

The UCA Martyrs: Challenge and Grace

Twenty years ago, at the UCA in El Salvador, my Jesuit brothers and Elba and Celina Ramos were murdered. I was in Thailand at the time. On my way back to El Salvador, I was scheduled to change planes in San Francisco. When I got there, Steve Privett and Peggy O'Grady were waiting for me in the airport. They both looked shocked. Meanwhile, out on the San Francisco streets, Paul Locatelli, loudspeaker in hand, was condemning the murders. With him was Tessa Rouverol. I was brought here to Santa Clara, and I stayed for several weeks. I was welcomed like a brother. When I got here I found that eight crosses had been set in the ground in front of the church. When somebody pulled them out, Paul Locatelli put them back immediately. I'll never forget all that. And it's for that reason that this visit feels like a kind of homecoming.

I want to speak to you about these martyrs. I'll speak about them with gratitude -- gratitude for who they were and for what they did. But I'll also speak with the conviction that it's very important to keep their memory alive -- and that it would be terrible to let that memory die.

The martyrs make us confront ourselves without evasions. They also shed light on the biggest issues in our world, and on what we have to do about them. We have to take on the idols which are rooted in the first world and demand victims in the third world, although their roots extend back to the first world. We have to try to turn history around, to save a civilization which, as Ignacio Ellacuria said, is gravely ill; a civilization which, as Jean Ziegler put it, is at death's door.

The martyrs, more than anyone else, show us the way to go. They're the ones who push us the hardest to follow Jesus; they're the ones who best introduce us to the mystery of his God.

In what some call this world of "abundance", the word "martyr" can seem strange, and even repulsive. But for us -- and here is the Christian paradox -- it produces light, and courage, and gratitude. That's why it shouldn't be allowed to lose its force. For Christians, it's a reference point, and in the quest to humanize this world, it's irreplaceable -- just as irreplaceable as the cross of Jesus. That's why I'm going to speak now about the eight martyrs of the UCA.

To give this a human and not simply an academic context, I'll begin by recalling how two well known people reacted to their deaths. The first was Fr. Pedro Arrupe. He was very sick -- in bed, and barely able to say a word -- when they were murdered. The nurse, a Jesuit brother, who gave him the news said that Fr. Arrupe began to cry. It was all he could do, but in his tears, he was giving himself completely. The second person is Noam Chomsky. He turned 80 this year. A journalist asked him where he found the strength to continue

struggling. Chomsky replied, “Images like this” – and he pointed to a picture of Archbishop Romero and the six Jesuits of the UCA.

These human beings touch the deepest part of any decent human being. They’re a reference point that gives life, although it is not easy to talk about that. Certainly in the case of the six Jesuits, and especially in the case of Julia Elba and Celina where the mystery of evil makes itself even more present powerful. .

1. Who they were

Injustice kills innocent people in different ways. It murders people like Archbishop Romero and Martin Luther King. And, slowly or violently, it kills bigger groups of people – the peasants of El Mozote and, in earlier years, the slaves on the cotton plantations here in the South.

The Jesuits of the UCA, “jesuanic” martyrs after the fashion of Jesus

Let’s begin with the six Jesuits. After the Medellin conference in 1968, and in the face of the people’s suffering, they were converted. They accepted that to be a Jesuit didn’t simply mean to “work;” it meant to “struggle.” “Struggle for the faith” and, even more surprisingly, “struggle for justice.” That was what reality demanded of them, and that’s what was said at the thirty-second General Congregation. Their deaths confirmed what the congregation had so lucidly predicted: “If we work for justice, we will end up paying a price.”

Each of the UCA martyrs had different talents, and brought them to bear in his work. It’s good to remember that, so that each of us can feel both challenged and encouraged. Let me tell you a little bit about each of them.

Ellacuria was 59. He was a philosopher and theologian and he was president of the UCA. He rethought the concept of university, of what a university should be. He did this from the vantage point of the crucified peoples -- and he did it *for* them. He used all his considerable gifts and strengths, and the resources of the UCA, to fight repression and oppression, and to achieve a negotiated peace in the country’s civil war.

Segundo Montes was 56. He founded the UCA’s Human Rights Institute. He focused on the plight of the refugees – the ones who stayed within the country, and the ones who left. Back then it was the violent repression that caused them to flee; today, it’s hunger and unemployment. He visited the people in the refugee camps in Honduras.

