



## The Martyrial Face of The Salvadorean Church from The Theological Biographies of Óscar Romero and Ignacio Ellacuría: A Revaluation of The Prophetic Dimension in The Ordained Ministry

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this study is to present the relationship established between liberation and martyrdom in the Salvadorean Church. The angle of analysis is the theological biographies of Óscar Romero and Ignacio Ellacuría, both martyrs of El Salvador. The method of biographical theology proceeds through contextual interpretations of lives and works of its characters. To do this, it takes into account his writings, studied with a hermeneutic of comparative analysis with other sources, taken from historical and ethnographic sciences. The method of theological biography, in this case, allows theology not only to verify the announcement of the Kingdom as proposed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but also discovers a new contribution in the way of interpreting these nuclei of Christian revelation. Liberation and martyrdom are fundamental realities for liberation theology, and they endow it with a specific direction and pathos. Their commitment and denunciation of social injustice constitute a prophetic dimension that serves as a model for an entire local church and in particular for the ordained ministry.

**Keywords:** Salvadorean Church, Theological Biographies, Martyrdom, Ordained Ministry

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### 1. Introduction

The purpose of my presentation can be stated as follows: In a local Church, with a prolonged context of political and economic oppression, where the faithful Christians, and particularly their pastors, come to the conviction of the moral obligation to denounce the injustice that oppresses them, you cannot expect anything but persecution and martyrdom. This statement may not be universal, but in Latin America it is a reality that has grown as an unquestionable fact since the mid-1960s, to the point of forming a distinctive Church model.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, a context in which there

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<sup>1</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, *La fuerza histórica de los pobres*. (Centro de Estudios y Publicaciones: Lima, 1980), 152-153; Camilo Maccise, "El nuevo perfil del martirio y la santidad. La experiencia cristiana de América Latina." *Vida espiritual* 96 (1989), 5-18; Juan Hernández Pico, "El martirio hoy en América Latina: escándalo, locura y fuerza de Dios," *Concilium: Revista internacional de teología* 183 (1983), 366-375. <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=7618077>. A particular study of

has been evangelical denunciation in favor of the poor and the oppressed, the real possibility of martyrdom has inevitably arisen. I would like to be clear from the beginning, and affirm as Archbishop Óscar Romero at the University of Leuven on February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1980, two months before his assassination: “*the Christian faith has a political dimension*”.<sup>2</sup> This political dimension of faith is no stranger to the ordained ministry, for it is in the vital framework of the historical Jesus.<sup>3</sup> In Argentina, “*priests have acted in politics since the resistance to the English invasions at the beginning of the 19th century, and whenever social and political discussions were raised in the country there were priests participating in them*”.<sup>4</sup>

With these presuppositions, I will focus on the Salvadorean Church and its martyrial vocation, which is rooted in the choice in favour of the poor and which, together with its awareness of the process of liberation, has come to question an oppressive system and enlighten other Latin American sister churches with its testimony.<sup>5</sup> My focus will be on the biographical theologies<sup>6</sup>, of a bishop and a priest, martyrs of the kingdom and prophets of a crucified people. Both Oscar Romero, Bishop of El Salvador (†1980),<sup>7</sup> and Fr. Ignacio Ellacuría (†1989),<sup>8</sup> Chancellor of the Central American University José Simeón Cañas, embodied with their prophetic word and their violent deaths the fate and destiny of a people, which fight even today against the oppressive system of a government that tries to gain global public attention by building mega prisons, and a Regime of Exception, which according to the Report of the University Observatory of Human Rights (OUDH) has proceeded since mid-2022 to arrest more than 47,000 people, and according to the report of 13th May of the same year, 1,145 among them are young people between 12 and 18 years of age.<sup>9</sup>

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our theme in the Salvadorean Church: John Thiede, *Remembering Oscar Romero and the martyrs of El Salvador. A Cloud of Witnesses*. (New York: Lexington Books, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> Saint Óscar Romero, *Voice of the voiceless. The four pastoral letters and other statements*. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Book, 2020), 199.

