A SPIRITUALITY OF CHRISTIAN SOLIDARITY

The Jesuit Martyrs of El Salvador

By ROBERT LASSALLE-KLEIN

ON 16 NOVEMBER 1989, under the cover of darkness, an élite Salvadoran military unit fired mortars into the doors of the Jesuit faculty residence at the University of Central America in San Salvador (UCA). Operating under special orders from the Salvadoran Military High Command, the US-trained commandos brutally machine-gunned six Jesuit priests, a seminary cook and her daughter. Soldiers with guns had been sent to silence the voice of the university. Among the dead were: Fr Ignacio Ellacuría, president of the university; Fr Ignacio Martín-Baró, vice-president and director of the University Institute of Public Opinion; Fr Segundo Montes, director of the university's Human Rights Institute and superior of the Jesuit community; Fr Amando López, professor of theology, and ex-president of the university's branch in Nicaragua, Fr Joaquín López y López, director of a programme helping El Salvador's poor children; and Fr Juan Ramón Moreno, who worked as a theologian in the university. With them died their friend, Elba Ramos, who was the cook for one of the neighbouring Jesuit communities, and her sixteen-year-old daughter, Celina, who was planning to be married the following year.

The outrage immediately attracted world-wide publicity and condemnation, undermining US support for the regime, and helping hasten the end of El Salvador's decade-long civil war. Three years after the war's end, and six years after the UCA assassinations, El Salvador is still struggling to find a formula for the politics of reconciliation. Nevertheless, the life and work of the UCA martyrs has a Christian salvific meaning which continues to reach far beyond the signing of El Salvador's peace accords. This essay explores the vision for national reconciliation which the UCA Jesuits gradually developed from 1987 to 1989, and attempts to bring out this vision's enduring significance.

The strategic vision developed by Ellacuría and his colleagues shows, moreover, how a spirituality of Christian solidarity and reconciliation can interact in a salvific way with political and material

interests in the ambiguous world of deals and compromises. As Jon Sobrino put it, who escaped the massacre only because he was absent in Thailand,

> It is already recognized that the martyrdom of Ellacuría and his companions – because of its sheer scale, its international repercussions and its timing – without doubt helped to bring about a negotiated end to the war. But additionally, one must ponder the longer-term salvation left us by Ellacuría and the other martyrs. This salvation is a reality, and consists, I believe, in their having generated a historical tradition with real effects. This is to say that these martyrs, through their living and dying, have dug a channel in history along which it is easier for people now to travel. They have left a power which is still at work . . .[1]

The vision of political reconciliation promoted by these Jesuits emerged from their spirituality and their essentially religious vocation. From 1969 onwards the UCA Jesuits had increasingly immersed themselves in a spirituality of Christian solidarity. Repeatedly and in different ways, this community indicated that it recognized the risen Jesus, vibrant and alive, in what Ignacio Ellacuría used to call 'the crucified people of El Salvador'.[2] Over a period of twenty years their lives had taken on the character of a response, as university professors and as academics, as human beings and as Christians, to God's self-offer – God's self-offer as mediated through the call to relieve the undeserved agony of this people.

This article will focus on the political ideas and actions which this essentially religious experience generated and through which this deeply Christian spirituality became real and historical. I will argue that by fostering the emergence of the country's poor masses as actors in civil society, the UCA Jesuits played a significant role in promoting a viable national politics of reconciliation for El Salvador. But it was a spirituality disposed to recognize the mediation of grace through the agency of the poor that led these Jesuits to appreciate the significance of what was happening politically in the months and years before their death. Indeed, from the perspective of faith, it can be said that their efforts became mediations of a holy and reconciling spirit to both sides of the civil war and finally played a critical role (through the impact of their martyrdom) in promoting the fragile beginnings of a process of national reconciliation.

1987 – Paths to a solution: Ellacuría's proposal

On 7 August 1987 in Esquipulas, Guatemala, Costa Rican President Oscar Arias led the Central American presidents to agreement on a

regional framework for a comprehensive Central American peace. The 'Arias Plan' envisioned processes of 'national reconciliation' in each country, amnesty, dialogue between belligerents, cease-fires, and the initiation of democratic processes leading to free elections and truly representative governments. Unfortunately, in El Salvador the regional peace process collapsed under the weight of political assassination, government intransigence, and resistance from a Washington still intent on a counter-insurgency victory. Nevertheless an important shift had begun. The UCA's national opinion poll showed that over eighty per cent of El Salvadorans wanted dialogue and an immediate resolution of the war.[3] Equally important, the many non-governmental groups which were revitalizing the country's civil society following the brutal repression during the early 1980s (e.g. unions, teachers, human rights groups, political parties, church leaders, the press, village and neighbourhood organizations, professional associations) were becoming articulate advocates for this unrepresented national majority and its demand for peace.

