

RUTILIO AND ROMERO: MARTYRS FOR OUR TIME

It is a real honor and a pleasure to visit Maryknoll and share with you some of the hope we associate with Archbishop Romero, as we approach the 25th anniversary of his martyrdom. Romero heads the list of 18 priests, one archbishop, five religious sisters, and hundreds of catequists who were slain in El Salvador between 1977 and 1992 for the faith, for the poor, for speaking the truth. They mixed their blood with 75,000 others who dared to dream of a future that would be different.

Bishop Pedro Casaldáliga of Brazil warns us, "Woe to that people that forgets its martyrs!" But in times of junk media and bad news, we can easily forget the good news of even the recent martyrs.

It is especially appropriate to recover the memory of Romero who represents the best of that "church of the poor" which promises so much for the universal church and for the world.

Here we have one of many imperfect parallels between Rutilio and Romero. For his part, Romero's enemies tried to discredit him as mentally ill. This is completely false.¹ But he did have tendencies to obsessive perfectionism, authoritarian rigidity, and timidity. Before becoming archbishop, insecurity and awkwardness among others led him to withdraw into his work. But he, too, overcame these limitations, especially as archbishop. For all of us neurotics, Romero and Rutilio, especially, are a genuine inspiration!

In 1967, Romero came to San Salvador as secretary to the Bishops Conference. Romero lived in the seminary where Rutilio Grande also lived and worked. Both men were shy; and Romero interacted little with the seminarians and the Jesuits. In those years Romero opposed those who, like Rutilio, were calling for pastoral renewal and social change.

Romero was ordained bishop in 1970. The day after the ordination the "First National Pastoral Week" began, sponsored by the Bishops Conference; and it revealed a deep crisis in the Salvadoran church. Just a few weeks before, the Central American bishops had assembled and called for implementing the Medellín Conference in Central America. They spoke of the salvation of the whole person, not just "souls". They emphasized the church's mission to the poor, denounced the

¹ See James R. Brockman, *Romero: A Life* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1989), pp. 49-50.

structural causes of poverty, condemned the violation of basic rights, and called for authentic liberation.

The Pastoral Week in El Salvador was dominated by progressive young priests, religious and seminarians. Rutilio played a conspicuous role. Conservatives and most bishops stayed home. Assuming the liberation perspective of the Central American bishops' meeting, the Conclusions of the Pastoral Week condemned injustice in El Salvador, denounced the church's past complicity in it and called for a commitment to the cause of the poor. A month later, the Bishops Conference rejected some of these conclusions as heterodox and named a commission, headed by Bishop Romero, to revise them. Rutilio wrote to the bishops through their secretary, Bishop Romero, trying to head off the intervention; but it was no use. The commission suppressed references to class division, domination, and the call to commitment to the cause of the poor. If that were not enough, the Sacred Congregation of the Clergy chimed in, all the way from Rome, objecting to expressions like "integral salvation" and, in general, the linking of salvation and social liberation. The Vatican also scotched additional references to injustice, a role for the church in forming community leaders among the poor and criticism of "magical ritualism".

Some more radical priests had wanted the pastoral team to give priority to political work and organization. There was no campesino organization in the region at the time, and the parish was ripe for harvest. The entire nation was polarizing, and organizing of the poor would soon spread through the country. The team recognized the need to organize the campesinos and expected the evangelization to lead to that eventually. But Rutilio, especially, felt that this was not the job of the parish and that, besides exposing the pastoral effort to attack, it would risk manipulating the people's faith. He also opposed those who considered reflection on "social reality" the best starting-point for pastoral work. Although he agreed that evangelization must include conscientization, he insisted on starting with the people's religious practice --something more their own, not "imported" from outside-- and giving priority to the gospel over any ideology and evangelization over politicization. As Rutilio himself put it, "We come to put leaven in the dough, not to give them a plan!"² Rutilio was convinced that the gospel not only called for radical social change, but was also indispensable to achieve it in a humane way. Others considered him blind to the need for a "scientific analysis" and a revolutionary strategy.

