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### Ignacio Ellacuría and the University: Universitariamente Bajando De La Cruz a Los Pueblos Crucificados

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**IGNACIO ELLACURÍA AND THE UNIVERSITY:  
*UNIVERSITARIAMENTE BAJANDO DE LA CRUZ A LOS PUEBLOS  
CRUCIFICADOS***

**A thesis submitted to  
Regis College  
The Honors Program  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for Graduation with Honors**

**by**

**Graham Hunt**

**May 2008**

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## **Preface: my lens**

There is injustice in the fact that when I graduate from Regis College I likely stand a better chance of finding work in El Salvador than do my friends Ana and Antonia, currently completing their studies at the Universidad Centroamericana “José Simeón Cañas,” the Jesuit university of El Salvador. This is a reality I struggled with one afternoon as I shared a simple lunch with the two women in the house where they live in San Salvador. Anita and Antonia, along with some thirty other students enrolled in the Programa Romero, come from some of the poorest rural communities of El Salvador. With scholarships from their local municipalities, and aided by the sliding tuition scale of the UCA, they have been privileged with the opportunity of a Jesuit education. But the economic reality of the country, to state it in direct terms, is such that there simply won't be jobs waiting for them when they graduate. Upon completing their studies, I reflected as I enjoyed the rice and tortillas lovingly prepared by my friends, students like Anita and Antonia will be faced with a choice: they may return to the communities of their upbringing and try to eke out a living working the unforgiving land as their families have done for generations, or they may emigrate to the United States in search of a better life as some 1,000 Salvadorans do each day, according to local estimates. It is a decision of no small import. In the case of Antonia, whose father was killed in El Salvador's 12-year-long civil war, and in the case of Anita, whose parents are aging and of poor health, these young women are being called in very material terms to support their families. The sick irony of it all is that these two represent a privileged population within Salvadoran society: the educated.

I, too, am privileged with a college education, and it is an education I don't take

lightly. But through the course of my studies I have come to appreciate that I have been gifted with a privilege much deeper than that of having engaged in scholarship, that of coming to know personally—to be befriended by—individuals like Anita and Antonia. And when I say people *like* Anita and Antonia, I mean the poor and the marginalized, those who, due to unjust socio-economic factors outside of their control, are not permitted to realize their full potential as agents in a society of people. Through the friendships I have been able to cultivate with the marginalized poor of El Salvador and of the United States, I have been given the vision to see that human society today is, at its fundament, *inhuman* and that the global system in which we live turns on an axis of profound injustice. This is a strong statement. But I say it with great confidence because, having been allowed for a moment to step outside of First World culture and to see the world as it is from the perspective of the oppressed majorities, I have come to understand that the privileges enjoyed by those of the wealthy nations come at a great human cost. Third World poverty, I am suggesting, far from being a problem proper to the so-called underdeveloped nations, is by and large the result of First World affluence. Poverty, to me, isn't simply a statistic, a concept to be theorized about; poverty to me is the pain I have seen in the faces of people I know and love. Poverty is something that I, as a First World consumer living on the backs of the poor, am responsible for. Poverty is a dispossessed friend to whom I must learn how to be responsible.

In his essay *The Scholastic Point of View*, (1989) Pierre Bourdieu warns of the kind of social isolation that can come about as a result of delving too deeply into the purely academic. As we become conversant in the scholarly perspectives in any given area, that is to say, we frequently become detached from the real needs of society. He describes the academy as “an institutionalized situation of studious leisure” in which the scholar is found



“busying oneself with problems that serious, and truly busy, people ignore” (p. 128). It might seem a harsh accusation, but it is a salient one if we choose to recognize that the vast, *vast* majority of people in this world are too busy trying to cover basic needs to even think seriously about education. Bourdieu goes on to declare that “what philosophers, sociologists, historians, and all those whose profession it is to think and speak about the world have the greatest chance of overlooking are the social presuppositions inscribed in the scholastic point of view” (p. 129). What my experience has indicated to me is that while the university purports to cultivate a better society, it most frequently does so in a way that doesn’t sufficiently take into account the deeply problematic reality of the society in which it operates and its own privileged position as an institution within that system. To state it more directly, what I am saying is that in a global system as unjust as I recognize ours to be, I see very few universities challenging the status quo.

The experience proper to me as a student is that only rarely, and with limited success at that, does a university education in the U.S. succeed in cultivating within the student a real human awareness of the marginalized, dispossessed “other” *as a person*. Social injustice, as I have hinted above, is most frequently just one among so many issues to be discussed in class. When social problems do become the object of study, the poor and dispossessed sometimes cease to be treated as subjects by those operating within Bourdieu’s “scholastic point of view.” My experiences in the College and with Regis’ Service Learning, Community-Based Learning, and Romero House programs have been counter to this generalization, as of course has been my time in El Salvador with Santa Clara University’s Casa de la Solidaridad program. But I am forced to admit, with no small amount of regret, that I don’t think my experience has been typical.