Ignacio Martin-Baro was 44. He was a social psychologist, and a pioneer in the psychology of liberation. He was also the founder of the UCA's Public Opinion Institute. The institute's aim was to make the truth known in a way that would make it hard for oppression to stifle it. Every weekend he would say Mass in communities on the outskirts of San Salvador and in the countryside.

Juan Ramon Moreno was 56. He taught theology, and accompanied communities of religious women as a spiritual director. He had also been the novice master for the Central America province. In the early '80s, he took part in the national literacy campaign in Nicaragua.

Amando Lopez was 53. He taught theology at the UCA. Earlier, he had been president of the Jesuit university in Nicaragua, and rector of El Salvador's interdiocesan seminary. In both countries he defended people who were persecuted by criminal regimes; on occasion he even hid those people in his room.

Finally, Joaquin Lopez y Lopez. He was 71. He was the only one of the six who was Salvadoran by birth. He was a simple, straightforward person, much like the poor he served. He worked at our high school in San Salvador, and later was the first general secretary of the UCA. Later he was the founder of a network of schools for the poorest of the poor. The network was called Fe y Alegría – Faith and Joy.

They were very different, but all of them were Jesuits and followers of Jesus. That's what they've left us. We can look to them to see who we should be and what we should do.

I want to say a word about what most characterized them.

First, they were followers of Jesus. They lived his life in a real way – not only intentionally or devotionally. As it is often the case. They directed their gaze at those who were truly poor – those who suffer the oppression of hunger, injustice and scorn, and the repression of being tortured, disappeared and murdered, often with great cruelty. Witnessing all of this, these Jesuits were moved to compassion. They “performed miracles” and “cast out demons.” The miracles occurred as they put science and their talents, their time and their rest, at the service of truth and justice. The demons they defended the poor against were the armies, the oligarchs, the governments. They had good models to follow: Rutilio Grande and Archbishop Romero. To the end -- and even as they endured bombings and threats -- they were faithful and merciful.

They died as Jesus did, and joined the cloud of witnesses – Christians, members of religious congregations, agnostics – who have given their lives for justice. These are the martyrs after the fashion of Jesus. They're an essential reference point for Christians and for anyone who wants to live in a human and

decent way in our world. Theirs were baptisms of spirit and blood. They followed Jesus.

The second thing that characterized them was the spirit of Ignatius. I want to dwell on this point a bit more, because today there's a lot of talk about Ignatian spirituality. I think they can help make Ignatius present today, at least in the third world, and that Ignatius can help us better understand Jesus.

That other Ignatius, Ignacio Ellacuria, did a rereading of the Spiritual Exercises from the perspective of the third world. That rereading includes three fundamental points that can serve as Ignatian presuppositions for the option for the poor and the struggle for justice.

The first is that our world is one which crucifies people. Our reaction to that – and I say reaction because this is a case in which there is no need for “discernment” – our reaction should be to work redemption.

The second is that we need to be honest with ourselves as Jesuits and ask, “What have we done to help put them on the cross, and what will we do to help take them down?”

The third – and this one is perhaps the hardest, and the one we do least often – is to take seriously that there are two ways of living our lives, being Jesuits, and building our societies and our universities; and those two ways are in conflict. The first is the way of poverty. It leads to insults and contempt; today we would say it leads to humiliation, defamation and threats; and from there to humility, to true life, to the deepest part of what it means to be human. The second way is the way of riches. It leads to vain and worldly honors; today we would say it leads to prestige among the “important” people of this world, and from there to arrogance and to a life which, personally and institutionally, is false. Summing up: the first way leads to salvation, to humanization; the second way leads to perdition, to dehumanization. It is, as Jesus said, a question of gaining our lives or losing our lives; and of being willing to pay the price.

Structurally speaking, Ellacuria insisted that we need to choose between a civilization of poverty –close to one that focuses on labor”-- and a civilization of wealth – close to one that focuses on capital.