<sup>3</sup> José Luis Sicre, “Jesús y la política de su tiempo,” *Razón Y Fe* 241 (2000): 367-382; 371-372. <https://revistas.comillas.edu/index.php/razonyfe/article/view/19254>; José Luis Sicre, *Con los pobres de la tierra. La justicia social en los profetas de Israel* (Madrid: Cristiandad, 1984), 456-460. You can also see: Rafael Aguirre and Francisco J. V. Cormenzana, “Justicia,” in *Mysterium Liberationis. Conceptos fundamentales de la teología de la liberación II*, edited by Ignacio Ellacuría, Jon Sobrino (Madrid: Trotta, 1990), 539-577; Rafael Aguirre, “La mirada de Jesús sobre el poder.” *Teología y Vida* 55, no. 1 (2014): 83-104. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4067/S0049-34492014000100005>

<sup>4</sup> Domingo Bresci, in Marta Diana, *Buscando el reino. La opción por los pobres de los argentinos que siguieron al Concilio Vaticano II*. (Buenos Aires: Planeta, 2013), 60.

<sup>5</sup> Matthew Ashley, Rodolfo Cardenal, Martín Maier (eds.). *La civilización de la pobreza. El legado de Ignacio Ellacuría para el mundo de hoy*. (Perú: CEP, 2014), 28.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Schneider. *Teología como biografía. Una fundamentación dogmática*. (Bilbao: Desclée de Brouwer, 2000), 12-14.

<sup>7</sup> Jon Sobrino, *Monseñor Romero. Testigo de la verdad*. (Buenos Aires: Ciudad Nueva, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> Gabriele Fadini, *Ignacio Ellacuría*. (Madrid: San Pablo, 2019), 16.

<sup>9</sup> University Observatory of Human Rights (OUDH), *Report: 100 días de Régimen de Excepción en El Salvador* (El Salvador: Publicaciones de Proyección Social de la UCA, 2022), 12.

It can hardly be argued that the Salvadorean society has advanced in living together, in solidarity and in general welfare in the last four years.<sup>10</sup> From this challenging context, I intend to give a retrospective and purposeful look that may recover the prophetic dimension of the ordained ministry<sup>11</sup> and of the entire people of God, which has been prioritized since the Second Vatican Council,<sup>12</sup> and the Episcopal Conference of Medellín.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, my presentation will be developed in three brief points: 1. What is the link between liberation and martyrdom? 2. What do Latin American martyrs say to the ordained ministry today? 3. Why does the universal Church fail to acknowledge the martyrs of justice? I will end my presentation with open conclusions.

## **2. Research Method**

The method of biographical theology has its foundation in the same revelation. God does not reveal objective contents, but himself. There is no theoretical truth in the Bible. The revelation of God is here closely interwoven with the history of those men and women who have assumed in their vital and existential praxis. Even though it is closely linked to the biography specific individuals, the word of revelation escapes any singularization or isolation. The vital and exemplary theology of so many theological existences, develops an “experimental dogmatics”, with leads to bearing witness to faith starting from life and not from the concepts.

The method proceeds through contextual interpretations of lives and works of its characters. To do this, it takes into account his writings, studied with a hermeneutic of comparative analysis with other sources, taken from historical and ethnographic sciences.

## **3. Result and Discussion**

### **What is the link between liberation and martyrdom?**

For a proper understanding of the subject, it is necessary to emphasize that El Salvador is a *place* in the theological sense from which and without which, the terms in question (liberation and martyrdom) are only abstract concepts. As Jon Sobrino points out, El Salvador is a substantial crux, a true *Sitz im Leben* (vital context), or

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<sup>10</sup> See the article on this topic: Rodolfo Cardenal, “Distintos, pero mejores.” Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas, 2023. <https://www.uca.edu.sv/cmr/editoriales/distintos-pero-no-mejores>.

<sup>11</sup> Mauti, Ricardo Miguel. “El Proceso De recepción Del Decreto Conciliar «Optatam Totius» En Las “Ratio” De La Iglesia Latinoamericana.” *Estudios Eclesiásticos. Revista de investigación e información teológica y canónica* 98, no. 385 (mayo 19, 2023): 393–94. Accedido junio 29, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.14422/ee.v98.i385.y2023.006>.

<sup>12</sup> Second Vatican Council: *Lumen Gentium* 8b; *Presbyterorum ordinis* 4.