My observations at the institutional level, amateur as they may be, have been similar. Rather than challenging the more problematic qualities of our global culture, universities seem by and large to corroborate and, indeed, collaborate with unjust structures and institutions pertaining to the status quo. A central focus of the academy, an axis around which a great deal of academic activity turns, in a great many cases appears to be the promotion of industry via the research of technology and theory and the training of professionals who are to put the most recent methods into action. It is in this way that the university serves, in so many words, to keep things just as they are and to fortify the present, unjust order. The academy, I am suggesting, despite claims to objectivity and neutrality, plays a definite social role that appears not to be entirely positive.

It is in the context of these observations that I come to the point of my discussion, the notable exception to the rule that is the Universidad Centroamericana “José Simeón Cañas and the university model, conceived in a collaboration of laypeople and Jesuits but largely impelled and certainly most fully expounded by the rector Ignacio Ellacuría, S.J., assassinated November 16, 1989 along with five of his brothers from the UCA’s Jesuit community, the community’s housekeeper Julia Elba Ramos and her daughter Celina. My respect for the figure of Ellacuría as a martyr of the Salvadoran people had grown steadily throughout my time at the Romero House—and suffice it here to say that our pilgrimage to El Salvador as a Romero House community was for me a truly life-changing experience—but my interest in the model particular to the UCA was piqued when, shortly before I left for my semester of study there, Peace and Justice Studies department chair Byron Plumley suggested I read the commencement address delivered to the Regis College graduating class of 1990 by Fr. Jon Sobrino, Jesuit of the UCA community who was outside of El Salvador on

a lecture tour at the time of the massacre of his brothers. In the address, entitled *The Salvadoran Martyrs and the Meaning of a Christian University*, Fr. Sobrino speaks at length about the martyrs of the UCA and what it means for a university to be true to its Christian inspiration in a world marked by profound injustice.

He quotes an address given by Ellacuría upon receipt of an honorary degree at Santa Clara University in 1982, declaring that “There are two aspects to a university. The first and more evident is that it has to do with culture, with knowledge, with the use of the intellect. The second, not so evident, is that it must be concerned with social reality; precisely because a university is inescapably a social force, it must transform and enlighten the society in which it lives” (Ellacuría, “Discurso de graduación en la Universidad de Santa Clara,” as cited in Sobrino, 1990, p. 13). This first aspect, at first glance, doesn’t seem particularly revolutionary. It would seem self-evident that the university “has to do with culture” in this sense. But the second aspect cited doesn’t come independently from the first; indeed—and here we begin to approach the revolutionary heart of Ellacuría’s thinking on the university—it would seem that the first aspect is profoundly informed and is actually subordinate to the second. Whether through its activity or through its passivity in the face of the social forces at work, Ellacuría submits, the university has a very necessary and indeed compulsory kind of agency within society. Owning up to and actively taking responsibility for that agency, and choosing to recognize the great injustice woven into the social fabric, the university must orient itself as an institution—and consequently must direct its academic work in the area of culture—towards the abolition of injustice and the construction of a better society. Speaking directly to the notion of a Christian university, Sobrino (1990) goes on to declare that “the *finality*—the aim and purpose—of any university which wants to be human and certainly of a

university which wants to be Christian must be to transform sinful society into a human society” (p. 13). The university, quite simply, *cannot*—this is *not* only to say that it should not—be still in the face of injustice. “If we measure the Christian inspiration of a university by its capacity to transform society in the direction of truth and justice,” Sobrino elaborates, “then we should also acknowledge from the start that a university can be antichristian” (1990, p. 13). If the university isn’t part of the solution, to extend this stark but illustrative dualism, it is then categorically a part of the problem. Sobrino demonstrates this grave reality, declaring that “A university introduces justice and grace into society when through its social weight it transforms society into a more just society, especially for the poor. It introduces sin—even despite good will—when through its social weight, the professional expertise it provides society, and its public stand on social issues, it reinforces an unjust society” (1990, p. 13). It is a grave warning, and arresting, too, as it comes issued from the heart of El Salvador, a nation stained by the violence of a savage social order.

Beyond indicting, however, and outlining the nature of the problem at hand, Sobrino goes on to paint a picture of what it means for a university to stand in favor of the poor and for justice. The image he sketches is composed in the colors of the theology of liberation; the language is that of the reign of God. The reign of God is a new world in creation, which Sobrino characterizes as “a world in which the resources of the world are justly distributed, in which life is possible, in which people on this planet can live really as brothers and sisters, in which utopia is not progress and abundance for the few, as it is now, but shared austerity” (1990, p. 14). The language of liberation, as we will later see, is a language that was shared by Ellacuría. It is a vocabulary which, once adopted, demands a radical reorientation of the university. To illustrate, it is worth citing Sobrino at length:

The reign of God must be carried out in this world starting from an option for the poor. To mention the option of the poor as a guiding principle for a university may baffle some people, as if an option for the poor might be optional, or necessary, or possible only for those who do pastoral work. But what this option means for a university is that the university looks at the totality of reality, from the perspective of the poor, that it even insists that—according to the Christian perspective—from what is below in reality we can see better than from that which is at the top. For theology, certainly, the light of the poor is an indispensable light to see the true God and to discover what it means to be really a human being. All this means that the university must be present in the world of the poor and that the world of the poor must be present in the university. We must still analyze the conditions that must be met so that this can become a reality, but it is beyond doubt that the world of the poor must enter the university, enter into its mind and into its heart, enter into its members and into its totality (1990, p. 14-15).