These three points – the crucified peoples, the need for liberation, and the path of poverty – in addition to being honest with ourselves – are, in my opinion, what most shines in the Ignatian style of the UCA martyrs, and what best explain why they ended up as they did. To be sure, in the Ignatian tradition there are many other important elements which need to be taken into account: the “magis,” “for the greater glory of God,” “in everything, to love and serve,” “the more universal the good is, the more divine it is” – all the things most often mentioned in the explosive growth of Ignatian thought that exists today. But in

my opinion the three points I've mentioned here are the easiest to understand – especially for the poor, and for those who don't know much about St. Ignatius. And, in my opinion, they're also the points which run the smallest risk of getting us lost in talk about concepts. They express realities which are clearly historical and can be verified.

In this context it seems worthwhile to mention a special fact: the UCA martyrs never made efforts to discern whether – in a situation which included threats, risks and persecution – it was God's will that they leave the country or stay. It never even occurred to them to do that. If we want to ask, how much of this was explicitly Ignatian, we would have to go to what he calls the first time of electing: making an election when one “neither doubts nor can doubt” (SpEx. no. 175). We would have to ask, “What moved and attracted their will?” Was it, as St. Ignatius put it, “God, our Lord” communicating directly to their souls? Or was it historical realities: “the suffering of the people,” which wouldn't let them live in peace; “the shame they would feel if they abandoned the people;” “the cohesive force of the community;” “the memory of the murder of Archbishop Romero, nine priests and four women religious;” even “having gotten used to being persecuted.” I think all of that moved their wills and shed light on the decisions they had to make, and the road they chose to follow. It was through all of that that, in the language of the Spiritual Exercises, God was helping them reach a point of *not doubting or being able to doubt*. But God doesn't act through just anything, but rather through things like the ones we've mentioned.

The Spirit of God urges to to act, to move, but its force passes through those who are suffering. That's what Pedro Casaldaliga is saying is his paraphrase of the famous poem by Antonio Machado.

Along the pathway which you are
Which you create even as you walk,
To help those who are stuck
To take heart again:
March to the beat
Of your people's song

I think that's how the UCA Jesuits discerned. They let themselves be drawn and led by reality. It's the synergy of God with those who are suffering. I can think of no other way to explain how they were moved and why they stayed where they were.

I want to end this reflection about the kind of Jesuits they were by recalling that “they died in community.” It could have happened differently; it could have been that Ellacuria, the main enemy, would be the only one killed. But there's an important truth – a providential one, if you will –in their being killed in community. That's how their lives and works had been, with joys and tensions, with virtues and sins, but always following a single, well-defined line. In this way the martyrs

expressed how the Society of Jesus is all of its members. It is a body, not a sum of individuals, some of them brilliant and some ordinary.

This community of six Jesuits was integrated into a larger community, the body of the worldwide Jesuit community. Since the thirty-second General Congregation, forty nine Jesuits have been murdered in the third world. Among them were three from the United States: Francis Louis Martiseck, 66, born in Export, Pennsylvania, shot to death in Mokamie, India in 1979; Raymond Adams, 54, born in New York, shot to death in Cape Coast, Ghana, in 1989; and Thomas Gafney, 65, born in Cleveland, Ohio, and murdered in Katmandu, Nepal, in 1997.

We often recall the glories of the Society: the reductions in Paraguay, Mateo Ricci in China.... But today these martyrs – some more famous than others – are the glory of the Society. Above all, they're the ones who keep the Society alive. A week after the killing of Rutilio Grande, Father Pedro Arrupe wrote:

“These are the kind of Jesuits that the church and the world need today: men impelled by the love of Christ, who serve their brothers and sisters regardless of their race or class. Men who know how to identify with those who suffer and live with them, to the point of giving their lives to help them. Brave men who know how to defend human rights and, if it should be necessary, to give their lives.” (March 19, 1977)

Julia Elba and Celina: the crucified people

Two women died with the Jesuits. Julia Elba Ramos was 42. She cooked for a community of Jesuit seminarians. She was poor, joyful and intuitive. Her daughter Celina was 15. She was active, was a student and catechist. She and her boyfriend had decided that they would get engaged the following month. Julia Elba and Celina had decided to spend the night in a guest parlor attached to the Jesuit residence because they felt they'd be safer there. But that night an order was given: “Leave no witnesses.” In the pictures of the two of them after they were killed, you can see how Julia Elba had tried to protect her daughter with her own body. A few days ago I heard a testimony about her by a woman who had known her well:

“I say she was very human because she could feel the pain of others. I lived in her home for a while. She was very friendly, and she knew how to get along with people. She was 33 at the time and I was 19. We had a lot of things in common. We both began to work at a very early age. She had worked on the coffee plantations from the age of 10.. She was a very strong woman. She always taught me not to let people do things to me, and not to give up in the face of problems. She had suffered a great

deal, but she was strong. She taught me to be a woman of value and to depend on myself, not on others.”

