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THE IMPACT OF MONSIGNOR ROMERO ON THE CHURCHES
OF EL SALVADOR AND THE UNITED STATES

José Jorge Simán
University of North Carolina

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ABSTRACT

The Impact of Monsignor Romero on the Churches of El Salvador and the United States

As we reflect on the influence the Church in an underdeveloped country has exercised over the Church in the most powerful country on earth, we may wonder why the Salvadoran Church has come to play this part. The historical elements we have introduced in this work provide the context for this influence, and it is interesting to note that the figure of Romero has served as the catalyst.

THE IMPACT OF MONSIGNOR ROMERO ON THE CHURCHES
OF EL SALVADOR AND THE UNITED STATES

José Jorge Simán
University of North Carolina

He comes in pride and sorrow, affirming all
His claims
Assured, beyond doubt, of the devotion of the
People
Who receive him with scenes of frenzied
Enthusiasm.

T.S. Elliot, "Murder in the Cathedral"

Thus his ministry, which was particularly solicitous for the
poorest and most deprived, was crowned with his blood. It
was a supreme testimony which remains as a symbol of the suffer-
ing of a people, but also as a cause for hope of a better future.

John Paul II

I believe our first thought should be to thank our Lord God for
having given us such a courageous Archbishop, for having given
him to us for three years, for his profound commitment as a
priest, such a seeker of justice and peace. And what is the
reason for his murder? To have loved justice, to have so loved
peace. I tell you that all the good people of El Salvador are
in mourning, though others are not. Instead they are rejoicing.
Theirs is a black pleasure, for it is the worst sin ever committed
in this country. We know that he is now before God, that he has
presented himself before Him and has said: 'Mission accomplished,
my Lord! Here am I! Like You on the cross here am I as well.'

Monsignor Ricardo Urioste, Vicar Capitular
Archdiocese of San Salvador
(TV-4 transmission, March 24, 1980)

Introduction

From the perspective of a believer, the function of the Church cannot be understood simply as a social organization. The present work is a study of the life and function of the Church in a small Third World country crucified by injustice--El Salvador.¹ Because of contemporary Christian solidarity, the life of that Church has radiated outward toward the universal Church. Here we focus on that illumination, particularly as it has reached the United States.

Among the dramatis personae in the life of the Salvadoran Church, we will encounter the prophetic figure of Monsignor Oscar Romero.

Undoubtedly a man outside of the usual mold of the Salvadoran Church, he aroused great interest in the United States church. Around him there developed a special relationship between the two. The events we will describe are very recent and have provoked contradictory reactions. Did Monsignor Romero fall in the midst of social conflict? Was he manipulated by the cleverest actors in that struggle? In this study, still in an initial stage, we will establish the autonomous influence of Monsignor Romero on those events.

I. The Traditional Church

Despite occasional moments of conflict, particularly with the Liberals, for decades the Church in El Salvador was considered a pillar of the established order.² The Church served to legitimate that order for religion was the bond that conferred ideological unity on society. As a social actor and as a physical presence, the Church was present, and is still present in the entire country.

In a society with a very low level of organization, the army, the Church, and more recently, some state organizations (municipalities, for example), have been the only institutions with a general permanence. If we keep in mind the fundamental role that the Church has played in the formation of Salvadoran national identity, it becomes obvious that any turbulence within this fundamental institution would spread to the rest of society.

For many years, with a few exceptions, the Salvadoran Church successfully cultivated good relations with whatever regime was in power in order to maintain its own privileged position. To the dispossessed majority of the population, it emphasized that God's will was to accept one's situation, and that difficulties in this life would be compensated in eternal life hereafter. In this manner a Manichean duality was established in which body and spirit, or temporal and eternal life, were conceived as separate realities. The Church would take charge of spiritual affairs while the civil government took care of earthly matters.

In spite of the common argument that the Church did not concern itself with politics, it is evident that in playing its traditional role the Church provided de facto support for the existing system, and that such support was crucial to the survival of that system. The military, the oligarchy, and the Church have been the traditional foundations of the Salvadoran social order.

II. The Origins of Change in the Church

The situation as described above began to change around 1960. Change was first slow and almost imperceptible. Later it came more swiftly. Finally it was accompanied by violence. These changes took place within the framework of transformations affecting the Catholic

Church at the global level. Among the latter should be included those movements suppressed ("movimientos acallados") by Pius XII, such as "the new theology."

The presence of the Church in the modern world was questioned "radically"--that is, to its very roots or foundation. There were many milestones in the process of aggiornamento initiated by Pope John XXIII: the Vatican Council II (1962-1965), the encyclicals Populorum Progressio and Pacem in Terris, and Pope Paul VI's encyclical Evangelii Nuntiandi. In Latin America, the Latin American Bishops Conferences of Medellín (1968) and Puebla (1979) signified a wholly new epoch. It was in Medellín, in the effort to apply Vatican II to the reality of Latin America, that the Church boldly charted new paths for pastoral practice in the context of "unjust structures" and "institutionalized violence."

If Christians believe in the fecundity of peace for the pursuit of justice, they believe as well that justice is an inevitable condition of peace. They see prevailing in many parts of Latin America an unjust situation that can be called institutionalized violence. Because of defects in the structures of agricultural and industrial enterprise, of national and international economies, and of cultural and political life, entire populations lack basic necessities. They live in a state of dependence which inhibits all initiative and responsibility. Similarly they lack any possibility of cultural improvement or participation in social and political life. This situation violates their fundamental rights, and urgently demands global, courageous and profoundly renovating transformations. It should not surprise us, therefore, that the 'temptation of violence' arises in Latin America. We should not try the patience of a people which for years has endured conditions which would be unacceptable to anyone with a greater awareness of human rights.⁴

It has been said that Medellín was "...one of the major political events of the century: it shattered the centuries old alliance of Church, military and rich elites."⁵

The 1979 assembly of the Latin American Bishops Conference in Puebla reaffirmed the conclusions of Medellín:

The immense majority of our brothers continue to live in a situation of poverty and of misery that has even worsened.

Analyzing this situation more closely, we discover that this poverty is not a temporary condition. Rather it is the product of economic, social and political structures and situations, which give rise to it, although there are other causes of misery as well.⁶

Evolution of the Salvadoran Church in the Last Twenty Years

Within the Salvadoran Church, Monsignor Luis Chávez, Archbishop of San Salvador, sought to apply the ecclesiastical renovation in his archdiocese.⁷ To this end, in 1966 he published a pastoral letter, "The Responsibility of the Laity in the Regulation of Temporal Life," which rankled the military government of Col. Julio Adalberto Rivera. The Archbishop supported the aggiornamento of the Church and promoted pastoral work with an ever greater lay participation, in accordance with Vatican II and its Latin American application as determined in the extraordinary Medellín Conference. This was an unequivocal stance.