² In Salvador Carranza, "Una experiencia de evangelización rural parroquial, Aquilares, septiembre de 1972 - agosto de 1974," *Búsqueda* 1975 (Archdiocese of San Salvador); cited in Cardenal, *Historia*, p. 249.

It was this general policy that Romero would later follow in relating faith to the social order.

By 1975 violence and threats were multiplying, and priests had become special targets. The president of the country began to denounce "liberationist priests". One such priest, ((Rafael Barahona,)) was captured and beaten in 1975. In 1976, the government scuttled its own modest proposal for land reform; six bombs exploded in the Jesuit university; and violent clashes caused two deaths at campesino assemblies near Aguilares. Shadow groups denounced "communist priests" in the media. The organized right accused the church, and especially the Jesuits, of directing subversion. The Salvadoran bishops publically divided over the crisis, some denouncing FECCAS.

Archbishop Luis Chávez y González had been archbishop for 38 years, but, nearing the age of retirement, he felt the enormous pressure of the challenge facing the church. In January, 1977, he offered his resignation. The nuncio announced, to the delight of conservatives, that the Vatican would name Bishop Oscar Romero as to replace him. The rightist organization FARO denounced (("preachers of the bloody revolution of hate and violence" and)) priests who were "little angels with red wings and machine-guns under their cassocks."³ In one month, five priests were tortured or expelled from the country.⁴ A member of the oligarchy was kidnapped by guerrillas and his body recovered on February 10. On February 20, presidential elections took place. Two days later Romero was formally installed as archbishop.

Rutilio knew that Romero frowned on the Aguilares pastoral adventure; but they were friends and respected each other. Although deeply disappointed by Romero's appointment, Rutilio nevertheless encouraged others to rally to the new archbishop's side as the church suffered persecution.⁵ He also urged the new archbishop to respond decisively and publically to the attacks.

The day he was installed Romero and four other bishops met with the president and other officials who handed them a list of "subversive priests". The bishops protested the expulsion of priests without dialogue, to no avail.

When the results of the presidential elections were announced a few days later, thousands occupied Liberty Plaza protesting fraud. The security forces attacked the protesters in the pre-dawn

³ Rodolfo Cardenal, *Historia de una esperanza. Vida de Rutilio Grande*. (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1985), p. 550.

⁴ "John Murphy, an American benedictine priest, was obliged to leave the country on February 25 under pressure by the nuncio who offered him as a second alternative arrest, torture and deportation" (Cardenal, *Historia*, p. 555). The government also blocked the return of seven foreign priests to El Salvador, among them Ignacio Ellacuría.

⁵ Salvador Carranza, *Romero-Rutilio. Vidas encontradas* (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1992), p. 45.

hours of February 27-28 killing 100, wounding 200 and arresting 500.⁶ A meeting of clergy, religious and bishops had been scheduled for the morning of the 28th, ((and Romero had asked Rutilio Grande to speak on protestant sects!)) As accounts of the massacre interrupted the meeting, Romero listened, asked questions ((The agenda was scrapped, and Romero)) and then requested all to return to their parishes and welcome those who were in danger. He was making his break with the government.

((On March 5, one week before Rutilio Grande's death, the Bishops Conference issued a communiqué denouncing not only violations of human rights but also the steep concentration of wealth and land. They proclaimed that the mission of the church was to announce a Reign of God that begins here on earth and that the church should stand with the poor in support of concrete means to rectify the injustice of the country. Romero had succeeded in unifying the bishops one last time. The Bishops Conference would soon become hopelessly polarized.))

On January 28, Mario Bernal, a native of Colombia and pastor of Santa Catarina de Apopa near Aguilares, had been captured and expelled from the country. The pastors of the vicariate prevailed on Rutilio to preside at a Mass of protest in Apopa on February 13. There Rutilio delivered his best-known homily --and very likely sealed his own fate. "All of us human beings have one common Father," Rutilio reminded his listeners.