In our world there are hundreds of millions of men and women like Julia Elba. They are the vast majority, and they perpetuate an oppression of centuries. In the America conquered and pillaged by the Spaniards in the 16th century; in Africa, enslaved in the 16th century and sacked in the 19th century by the Europeans; in the planet that today suffers an oppressive globalization under the aegis of the United States. They die the quick death of violence and repression. There's no doubt that they're the ones who most suffer the consequences of our excesses. In wars and invasions: Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine; in the handling administration of medicine and drugs: malaria, AIDS; in our awful ecology: floods, growing deserts, losses in agriculture; in natural catastrophes: the immense majority of those who die in earthquakes are those whose homes weren't built with enough iron; they live on mountain slopes, on riverbanks, alongside train tracks...

There is more wealth in the world, but also more injustice. Africa has been called the dungeon of the world, a continental holocaust. According to the FAO (Food and Agricultural Organization), two and a half billion live on less than three dollars a day, and 25,000 people die of hunger every day. The growing deserts threaten the lives of 1.2 billion people in a hundred countries. Immigrants aren't treated like brothers and sisters, The earth under their feet is denied t them.

These words of Pedro Casaldaliga's are from 2006. Neither G-7 nor G-8, and now G-20, have done anything significant to turn around this situation. To recall the millenium goals is, today, a mockery and an offense to the poor. In one year the number of hungry people has increased by 100 million, and every five seconds a child is, as Jean Ziegler puts it, murdered by hunger – “murdered” since this is a situation that we could eliminate.

These people are the “suffering servants of Yahweh” of our day. The language of “crucified people” is not used, and it's politically incorrect. These men and women who die are innocent; they haven't committed the “sins” committed by Archbishop Romero or Ignacio Ellacuria. They were simply there. They die cruel deaths, often numerous deaths, after lives of great suffering. The five million men and women who have died in the Congo are unknown, victims of a war that's about getting coltan to the world of abundance, there to be used by the huge companies that make missiles, telephones and computers. These people are helpless, defenseless. Really, who defends these peoples? Who risks anything important to take them down from the cross?

Those who died like Jesus, the “jesuanic” martyrs– or at least, some of them – are known and venerated. But not the crucified people. What's worse is that – even though the Jesuits would never have wanted this – they overshadow

the others. Ellacuria would never have wanted the brilliance of his image to obscure Julia Elba.

It may seem absurd, but I've asked myself, who is more a martyr, Ellacuria or Julia Elba? In which of them is the cross of Jesus reproduced more faithfully? The Jesuit martyrs are a better expression of the decision and the freedom to risk one's life, but not of the blackness of today's injustice, or of how difficult it is today simply to live. The deaths of people like Julia Elba and the vast majority of those murdered, don't express as well the active character of the struggle, but they better express the fact that those who've been killed have been innocent and defenseless; they never had a chance to avoid their deaths. They're the ones who bear more of the burden of a sin that has annihilated them little by little in life, and definitively in death. They're the ones who best express the enormous suffering of the world. Without aiming to do it, and without realizing that they're doing it, they "complete in their flesh what was lacking in the passion of Christ." They don't "add" to his passion, as the exegetes would say, but they do "reproduce" it.

The Jesuits weren't killed for practicing a Kantian fidelity to universal ideals of truth and justice; they were killed for defending these crucified peoples. You can't understand them – and their witness -- if you don't keep in mind the crucified peoples. It would be like trying to understand the cross of Jesus without taking into account the wretched poor whom he helped in their prostration and whom he defended against the scribes and Pharisees and high priests and followers of Herod.