To take seriously this option for the poor, however, to really let the reality of oppression enter into the soul of the academy and to stand in the face of the forces of injustice, has some very grave consequences. In the austere chapel of the UCA campus, next to the tombs of the six slain Jesuits, an inscription reads “What does it mean to be a Jesuit today? To commit oneself under the standard of the cross in the crucial struggle of our times: the struggle for faith and the struggle for justice that that same faith demands . . . We cannot work for the promotion of justice without paying a price.”<sup>1</sup> The Jesuits of the UCA paid the ultimate price for their work with the university, and in their life and death there is an important lesson to be learned for university people today.

What it is to *be university* in solidarity with the oppressed majorities—this is the guiding question of this thesis. The attempt will have to be modest, but the task is great: to

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<sup>1</sup> The text of the inscription, in Spanish, reads: “¿Que significa hoy ser jesuita? Comprometerse bajo el estandarte de la cruz en la lucha crucial de nuestro tiempo: la lucha por la fe y la lucha por la justicia que la misma fe exige . . . No trabajaremos en la promoción de la justicia sin que paguemos un precio. . .”

transmit some of the light that Ellacuría shone as a university person into a world dark with injustice, to indicate what it might mean for the university to engage in the crucial struggle of our times—to stand hand in hand *as a university* with the oppressed majorities. It is with no idle interest that I write this thesis. Because it isn't for myself, after all, that I write; it is for my friends, so many in number, people like Anita and Antonia who have been left by the wayside in the march of an utterly inhuman global society. I hope it can do them some justice.

Graham Hunt

San Salvador

January 9, 2008

## **A modo de introducción**

Shortly after midnight on November 16, 1989, troops from the Salvadoran military's elite Atlacatl battalion stole onto the campus of the University of Central America. The city of San Salvador was in total war by this point, the leftist guerrilla forces of the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional having launched their second "final offensive" five days before in a desperate, last-ditch effort to overthrow a military regime staunchly supported by the United States. The soldiers mulled around for a short while, setting off a grenade and damaging a number of vehicles in a parking lot near the pedestrian entrance at the south of campus. But they didn't waste much time in making their way to the and the adjacent Jesuit residence, where they proceeded to systematically massacre six priests of the UCA's Jesuit community, along with a domestic worker, Julia Elba Ramos, and her teenage daughter Celina. Julia Elba and Celina had sought refuge at the Jesuit residence as the violence of the civil war overtook the capital city.

Ignacio Ellacuría—the rector of the UCA—and five other Jesuits were dragged into the garden outside the residence and forced to lie face down on the ground. Moments later the soldiers opened fire on the prostrate priests. Ellacuría's head was torn quite literally to pieces in the fusillade, and some Salvadorans today suspect that there was intended a certain sick symbolism in so destroying his brain. The killers wanted to make it clear that the great mind behind the UCA had been destroyed. Of the troops responsible for the massacre, several had been trained in the United States at the School of the Americas.

Why were Ellacuría and the other Jesuits killed? As priests and as university people, what could they have done to so incense the Salvadoran authorities as to order them

assassinated? Sure enough, as the indiscriminate slaughter of tens of thousands of peasants over the course of twelve years of civil war shows, the Salvadoran military of the 1980s needed little excuse to kill someone. But the UCA, on that night in 1989 and on many occasions prior, became the target of a specialized kind of violence. More than to simply kill six men who happened to be living and working at the UCA, the powers that were in the small Central American felt obliged to terminate, using whatever means necessary, the particular kind of university work underway at the UCA. What was it about the nature of this work that the authorities found so threatening?

The UCA was founded in 1965 under the auspices of a highly conservative Church hierarchy and with the financial support of the wealthy oligarchy—a tiny sector of society which controlled (and continues to control) virtually all of the material and monetary resources in the Central American nation of El Salvador. It was precisely this massive disparity, combined with the marginalization of the majority of Salvadoran society from political life—the effective closing-off of political alternatives that might have lead to the gradual establishment of a more just order—which provoked the poor to organize and engage in a guerrilla war against the Salvadoran government. This kind of revolutionary foment was already taking hold in El Salvador at the time of the UCA’s founding, and the idea, initially, was that the newly-founded university would work to counter the leftist and revolutionary currents flowing out of El Salvador’s National University at the time. This conservative posture was very soon to change, however.