In January 1970, the Congress on Agrarian Reform⁸ took place in the National Legislative Assembly, with the participation of both governmental and nongovernmental delegates. Among the latter, the Catholic Church came out solidly in favor of agrarian reform, thus creating considerable stir among the rest of the participants. The response of the economically powerful groups was not long in coming. Only hours later, the priest who had presented the Church's position was kidnapped.⁹

The same year, as part of the application of Vatican II and at the urging of the Archbishop, a Pastoral Week was sponsored by the Salvadoran Bishops Conference (CEDES). This event brought together university leaders with representatives of Catholic worker and peasant organizations and of Catholic Action (Accion Católica). Among the conclusions emerging from these meetings, there was one which particularly offended some of the bishops, for it called for a denunciation of their connivance "with the Salvadoran oligarchical workers."¹⁰ This was one of the first incidents which divided the Salvadoran bishops, the opening of a clear breach in the Church hierarchy which has persisted to this day.

Another example of how the application of the Church's new orientations created divisions in the hierarchy concerned the educational content of some of the main Catholic high schools in the country. In 1973, the economically powerful groups created a national scandal by denouncing the attempt to apply the Vatican II and Medellín directives in the schools as Marxist teaching.¹¹ These incidents foreshadowed the larger problems to come as a result of changes in the nature of pastoral work.

Pastoral Change

The pastoral work of the Church acquired an extraordinary vitality through the efforts of its agents. Among them the lay workers became especially important. Organized in a network of Delegates of the Word and ecclesiastic base communities (comunidades eclesiales de base),¹² they gradually spread out all over the country.¹³ Their activities supplemented and strengthened the traditional visits of the parish priest to the communities in his district. Inspired by Medellín, they established the basis for what would later become the ecclesiastical

base communities, seeking an effective articulation of Christian faith with everyday tasks.

They reflected together on the Bible and the documents of Vatican II and Medellín. They discussed the growing difficulty of the majority of the population's struggle for subsistence. They began to see that their situation was not in accordance with God's will and that they should organize themselves to take a more active role in the creation of a more just society. In this process of articulating faith and daily activities, associations, cooperatives, and unions gradually took shape. Out of this process would emerge popular organizations.¹⁴

Divisions within the Hierarchy

During this period, as the Church partially withdrew its support from the established order, the split within the hierarchy became public. The criticisms of Monsignor Aparicio, Bishop of San Vicente, concerning the situation of the country and the military government, were notorious at the time. Paradoxically, Monsignor Aparicio, who was one of Monsignor Romero's most acerbic critics within the Church, was at times also one of the strongest critics of the status quo. Among the disagreements between the bishops, there was one between Monsignor Aparicio and Monsignor Castro Ramirez, then Bishop of Santiago de Maria.¹⁵ The acrimony that marked the disagreement over insignificant matters between Monsignor Aparicio and Monsignor Ramirez was in itself a symptom of crisis in the hierarchy.

III. The Role of Monsignor Oscar Arnulfo Romero

Hitler's propaganda minister, Joseph Goebbels, told church people, "You are free to seek your salvation, as you understand it, provided you do nothing to change the social order."

Unexpectedly, the figure of Monsignor Romero came to play a truly significant role in Salvadoran history. That role corresponds to his leadership, in words and deeds, as a fearless defender of the poor.

Background

The archbishop, in a small country like El Salvador, plays a dominant role in his church. He is the head, as it were, of the ecclesiastical province; though without special jurisdiction, relative to the other bishops, he is primus inter pares. In addition, the archdiocese in El Salvador includes the capital city, San Salvador, thus giving it greater weight in national affairs than the other dioceses.

In 1977 the resignation of Archbishop Chávez was accepted by the Holy See. Throughout his long career as a bishop, Monsignor Chávez was always well-respected. A few months before his resignation, however, right-wing groups launched a campaign of defamation against the pastoral

agents of the Archbishop and his Auxiliary. Relations between the government and the Church deteriorated rapidly.¹⁶

The final days of Monsignor Chávez's episcopate were permeated by tension and confrontation. Priests were being expelled¹⁷ from the country, while the ecclesiastical base communities and the Delegates of the Word were being persecuted. Many of them even disappeared. The confrontation between the Church and state worsened as members of the Church, including the venerable figure of Monsignor Chávez, were publicly maligned. In this atmosphere of increasing polarization, Monsignor Romero was installed as the new Archbishop.

The Appointment of Monsignor Romero

The designation of Monsignor Romero as Archbishop of San Salvador was a cold water bath for the segment of the Church actively working to implement the ideas of Vatican II and Medellín in El Salvador. His candidacy for the post had been supported especially by the most conservative sector of the Latin American Church, led by Bishops Casariego and López Trujillo, the Cardinal of Guatemala and Secretary of Conferencia Episcopal Latinoamericana--CELAM (Latin American Bishops Conference), respectively.

Normally, the bishop who would replace an outgoing Archbishop would be the Auxiliary Bishop of San Salvador. The bishop who held this post at the time, Monsignor Arturo Rivera Damas, was the preferred candidate of the most progressive sectors of the Salvadoran Church. The appointment of Monsignor Romero in his stead was intended to heal the growing rift between the Church and the government, and a reconciliation was widely anticipated.

The country's conservative groups were euphoric over the appointment of Romero, to the point where El Diario de Hoy, one of the most conservative newspapers of San Salvador, published his photograph in color in the front page of the Sunday edition. Later the same paper would turn out to be one of his harshest critics. Within the hierarchy, Monsignor Aparicio saw in his appointment the opportunity to establish control over the Salvadoran Bishops Conference and the country's religious life in general, thereby replacing the influence of Monsignor Chávez, at one time the undisputed head of the Salvadoran Church.

At the outset Monsignor Romero was greeted with skepticism, on the part of the people, the progressive clergy, and religious and lay workers as well. With his actions, however, he gradually won their support. Humbly he asked for assistance from leading priests such as Monsignor Ricardo Urioste and Father Fabian Amaya among others. The encounter with reality resulting from a "preferential option for the poor"¹⁸ would provide the basis for integrating these different forces within the Church.

The new archbishop came from a traditional theological background. He was, however, sensitive to the suffering of the poor. On many occasions he privately protested military abuses, but without obtaining any concrete results.

Monsignor Romero assumed the archbishopric on February 22, 1977. Shortly afterwards, the country was rocked by several events taking place in the Archdiocese of San Salvador. First, a wave of repression was unleashed in the face of opposition protests over the latest presidential electoral fraud. Second, two catechists and a Jesuit priest, Rutilio Grande, were murdered on March 12. The latter was well-known for his ministerial capabilities and had enjoyed the complete confidence of Monsignor Romero. Finally, in June of that year, the White Warrior Union threatened to kill all of the Jesuits in El Salvador if they did not leave the country.¹⁹

As signs of the times, these events forced the Archbishop to take a strong stand. He declared that he would not attend any official function until the murder of Father Grande and the two catechists had been investigated and its perpetrators brought to justice.