<sup>13</sup> Second Episcopal Conference of Latin America, *The Final Documents of Medellín* (Córdoba: San Pablo, 1969), 172.

even, said without rhetoric, also a *Sitz im Tode* (context of death).<sup>14</sup> Indeed, just as the oppression and hope of the poor through the popular movements that have carried them out are real, so are the countless martyrs and victims of all kinds: active martyrs, for bringing about liberation, and passive martyrs – killed anonymously in the massacres – eliminated in order to terrorize the survivors. Among the former group are Rutilio Grande, Oscar Romero, the missionary sisters of Maryknoll, the Jesuit community of the UCA and two servants, among others.<sup>15</sup> Among the latter group are the martyrs of the massacres of Sumpul River or the one in the Lempa River,<sup>16</sup> or the massacre of the entire population of El Mozote.<sup>17</sup> In our opinion, the Latin American theology as a whole certainly gave much more reflection to liberation than to martyrdom in its first ten or fifteen years of existence.<sup>18</sup>

In El Salvador, however, reflection on both arose almost simultaneously. The objective reason is that shortly after the practices of liberation began, repression, persecution and martyrdom were also brought about,<sup>19</sup> and both were soon unified in theological reflection. The latter should not have been so, but it was, and among others, for two reasons which are well expressed in both the lives and thoughts of Oscar Romero and Ignacio Ellacuría. The first reason is to have stressed - more than in other places, we think - the theological and Salvadorean importance of martyrdom in itself and to have shown as we have already said, the essential relationship between martyrdom and liberation. The latter was done in two ways. On the one hand, martyrdom was understood very early on as something that must be taken into account *a priori* in the processes of liberation, since, according to the Christian faith, the eradication of historical sin must be carried out using a power external to that sin, but also, by necessity, burdening oneself with the reality of that sin which destroys

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<sup>14</sup> Jon Sobrino, *Witnesses to the Kingdom. The Martyrs of El Salvador and the Crucified Peoples*. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Book, 2003), 101.

<sup>15</sup> Instituto de Estudios Centroamericanos and El Rescate, *The Jesuit Assassinations. The Writings of Ellacuría, Martín Baró and Segundo Montes, with a Chronology of the Investigation*. (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1990), 27-39.

<sup>16</sup> José Sols Lucia, *La teología histórica de Ignacio Ellacuría* (Madrid: Trotta, 1999), 16.

<sup>17</sup> A thorough study can be seen at: Mark Danner, *Masacre: La Guerra sucia en El Salvador* (Barcelona: Malpaso, 2016), 284; can also be seen: Sol Yáñez, "La masacre de El Mozote: investigación pericial y retos de la reparación psicológica," in *Violación de derechos humanos en América Latina: Reparación y rehabilitación*, edited by Elisabeth Lira, Marcela Cornejo, Germán Morales (Santiago de Chile: UAH, 2023), 241-261.

<sup>18</sup> In this as in many other cases, historical experience, the faith of the peoples and the corresponding pastoral care revalued martyrdom before theology expressly did so. At the theological level, the magazine *Concilium* published a monographic issue in 1983 dedicated to "martyrdom today" with which several Latin American theologians collaborated.

<sup>19</sup> In 1977, when the popular movements had been active for a short time, repression began, understandably, but so did the persecution to the Church and, along with it, the martyrs. Already in 1977, at the request of Monsignor Romero, Jon Sobrino contributed with a first theological reflection on martyrdom: "Significado teológico de la Persecución a la Iglesia: about the Archdiocese of San Salvador," in Jon Sobrino, *Resurrección de la verdadera Iglesia: Los pobres, lugar teológico de la ecclesiología*, edited by Sal Terrae (Santander: Presencia Teológica, 1984), 243-266.

and kills. On the other hand, martyrdom, like the death of the servant and of the crucified Christ, was also understood from its salvific potential.

In this sense, the need to relate martyrdom and liberation was seen from the beginning, but its benefit was also seen in El Salvador. This is what Oscar Romero did at a pastoral level by proclaiming the need for martyrs in a world of sin and the possibility of putting them to yield fruitfully.<sup>20</sup> And so did Ignacio Ellacuría in his own life and theology when reflecting on the suffering servant of *Yahweh*, in his double dimension of bearing sin and being destroyed by it on the one hand, and being light and salvation on the other hand. Thus, very soon, already in 1978, he published his well-known writing, *The Crucified People: An Essay in Historical Soteriology*.<sup>21</sup>

### **What do martyrs say to the ordained ministry today?**

Both in the case of Monsignor Romero and Ignacio Ellacuría, even brutally confronted with persecution and greatly valuing martyrdom never took refuge in it to disregard what is at the origin of the salvific movement, that is, the primary and direct will of God which is the liberation of the oppressed. I am going to illustrate this through a fragment of a famous homily of Romero of July 15, 1979, where he asked; I quote:

Why did they kill Father Rafael Palacios? It is very difficult to say, but basically there is something that I would like to be a reflection of our pastoral care. There is undoubtedly an institution of sin, of injustice, which the Pope himself has denounced when he came to Latin America and which Puebla also denounces without any inconvenience.<sup>22</sup>

It is a sin that cries out to heaven. And when the Church in Puebla says "*preferential choice for the poor*",<sup>23</sup> it does so in a gesture of solidarity with that immense majority that is increasingly lacking in what others overabound. It is participating with those who are deprived of participation, with those who are outcasts. Putting yourself in that situation is very dangerous! It is deadly in an environment where the privileged would not want such things to be mentioned, and then the Church is the target of slander by calling it a communist, political, subversive, and there is suspicion around its meetings. It is a reality. And the Catholic who does not see it and does not want to join the voice of the Church which denounces this reality and cries out for a fairer world, they are not a true member of the Church that the Lord wants in our time. But to get into that commitment is to expose oneself to the risks that we are mentioning here. That is why they kill those who preach true

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<sup>20</sup> See the important study at: Edgardo Colón-Emeric, *Óscar Romero's theological vision: Liberation and the transfiguration of the poor* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2018).

<sup>21</sup> Ignacio Ellacuría, *Escritos Teológicos II* (San Salvador: UCA, 2000), 137-293.

<sup>22</sup> Third Episcopal Conference of Latin America, *Documento de Puebla* (Buenos Aires: San Pablo, 1979), 281.

<sup>23</sup> Third Episcopal Conference of Latin America, 1134.

justice in the Church of the Lord, those who cry out from the Church – which must be God's voice – what God does not like in society.<sup>24</sup>

In line with this text it can be said that the martyrdom in El Salvador has helped a lot to understand why they killed Jesus, which is of utmost importance.<sup>25</sup> And, in Latin America, the reality – unlike what normally happens in the First World – is a great hermeneutic help. In the First World, hermeneutical principles are often developed in order to bridge the historical distance that separates us from texts from many centuries ago and from the realities they narrate (Old and New Testaments). In other words, the current reality is an obstacle rather than an aid to understanding the past. In Central America, however, reality is in many cases a positive aid to understanding the biblical texts. And this certainly happens with regard to the death of Jesus. Any Salvadorean peasant, even with little social awareness and with a low level of literacy, knows perfectly well why they killed Jesus: Jesus was murdered for the same reason that Monsignor Romero, Ignacio Ellacuría and the community of the UCA were murdered, including two women, mother and daughter who helped with domestic chores.<sup>26</sup> This is why Ignacio Ellacuría has developed the idea of a crucified people, which takes place during Jesus' history, life and violent death. This theological perspective is not from the First World, but it is in the Third World; it is not in the rich and oppressive classes, but it is in the oppressed classes; it is not in those who serve oppression, but in those who fight for justice and liberation.<sup>27</sup> When you analyze the homilies that Monsignor Romero pronounced over three years as archbishop of El Salvador, you are astonished by the hundreds of names of people that are mentioned (men, women and children) who were kidnapped, tortured and killed, which are reported to public authorities. Romero did not omit "anything" in his preaching. Even his complaint to U.S. President Jimmy Carter, when neither the Salvadorean Episcopal Conference, nor John Paul II himself were hesitant to speak, Romero expressed in a respectful but convincing letter on February 17, 1980:

The brutal way in which the security forces recently evicted and murdered the occupiers of the headquarters of the Christian Democratic Party even though the junta apparently did not authorize the operation is an indication that the junta and the Christians Democrats do not govern the country, but that political power is in the hands of unscrupulous military officers who know only how to repress the people and favor the interests of the Salvadorean oligarchy.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> San Óscar A. Romero, *Homilías de fe y esperanza. Ciclo B/II (1979)* (Madrid: BAC, 2021), 113.

<sup>25</sup> More on this topic can be found at: Adriana Destro, Mauro Pesce, *La muerte de Jesús. Investigación de un misterio* (Navarra: Verbo Divino, 2015), 74-77.

<sup>26</sup> Teresa Whitfield. *Paying the Price: Ignacio Ellacuría and the Murdered Jesuits of El Salvador* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 41.