Assigned to the UCA in 1965 by his superiors in the Jesuit order, Ignacio Ellacuría began almost immediately upon his arrival at the university to advocate for and to actively work towards the implementation of a very different kind of university model. In 1970



Ellacuría delivered a public discourse upon the occasion of the signing of a loan from the Interamerican Development Bank—an act which signified a large step towards the termination of the UCA’s financial dependence upon the oligarchy. He spoke, naturally, of the university and its function within the Salvadoran context, but did so in a way that, given the volatile reality of El Salvador in 1970, may have sounded to the State authorities of the moment—a military dictatorship—outright antagonistic. At one point he declared:

The specific way in which the university should put itself to the immediate service of all is by directing its attention, its efforts, and its university functioning towards the study of those structures which, for being structures, condition for good or for bad the life of all citizens. It should analyze those structures critically and it should contribute, in the way proper to the university, to the denunciation and destruction of injustice, and should create new models so that the society and the state can move forward (p. 22).<sup>1</sup>

In a society marked by a radical disparity between rich and poor and moreover founded upon the utter exploitation of the poor majority by a wealthy few, these were fighting words.

While Ellacuría’s statement certainly evolved over the 24 years of his tenure at the UCA, these central presuppositions remained the same: the university must struggle for a more just order, and it must do so in the way proper to the university (*universitariamente*). 19 years after this early statement, the assassination of the Jesuits came as the Salvadoran government’s response to the UCA’s carrying out of these fundamental precepts. The Jesuits of the UCA were killed because they had attempted to create what would be, as the UCA’s motto indicates, a “university for social change.” They were killed because they tried to

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<sup>1</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “La forma específica con que la universidad debe ponerse al servicio inmediato de todos es dirigiendo su atención, sus esfuerzos y su funcionamiento universitario al estudio de aquellas estructuras que, por ser estructuras, condicionan para bien o para mal la vida de todos los ciudadanos. Debe analizarlas críticamente, debe contribuir universitariamente a la denuncia y destrucción de las injusticias, debe crear modelos nuevos para que la sociedad y el Estado puedan ponerlas en marcha.”

create a university that would be true to its Christian inspiration. They were killed because they had worked to make a university that would function, *universitariamente, para “bajar de la cruz a los pueblos crucificados.”*

To grasp the fuller implications of what this means requires that we take something of a long journey with Ignacio Ellacuría. Saturated as they are with the language of theology and with the weighty terms proper to his own philosophical production, Ellacuría’s statements about the university must be analyzed in light of his broader intellectual endeavor, and likewise be situated within the concrete context of his life and martyrdom. To contextualize our understanding of Ellacuría’s idea of the university, we will first sketch in broad terms some of the aspects central to liberation theology, a theological approach to which he adhered. Secondly, we will study his life and work—giving primacy to his own experience as a human being and as a Christian in the reality of El Salvador—and analyze how this experience impacted his philosophical inquiry. Finally, we will return to the topic of the university and discuss in greater depth the meaning of his often-incendiary statements about the role of the university in a global system predicated on structural injustice.

## **The theology of liberation: faith that does justice**

“Only a God who has come down into history can raise it to God.”

Ignacio Ellacuría, *The Historicity of Christian Salvation*

### **The turn towards reality**

In direct terms, the theology of liberation might best be described as the fruit of a confrontation between faith and reality. To understand what this faith is, then, and how it has been informed by this confrontation, it is necessary in the first place to understand just what kind of reality it is that is being confronted. It is, first and foremost, the reality of overwhelming poverty and massive structural injustice proper to Latin America. “As we turn to the world of the Latin American popular masses and open our eyes to see those masses,” reflects Jesuit theologian Roberto Oliveros (1993), “we find ourselves face to face with the results of centuries of institutionalized injustice. Millions upon millions of persons are subjected to an inhuman, demeaning poverty.” For this is the first insight key to the theology of liberation: the world in which we live is a profoundly broken one, and it has been broken by human hands. “We run up against this unjust poverty with every step we take,” he continues, “and the collision deeply shakes the hearts of Christians of good will” (p. 4). This turn toward reality and this ‘shaking of the heart’ of Latin American Christians that lies at root of the theology of liberation became perhaps most patently evident in the institutional Church after the first Conference of Latin American Bishops in Medellín, Colombia, in 1968. This revitalization of the mission of the Church in Latin America, in important ways a

continuation and a carrying-forward of the work started at the Second Vatican Council, was later reaffirmed, in 1979, at a second conference held in Puebla, Mexico. In the final redaction of the document drawn at Medellín, reflecting on the overwhelming reality of Latin America, the bishops declare:

. . . the present historical moment our people are living is characterized in the social order and from an objective point of view by conditions of underdevelopment dramatized by the imposing phenomena of marginality, alienation and poverty, and largely influenced, in the last analysis, by economic, political and cultural structures dependent upon the industrialized metropolises which monopolize technology and science (Neo-Colonialism). From the subjective point of view it is characterized by the personal awareness of this situation that awakens among large sectors of Latin Americans attitudes of protest and the desire for liberation, development and social justice (1968, p. 126).