His capacity to listen to the poor and his understanding of their struggle for survival, as well as the abuse of the underprivileged at the hands of the security forces, were among the elements that shaped the episcopate of Monsignor Romero. Incredibly, his weekly homilies attracted the largest audience of any program on Salvadoran radio. Every Sunday peasant delegations and international delegations would attend the mass. The international press corps was there too and at the end of the mass they would interview him. It is no exaggeration to say that the entire country listened to him, whether they approved or rejected his words.

The situation in El Salvador had reached a boiling point. Electoral fraud and repression had provoked a more combative attitude among the people, manifest in the growing strength of popular organizations. As popular protests increased in scale, a political consciousness was being forged in the concrete experiences of those struggles. The violence of the State had set off a reaction that gave a revolutionary stamp to the popular organizations.

We may note a dialectical relation between the reality of El Salvador and Monsignor Romero. Not only did he shape that reality, but he was molded by it as well. This interaction can be considered one of the political dimensions of the Church.

Monsignor Romero: Rupture or Continuity?

Was there rupture or continuity between the Chávez and Romero periods? There appears to be continuity in the Archdiocese with respect to the prevailing vision of reality. There was a break, however, impelled by the circumstances of the time, not simply in the styles of the two Archbishops, but in the forms in which they chose to act. Monsignor Romero's weekly homily became his preferred means for communicating "the preferential option for the poor"--a way of explaining, symbolically, the evangelical commitment of the Church. At the same time, his freedom to openly judge the march of events in a fast-deteriorating situation gave him a credibility that no other public figure could achieve. Thus he simultaneously appeared as an arbiter above the social conflict and as an actor within it in defense of those with no voice of their own.

Romero explained the Church's attitude toward the Salvadoran panorama in the following manner:

The conflict is not between the Church and the government. It is between the government and the people. The Church is with the people and the people are with the Church, thank God.²⁰

This posture of the Salvadoran Church, with its clear "preferential option for the poor," earned it the very fate of the dispossessed-persecution, defamation, torture, exile, and murder. He added that:

It would be sad if in a homeland where there is so much horrible killing, there were no priests counted among the victims. They are witness to a Church incarnate in the problems of the people.²¹

The Deepening Split within the Hierarchy

In this latter period, the traditional divisions inside the hierarchy reached a new high point.²² It is important to emphasize, however, that Monsignor Romero did not seek to divide the Church; rather he sought for it to reflect and embody the reality of El Salvador for such was his understanding of the ecclesiastical mission. His willingness to learn from the suffering and needs of the people, combined with his continual consultations with religious and lay leaders at all levels, gave him a rare comprehension of that reality. His constant prayers sustained and illuminated this challenging task.

Within the archdiocese, he promoted the organization of activities that would allow him to verify and quantify the constant abuses inflicted on the most oppressed sectors of the population. Among them were Legal Aid (formed by law students), weekly breakfast meetings with the National Commission for Peace and Justice and various priests, the Confederation of the Religious of El Salvador (CONFRES), the Federation of Catholic High Schools, the Presbyterial Senate, and pastoral visits. Not only did he create such formal mechanisms for regular consultations but there is no known instance of his having refused a dialogue with anyone who sought it--the social status of his visitor notwithstanding.

He made real efforts to share with the other bishops this vision of the ecclesiastical task. Nevertheless, the other bishops did not possess the same openness and willingness to talk. Only on few occasions did they make the effort to implement such means of establishing contact with reality. In part this explains their differences with Monsignor Romero. Given the critical situation in the country and the growing persecution of the Church, these divisions became public affairs.

We have noted above the legitimacy of the Church and its potential for questioning the established order in an asphyxiating environment with no room for dissent. These circumstances allowed the Archbishop to publicly assume the role of spokesman for those who could not speak for themselves, for those who could not afford to pay the media to present their version of the facts or their petitions for justice. This

position caused an uproar in the Salvadoran Bishops Conference, with the Archbishop's opponents blaming him for the difficulties between the Church and the government. The bishops Aparicio, Alvarez, and Revelo, with support from the government and right-wing groups, sought to undermine Romero and cast doubt on his representativeness of the Church. Their success was minimal, however, since his image and what he represented to most Salvadorans remained intact.²³

This campaign against him within the Church was perhaps the cause of Monsignor Romero's greatest suffering. Several times he went to Rome to speak with the Pope and the Roman Congregations.²⁴ There he sought to explain his pastoral activity and correct the distorted reports reaching Rome through the Salvadoran Papal Nuncio and the other bishops.²⁵

Had the Church Become Subversive?

To the accusation that the Church of the Archdiocese had become subversive, Monsignor Romero replied:

Do not mistake, my brothers, the mission of the Church, evangelizing and working for justice, with a subversive campaign. It is very different! Unless, one is ready to call the Gospel subversive, truly what is, is shaking the foundation of an order which, because it is unjust, should not exist.²⁶

As we observed above, his consistent denunciations of life-denying practices had converted him into a national arbiter:

This is the fundamental point of my sermon. Nothing matters to me so much as human life.... To violate it is a more serious and profound offense than the violation of any other human right, because it is the life of God's children, and because spilt blood only denies love, awakens new hatreds, and prevents reconciliation and peace. What we need, here and now, is a stop to the repression!²⁷

He condemned the idolatry both of money and of political parties and organizations.²⁸ In several pastoral letters,²⁹ he spoke not of abstract themes but of the events of daily life in El Salvador. Through these letters he sought to insert his views in that reality.

The Historical Projects

The majority of those who have criticized³⁰ the pastoral labor of Monsignor Romero point to his advocacy of the dispossessed and argue that he never condemned the errors of the popular organizations. In one of his most famous and controversial homilies (January 20, 1980), he presented and evaluated what he called the three projects or strategies (proyectos) in conflict in El Salvador: the oligarchy's, the governing Junta's, and the popular project.