In 1987 Ignacio Ellacuría was one of the first to perceive the changes under way and to appreciate their significance. That year he published 'Paths to a solution for the present crisis of the country'[4] in the UCA's journal *Estudios Centroamericanos*. His thesis was that the collective existence of such groups constituted a new 'third force' that could become a key factor in moving the country from stalemate towards a solution. For Ellacuría and for El Salvador, this new development represented a move away from the traditional emphasis on the government and on the guerrillas. Through institutions of this new type, the much talked about 'popular masses' themselves could initiate significant action at national level.

In the first section Ellacuría proposes the creation of a process of national reflection. Archbishop Rivera y Damas and the UCA were soon to realize this proposal through a series of events which they called the 'National Debate'. This new national conversation on the future of the country was to be the most important political development of 1988, beginning a process that would lead to peace, despite various attempts, such as the UCA murders, to silence its voice. But not until section four does Ellacuría make the highly original proposal that the recent emergence of a 'third force' in Salvadoran political conversation 'could become an important element both for defending the just interests of the lower-class majority, and for creating a political solution for the conflict and its causes'.[5] Ellacuría stresses that this 'third force' is not a political organization but a social one. He links it

to what he saw as an emerging theme in the Church's social teaching, namely, that social organizations were an important means through which individuals' interests could be defended against an oppressive state power.[6]

Ellacuría's notion of the 'third force' also fits into a larger discussion among Latin American theorists about the meaning of civil society and about its role in the continent's transition to democratic forms of government and life after decades of military rule. In their excellent survey of this discussion, *Civil society and political theory*, Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato write of how many Latin American theorists see the 'resurrection of civil society' as of major importance in the establishment of human rights following a period of dictatorship: 'Here, civil society stands for a network of groups and associations between (in some versions, including) families and face-to-face groups on one side and outright state organizations on the other, mediating between individual and state, private and public.'[8] This approach is reflected in Ellacuría's argument. On the El Salvador scene, he explicitly mentions trade union movements, large identifiable segments of El Salvador's unrepresented masses (the unemployed, refugees, marginalized communities living in shanty towns), and organizations doing social development work: churches, educators and some private business.[9]

Ellacuría is also seeking new institutional means through which the country's dispossessed masses can have an influence on Salvadoran affairs. He is looking for alternatives to the guerrilla movement and to the government's military and bureaucratic apparatus. He proposes a programme for the political mobilization and co-ordination of Salvadoran civil society, and adds:

> To flee from this (needed) effort, claiming that it might be subject to political manipulation, is to ignore the fundamental obligation for each and every social power: that of putting its specific weight and capacity for pressure at the service of the masses and towards the solution of the national conflict.[10]

He adds that Salvadoran civil society should use means which are non-violent. By November 1987 Ellacuría had attracted the interest of a man who would play the key role in putting a version of this proposal into effect: San Salvador's Catholic Archbishop Rivera y Damas.

1988 – El Salvador's national debate[11]

Many saw 1988 as a critical year for El Salvador. The Reagan presidency was coming to an end with elections in the United States. In

El Salvador legislative elections took place in March, and the right-wing ARENA party soundly defeated the incumbent Christian Democrats. There were many electoral irregularities, and the participation of the left in the campaign was minimal. Nevertheless, many commentators saw the result as a stinging rejection by the Salvadoran people of Christian Democratic rule and its US backers. The following year ARENA would likewise wrest the presidency from the Christian Democrats, whose political programme had become identical with that of their patrons in Washington. Also, important changes under way in the Soviet Union under Mikhail Gorbachev had brought *perestroika* to the fore in relations with the West. Thus the anti-communist rationale for US counter-insurgency was evaporating, and El Salvador's electorate had chosen the only viable national party offering an alternative to eight years of US-sponsored Christian Democratic rule. The FMLN, the guerrilla movement, therefore hoped for a 'year of decision'.