Taken as descriptive of the Latin American reality, this observation is illustrative of the ‘signs of the times’ operative in the historical moment, but in addition, understood as an apprehension on the part of the Church hierarchy of massive structural injustice and revolutionary foment, it is emblematic of the manner in which those signs were breaking into and making themselves felt within the life of the Church. The observation is noteworthy as well in that it goes so far as to name the First World, insofar as it extends its economic, political, and cultural hegemony over the peripheral nations, as a culpable agent in the exploitation of the poor majority of Latin America. The tension evident in the Church’s encounter with the Latin American reality became only more palpable with the passage of time and in 1979, at the Third General Conference held in Puebla, México, the gathered bishops pronounced that “From the depths of the countries that make up Latin America a cry is rising to heaven, growing louder and more alarming all the time. It is the cry of a suffering people who demand justice, freedom, and respect for the basic rights of human beings and

peoples” (The Third General Conference of Latin American Bishops, p. 48). The cry, then as now, was a cry for liberation. And it was a cry that the Church could no longer ignore.

But such painfully direct recognition in the very Magisterium of the broken reality of Latin America, however indicative of the profoundly transformative nature of the Church’s ongoing encounter with that reality, does not as such signal the genesis of liberation theology. Because as much as it has found inspiration in the reformed understanding of what it is to be Church in the modern world that took shape at Vatican II and the further reflection on what it means to be Church in Latin America that coalesced at Medellín and Puebla, the theology of liberation has surged into being primarily as the organic expression—on the part of the poor and the oppressed themselves—of a faith that grapples in concrete ways with the weight unjustly thrust upon the oppressed majorities. Peruvian theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez (1971)<sup>2</sup> clarifies this central point, explaining that “Behind liberation theology are Christian communities, religious groups, and peoples, who are becoming increasingly conscious that the oppression and neglect from which they suffer are incompatible with their faith in Jesus Christ (or, speaking more generally, with their religious faith). These concrete, real-life movements are what give this theology its distinctive character; in liberation theology, faith and life are inseparable” (p. xix). Liberation theology, then, far from an academic reflection removed from the exigencies of daily life, is in the first moment a *lived* faith which puts itself at odds with the concrete conditions of injustice against which the majority of the world’s faithful struggle day-to-day. It does not trickle from the top, then, a product of the ongoing theological reflection in the European Church, but rather springs upward from the bottom—from the depths of the deeply problematic reality of Latin America. In so doing it brings

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<sup>2</sup> Gutiérrez is widely credited with having coined the term “liberation theology.”

faith, and indeed the very question of God, into a novel kind of engagement with history.

### **A new horizon**

Beyond merely apprehending the deplorable state of poverty in which the majority of Latin American people live, then, the theology of liberation takes the crucial next step of defining that injustice as something that is fundamentally and in direct terms sinful. As a singularly onerous manifestation of sin and one that gives rise to other, more patently visible forms, furthermore, the massive injustice being perpetrated in the structural sphere constitutes a primary manifestation of the evil which Christianity must confront in the world today. Ignacio Ellacuría (1987) expounds that:

Oppression in all its forms and . . . every kind of structural injustice, is the worst form of violence, because it affects the majority of the population and does so in what is most sacred and profound: the preservation and improvement of life itself . . . even though it presents itself in modes and manners that lack dramatic effect. Liberation theology sees as violence and as a source of violence everything that it calls social sin which, in the Latin American context, is in great part the result of the prevailing capitalism—both in the center-periphery north-south relationships, as well as in the corresponding reflection within each country. The principal reflection of this violence, but not the only one, is the condition of poverty and destitution that fundamentally affects, not only the quality of life, but the very fact of living (as cited in Beirne, 1996, p. 60).

This statement, while exhibiting a strong parallel to the earlier declaration by the Latin American Bishops, is notably more direct. It is more direct in its nomination of capitalism as a root cause of the structural injustice proper to Latin America, and more direct in its recognition of that injustice as a patently sinful situation. Indeed, it is a thoroughly confrontational statement. There is a battle being waged between the interests of the new

global capitalist order and the majority of human people who find themselves exploited according to the whims of that system, and as a Christian and as a theologian Ellacuría is declaring which side he's on. He is not alone in so doing and concordantly the theology of liberation, in the way proper to a theological undertaking, is making its stand at the side of the poor and the oppressed. Oliveros (1993) explains that:

When we speak of theology in Latin America, we must speak of the theology of liberation. Here, for the first time in the history of our subcontinent, a theology is appearing that belongs to us – a theological reflection incarnate in the situation of the persons and peoples of America. Current Latin American reality, subjected to an in-depth reflection in the light of faith by the theology of liberation, has furnished theologians with a reorientation and has rejuvenated the task of Christianity and of the church in our lands (p. 3).