So, all . . . evidently, are brothers and sisters. . . . But Cain is an abortion in the Plan of God, and . . . here in this country Cains exist, and they invoke God which is worse. God, the Lord, . . . gave us . . . a material world for all without boundaries. ((That's what Genesis says.)) It's not a matter of my saying: 'I bought half of El Salvador with my money! . . .'.⁷

Three weeks later, on Saturday March 12, Rutilio and five riders made their way in the parish Safari through the cane fields between Aguilares and El Paisnal where a Mass was scheduled. A storm of bullets stopped them short, killing Rutilio, Manuel Solórzano (72) and Nelson Rutilio Lemus (15).

The rich and powerful had committed a tragic error, turning a zealous pastor into local saint and popular hero. Perhaps the single most important effect of Rutilio's death was its impact on Archbishop Romero.

Rutilio, Nelson and Meme had been murdered about 5:30 PM, and Romero arrived in

⁶ Figures in Phillip Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion: Christians in Central American Revolutions* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1984), p. 122.

⁷ Text in Carranza, *Romero-Rutilio*, pp. 117-32. (Check page ref.)

Aguilares, visibly shaken, as Mass was beginning about 10:00 PM. After the somber Mass, he convoked a late-night meeting of priests, sisters and laypeople and asked, in what would become his trademark manner, "What should we do and what can we do as Church in response to the death of Father Grande?"⁸

On Monday, at the funeral Mass in the cathedral, the archbishop roundly affirmed the pastoral work of Aguilares as a faithful embodiment of Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. Romero gave thanks for these three "co-workers in Christian liberation". As a companion of Rutilio's remarked, at that moment, "If he had harbored some doubts about Tilo's pastoral work, these vanished" before his broken body.⁹ The three victims were buried in the church at El Paisnal the same day.

During the rest of the week, laypeople, sisters and priests rallied around Romero in the type of collective work that would characterize the next three years of his ministry. Catholic schools suspended classes for three days of reflection. The archbishop announced that he would attend no government functions until Rutilio's murder had been clarified. The following Sunday all Masses in the archdiocese were cancelled except a single Mass at the cathedral.

((Romero had been archbishop only one month. But in view of his clashes with the papal nuncio over the single Mass and the persecution, made a brief visit to Rome to explain his pastoral work to the pope. The Secretary of the Congregation of Bishops lectured him; but Pope Paul received him warmly.¹⁰))

The political crisis and the church-state division continued to deepen. ((Eight died in May 1 Labor Day clashes. Days later,)) In May the archdiocesan printing office was bombed for the second time. A Jesuit was captured, beaten and expelled. On May 11, diocesan priest Alfonso Navarro was gunned down along with a young parishioner, apparently in reprisal for the execution of the foreign minister by guerrillas. Flyers began to circulate reading, "Be a patriot, kill a priest."¹¹

On May 19, two months after Grande's death, the army occupied Aguilares and cut it off from outside communications as part of what the army called "Operation Rutilio". Witnesses claimed the soldiers killed 50, brutally mistreating many others, especially if they had a picture of Rutilio in their homes. Hundreds were taken away. The army turned the church into their barracks, machine-gunning the tabernacle. The three remaining Jesuits in Aguilares were deported. When the

⁸ Carranza, *Romero-Rutilio*, pp. 55-56.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

¹⁰ Brockman, *A Life*, pp. 18-21.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 25-29.

siege was finally lifted on June 19, Archbishop Romero returned to celebrate Mass and comfort the community. He told the people:

You are the image of . . . Christ nailed to the cross and transfixed by a spear. ((It is the image of all those towns which, like Aguilares, will be transfixed, will be trampled, but . . . Aguilares is singing the precious refrain of liberation)) We suffer with those who are lost, with those who are fleeing and do not know what is happening to their families . . . We are with those who suffer torture.¹²

It was the first of the great, prophetic homilies of Romero. The five thousand present applauded. After the Mass, the congregation filed out in procession toward the square with Romero carrying the Blessed Sacrament. When the National Guard, armed with rifles, threatened to block the procession, the people turned to Romero. He called out, "Keep going!" The guard drew back and the procession moved ahead.