Ellacuría, however, understood from the university's national opinion poll that the population was in no mood to continue the war. He therefore found little more than a promise for 'business as usual' in the aforementioned events.[12]

By now the Archdiocese and the UCA had begun their own planning for a different kind of initiative, based on Ellacuría's April proposal in *ECA*, designed to co-ordinate and multiply the impact of El Salvador's emerging 'third forces'. In late November 1987 Archbishop Rivera y Damas and Ellacuría had agreed that the UCA and the Archdiocese should both work to establish a national forum for a political discussion on the future of the country.[13] At an early December meeting in the university involving many of the country's leaders, the Archbishop presented his official public proposal for 'a public debate among all the effective forces of the country',[14] recommending that the university help sponsor the planning process. Owing to ecclesiastical politics, the Archbishop felt it necessary explicitly to exclude Ellacuría from the planning team, and the latter's influence on the process was not publicly acknowledged. The university's role was, however, crucial.

On 20 July 1988 invitations went out to 102 organizations. The process was designed to make clear a number of points on which broad consensus existed in the country. The covering letter expressed the hope that these points of consensus would help the government, the armed forces and the political parties on the one hand, and the guerrilla movement on the other, to bring the conflict to an end through dialogue and negotiation.[15]

In the following months the conference and ensuing events seriously altered the country's political landscape. El Salvador's 'third forces'

were able to make themselves heard on the national scene as never before.

As editor of the university's journal, Ellacuría wrote:

> The national debate has been one of the important events of 1988 in El Salvador. Over more than two months – July and August – it has become the newest and most dynamic factor in the socio-political process. It has attracted the attention of practically all the significant forces in the country and forced them to react to its conclusions. The government, the Armed Forces, the political parties, private business, the Church, the FMLN have all spoken about it, as well as, of course, those actually participating in it. The communication media have given it a lot of space, to the point of making it into one of the principal themes of discussion.[16]

However, Ellacuría was well aware of the limitations of what had been achieved. Many groups, for example, refused the invitation to participate. Nevertheless there was a majority consensus on no less than 147 statements, and unanimity on several key points, such as the absolute priority of the need to direct economic resources away from the war towards the basic needs of the population, and the criteria that 'the solution must be Central American and not a US "intervention" '.[17]

Most importantly, however, the process had mobilized the opinion of the people themselves, and articulated the outline of a broad national consensus. Even Alfredo Cristiani, the presidential candidate of the right-wing ARENA party, which had long supported the brutal suppression of Salvadoran civil society, stated he agreed with eighty-five per cent of the conclusions. And he committed his government to a 'permanent dialogue' with the guerrilla movement.[18] The initiative had swung from the government and the guerrilla movement to El Salvador's 'third force'. And the National Debate, by giving expression to the overwhelming desire for peace, created a momentum for negotiations that demanded a response from both the FMLN and the government.

1989: Collapse of negotiations, war, assassination and resurrection

Cynthia Arnson's excellent study of US policy on Central America describes the situation as 1989 began, recalling that:

> the far-right ARENA party [had] won control of El Salvador's National Assembly in March 1988, putting former Major Roberto

> D'Aubuisson, suspected mastermind of the assassination of Archbishop Romero, in a key position of power. President Duarte, himself suffering from incurable liver cancer, seemed to personify the multiple ills of his administration. Economic austerity measures had taken a devastating toll on the party's urban base, eroding popular support for the regime. Violent abuses by the army and death squads were resuming an upward spiral, prompting Duarte to decry the 'extremist death squads that seem to be coming back to life'. The Christian Democrats themselves were badly divided over who should succeed Duarte as candidate in the 1989 presidential elections.[19]

Then, on 23 January 1989, just as the presidential campaign began in earnest, the guerrilla movement surprised everyone with a proposal to postpone the election for six months until 15 September 1989.[20] The military would be kept in their barracks; absentee ballots for those living abroad would be provided; representatives from the Democratic Convergence (an independent opposition party closely associated with the FMLN) would sit on the Central Elections Council; and all would abide by the outcome. The Christian Democrats agreed to the proposal, as did the president of the Central Elections Council. But it was rejected by ARENA, which was confident of electoral victory. It did indeed win, with fifty-four per cent of the vote, on 19 March 1988. The guerrilla movement, which had been laying the groundwork for a major offensive since 1987, once again found itself outside the political process and turned its eyes towards war.