In his homily, he emphasized "that it is not the Church's place to identify with one project or another, nor to take the lead in an eminently political process." He also recalled what he had written in his fourth pastoral letter:

What truly interests the Church is to offer the country the light of the Gospel for the salvation and integral development of man. This salvation comprehends the structures in which he lives, so that they not impede but rather assist him to live as a child of God. This is the the Church's mission, completely evangelical. No community or pastoral agent can claim that one or another project corresponds to that community.³¹

Following these reflections he then passed judgment on each of the projects. He openly condemned the oligarchical project, quoting against it the documents of Medellín and John Paul II's speech in Puebla:

If they jealously defend their privileges and, above all, defend them with violent means, then they bear the responsibility before history for desperate, revolutionary explosions. (Medellín)

The Church defends, it is true, the legitimate right to private property; but it teaches, with no less clarity, that on every private property there rests a permanent social mortgage...no one can possess property that is not mortgaged to the common good.... And if the common good so requires, there should be no hesitation before its expropriation under due process. (Puebla)³²

The second project, that of the Junta, was defined by the Archbishop as "reform with a big stock" (reformas con garrote), or reform with repression. He warned:

If it wants to save itself, it must amputate immediately and without pity the part that is rotten and be content with the healthy part.... A project that, out of fear or ulterior motives, opts to try to put a good face on that which is irremediably ugly, is destined to ruin. It will find no support among the people.³³

Monsignor Romero evaluated the third, or popular project, in the following terms:

I am hopeful concerning its efforts at coordination, above all because they are accompanied by an invitation to the rest of the democratic sectors of the country to participate in the creation of a widespread and powerful unity. I hope that this invitation is sincere, and that it represents on their part an openness and flexibility. Such attitudes will facilitate the gestation and realization of a politico-economic project that is capable of receiving

majority support from the people and guaranteeing the respect and development of the people's Christian faith and values.... To those of the popular project, I want to say the same thing that I told the government: that words and promises are not enough, particularly when they are shouted with delirium and demogogy.³⁴

Though this view of Salvadoran reality led him to regard the popular project with hope, his support for it was not uncritical. In all of his writings, it is evident that his first priority was to maintain undiminished the Church's independence of judgment, to encourage that which was good and to denounce that which was bad.

Through his call to conversion, and in search for a just social order in which all Salvadorans would share in responsibilities and benefits, Monsignor Romero continually attacked the "institutionalized violence" that characterized the present society. He described "institutionalized violence" in this fashion:

The most acute form of violence on our continent, and in our country as well, is that which the Bishops in Medellín called 'institutionalized violence.' It is the product of an unjust situation in which the majority of men and women, and above all children, are deprived of life's necessities.

This violence is inherent in the organization and daily functioning of a social, economic and political system. This system accepts as common sense the idea that progress is only possible if a privileged minority utilizes the productive force of the majority of the population. Historically we always find this class of violence where social institutions function to benefit a minority or systematically discriminate against those groups or persons who defend the true common good.

Those who are responsible for this institutionalized violence, apart from the unjust international structures which support it, include the people who hoard economic power without sharing it, 'people who jealously guard their privileges and, above all, ...people who defend their privileges using violent means themselves. They include as well all those who do not take a stand for justice with the means at their disposal, and who remain passive for fear of the sacrifices and personal risks that every bold and truly effective action implies.'

This 'institutionalized violence' is a dramatic and entrenched characteristic of our country.³⁵

Monsignor Romero emphasized that he was the Archbishop of all Salvadorans and that, as Paul VI used to say, if one wanted peace it was necessary to fight for justice. Though his defense of the poor was solid and permanent, this did not imply a one-sided vision.

IV. Monsignor Romero and the U.S. Catholic Church

El Salvador cannot be separated from the military budget issue, the nuclear freeze and the general perception of the direction of American Foreign Policy.³⁶

Rep. Jim Leach, R-Iowa

The Catholic Church has been the most influential group (on El Salvador policy).³⁷

Rep. Michael D. Barnes, D-Maryland
Chairman of the House Inter-American
Affairs Subcommittee

I've never seen anything like it. Members of Congress who have had trouble with the Catholic hierarchy in their districts because of abortion, have suddenly found re-entry on this issue.³⁸

Bruce Cameron, House aide

The Church's true catholicity, or universality, took on an unusual form in the Salvadoran Church. In the midst of persecution, suffering, assassinations, defamation, and a painful but fertile internal tension, the Salvadoran Catholic Church had two different, if complementary, projections toward the international ecclesiastical community. One was as a Church in need and the other was as an exemplary Church. In the first case the considerable threat to its very existence obliged it to seek external solidarity. In the latter, its testimony enabled it to become a model Church in a permanent process of renovations while trying to remain loyal to the Gospel.

From this standpoint, the major impact that its agenda has had on other countries becomes comprehensible. Nevertheless, its most important impact has been on the United States Church: in the first place, the United States plays a determining role in the destiny of the Salvadoran people. In the second place, the United States Church has perceived the possibility of neutralizing policies that it considers contradictory to the rights and aspirations of the Salvadoran people.³⁹

Antecedents

Beginning in the 1960s, a variety of factors led the United States Catholic Church to perceive a change in Latin America.

(1) Following Pope John XXIII's request that the United States Church donate to Latin America the services of one-tenth of its personnel, the Second Congress of Religious Workers of the United States met in August 1961, at the University of Notre Dame. They were addressed by Monsignor Agostino Casaroli in the name of the Pontifical Commission of Latin America, and he asked that 10 percent of the membership to the United States Religious Superiors go to Latin America for 10 years to do pastoral work. Thus began a remarkable collective

effort that Father Hesburgh, president of Notre Dame, would describe as a "true crusade."⁴⁰ As a result, the problems of Latin America attracted the attention of important sectors of the United States Church, a development that would be reinforced by the missionaries working there.

(2) The persecution suffered by the Brazilian Church, especially during the 1960s, initiated a process of "consciousness-raising" (*concientización*) in the United States National Conference of Catholic Bishops (USNCCB).⁴¹

(3) The course of events in Chile, from the presidency of Eduardo Frei to that of Pinochet, likewise had an important impact, and particularly the admitted participation of the United States government in the bloody coup d'etat that toppled President Allende.⁴²

(4) This period also witnessed a renewal of the United States Church, to the point where, at present, two-thirds of North American bishops have been named since the Vatican Council II.

The USNCCB, which normally follows Latin American affairs through its International Office for Peace and Justice, was deeply moved by the Olancho massacre in Honduras (1975) and the Nicaraguan struggle to overthrow the Somoza dictatorship (1977-1979). Very likely, however, it was the White Warriors Union's death threat to the Jesuits in El Salvador, with the anguished outcry for solidarity it provoked in the international religious community, that brought El Salvador and other Central American countries to the forefront of the USNCCB's interests.

The Salvadoran and U.S. Churches⁴³

Communication between the Salvadoran and United States churches began in the mid-1970s and concerned pastoral activities as well as the incipient persecution of the Salvadoran Church. The grotesque threat against the Jesuits,⁴⁴ however, prompted the USNCCB take a more active interest in Salvadoran affairs, and a USNCCB official was sent there to investigate the matter in situ. On July 6, 1977, Monsignor Bernandin, then president of the USNCCB and presently Archbishop of Chicago, released a report deploring the persecution of the Church and expressing fraternal solidarity with the bishops, clergy, and religious workers of El Salvador, particularly with the Jesuits in view of the threat against them. Through Church channels the message reached the United States Catholic population, and in areas where there were Jesuit-run churches, centers, universities, and high schools, the impact was especially great. A campaign was mounted to get the State Department to intercede with the Salvadoran government. In the end, the Jesuits stayed in El Salvador and they were not exterminated.