Two days later the White Warriors Union threatened to kill all the Jesuits in El Salvador if they did not leave. But they made clear their intention to stay, and the deadline passed without incident.

The new president was to be inaugurated on July 1. In the preceding five months, "two priests had been killed, two tortured, one beaten, two jailed, four [besides the Jesuits] threatened with death, seven refused reentry to the country, and eight expelled."¹³ It was now clear to Romero that the government would undertake no serious investigation. So, in a dramatic break with tradition, he refused to attend the new president's inauguration. Two other bishops did attend, however, including the military vicar who justified the government's actions in the interest of "safeguarding of public order."¹⁴

Rutilio's death, and the persecution of which it was a part, had become a sign of contradiction revealing the hearts of many. One week after Rutilio's murder, Cardinal Casariego of Guatemala wrote to his priests warning them to stay out of politics, citing the case of El Salvador where "several priests were expelled from the country [he might have added "and killed"] for departing from their mission and meddling in partisan and sectarian politics."¹⁵ The organized right

¹² Homily at Aguilares, June 19, 1977 in Oscar Arnulfo Romero, *La voz de los sin voz. La palabra viva de Monseñor Romero*, Introducciones, comentarios y selección de textos por R. Cardenal, I. Martín-Baró y Jon Sobrino (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1980), pp. 208-12.

¹³ Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion*, p. 128.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

¹⁵ Cited in Brockman, *A Life*, p. 73.

published these words in all the Salvadoran papers. Archbishop Romero quickly grasped that, once he took a stand with the poor and opposed their enemies, he drew the fire of persecution to himself. Now the pious, "orthodox," non-political churchpeople, including most of the bishops, abandoned him or even openly opposed him. Some sent negative reports to Rome. In Romero's three years the Vatican sent three official visitors to investigate his pastoral practice. No such visitors reviewed the work of bishops who supported the military and even neglected their pastoral responsibilities. Romero also discovered, however, that the poor and the great majority of priests and religious, especially those whom he had previously criticized and suspected, rallied to his side.

What does Romero's legacy, and that of all the martyrs, say to us?

The Legacy of Rutilio and Romero

What do Rutilio and Romero say to us? Today the martyrs continue to be good news for the world and for the church even as bad news assails us. To the world they are signs of credible love, and so of hope amid cynicism and despair. To the church they show how to follow Christ faithfully today.

Consider, for example, how Rutilio and Romero exercised leadership in their ministries. Grande the priest and Romero the bishop channeled their personal commitments through these offices. Today, as we witness a kind of "sacerdotalization" of the church, it might feel uncomfortable to emphasize that. We are frequently reminded that the church is not a democracy and left wondering whether it is a tyranny. ((It is for this very reason that we need to recall how Romero and Grande broke with clerical authoritarianism in favor of broadly consultative and participatory leadership in their ministries without surrendering the teachings of the Gospel or of the church.))

As for Romero, at the beginning of his ministry as archbishop, what most impressed many were his frequent appeals for help and advice. Simple poor people treasure the memory of the archbishop explaining a problem to them and asking their personal opinion. Each week a team of advisors helped Romero prepare his Sunday homily. His pastoral letters involved countless meetings and re-writings. For the fourth letter and also in preparation for the Puebla Conference, he used a written questionnaire to solicit opinions throughout the archdiocese.

This participatory style of leadership was an expression of the fundamental option of both men: the Reign of God, integral liberation, God's project of new human beings in a new community. Announcing this good news to the poor was the very heart of their ministry. It gave meaning to the sacraments, preaching, catechism and popular devotions.¹⁶ The prophetic ministry of Rutilio and

¹⁶ Rutilio had made this explicit at the time of deep personal crisis after leaving the seminary.

Romero shaped the church of the poor, with its support of popular organizations and its martyrs.