However, when he took office on 1 June 1989, Alfredo Cristiani surprised everyone by revealing a five-point plan for negotiations with the guerrillas, in which surrender was not a precondition. Then in August the rebels proposed 'to initiate as soon as possible a definitive process of negotiation aimed at putting an end to the war and to place all our forces at the service of constructing a true democracy'.[21] Of course, none of this was taking place in a vacuum. Salvadoran public opinion had discredited the war. In the US, the ongoing stalemate, regional agreements emphasizing the need for peace, continuing human rights abuses by the state, and the failure of the Christian Democrats had eroded domestic Congressional support for Salvadoran counter-insurgency. Moreover, the cold war, the logic of which had driven the Reagan and Bush administrations to maintain and finance the war, seemed to be coming to an end.

Hopeful signs abounded. The university's journal expressed 'cautious optimism' regarding Cristiani's surprisingly moderate policies during his first hundred days.[22] In September talks between the government and the guerrillas in Mexico produced a proposal from the rebels

for a cease-fire to begin by 15 November 1989, and a peace by 31 January 1990. At subsequent talks in Costa Rica, the government demanded an immediate cease-fire. Cristiani would not guarantee safety for the combatants. But both sides agreed to create a special commission whose role would be to enforce human and civil rights. There was also a general agreement on the need to deal with the economy, and to reduce the size of the armed forces. The FMLN and the government agreed to a third meeting for 20 and 21 November 1989 in Venezuela.

The meeting never took place. Military events, together with the voices of the militarized right and the left, closed the space for political negotiation. Moreover, there was now congressional support for US military aid. Between the elections in March 1989 and Cristiani's inauguration in June 1989, the far right had escalated its campaign of violence and murder. For their part, the rebels had begun a series of assassinations. On 19 April 1989 the residence of new vice-president, Francisco Merino, was bombed and the Attorney General, Roberto García Alvarado, was murdered by a bomb placed on the roof of his jeep.

Right-wing attacks on the Church and the Jesuits reached a level not seen since the early 1980s. On 3 March 1989 an extreme-right group, the Crusade for Peace and Work, denounced what they called the 'tiny group of satanic brains led by Ellacuría and a pack of communist hounds' ruining the country.[23] On 14 March a grenade exploded at the university's emergency electric power plant. On 18 March a paid advertisement denounced the 'deceitful Jesuits Ignacio Ellacuría, Segundo Montes, and others, who with their doctrines, are poisoning many young minds'. On 16 April an advertisement paid for by the Armed Forces High Command itself charged Segundo Montes with defending the guerrillas' use of land mines, and placed him with 'groups and individuals who insist on defending the terrorism of the FMLN-FDR and its front organisations'. On 20 April, the country's Vice-Minister of Defence, Colonel Juan Orlando Zepeda, said that the university was a 'refuge for terrorist leaders, from where they plan the strategy of attack against Salvadorans'. He specifically charged that the previous day's assassination of the Attorney General had been planned at the UCA. A week later, on 28 April, three bombs exploded at the university's printing presses.

It is hard to miss the preoccupation of these attacks with the Jesuits (especially Ellacuría) and the work of the university. Indeed, it was

during 1989 that Monsignor Freddy Delgado published an outrageously slanderous book aimed specifically against the Jesuits.[24] The *Diario de Hoy* newspaper stated that the book:

> confirmed that all the groups at the service of international communism were planned and organized in the installations of the UCA with the active participation of its Jesuit leaders, beginning with the sadly famous Ignacio Ellacuría, the most nefarious individual ever to set foot on Salvadoran soil.[25]

Thus, despite the peace negotiations, the life of El Salvador came to be dominated by assassination, irresponsible rhetoric, and the drums of war. The emerging voice of El Salvador's civil society – in the sense of Ellacuría's 'third force' – was again being brutally silenced by repression and murder. All-out war finally enveloped the country and its capital on 11 November. Ellacuría's hope, that his National Debate would lead to a negotiated solution through the 'profound and wide-ranging' national conversation it had generated, was in ruins.