This dramatic sequence of events reinforced the lines of communication between the two Churches. With the increased flow of information, United States leaders maintained close contact with the Christian witness borne by the Archdiocese of San Salvador and with the Salvadoran situation in general. In July 1977, USNCCB leaders

testified before the House Subcommittee on International Organizations in its hearings on religious persecution in El Salvador. Since then they have presented similar testimony before other House and Senate hearings on El Salvador, a commitment which continues to the present day.

Monsignor Romero and the USNCCB

During the Latin American Bishops Conference in Puebla (1979), a group of the participating Latin American bishops sent an open letter of support and solidarity to Monsignor Romero. This prompted another letter of support from Archbishop John Quinn of San Francisco, at the time president of the USNCCB. Among other things, it conveyed the following:

Unfortunately, justice, reconciliation and peace seem as elusive today as ten years ago. New acts of aggression against the poor have continued and each year has witnessed new martyrs from the ranks of the clergy. The litany of recent events, ranging from the subtle harassment of the Church through interference with your radio broadcasts to such acts of wanton cruelty as the shooting of a score of peaceful demonstrators on the steps of the Metropolitan Cathedral, move us once again to express our deepest sympathy with our suffering brothers and sisters in El Salvador and our fervent prayer that their suffering may soon be rewarded with justice. We pledge our every effort to do what we can in this country to hasten the resolution of this most painful situation. (emphasis added)

After the assassination of another priest, Octavio Cruz, the USNCCB presented new testimony before the Committee on Foreign Relations of the U.S. Senate on December 6, 1979. This testimony echoed the declarations of Monsignor Romero opposing aid to El Salvador and included this statement:

We agree fully with the Archbishop and express the future hope that our future relations with the countries of this region will be guided ever less by military considerations. Governments genuinely directed to the well-being of all their citizens have no need of massive security forces, absent external threats; governments not so directed should not find us among their military suppliers.

On February 17, 1980, Monsignor Romero sent an open letter to President Carter urging him to stop providing military aid to the Salvadoran government. Soon afterwards, on the anniversary of the deaths of Rutilio Grande and the catechists, Archbishop Quinn sent another letter to Monsignor Romero assuring him of the Conference's total support and of "all we can through the U.S. Catholic Conferences in Washington to see that your advice to the President is followed." (emphasis added)

A few days after this last letter, on March 24, Monsignor Romero was assassinated in the chapel of the cancer clinic in San Salvador. Archbishop Quinn led the USNCCB delegation which attended his funeral. On returning to the United States, they testified once more before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and again called for Monsignor Romero's request to be heeded. Their statement read in part:

Archbishop Romero died denouncing the repression that still characterizes the policy of the Salvadorean security forces that run the country. He asked President Carter to withhold all support that is called military or security, no matter how 'non-lethal' the proffered items may be in themselves, because support from our country directly to the military of El Salvador can only strengthen the repressive forces, convincing them further that no matter how reprehensible their actions, they can still count on the friendship of the United States.

The Archbishop asked the United States to condition any economic aid, presumably destined to the well being of the Salvadorean people, to a reform and cleansing of the country's security forces.

Time and again he insisted that the solution to El Salvador's problem, its massive 'institutionalized violence' which allowed the very few to acquire fortunes and forced the very many to live in needless grinding poverty, lay in the areas of radical social and economic reforms, active participation by the organized masses in the political life of the country, and - as a first step and precondition to the success of the others - bringing the security forces under control.

What has happened since the coup of last October has been the appearance of reform, the still more total exclusion of the organized masses from political life, and the continuation of hard-line military dominance. Instead of 'reforms without repression' as the Archbishop repeatedly called for, there has been the appearance of reforms accompanied by repression to the point that the program of the government could almost be described as repression without reform.

The second draft of the USNCCB's pastoral letter on the matter of nuclear arms has received much attention in the communications media. Central America and nuclear arms appear to be two issues that have moved the United States hierarchy to take different and sometimes opposite positions from those of the United States government. The question arises as to how this phenomenon has come about, for only a few years ago, as the Vietnam War wrenched United States society apart, the Catholic hierarchy remained silent. As one journalist asked rhetorically, "What has happened to the United States Episcopate?" The answer: "They have adopted a new model of 'bishop.'

Simplifying grossly a complex change, the new model is Oscar Romero. A bishop rooted in the Gospel who spoke openly in favor of life and human dignity no matter what." (emphasis added)⁴⁵

Romero: A Milestone in the Relations Between the Two Churches

As we reflect on the influence the Church in an underdeveloped country has exercised over the Church in the most powerful country on earth, we may wonder why the Salvadoran Church has come to play this part. The historical elements we have introduced in this work provide the context for this influence, and it is interesting to note that the figure of Romero has served as the catalyst.

The critical weight of the United States in the Salvadoran process has been a decisive factor. The USNCCB was conscious of this influence. It also was aware of the fact that support for a government which does not represent the values of the American people exacerbates rather than resolves the conflict. The USNCCB's close and well-informed attention to the march of Salvadoran events has offered an alternative source of information to that provided by the State Department, and here knowledge of Romero's chosen path has been important. His actions, those of a true pastor committed to accomplish the esprit of Vatican II and Medellín, a tenacious defender of the poor without allowing himself to be manipulated by political actors, aroused and confirmed trust in his person. In turn, this facilitated a truer apprehension of Salvadoran reality.

The figure of Romero represents the new Church's efforts to stay close to the people and to share in its Calvary. In the midst of controversy, his profound spirituality and incarnation of alter Christus made him the very model of a post-conciliar bishop. His thought, as manifested in his homilies and pastoral letters, amply reflected his personal motto, "to feel with the Church" (sentir con la iglesia). His self-effacing commitment to serve the Church and his unswerving fidelity to the Word of God and Magistery of the Church stand out clearly in his words and deeds.

These qualities reinforced his activities and struck a responsive chord among other bishops, not only in the United States, but also elsewhere in Latin America, Canada, Europe, and Third World countries with problematics similar to that of El Salvador. He has had an extraordinary resonance in the universal Church. As these lines are written, some twenty books have been written about him, while his homilies and theological writings have been translated into several languages, infusing new life into the theological reflections and daily practice of the Church.

In preparing this study, I have had the privilege of studying the as-yet-unpublished diary of Monsignor Romero. It has helped bring me closer to the outstanding spirit of a man committed to his Church and to his people. The day when this diary becomes part of the Christian patrimony his influence and inspiration will reach new heights.