The poor, as representatives of Christ, were Romero's fundamental criterion for decision-making and evaluating events. He did not first ask, "How will this measure affect the church?", but rather "How will this affect the poor?" On several occasions, he risked the interests of the institutional church in order to stand with the poor. In one of the most politically charged moments of El Salvador's history, Romero ventured an evaluation of the three contending political projects on the basis of what each project offered the poor. He completely rejected the rightist project of the oligarchy as anti-Christian, "anti-pueblo," idolatry of wealth and power: ("The Right means precisely social injustice, and it is never just to maintain a rightist orientation."¹⁷) To the consternation of the left, he did not condemn outright the project of the reformist juntas of 1979-80. He praised their promise of radical change but condemned the hypocrisy of "reforms bathed in blood" and the way the Christian Democrats to lent a facade to official repression. ((The reforms, he added, ought not lead to "a capitalist economic model that permits . . . continued accumulation and concentration of wealth in a few hands."¹⁸) Romero did not identify himself, or the Church, with any concrete project, but he found more to approve in the still-inchoate project of the popular organizations precisely because he saw there "the best, and the most workable, translation into political terms of the option for the poor."¹⁹ He favored this project even as he criticized the popular organizations for their frequent sectarianism, the absolutization of politics, dogmatism, violence and insensitivity to religious values. When a reporter asked what he thought of the left, Romero replied that he did not think of the popular organizations as organizations of the left but rather as organizations of the people.²⁰

In such a volatile situation, Romero could easily have appealed to the church's neutrality in political matters and safeguarded what some considered the interests of the church. But that would not have served the interests of the poor. The lesson is still valid. Following the lead of bishops like the late Cardinal Bernardin and Archbishop Weakland, the U.S. bishops made the poor the decisive

Cardenal, *Historia*, pp. 194, 200, 206-7.

¹⁷ Interview, *El Diario de Caracas*, March 19, 1980 in Romero, *La voz de los sin voz*, p. 435.

¹⁸ Homily, December 16, 1979.

¹⁹ Jon Sobrino, *Archbishop Romero: Memories and Reflections*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1990), p. 93.

²⁰ Cf. Interview, *El Diario de Caracas*, March 19, 1980, in Romero, *La voz de los sin voz*, pp. 435-46.

criterion for evaluating the economy.²¹ Today the poor of the world desperately needs the church in the U.S. to *apply* this criterion to U.S. foreign policy, as the U.S. government bullies the U.N., refuses to recognize a right to food (at the World Food Summit in Rome last November), imposes draconian economic policies on poor countries through the multilateral lending agencies, renews high-tech arms sales to repressive Latin American militaries, legitimates the brutality of these same militaries at the School of the America in Fort Benning, Georgia, competes for the distinction of stingiest foreign-aid donor in the world, and imposes an immoral blockade on the people of Cuba.

The pope has suggested that the Synod of the Americas in Rome this coming November would be an appropriate opportunity for the bishops of both American continents to review North-South relations which includes the problem of the external debt²² which stands today at \$1,000 for every man, woman and child in Latin America and continues to straight-jack the economies of Africa and Latin America.

The church's credibility depends on whether its future leadership will stand by the defenseless in the spirit of Romero and Rutilio. Clouds certainly darken the horizon. The church seems to be retreating rather than advancing in this respect. Church leaders who opt for the poor are suspected and investigated; those who opt for prestige are frequently promoted. Back in El Salvador, and in fact throughout Latin America, the church remains deeply polarized around the issue of prophetic pastoral practice and the theology of liberation. Some want to forget the legacy of Romero and a generation of martyrs. Romero is never mentioned in episcopal documents in El Salvador, for example. Nor was he mentioned during last year's papal mass there. But it will be difficult to keep the martyrs in their tombs.

At the time of the pope's visit to El Salvador last year, our Pastoral Center ((at the Central American University (UCA))) was besieged by reporters who wanted us to confirm stories they seemed to written before they left Europe or North America. The outline went like this: "The pope visited Central America in 1983 when Marxism threatened to take over society and liberation theology threatened to take over the church. Now Marxism is dead, and liberation theology lives only in the brains of aging theologians." Well, I can't speak for Marxism, but the diagnosis regarding liberation theology and, by implication, the prophetic church of the poor, seems to me, to paraphrase Mark Twain, greatly exaggerated.