The machine-gunning at the new Jesuit residence, early on the morning of 16 November 1989, seemed indeed to symbolize how dialogue and negotiation had been eclipsed. Most of the top Jesuit leadership of the UCA was dead, with their friend Elba and her daughter, who had sought refuge with the Jesuit community that night. Some of the bodies of El Salvador's leading intellectuals had their brains dislodged by a soldier's boot. One assailant took the time symbolically to reenact the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero by shooting the dead prelate's image carefully through the heart. The university had tried to make the gospel a historical reality by supporting El Salvador's 'third force' in its efforts to construct a politics of negotiation and reconciliation. The enterprise seemed to have met with utter defeat.

The story has an important postscript, however. One by one over the next two years all the major power-brokers and political forces (the US government, the Salvadoran Military High Command, the FMLN, the oligarchy and, finally, the Salvadoran government itself) were forced to admit that their own strategic visions for the country had not succeeded, and had no future without the approval of the country's masses. These masses were now mobilized; and they were insisting on peace and the creation of the institutional structures required for guaranteeing an end to the general repression of civil society. El Salvador's 'third forces', by voicing the aspirations of the country's poor masses, had created a non-aligned political force that was proving to be formidable.

By undermining the legitimacy of the various power-brokers, this increasingly independent and articulate civil society proved pivotal in promoting a viable politics of national reconciliation. Thus the strategic vision, promoted so diligently by Ellacuría and the Jesuit university in solidarity with so many others, experienced a resurrection in the successful conclusion of a comprehensive peace accord two years later.

1991 saw the UN and its Secretary General Javier Pérez de Cuellar play a crucial, if somewhat frantic, role in tortuous peace negotiations. They concluded at the UN building in New York, twenty-eight minutes after the end of the year and the expiry of his term. The accords were signed in Mexico City on 16 January 1992. The final documents contained significant provisions for military, political, economic and social reform. In the end, the very existence of the treaty demonstrated how inadequate were the plans which the major power-brokers had attempted to impose on the Salvadoran people during the 1980s. The hope of US policy makers for a military victory over the guerrillas had proved unachievable owing to the expense involved and the lack of Salvadoran support (though they had succeeded in preventing a rebel victory). The guerrillas' dream that vast numbers of Salvadorans would rise up in a general insurrection proved to be unrealistic (despite several important military offensives). For its part the far right's ideology of national salvation, and the elimination of civil society, embraced by the military and the Salvadoran government, had wrought a terrifying decade of murder and economic ruin. Ironically, however, this reign of terror merely demonstrated the courageous resiliency, independence and importance of the country's 'third forces'. Ultimately, it seems, Ellacuría was correct in 1987 when he argued that El Salvador's emergent civil society provided the proper vehicle for the mobilization of the country's poor masses, for the expression of their demand for peace and for their aspirations towards reform. With the peace accords, the approach to El Salvador's future represented by the 'third force' has outlasted the strategic visions of El Salvador's power-brokers.[26]

Conclusion

I have suggested, then, that the Jesuits at the University of Central America in El Salvador were involved, during the years and months before the November 1989 massacre, in the mobilization and co-ordination of Salvadoran 'civil society' – a movement in which members of the country's poor masses were important participants. These Jesuits were thereby helping establish the role of the dispossessed in creating a viable national politics of reconciliation in El

Salvador. As Jon Sobrino put it, they have generated a 'real historical tradition with real effects', opening up possibilities for us who follow. What, however, does all this offer for now, when the so-called 'politics of peace' in El Salvador is in fact marked by glaring unfairness and is increasingly leading to disenchantment? What can it say to us when our hearts sink at the prospect of sustaining a spirituality of Christian solidarity in a context of *Realpolitik*, deals and compromises?

I believe that answers to such questions can emerge from close analysis of how the Jesuit martyrs of El Salvador realized in practice their spirituality of Christian solidarity. What led these Jesuits to appreciate the importance of El Salvador's emerging 'third forces' was a spirituality disposed to recognize the agency of the poor as a mediation of grace. Ellacuría and his friends spoke evocatively of solidarity with 'the crucified people' of our world. But they also made this spirituality something historical by identifying their work and their lives with the faint patterns of salvation emerging from the confusion that was El Salvador in 1987.