<sup>27</sup> Ignacio Ellacuría, El pueblo crucificado, in Ignacio Ellacuría, Jon Sobrino, (eds). *Mysterium Liberationis. Conceptos fundamentales de la Teología de la Liberación II* (Madrid: Trotta, 1990), 214.

<sup>28</sup> Letter to President Carter (February 17, 1980), in Saint Óscar Romero, *Voice of the voiceless. The four pastoral Letters and other statements* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Book, 2020), 206.

In his homily, on the same day he sent this letter, he said:

...the Church suffers the fate of the poor: persecution. Our Church boasts of having mixed its blood of priests, catechists and communities with the massacres of the people, and having always borne the mark of persecution. It is slandered and we do not want to hear its voice that claims against injustice, precisely because it is a hindrance. This is the political dimension of faith.<sup>29</sup>

Because of all this, it is not surprising that a year after beginning his diocese, in the Cathedral of San Salvador on February 14, 1978, PhD Timothy Healy, president of Georgetown University (Washington), conferred a doctorate *honoris causa* on him with these words: *"In recognition of the moral leadership that you have shown towards the Church of El Salvador. Your courage and eloquence in defending human rights have truly gained international admiration."*<sup>30</sup> The ordained ministry in Latin America, renewed according to Vatican II and Medellín, adopted a Church "model" which in many cases was contested and rejected within the Church itself. This "Jeshua" Church is persecuted because in the *historical upholding of its faith* by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, it has no choice but to question regimes that clearly destroy the running of a fair historical project in the best interest of the oppressed majorities.<sup>31</sup> As Monsignor Romero said: *"It would be sad if we did not also count priests among the victims in a homeland where murder is being committed so horribly. They are a witness of a Church incarnated in the problems of the people."*<sup>32</sup>

The priestly movements that originated in several Latin American countries since the mid-60s: ONIS (Peru), Golconda (Colombia), MSTM (Argentina),<sup>33</sup> were very clear that the commitment to the poor included the prophetic dimension of proclamation and denunciation. Many of these movements acted in times of repression and military dictatorships. They all agreed that the commitment involved persecution and violent death as a real possibility.

### **Why does the universal Church not ultimately acknowledge the martyrs of justice?**

I briefly relate two anecdotes: the first one is told by Camilo Maccise, who was Superior General of the Carmelites, and says, *"Upon learning of the murder of Monsignor Romero while celebrating Mass on March 24, 1980, a cardinal, resident in*

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<sup>29</sup> San Óscar Romero, *Homilías de resurrección y vida. Ciclo C (1979-1980)* (Madrid: BAC, 2018), 300.

<sup>30</sup> San Óscar Romero, *Homilías de denuncia y compasión. Ciclo A (1977-1978) I* (Madrid: BAC, 2019), 257.

<sup>31</sup> Jon Sobrino, *Resurrección de la verdadera Iglesia: Los pobres lugar teológico de la eclesiología*, 249.

<sup>32</sup> Homily from 6th June, 1979; quoted by Jon Sobrino, *Cartas a Ellacuría 1989-2004* (Madrid: Trotta, 2004), 74.

<sup>33</sup> José Pablo Martín, *El Movimiento de Sacerdotes para el tercer mundo: Un debate argentino* (Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de General Sarmiento, 2010), 71-74.

Rome, stated word by word: *I am sorry that a sacrilege was committed. On the other hand, he sought it out for having got into politics.*"<sup>34</sup> The second anecdote is from Monsignor Pedro Casaldáliga († 2020), who was a bishop of Sao Félix de Araguaia (Brazil), and it tells how, in his dialogue with the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, on the occasion of his *ad limina* visit in 1988, the following question was asked, among others, by the then prefect Cardinal Ratzinger:

You easily call Monsignor Romero, Camilo Torres, etc. martyrs. It is good to remember certain characters who dedicated themselves to a people, but to call them martyrs! Casaldáliga's response was: "We know how to distinguish between the 'canonical' martyrs, officially recognized by the Church, and those many other martyrs, whom we call martyrs of the Kingdom, who gave their lives up for justice, for liberation, and who also died explicitly for the sake of the Gospel."<sup>35</sup>