V. Final Reflections

A simplistic analysis that tries to pigeonhole the position represented by Romero's pastoral labor cannot see how, from the perspective of the Church's internal logic, it was no more than the concrete expression of a Pastor seeking to be faithful to his ecclesiastical mission in the place that was El Salvador and the time that was his to live. He could not place himself, as the holders of power desired, apart from temporal interests, forces in conflict and the ideologies of the world. His was not the dualistic vision of reality, where sacred history and civil history were unconnected and parallel processes, where the history of salvation had nothing to do with salvation in history.⁴⁶ This position, which displaces the problems of the present to the end of all time, mystifies reality and thereby facilitates the repression, by established powers, of the majority of God's people.

On the contrary, Monsignor Romero was conscious of his insertion in reality, of how it shaped him as he was attempting to mold it. He understood that his words and acts were subverting the established order and that his continual calls to conversion were creating stirrings of hope amidst the increasing poverty of the majority of Salvadorans. His prophetic and demanding voice was not heard bargaining with the powerful, but rather calling for urgent changes in the structures of society so that it might cease to be a factory of misery and be converted into a just and cohesive body that deserved to be called Christian.

His homilies, calling for the kind of dignity for God's children that would allow them to be the protagonists of their own history, echoed throughout the country. This produced an open confrontation with the established order. It aroused a wrath and violence that was not only directed against the people, but also against the active members of the Church. Sobrino's description of Romero, as a man of faith who believed in God,⁴⁷ captures the nature of his exemplary force across the world. Through his homilies, pastoral letters, declarations, and actions, and especially in his unpublished personal diary, it becomes clear that to present him as a man of the "center" maintaining a position equidistant from "left" and "right" is an error. He should be seen as someone who sought to give encouragement where there was greater truth, justice and possibilities for peace. He did not operate with a negative perspective; he was not interested in "anti" definitions. He did not fall into the trap of choosing, as if his position demanded it, between the "left" or the "right." His posture was clear, and it was not that of not choosing; rather it was a consistent "preferential option for the poor," and in the case of El Salvador where the poor were the majority, he opted for the people.

The polarization of Salvadoran society had reached the point where the two sides in conflict could be clearly distinguished. Romero understood the risk of being misinterpreted or judged, but in order to remain faithful to his mission, he felt compelled to pronounce his word when the situation of society was a "situation of sin." For this reason he opted for the weak and the disenfranchised who have

always been the privileged before God. Prophetically denouncing this sin in such a polarized context, he paid the price of his "preferential option for the poor."

His public commitments to Vatican Council II, Medellín and Puebla were transformed into social postures and political attitudes in evident harmony with his evangelical commitments. The struggle for a more humane and just society would find in Romero's Church an institutional force with an ample presence in the polis. He used this space to defend those with nowhere to turn and to help in the construction of a society where all Salvadorans would be citizens of the same rank.

That these actions contained political dimensions was not in itself novel, for the Church had always had such dimensions. However, as we have noted, this aspect previously signified a legitimation of the established order, while with Romero, this state of things was denounced as unjust disorder. He did not limit himself to pointing out what was bad, but sought to foment aspirations and efforts to construct a Christian alternative. He was courageous and unrestrained in his support for the repressed efforts of the poor to organize themselves and participate in society. Discerning the implications of his actions, he was not swayed by fear of persecution or slander from other actors in the Church or in society, for he knew that his option for the dispossessed had been that of Jesus as well.

Pedro de Casaldaliga, bishop in the Brazilian Mato Grosso, expressed this latter quality in his poem "Saint Romero of America, Pastor and Martyr."

We are once again facing a Witness
Saint Romero of America, our pastor and martyr.
Romero of that Peace that seems impossible on this Earth at war
Romero, purple flower of that irrepressible Hope that wells
throughout the Continent

Romero of that Latinamerican Easter
Humble glorious pastor
Assassinated for a fee
for a dollar
for hard cash.

Just as Jesus, by order of the Empire
Humble glorious pastor,
abandoned
by your own brothers of Crozier and Throne
(The curias cannot understand you:
No solid Synagogue can understand a Christ)
Your wretched ones follow you
still faithful in despair
At once pasture and flock in your prophetic mission.
The people proclaim you saint.
In their hour they consecrated you as the 'kairos.'
The poor taught you to read the Gospel.⁴⁸

Romero's message alienated the powerful groups, who left no dollar unspent in efforts to discredit and slander him, branding him a political agitator and even referring to him as Beelzebub. Unperturbed, however, Monsignor Romero called them to conversion with valiant prophecy and pastoral love, promising them the good news if they were converted.

Other groups similarly felt alienated because the Church was not as radical as they had hoped it would be. They did not understand, or refused to understand, the new pastoral spirit.

Nevertheless, for both of these groups Romero retains his concern and called them to sit at the same table. Many lapsed Christians came back to the Church because of the excitement and good news his message carried. While ultimately the Church lost some of its most powerful parishioners, the Church of Romero purified itself and attained a force as never before. His concern was always to ensure that the Church was with the people of God and that its pastors were at their service.

In the United States, the USNCCB followed almost intimately the fortunes of Romero and his flock. His witness and his definition of the Church spread far beyond the Central American region.

His martyrdom at the moment of the word in the celebration of the Eucharist was the imprint with which God crowned his life. His example and fidelity to "feeling with the Church" was the strongest guarantee of his pastoral labor.

One of the most outstanding elements which characterize the development in the Latin American Church represented by Monsignor Romero is that his struggle was not based on the defense of the Church as an institution, but rather, on its raison d'etre, which is the people of God.

The learning process of the journey together of the USNCCB and Monsignor Romero is an extraordinary manifestation of the universal and Christian solidarity of the Church. It appears that this reciprocal influence has led to a rebirth of the Christian spirit, with its catholic meaning, in the leadership of God's people.

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⁴Los Textos de Medellín y el proceso de cambio en América Latina (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1977), Paz n. 16, pp. 37-38.

⁵Penny Lernoux, Cry of the People (New York: Doubleday Books, 1980), pp. 36-47.

⁶Cited by Luis Ugalde in the prologue to Otto Maduro, Religión y lucha de clases (Caracas: Editorial Ateneo de Caracas, 1979), p. 14.

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⁹ Higinio Alas, El Salvador: ¿Por qué la Insurrección? (San José: Secretariado Permanente de la Comisión para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos en Centroamérica, 1982), p. 172.

¹⁰ The bishops' opposition leader was Monsignor Aparicio. They formed a commission to correct the conclusions, but with negative results. Pablo Richard and Guillermo Meléndez (Eds.), La Iglesia de los Pobres en América Central (San José: DEI, Editores, 1982; Rutilio Grande: Mártir de la evangelización Rural en El Salvador (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1978), p. 38.