It will require much hard work and political analysis to create a proper 'civil society' shaped by the participation and aspirations of El Salvador's poor masses, and to build a politics of national reconciliation that will be viable in the long term. In the years ahead El Salvador will need the spirituality of Christian solidarity, and the friendships such solidarity brings with it. This spirituality will keep alive the country's living memory of the reign of God preached by Jesus of Nazareth. So too, elsewhere around the globe, Christians can and will continue to turn to the holy, practical wisdom enshrined in spiritualities of solidarity, different spiritualities each drawing on particular cultures. There they will find the insight to discern salvific movements emerging within today's historical realities, and, what is more, the courage to identify their lives with these movements.

NOTES

[1] Jon Sobrino, 'Ignacio Ellacuría, el hombre y el cristiano: "bajar de la cruz al pueblo crucificado"' *Revista Latinoamericana de Teología*, 11 (1994), pp 131–161, 215–244, here p 238. (unpublished manuscript used with permission of author, March 1994), p 42.

[2] Ignacio Ellacuría, 'Discernir el signo de los tiempos', *Diakonía* 17 (1981), p 58.

[3] Ignacio Martín-Baró, *La opinión pública salvadoreña (1987–1988)* (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1989), p 90, cited in Teresa Whitfield, *Paying the price: Ignacio Ellacuría and the murdered Jesuits of El Salvador* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), p 315.

[4] Ignacio Ellacuría, 'Caminos de solución para la actual crisis del país' in Ignacio Ellacuría, *Veinte años de historia en El Salvador (1969–1989): escritos políticos* vol II (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1991), pp 1151–1169.

[5] *Ibid.*, p 1162.
[6] *Ibid.*
[7] Jean L. Cohen, Andrew Arato, *Civil society and political theory* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992).
[8] *Ibid.*, p 48.
[9] Ellacuría, 'Caminos de solucíon', p 1163.
[10] *Ibid.*, p 1167.
[11] This section basically follows the narrative of Whitfield, pp 317–320.
[12] See '1988, un año de transicíon para El Salvador' in Ignacio Ellacuría, *Veinte años de historia en El Salvador (1969–1989): escritos políticos* Vol 1 (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1991), pp 453–466.
[13] Ignacio Ellacuría, *Notebooks* no 189 (20 November 1987), cited in Whitfield, pp 317–318.
[14] *Ibid.*, p 863.
[15] 'Carta de invitación del Señor Arzobispo de San Salvador' in *Debate nacional 1988* (San Salvador, 1988), as cited by Whitfield, p 318.
[16] 'Editorial: El significado del debate nacional', *Estudios Centroamericanos* 43 (1988), p 713.
[17] *Ibid.*, p 741.
[18] See Whitfield, p 320.
[19] Cynthia Arnson, *Crossroads: Congress, the President, and Central America* (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1993), p 226.
[20] The information on the FMLN guerrilla movement in the next few paragraphs closely follows Tommie Sue Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador: from civil strife to civil peace* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), pp 213–215.
[21] Cited in Montgomery, *Revolution*, p 215.
[22] *Estudios Centroamericanos* 44 (1989), p 632.
[23] All the incidents cited in the paragraph are from the Jesuit Lawyers Committee's chronology entitled 'Attacks on El Salvador's Jesuits' in Martha Doggett, *Death foretold: the Jesuit murders in El Salvador* (Washington: Georgetown UP, 1993), p 308.
[24] Monsignor Freddy Delgado, *La Iglesia popular nació en El Salvador* (San Salvador: privately printed, 1989). Also see: Alvaro Antonio Jérez Magaña, *La infiltración marxista en la Iglesia* (San Salvador: Editorial Dignidad, 1988).
[25] *Diario de Hoy*, 25 January 1989, cited in Whitfield, p 327.
[26] Though peace and some significant reforms would come to El Salvador as a result of the accords, the country's fundamental social and economic problems (e.g. landlessness, economic development, various forms of poverty as indicated by extremely low social indicators, political extremism and human rights violations etc.) remain to be addressed. Likewise the UCA faces serious problems in the years ahead. However, I believe that the growth of a Salvadoran civil society, representative of the interests of the country's poor masses (whose role Ellacuría prophetically enunciated in 1987), is one of the nation's most important assets for facing the daunting challenges ahead. One can only hope that its autonomy and significance will be respected by the government, the opposition, the extreme right, and by foreign governments, such as that of the US, which have interests in the region. No doubt the voice of the UCA will continue to be heard on this subject.