A final reflection in faith. Some of the UCA martyrs – the Jesuits – were more like Mons. Romero. Others – Julia Elba and Celina – were more like the crucified peoples. Seeing them together, we can say that in them Jesus and his God passed through this world carrying the cross. But – despite all appearances – it's also true that in them the God of salvation passed through this world. That's what Fr. Ellacuria said with scientific rigor. For my part, I've put it this way: "Outside the poor and the victims, there is no salvation."

Let me end this point with two brief reflections. The first is that the murderers and the people who've set up these oppressive structures include baptized Christians, some of them educated in Christian institutions. The second is that it seems that the people in charge of canonizing new saints don't know what to do with the martyrs after the fashion of Jesus, the martyrs for justice. And there's no place in the canonization process for the majority of the men and women of the crucified peoples. It would be good to rethink these processes, and whether they are canonized or not, it would be good if the church did everything it could to dignify these majorities who have borne the cross in life and in death. They are God's preferred ones.

2. What the UCA martyrs ask of us, and what they offer us

They ask nothing for themselves. But our consciences tell us, “We’ve got to do something.” It’s important not to forget them, to remember them with affection and gratitude. It’s also important to demand the truth about the murders and to insist that those responsible be brought to trial; we won’t be able to improve this world if the lies and cover-ups and impunity remain intact. But that’s not enough. We need to let them question us and inquire what they ask of us.

I think they ask us to carry on, to be as they were and do as they did, beginning – as they did – by seeing our lives, our vocations and our work in terms of con-version, a turning around of our lives and a turning around of history. Archbishops Romero did not like people to use the word “conversion” as a way of talking about how he changed, but his is a famous example of what we might call a turning upside down of our way of being and doing .

As for the conversion of the UCA martyrs, their fundamental way of being and doing had its roots in the Spiritual Exercises they made in 1969. The key aspects were being honest about reality, being consistently merciful without counting the cost, and working for a civilization of poverty.

I’ll give you some examples of this. I’ll concentrate on what the university was for them, and what it demanded of them, but I think that, by analogy, the same could be said about pastoral work, humanitarian work, human rights work...

The demands of the university were serious; we can see that in the fact that it’s not a common occurrence for Jesuits working in universities to be murdered.

On June 12, 1982, this university gave Ignacio Ellacuria an honorary doctorate. That day he gave an important speech. When we re-read it today – even taking into account the differences of time and place – it still sheds light and points us in a direction and offers us an impetus to build a Jesuit university of Christian inspiration. We’d have to be creative in adapting his words then to our reality today, but it would be foolish to ignore those words. Let’s look briefly at some of the most novel and challenging and fruitful aspects of that talk.

Who does the university have to answer to? Every university is concerned with knowledge and with a particular kind of intellectual exercise. In that sense, Jesuit universities are no different from others. Ellacuria thought that, too, and demanded that knowing be pursued as rigorously as possible, and that teaching and research be of high quality. I’m not going to dwell on that; he took it for granted. But he insisted on something else that isn’t so obvious, or so commonly accepted. He said, “The university is a social reality and a social

force. Historically it has been affected by the reality of the society it lives in. Its goal is to enlighten and transform the reality it lives in and lives for.”

This leads to a crucial question: who does the university have to answer to? To whom is it responsible? There are certain conditions for the university’s existence: the Jesuits themselves and their university tradition; the church institution which, in certain circumstances, gives its approval; the past and present academic community; those who make things possible economically, financially and, sometimes, politically; the student body... All these have to be paid attention to; but ultimately, the university doesn’t have to answer to them – and lets us remember than universal answers aren’t good enough here; and preconceived answers are no help, either.

They say we’re living in a globalized society. However, the term “globalization” frequently obscures drastic differences. Universities like ours are in the Third World. The interests of the people there – that is, the interests of the majority of the world – are different from and opposed to the interests of the minorities in the first world. Universities like ours have to answer to a world of poverty and ignominy, a world where there’s so much oppression and repression. About that we have no doubt, nor can we doubt.

We have to use means which are appropriate to a university, but our most important goal has to do with the world outside, because what we are trying to do is help free people from every kind of oppression – that is, to take the crucified people down from their cross. If the university doesn’t make this its priority, it can be a center of knowledge, along with others, and more or less competent and competitive, but it won’t be a university of Christian inspiration. We can’t take that Christian inspiration for granted; the temptation to fall short of that is always lying in wait.