Just as the theology of liberation emerges from the faithful reflection, on the part of the oppressed, on the untenable circumstances of their marginalization, the new theology being elaborated proceeds from a concrete decision, on the part of the theologian, to cast one's lot with the downtrodden. In so engaging themselves in the historic struggle of the poor for a more just order, the theologians of liberation are thereby of course bringing their theological reflection into dialogue with the concrete question of historical liberation. But furthermore, and crucially, they are at the same time bringing into question the hermeneutic presuppositions traditional to the entire theological enterprise. In making the decision to look upward from the bottom, liberation theology subjects itself to a decidedly different vista from that seen from the top looking down. Looking up, it is clear, the theology sees in the status quo an unjust order so violent that it threatens the very life and livelihood of the majority of humankind. And looking about itself into the faces of the oppressed, the theology of liberation sees none other than the crucified form of Christ the Savior. Establishing that "The

full revelation of God in history occurred in Jesus Christ,” Oliveros declares that “It was manifested in the poor. That context became the privileged locus for the knowledge and experience of the God of Jesus. Thus the privileged theological locus is constituted by the poor and the cause of their liberation” (1993, p. 13). To know God, this is to say, is to walk alongside the poor on their dark and difficult path toward liberation.

### **God in history**

Defining the task of theology as that of accompanying the oppressed on their hard march toward a better future, then, implies that theology must from now on put itself actively at the service of building that which is to come. The good that is to come with that construction, the light to be seen at the end of the tunnel, is what the theologians of liberation refer to when they speak of the Reign of God. Gutiérrez clarifies, stating:

Indeed, if human history is above all else an opening to the future, then it is a task, a political occupation, through which we orient and open ourselves to the gift which gives history its transcendent meaning: the full and definitive encounter with the Lord and with other humans. ‘To do the truth,’ as the Gospel says, thus acquires a precise and concrete meaning in terms of the importance of action in Christian life. Faith in a God who loves us and calls us to the gift of full communion with God not only is not foreign to the transformation of the world; it leads necessarily to the building up of that fellowship and communion in history (1971, p. 8).

If to know God means to know the poor, in this view, to be Christian is to work towards the greater harmony of the human community by putting oneself at the service of the liberation of the oppressed. The very same binds that tie the least of human society and which keep humankind from harmonizing together as a community, this is to say, also detain that society from growing closer to God. To engage in truly liberating praxis, then, is to participate in the



execution of God's will on earth. "The full significance of God's action in history," Gutiérrez drives the point further, "is understood only when it is put in its eschatological perspective; similarly, the revelation of the final meaning of history gives value to the present. The self-communication of God points toward the future, and at the same time this Promise and Good News reveal humanity to itself and widen the perspective of its historical commitment here and now" (1971, p. 95). Conversely, then, there is thus implied an assertion that, just as humanity grows closer to God as it grows closer together, human society becomes qualitatively more human the more that it enters into closer communion with God.

The distinctly political quality of Christian praxis understood in this way, while absolutely key to the undertaking, should not be taken to suggest that all of Christian praxis can thereby be reduced to political engagement in the cause of the oppressed as per the theology of liberation. Nor, furthermore—and there is room for confusion here—should God's will be identified with the human action that enacts it. Gutiérrez gets to the crux of this delicate point when he explains that:

Temporal progress—or, to avoid this aseptic term, human liberation—and the growth of the Kingdom are both directed toward complete communion of human beings with God and among themselves. They have the same goal, but they do not follow parallel roads, not even convergent ones. The growth of the Kingdom is a process which occurs historically *in* liberation, insofar as liberation means greater human fulfillment. Liberation is a precondition for the new society, but this is not all that is. While liberation is implemented in liberating historical events, it also denounces their limitations and ambiguities, proclaims their fulfillment, and impels them effectively towards total communion. This is not an identification (1971, p. 104).

What is going on here? If to raise the human community towards a fuller encounter with

God via the cultivation of a more human society here on earth is to God's will, then how is it that this action is separable from the construction of the Reign of God? The response, it would seem, would be to suggest that that in allying themselves with the oppressed and taking a stand against the injustice of the prevailing system, the faithful are thus reaching beyond the historical and taking as their far-reaching goal the transcendent encounter that would be the full communion between God and humanity. Precisely what this encounter might look like is, to say the least, difficult to understand, for as the Uruguayan Jesuit Juan Luis Segundo (1993) affirms, “. . . Christians do not possess, even by understanding it, the truth that God communicates to them until they succeed in transforming it into a humanizing difference within history” (p. 332). As authors of the history of humanity, the theology of liberation tells us, our task is to write ourselves towards the more consonant human community that will in turn conduce us toward a fuller understanding of God.