¹¹ Cf. Clodovis Boff, "Fisonomía de las Comunidades de Base" in Concilium, April 1981, pp. 90-98; Diakonia (Managua, Nicaragua: CICA, 1981), No. 19, October 1981.

¹² Cf. Richard... op. cit., p. 73; Estudios Centroamericanos, (ECA) October-November 1975, p. 711.

¹³ There were many rural centers of pastoral learning. The first one was Centro El Castaño (La Unión). That was directed by North American priests and nuns. Other centers were: Los Naranjos (Usulután), La Providencia (Santa Ana), San Lucas, Guadalupe and Suchitoto.

¹⁴ In the Salvadoran context, the colloquial term "popular organizations" refers to associations of diverse character united around certain political positions and goals. They constitute an alternative to traditional political parties, as the latter have seen their opportunities to participate in the political, economic, and social life of the country progressively diminished. The popular organizations include, for example, the principal peasant, worker, teacher, and student organizations, and constitute the base of what is now the Salvadoran insurgent movement.

¹⁵ When the National Office of Cinema was created, all the bishops had to sign the constitution act, but because of a disagreement between Monsignor Castro Ramírez and Monsignor Aparicio, this was delayed until I was able to convince Monsignor Castro Ramírez.

¹⁶ Cf. Editorial of ECA, November 1976.

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- 17 The expelled priests were: Fathers Bernardo Survil, Juan Murphy, Willibrord Denaux, Benigno Fernandez, Lorenzo McCulloch, Pedro Declercq, Juan Deplancke, Juan Ramón Vega, Luis de Sebastián, and Ignacio Ellacuría. Secretariado Social Interdiocesano, Persecución de la Iglesia en El Salvador (San Salvador: Colección "Iglesia y Derechos Humanos," June 1977), p. 19.
- 18 There is a special section of Puebla's Final Document devoted to the option for the poor (1124-1165), and it is one of the most impressive in the whole document. "The evangelisation of the poor is the supreme proof of His (Church) mission" (1142). Cf. "Poverty" 5,7,8 in Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops (Medellín) The Church in the Present-Day Transformation of Latin America in the Light of the Council (Washington, D.C.: Secretariat for Latin America, National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1979), pp. 174-176.
- 19 Cf. Union Guerrera Blanca (UGB) War Report No. 6 (June 21, 1977). White Warrior Union warned that if not all Jesuits left the country before thirty days, they would be immediately exterminated.
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- 21 Ibid., p. 456.
- 22 Cf. James Brockman, The Word Remains: A Life of Oscar Romero, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1982), passim.
- 23 Brockman, op. cit., Bishop Alvarez's attacks on Romero, pp. 100, 125, 133, 162; Bishop Aparicio's attack on Romero, pp. 98-103, 105-108, 132-133, 148, 162; Bishop Revelo's attacks on Romero, pp. 84-87, 101, 116-119, 134-135; Richards, op. cit., pp. 103-106; "Que queda de la opción de los pobres?" in CRIE (Mexico), Documentos No. 2, August, 1981. Monsignor Freddy Delgado was the secretary of Salvadoran bishops conference and from that position tried to manipulate the conference in Bishop Aparicio's favor at any cost.
- 24 Brockman, op. cit., Conflicts with Papal Nuncio Archbishop Emmanuele Gerada, pp. 14-19, 91-93, 101-103; with Papal Nuncio Lajos Kadar, pp. 191-192; with Cardinal Sebastiano Baggio, pp. 113-120, 151-153; meetings with the popes, pp. 20, 46, 59, 119, 145-146, 151-153, 203. Cardinal Eduardo Pironio was always favorably disposed to him, pp. 114-115, 120, 155, 203, 232.
- 25 Brockman, op. cit., p. 108, expresses clearly this point when he writes: "The nuncio and Bishop Aparicio, the congregation's (one of directing institutions in the Vatican) primary sources of information, did not hide their aversion to his (Monsignor Romero) pastoral policies."

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- ²⁶ La voz de los sin voz, op. cit., p. 456.
- ²⁷ Ibid., p. 454.
- ²⁸ He was critical of some of the popular organizations and political parties that would make their institution the ultimate judge of their institution the ultimate judge of their doing and in some cases they would have to obey without questioning them, so making them an idol. Cf. Oscar Romero and Arturo Rivera Damas, "The Church, Political Organization and Violence" in Cross Currents, Vol. XXIX, No. 4, pp. 397-402.
- ²⁹ The pastoral letters were "Iglesia de la Pascua" (April 1977); "La Iglesia, Cuerpo de Cristo en la Historia" (August 1977); "La Iglesia y las Organizaciones Políticas Populares" (August 1978); and "La Misión de la Iglesia en Medio de la Crisis del Pais" (August 1979).
- ³⁰ Cf. Dermot Keogh, Romero El Salvador's Martyr (Dublin, Ireland: Dominican Publications, 1981), pp. 77-80; Lernous, Cry of the People, pp. 73-76; Rutilio Grande, pp. 106-118; Persecución de la Iglesia en El Salvador, passim.
- ³¹ La voz de los sin voz, op. cit., p. 238.
- ³² Ibid.
- ³³ Ibid., p. 241.
- ³⁴ Ibid.
- ³⁵ Ibid., pp. 114-115; John Paul II defined "institutionalized violence" in one of his homilies in Guatemala, March 7, 1983, saying: "We remember that one can kill one's brother little by little, day by day, when he is denied access to the goods God has created for the benefit of all and not for the profit of a few", Latin American Weekly Report, WR-83, 11, 18 March 1983.
- ³⁶ Congressional Quarterly, April 24, 1982, p. 895.
- ³⁷ Ibid., p. 898.
- ³⁸ Ibid.
- ³⁹ As an example of this, see Bishop John R. McGunn of Rockville Centre pastoral letter on El Salvador in The Long Island Catholic, July 21, 1983.
- ⁴⁰ Cf. Gerald M. Costello, Mission to Latin America (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1979).

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⁴¹Cf. Thomas Brunneau, The Political Transformation of the Brazilian Catholic Church (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), and The Church in Brazil: The Politics of Religion (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1982); and Helena Salem, et al., A Igreja dos Oprimidos (São Paulo: Brasil Debates, 1981).

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⁴³Please see the excellent article by Thomas E. Quigley, "The Catholic Church and El Salvador," in Cross Currents, Summer 1982.

⁴⁴Please see note 19.

⁴⁵National Catholic Reporter, November 26, 1982.

⁴⁶Ignacio Ellacuria, "Iglesia y Realidad Histórica," Estudios Centroamericanos, 331, mayo de 1976, XXI, p. 213.