²¹ United States Catholic Conference, *Economic Justice for All* (Washington, D.C.: N.C.C.B., 1986), No. 24.

²² John Paul II, *As the Third Millenium Draws Near (Tertio Millennio Adveniente)*, No. 51 (in *Origins*, Vol. 24, No. 24 [Nov. 24, 1994]).

We at the UCA directed reporters' attention to a recent survey of religion in El Salvador conducted by our university some months before. Pollers asked Catholics, Should the church "get involved in social conflicts"? Forty-eight percent responded Yes, a large plurality (since 14% had had no opinion) representing a 10% increase since 1988. Catholics were then asked if the church "ought to prefer the poor." Sixty percent said Yes, up from 43 percent seven years before. When asked if Archbishop Romero should be canonized, 50% of Catholics said Yes (with 20% expressing no opinion), more than double the percentage (22%) in 1988.

In addition, 83% of all Salvadorans felt that the newly-appointed archbishop ought to denounce social injustice and promote action to eradicate poverty. Forty-four percent of Catholics agreed that good Christians could vote for a party of the left vs. 38% who said No (16% expressed no opinion). By contrast, twenty-nine percent of Protestants (mostly from pentecostal groups) said Yes and 56% No (15% had no opinion).²³ Keep in mind that many people would be fearful to express these majority and plurality views in El Salvador.

The responses demonstrate how a high percentage of Salvadorans now take for granted the fundamental convictions of the church of the poor and liberation theology. Even unbelievers express indignation at the archdiocese's present retreat from social responsibilities. After 38 years of Archbishop Chávez, three of Romero and 15 years of Rivera Damas, most consider failure to stand by the poor as dereliction of duty on the part of the church. These convictions have taken deep root because, far from having been imposed by elites, they feed on the faith of the poor themselves and also, of course, because they are sealed in blood. Archbishop Romero prophesied that, even if he were killed, his word would remain. And so it has; not only his spoken word but also his martyrdom which Bishop Casaldáliga has called his greatest homily. I am convinced --and this is no poetic exaggeration-- that Romero exercises more real influence in El Salvador today than any person walking around "in the flesh". He is a constant point of reference --in classes, homilies and ordinary conversations.

To the surprise of some, younger Salvadorans, the great majority in this young country, are appropriating the martyrs' legacy, as they have demonstrated at commemorative celebrations and during the pope's visit. This legacy is alive and well in so many homes and parishes and Catholic schools, thanks in great part to those key formers of youth, the women religious.

((Like all young people today, young Salvadorans, even in their poverty, feel the tug of

²³ Instituto Universitario de Opinión Pública, "La religión de los salvadoreños en 1995," *Estudios Centroamericanos* (ECA), No. 563 (September, 1995): 859-62. I have combined practicing and non-practicing Catholics for the last question (p. 851) and calculated on the basis of figures in Table 8 on p. 857.

consumer society. But partly because of the inroads of liberal culture, they are also developing an increasingly critical consciousness.) Like their peers elsewhere, young Salvadorans reject the old hypocrisies and authoritarianism in the church. But this does not mean they want out. It means they respond to a consistent and credible love. The martyrs have demonstrated such love. As Jon Sobrino says, a credible love has its own efficacy, because it inspires others to "carry on the cause that was expressed in that love."²⁴ In the South as in the North, the Church of the future will either stand with the poor in a credible love like this, or else it will be stand with fewer and fewer people altogether.