### **Evangelization redefined**

In granting such primacy to worldly issues of servitude and oppression, and their contrapositive liberation, it might be said that liberation theologians are thus bringing new definition to the evangelical task of the Church. Focusing not so much on the life that is to come after death, as per the traditional doctrinal interpretation of salvation passed down by the hierarchical Church, they are working instead from an explicit recognition of the fact that the majority of humanity is being denied life here on earth. This shift in horizon has landed liberation theologians in no small amount of tension with Church authorities, however. In bringing theology into such direct dialogue with the historical question of liberation, the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has accused, the theology of liberation

exhibits a dangerous tendency to leave to the wayside central questions pertaining to personal sin and salvation. “Faced with the urgency of certain problems,” declared the Congregation in 1984, headed at that time by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, “some are tempted to emphasize, unilaterally, the liberation from servitude of an earthly and temporal kind. They do so in such a way that they seem to put liberation from sin in second place, and so fail to give it the primary importance it is due. Thus, their very presentation of the problems is confused and ambiguous. Others, in an effort to learn more precisely what are the causes of the slavery which they want to end, make use of different concepts without sufficient critical caution” (Introduction, paragraph 3). The insinuation on the part of the Congregation, on the one hand, is that the theology of liberation engages sin on the social and structural levels in such a way that the theme of personal liberation from sin is left to the margin. On the other, the congregation levels the accusation that the theologians of liberation, in engaging so directly worldly problems of servitude and exploitation, make uncritical borrowings from the social sciences in order to undertake their theological reflection.

While the congregation (1984) acknowledges that “In itself, the expression “theology of liberation” is a thoroughly valid term” which “designates a theological reflection centered on the biblical theme of liberation and freedom, and on the urgency of its practical realization” (Section III, paragraph 4), it nonetheless goes on to declare that “Unquestionably, it is to stress the radical character of the deliverance brought by Christ and offered to all, be they politically free or slaves, that the New Testament does not require some change in the political or social condition as a prerequisite for entrance into that freedom” (Section IV, paragraph 13). The direct allegation on the part of the Congregation, again, is that the theme of personal deliverance from sin goes ignored in the nascent theology

of liberation. But furthermore—and critically—there is in the Congregation’s declaration a tacit but firm assertion that the ultimate object of faith, taken to be personal salvation, does not *as such* pertain to historical Christian praxis. The majority of humanity may be shackled in an oppressive poverty, this is to say, but they are in all actuality free insofar as they accept Christ’s gratuitous gift of love. But in so leveling this accusation, it must be recognized, the Congregation neglects to engage the theme of personal conversion that is so central to the theology of liberation. For the burgeoning theology indeed *insists* in no uncertain terms that a profound conversion must shape the hearts of people. But the distinct assertion maintained by theologians of liberation—and here is found the radical reorientation, the turning-on-its-head of traditional theology that lies at the root of the conflict—is that this conversion must consist in the first moment in a turn toward the poor and a commitment to the cause of the oppressed. Oliveros (1993) explains this turn, stating that:

In Latin America today scripture is reread in liberation theology from the viewpoint of the poor – from the viewpoint of the exploited class with which Christ joined in solidarity. Hence the question: What demands does love for our neighbor involve today? This is not simply one of the topics addressed in the theology of liberation; it is its heart and soul. Here is the lifeblood of the experience, original intuition, and very existence of the Christian groups engaged in the praxis of liberation. Loving God and neighbor means turning from the beaten path, entering the pathways of the oppressed, those struck down by injustice, and making a commitment to their cause (p. 7).

In turning to the reality lived by the majority, this is to suggest, believers must then allow that painful reality to enter and exert an influence on their lived faith. Oliveros’ ‘shaking’ of the Christian heart, then, denotes something more than a one-way transmission from the heart-breaking reality of the poor into the hearts of believers. A profound transformation is demanded in the encounter. Oliveros clarifies further, declaring that “In our history,

communion with our neighbor passes necessarily by way of the option for the poor. Our love of neighbor becomes reality when we love the impoverished of the earth. The word *conversion*, etymologically, denotes a “turning to.” Christian conversion is a turning to the poor, a harmonizing of our heart with theirs, a weeping with their suffering, a rejoicing in their joys” (1993, p. 8). The theology of liberation, it is worth reiterating here, localizing in the crucified form of the exploited majority of humankind the present manifestation of God in history. Opening one’s heart to the poor isn’t simply ‘the Christian thing to do,’ then, but is actually and in concrete terms constitutive of opening one’s heart to God. Nonetheless, the Congregation (1984) warns that:

. . . the feeling of anguish at the urgency of the [social] problems cannot make us lose sight of what is essential nor forget the reply of Jesus to the Tempter: “It is not on bread alone that man lives, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4; cf. Deuteronomy 8:3). Faced with the urgency of sharing bread, some are tempted to put evangelization into parentheses, as it were, and postpone it until tomorrow: first the bread, then the Word of the Lord. It is a fatal error to separate these two and even worse to oppose the one to the other. In fact, the Christian perspective naturally shows they have a great deal to do with one another (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, section VI, paragraph 3).