In Christian terms, what we’re talking about here amounts to the university’s option for the poor and the victims. The university’s task is to see to it that the poor – who can’t take life for granted – have life; and that the poor – who have the powers of this world ranged against them – be defended from all oppressive powers.

The university as a whole has to do this, making the best use of reason in its teaching, research and social outreach; it’s not enough for the university to simply help poor students, which might be good on other accounts.

Science for those who have no voice. Ellacuria said the university should incarnate itself intellectually among the poor. That’s hard to understand, practically or theoretically. But it becomes easier to grasp when we see what the aim was: “to be science for the voiceless and intellectual support for those who, in their reality, have the truth and are right, even though it is at times in the way of destitution, but who can’t establish this academically.”

For us in El Salvador, these words of Ellacuria's remind us of Mons. Romero's: "I want my homilies to be the voice of the voiceless" (July 29, 1979). He wanted to defend them against those who had too much voice. It's worth noting that when Ellacuria sought a point of contact between academic reason and the word of the church, he didn't have recourse to the themes of theory vs. praxis, fallibility vs. infallibility, doubt vs. certainty; rather, he spoke of defending the oppressed and the victims. Here pastoral language and university language become one.

Mons. Romero said, "That's why my words don't go down well with those who have too much voice." That's why the church was so harshly persecuted in his time. The same thing happened, and for the same reason, to the university in Ellacuria's time. In his speech here at Santa Clara, he recalled the attacks and threats the UCA received in those years. The most important thing he said remains valid today: "In a world where falsehood, injustice and repression reign, a university that struggles for the truth, for justice and for freedom should expect to be persecuted." That's why it's important to look at how much persecution a Christian university suffers, and at who attacks it and who praises it, and at how it acts in the face of all this.

When the language and reasoning of the university and the church are serious, instead of being "light" and amorphous, they're more cutting than a two-edged sword. When that happens, a world that claims to be tolerant and to defend freedom of thought and expression, tries to defend itself against compassionate reason and the word of the God of the poor. Forty years ago, even the CIA tried to defend itself against Medellin and the theology of liberation. It was afraid of them; as the Rockefeller report put it, "they jeopardize our interests." In Latin America, governments and armies murdered dozens of priests, among them four bishops. But universities can produce this same kind of fear in the powerful.

A "poor" and "powerless" university. It's what Jesus asked of the disciples when he sent them off to do their work: "Take nothing with you for the journey." "Don't be like those who use their power to oppress." If we're applying this to the university today, we'd have to be realistic and put it in context, but it shouldn't be ignored as if it wouldn't affect at all the work of the university.

In the meditation on two standards, St. Ignatius is very clear that poverty and powerlessness are not only ways to perfection but also paths to life, to becoming more human. He insists that they exist in dialectical opposition to wealth and power. This was the St. Ignatius of Manresa. Later, when he was the General of the Society, he had to contextualize this – and it wasn't easy. To carry out their apostolate, the Jesuits needed resources, so of necessity they began relationships with benefactors. This brought them in contact with the world of riches, honors and power: kings, noblewomen, cardinals... This was a

serious problem for St. Ignatius, and he sought solutions for it. A well known example is his recommendation to Laínez and Salmerón, theologians who went to the Council of Trent. Going there meant entering the world of church power and, indirectly, civil power. He ordered them to live and to spend their nights at hospitals for the poor. It was a way of living out the two standards in what was, objectively speaking, a situation of wealth and power.

Today, trying to live *in poverty* means living in austerity, rejecting luxuries in buildings and churches, and avoiding excessive solemnities, even when this is accepted and even expected socially.; and certainly avoiding –in comparison with poor and low middle classes- huge inequalities.

As for being *powerless*, that doesn't mean we should give up the power that comes with knowledge, because that would put it in the hands of those who would use that power to hide the truth and to oppress. Still, having power can lead to arrogance, to subjugating others; this has to be avoided, in the same way that we have to avoid the satisfaction we can sometimes feel when we're close to those who have civil or ecclesiastical power.

As for arrogance, there's no better remedy for it than to let the poor be the good news for us. They do that in a special way when, without saying it, they forgive us. Another thing that can help us overcome arrogance is persecution – when we accept it humbly.