Walbert Bühlmann has written of the Third Church, meaning the church of the Third World.²⁵ The First Church is the Church of the East, of Asia and Eastern Europe; the Second Church is the Church of the West which dominated missionary activity and with it the onetime mission lands. But this dominance is passing. Two thirds of Christians,²⁶ including 63% of Catholics,²⁷ now live in the poor South and comprise the Third Church. ((About thirty years ago, the demographic center of gravity in the Catholic Church shifted from the North to the South.²⁸ More Catholics now live in Latin America than in Europe and North America combined.²⁹)) And these local churches have come into their majority. In time for the third millenium, as Karl Rahner noted, the Church has finally become a global church.³⁰

The Third Church invites the global church to become ever more the "church of the poor". Through this Third Church, the poor of the earth invite the whole church to correct rather fundamental defects in our way of being church that reach back at least to the Constantine settlement when the church became allied with state power. That formula has been modified and

²⁴ Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical-Theological Reading of Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. Paul Burns and Francis McDonagh (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1994), p. 246.

²⁵ Walbert Bühlmann, *The Coming of the Third Church: An Analysis of the Present and Future of the Church*, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1977).

²⁶ Penny Lernoux, *People of God: The Struggle for World Catholicism* (New York: Viking, 1989), p. 8.

²⁷ *Statistical Yearbook of the Church, 1993* (Rome: Secretary of State of the Vatican, 1993), p. 41.

²⁸ See Bühlmann, *Third Church*, p. 20.

²⁹ *Statistical Yearbook, 1993*, pp. 35-41.

³⁰ Karl Rahner, "Towards a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II," *Theological Studies* 40 (1979): 716-27.

reformed over the centuries; but today the Third Church invites the whole church to pact a new alliance with the powerless as Jesus did and from there to announce a credible "salvation" for all, a Reign of God which begins here and is eternal life, new human beings living in communion with God and one another.

The First and Second Churches had their "Fathers", their Chrysostoms and Augustines (and their Mothers, too, whose teaching has not come down to us); and they had their doctors, their Aquinas's and Teresas of Avila. It is hardly fashionable to speak of Fathers of the Church today. But the nature of this "Third Church" invites us, I think, to speak analogously of "Fathers" as in the past. The Third Church will probably have more Mothers than Fathers; but Romero, analogically speaking, will certainly be one of its fathers. ((Some years ago, I received a letter from a Jesuit in Peru who had just read Romero's homilies. "He was not invented by the Left," my friend exclaimed. He was amazed at the depth and richness of Romero's thought.)) Bishop Pedro Casaldáliga of Brazil has gone so far as to say "The history of the Church in Latin America divides into two parts: before and after Romero."³¹ But Romero's witness echoes far beyond Latin America. Romero will deserve, I believe, to be recognized as a genuine a Doctor of the Church of the next millennium, a doctor the church of the poor, the only one with the right to call itself Christian. The only church that can be everyone's church, and so, the only church with the right to call itself Catholic.

It is difficult to speak a credible word about God today, and perhaps that is how it should be. Before he was tortured and killed in Bolivia in 1980, Lluís Espinal said, "Whoever does not have the courage to speak on behalf of human beings has no right to speak of God." Romero could speak a credible word about God because, for him, as he said paraphrasing Irenaeus of Lyons, *Gloria Dei, pauper vivens*, the glory of God is that the poor have life.³² Romero and others like them speak a credible word about God because they giving witness to God's own compassion for the suffering.

Romero fell at the altar. The Spaniard José María Valverde wrote of him:

Dark centuries ago,
it is told, a bishop died
by order of a king,
spattering the chalice with his blood
to defend the freedom of the church

³¹ Cited in Sobrino, *Memories and Reflections*, p. 55.

³² Oscar Arnulfo Romero, "La dimensión política de la fe," in *La voz de los sin voz*, p. 193. The occasion was the reception of an honorary doctorate at the University of Louvain, February 2, 1980.

from the secular might.
 Well enough, surely. But
 since when has it been told
 that a bishop fell at the altar
 not for the freedom of the church,
 but simply because
 he took sides with the poor--
 because he was the mouth of their thirst for justice
 crying to heaven
 When has such a thing been told?
 Perhaps not since the beginning,
 when Someone died
 the death of a subversive
 and a slave.³³

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³³ English translation in Sobrino, *Memories and Reflections*, p. 46.

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