Likewise it is significant that the Puebla Document, although it had spoken of the "*preferential choice for the poor*", avoided the use of the word "martyr" when it referred on more than one occasion to persecution and "*sometimes death, in testimony to its prophetic mission.*"<sup>36</sup> The question posed at this point as to why the universal Church does not ultimately acknowledge the martyrs of justice has a challenging meaning in Latin America, since it places the vast majority of the local Churches into the commitment to examine what Church model they want to fit into. Latin America is, though not the poorest continent, the one with the greatest inequalities. In a continent that is predominantly Christian, this reality is a "real scandal" and an obstacle to a credible proclamation of the Gospel. The fact that creation has gone wrong for God, Ignacio Ellacuría's provoking phrase, is something that economists state nowadays.<sup>37</sup>

The terrible poverty is on the rise in Latin America; it is estimated that the post-pandemic effect will leave more than 200 million Latin Americans who will live in harsh poverty and another 200 million in extreme biological poverty within less than ten years.<sup>38</sup> And to this inhumane poverty we add the victims of repression in the wars originated by it. In Central America alone, there is an estimate of 450,000 victims. The theology of the "crucified peoples" which was thought and developed by Ignacio Ellacuría is immensely helpful and necessary at a real fact level, because "cross" means death, and death is what the Latin American peoples are subjected to in countless ways. It is a slow but real death caused by poverty arising due to unfair

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<sup>34</sup> Judgement heard at: Camilo Maccise, "El nuevo perfil del martirio y de la santidad. La experiencia cristiana de América Latina." *Revista Vida espiritual* 96 (1989), 7.

<sup>35</sup> Pedro Casaldáliga, "Casaldáliga: crónica y carta de mi viaje a Roma: La piedra, Asís y la espiga de maíz." *El Ciervo: revista mensual de pensamiento y cultura* 451 (1988): 15.  
<https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=4414158>

<sup>36</sup> Third Episcopal Conference of Latin America, *Documentos de Puebla* 92; Cf. 265, 668, 1138.

<sup>37</sup> A thorough analysis can be seen at: La desigualdad mundial en la riqueza en el siglo XXI, Thomas Piketty. *El Capital en el siglo XXI* (Madrid: Fondo de Cultura económica, 2015), 473-515.

<sup>38</sup> Jon Sobrino, *El principio-misericordia, Bajar de la cruz a los pueblos crucificados*, edited by Sal Terrae (Santander: Presencia Teológica, 1992), 84.



structures, i.e., “institutionalized violence”. Thus, the poor are those who die before their time comes. The prophetic function accurately consists in “bringing crucified peoples down from the cross”; it is right here that the Salvadorean Church becomes a light and testimony for the peoples.<sup>39</sup>

#### **4. Conclusion**

I would like to conclude my presentation by recalling one fact. When Monsignor Romero was murdered at the altar, it took many centuries back in history, to the eleventh century, to find a parallel in the murder of Saint Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury. But with a very important difference: Becket was murdered for defending the freedom and legitimate interests of the Church; Romero, on the other hand, for defending the poor. In our presentation we have been stimulated by this aim: to highlight how some local Latin American churches (specifically the Salvadorean Church and other martyrial churches) have received the prophetic character of the ordained ministry, in creative fidelity, as the Second Vatican Council wanted to revalue it, placing it as the first and main position in the *tria munera*. An alteration of what was intended by the Council should not have happened without important pastoral consequences, such as stating that the style of ordained ministry is sacramentalist bias, depending to a large extent on the Tridentine representations, where the ministry is centered in the parish, with little, not to say a lack of involvement with the social issues that affect the suffering people.

The Church’s charitable activity and the ordained ministry within it will always be necessary, but it can be neither the ideal nor the only horizon of action of ecclesial communities that, in fidelity to the Gospel of Jesus, dare to denounce the institutionalized sin of injustice, in which as Ignacio Ellacuría said, no one should have the right to the superfluous when the vast majority lacks what is necessary. The reality of martyrs makes it clear that the kingdom is not only beneficial but truly liberating and the ordained ministry must embody the announcement of this kingdom. To benefit means to do good, and that’s fine, but to liberate means to do something good in the face of an enslaving power that is determined to prevent it. Jesus acted in a liberating, not only beneficial way, when he healed the sick and cast out demons, and when he embraced sinners marginalized by social and religious conventions. Without this double movement the Church cannot honestly call its mission a liberating one. Without it, the Church’s mission and the ordained ministry, can be at best a beneficial one, but it will not be the like the mission of Jesus.

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<sup>39</sup> Jon Sobrino, *Witnesses to the Kingdom: The Martyrs of El Salvador and the Crucified Peoples* (New York: Orbis Book, 2003), 103.

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