⁴⁷Jon Sobrino, "Monsenor Romero: Martir de la Liberación. Análisis Teológico de su Figura y su Obra," Estudios Centroamericanos, 377/378, marzo-abril de 1980, XXI, pp. 253-276; Jon Sobrino, Romero Martyr of Liberation (London: CIIR, 1982), pp. 37-76.

⁴⁸Pedro Casaldaliga, Obispo de São Felix, San Romero de America, Pastor y Martir, Estudios Centroamericanos, 379, Mayo de 1980, XXXV, p. 492. Translated by Dr. Rowan Ireland.

"Estamos otra vez en pie de Testimonio
San Romero de América, pastor y martir nuestro!
Romero de la Paz casi imposible en esta Tierra en guerra
Romero, flor morada de la Esperanza incólume de todo el Continente

Romero de la Pascua latinoamericana
Pobre pastor glorioso,
asesinado a sueldo,
a dolar,
a divisa.

Como Jesús, por orden del Imperio
Pobre pastor glorioso,
abandonado

por tus propios hermanos de Báculo y de Mesa.
(Las curias no podían entenderte:
Ninguna Sinagoga bien montada puede entender a Cristo.)
Tu 'pobrería' si te acompañaba
en desespero fiel
pasto y rebaño, a un tiempo, de tu misión profética.
La hora de tu Pueblo te consagro con el 'kairos.'
Los pobres te enseñaron a leer el Evangelio."

The United States Right and Monsignor Romero

In the materials analyzed for this study, no direct criticisms of Romero have come to light in United States right-wing publications. In the majority of cases there is neither mention nor judgment of him. Ignoring Romero is one of at least two ways in which the United States right can deal with the phenomenon he represents; the other is to argue that he was manipulated by Marxist-Leninist groups until, near the end, he realized it and attempted to change. However, there is little evidence in his homilies and personal diary to support the latter charge.

Two examples may serve to illustrate these alternatives. In the first, a pamphlet by Kerry Ptacek titled "The Catholic Church in El Salvador" and published by the Institute on Religion and Democracy (IRD), there is no reference to Monsignor Romero. To speak of the contemporary Salvadoran Catholic Church with no mention of Romero is no small task, since his influence is continually manifested. Monsignor Rivera Damas, the new Archbishop of San Salvador, refers to him often, and Monsignor Gregorio Rosas, the new auxiliary bishop, explicitly took him as a model following his appointment.

Ptacek focuses on the question of who speaks for the Catholics of El Salvador. The answer, according to the author, is Archbishop Rivera Damas, through his homilies, and CEDES, through their pronouncements.

Interestingly, CEDES and Pope John Paul II coincide in seeking a solution to the Salvadoran conflict through dialogue, a position which makes Ptacek's thesis difficult to defend. The following are excerpts from recent public positions taken by the Pope, CEDES and Archbishop Rivera Damas:

I am perfectly aware that the discordances and divisions which continue to disturb your country, causing new conflicts and violence, have their truest and deepest root in situations of social injustice. This problem has forcefully erupted at the political level, but it is above all of an ethical nature.

The methodology of violence which has led to a fratricidal war--situating on one side those who believe that armed struggle is a necessary instrument to build a new social order, and on the other those who resort to the principles of 'national security' to legitimate brutal repression--finds no rational justification, much less a Christian one.

John Paul II¹

¹El Dialogo, Camino para la Paz en El Salvador (San Salvador: Publicacion de la Comision Arquidiocesana de Justicia y Paz, 1982), p. 9.

APPENDIX

Thus we exhort all sides in the conflict to abandon inflexible postures and to open a sincere, clear and loyal dialogue, animated by good will and a spirit of authentic patriotism. Let them put the union of the Salvadoran family ahead of individual or groups interests. For its part, the Church maintains its willingness to work tirelessly--from its own identity--for peace and reconciliation between Salvadorans who have been obliged to become enemies.

CEDES²

After the letter sent by the Supreme Pontiff to our people, and the joint communique of CEDES, many national and international entities have begun to speak of dialogue and reconciliation as the only rational way out of the conflict. But even as I make this heartening observation, I have another, more painful one. That is that political repression has increased both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Monsignor Rivera Damas³

Ptacek states that the Archbishopric's Legal Aid (Socorro Jurídico del Arzobispado-SJA) did not have the support of the Archbishop when he was Apostolic Administrator of San Salvador. This is a controversial and complex issue, since in Romero's day, the other bishops except for Rivera Damas had pressured the Archbishopric to withdraw its support from SJA, precisely because it was one of the few sources of information about El Salvador and thus occasioned conflicts with the government. Rivera Damas, as he expressed on various occasions, never cast doubt on the veracity of the SJA's data; rather his criticism was that the SJA, in its count of deaths and disappearance of civilians, did not include those caused by the guerrillas.

The situation was resolved with the creation of a new office called the Office of Legal Protection of the Archbishopric. In its first report released in May 1982, the new institution published the following statistics:

² Ibid., p. 7.

³ Homily of Monsignor Artur Rivera Damas in the Cathedral of San Salvador, August 22, 1982.

APPENDIX

VICTIMS OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE

Deaths attributed to:

Unidentified paramilitary squadrons	174	
Combined corps of the Armed Forces	73	
Army	10	
National Police	4	
Civil Defense	2	
Civil Agents	1	
Subtotal	264	(98%)
Politico-military organizations (i.e., guerrillas)	6	
Subtotal	6	(2%)
TOTAL	270	(100%)

I raise this point to show that Ptacek's argument is simply off the mark.

The example of the right's other alternative comes from the March 19, 1982 issue of National Review. In an article entitled "Cry El Salvador," John Kurzweil quotes the following reference to Romero by Monsignor Aparicio:

Shortly before his assassination he realized that the Marxist-Leninists' desire for power was greater than their desire for social justice.⁴

This contrasts, however, with declarations made by Monsignor Romero to Diario de Caracas a few days before he was murdered. To his interviewer's question, "What does the left represent?" he responded:

I don't call them forces of the left, but rather forces of the people, and their violence may be the fruit of the anger provoked by social injustice. That which some call the 'left' is the people. It is the organization of the people and its demands are the people's demands. I believe that a government without a base in the people is not a government of the people; to be effective, therefore, it has to seek out that base. a government that introduces reforms to benefit the people should have popular bases, because the people will not see their liberation in something that is given to them, or imposed upon them. Nor

⁴ National Review, March 19, 1982.

APPENDIX

should they perceive the government as something that gives; rather it should assist in the process that the people themselves are carrying out.⁵

⁵ La voz de los sin voz: La palabra viva de Monseñor Romero. Introduction, commentaries and selections by Jon Sobrino, Ignacio Martin-Baro and Rodolfo Cardenal (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1980), p. 435.