A final reflection: a clarification on *academic excellence*. It's part of the Jesuit educational tradition, but one could wonder if insisting on it is possibly a way of covering up something else. For me the problem arises when it's said that academic excellence and university excellence are the same thing, and when we become too anxious to be like other famous universities. Yes, we need to have *academic* excellence if we're going to have *university* excellence; but they're not the same thing. What can be even worse is if the insistence on *academic* excellence leads to a diminishing of *university* excellence. We've been clear about what *university excellence* consists of: forming a society that emphasizes truth, justice, liberation and humanization. Academic excellence is necessary, and even very important, for that; but it's not the final goal. It's a means, but it's not the end.

In fact, that's how it's been in Jesuit universities. Knowledge has been an important instrument for several important things: defending the faith, insuring that the church has recognition and prestige, helping some social groups grow in their potentialities...

To achieve all that, academic excellence has been necessary. But what we're proposing goes beyond that. Taking the crucified people down from the cross means making life and dignity and fraternity possible in the world of the

poor and oppressed. Once this is firmly established, we can return to the subject of academic excellence, turning it into an “integral” academic excellence.

The point is that in our world, what reigns isn't just ignorance; it's falsehood. So seeking the truth isn't simply a question of trying to know more; it's a matter of exposing established lies. What predominates today is ideology. It has a structural and institutional dimension. It tries to use knowledge to defend interests that are often unjust. So if we're talking about excellence in the area of knowledge, what's needed is a conversion of the intelligence to overcome falsehood and ideology. I believe that happens when we let ourselves be affected -including intellectually – by the crucified reality. It's a way of healing reality and also of healing our knowledge, and expanding its horizons. This calls into question the usual way of understanding academic excellence, a way that, even in the best of cases, is naïve. This offers a new direction for academic excellence, and shows that it's strengthened, not weakened, when the university is dedicated to the liberation of an oppressed world.”

Let's not forget that the establishment is always pushing for conventional academic excellence. Its aim is to produce ideologies that favor it and graduates who are very competent at maintaining the *status quo*. What's much harder is to find social forces that can transform the world, and that the university is willing to take under its wing. These social forces come from the poor, the victims and the martyrs.

3. The grace of the martyrs

We have remembered the martyrs. Their lives and deaths were hard; for that reason my words may sound strong. But it's also true that the beatitudes apply to them, and that for us they are, they can be, a blessing. They encourage us to give ourselves to others. They offer us a kind of hope and courage that we can find nowhere else – not even necessarily in the liturgical or academic events.

At Christmas time we say that in Jesus of Nazareth “the goodness of God appears.” During Holy Week we hear Pilot say “*ecce homo*”, “Behold the true man”, Jesus, “true man,” the one who “took upon himself the burden of reality our of love for the little ones.” Both things – the appearance of God and the appearance of the human in a world of darkness is good news.

That's what we're celebrating in this university event. The six Jesuits of the UCA carry us in their faith. We can have a hint of it, even if it's only in the sense of walking humbly and on tiptoes. Julia Elba and Celina carry us in their faith, but in a different way. For my part, I'm not able to reach the depths of that mystery. But God knows them and – only God knows how – they bring us to God.

Against worldly wisdom the martyrs generate hope. Thousands of poor *campesinos* who had family members killed gather at the UCA on the eve of November 16 to celebrate, to pray and to sing. Jürgen Moltman has put it very well theoretically: “Not every life is an occasion of hope, but the life of Jesus is – Jesus who, out of love, took up the cross.”

That’s all. I want to thank Santa Clara University very sincerely for the opportunity it’s given me to say these words to you. I’ve tried to make present to you, at least in some sense, the suffering and the hope of an admirable people, and the memory of my brothers and sisters of the UCA. I also want to thank you for the honor you’ve bestowed on me personally. It reminds me of the affection you showed me 20 years ago. I interpret it as a symbol of this university’s solidarity with the UCA and with the Salvadoran people.

My final words are the ones I wrote here twenty years ago:

“Rest in peace, Ignacio Ellacuría, Segundo Montes, Ignacio Martín-Baró, Amando López, Juan Ramón Moreno, Joaquín López y López, companions of Jesus. Rest in peace, Julia Elba and Celina, beloved daughters of God.

May your peace give hope to us, the living, and may your memory keep us from resting in peace.”

Jon Sobrino
November 5, 2009