But that is precisely the point that liberation theology drives home with such intensity. The pressing worldly needs of the here and now indeed cannot be divorced from the good news of the gospel, *nor vice-versa*. Just as the Congregation purports that liberation theology, in locating its horizon squarely in the reality of poverty lived by the majority of humanity, leaves to the margin a spiritual essence essential to the Christian faith, liberation theology conversely proposes that the Christian faith, when it centers itself in the abstractly spiritual, risks marginalizing the Gospel’s absolutely essential call to a Christian praxis that is

responsive to the reality of the majority. On this point, Brazilian liberation theologian Clodovis Boff (1993) affirms that “. . . theology must not be concerned merely with *historical* liberation. The *personal* (prepolitical) and *eschatological* (postpolitical) dimensions of the life of faith must also be developed (even in behalf of the oppressed, who are already, and who continue to be, human persons). Even so, it must be said that, in the *comprehensive* (not necessarily the individual) process of theological production, the question of the oppressed must today constitute the *dominant perspective*, that is, not the exclusive perspective, but not just one among many, either” (p. 61). The idea, then, is clearly not to leave behind the essential spiritual element and to ignore questions of personal faith and personal salvation; rather, it is to concretize these questions and make them relevant to the here and now. When most of humankind is left to subsist on the scraps unwanted by a wealthy minority, the theology of liberation tells us, the Good News of the Gospel—if it is really to be good news—must be understood in light of the deeply unjust reality of the historical moment. And that Good News, at the same time, must be made operative in a liberating praxis committed to bringing the human community closer together in a more just and equitable society.

This interpretation of Christianity as a fundamentally liberating faith has given rise to further doctrinal suspicions on the part of Church authorities when it has gone on to assert, as we have seen above, that the reality of poverty lived by the majority constitutes the privileged place for interpreting scripture. Much recent controversy has revolved around the work of Jesuit Father Jon Sobrino, referenced in the preface to this thesis, and the 2001 decision of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to put a number of his Christological writings under review. The pieces under scrutiny are Sobrino’s *Jesucristo*

*Liberador: lectura histórico-teológica de Jesús de Nazaret* (1991) and *La fe en Jesucristo: ensayo desde las víctimas* (1999). In the former, Sobrino asserts that “[Latin American Christology . . . identifies its setting, in the sense of a real situation, as the poor of this world, and this situation is what must be present in and permeate any particular setting in which Christology is done]” (*Jesucristo Liberador*, p. 28, as cited in Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, section I, paragraph 2, 2006). The Congregation, in stark contraposition to Sobrino’s hermeneutic, has responded that “The ecclesial foundation of Christology may not be identified with “the Church of the poor”, but is found rather in the apostolic faith transmitted through the Church for all generations” (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, section I, paragraph 4, 2006). The message is clear. The privileged place for the interpretation of the Word, and in case of Christology the life and works of Jesus, in the eyes of the Congregation, is not to be found at the bottom. The Congregation prefers to locate the doctrinally correct understanding of the Gospel in an altogether more abstract location, in the “apostolic faith” maintained by the community of believers and “transmitted through the Church.” But in situating this faith in the greater body of the Church, a rhetorical device which seems at first to be a stand against the supposed sectarian threat liberation theology poses to the Universal Church, the Congregation’s critique carries with it the tacit assertion that the real truth about the faith—and the hermeneutically correct place for interpreting the Gospel—must and will remain firmly in the hands of the doctrinal authorities themselves. Leveling its criticisms from the top, as it were, of the hierarchical structure, the Congregation will not admit of conflicting statements emanating from another location. It is in no way surprising that the Congregation would feel threatened by the new conception, however; in resituating the locus of God’s salvific presence outside of the institutional Church and instead

in the poor majority, the theology of liberation thus turns theology on its head and shakes the very foundation upon which the entire enterprise is built. But in taking as its starting point the undeniable fact of the untenable reality lived by the majority, it must be acknowledged, liberation theology does not pretend to work to the exclusion of other theologies. It does, however, assert itself as a total theology. Boff clarifies that “Although the theology of liberation is not an *exclusive* theology, inasmuch as it defines itself strictly as a theology developing the social function of faith from the perspective of the poor, nevertheless it is *not merely one theology among others*. It is a theology which, from a point of departure in its fundamental project, challenges all theologians, precisely because it bears on a question having a relation to all other questions: the concrete question of the social emancipation of today’s oppressed” (1993, p. 60). The theology of liberation, this is to say, while it doesn’t profess to displace all other theological undertaking, has entered the wider theological discussion in a way that cannot be ignored. From now on, all theology must enter into dialogue with the theology of liberation and, consequently, with the concrete question of historical liberation.

This explicit engagement with the social and political on the part of liberation theology has proven particularly problematic in the eyes of the Church hierarchy, however, when it has led liberation theologians to employ methodologies considered unorthodox by the Church in analyzing the social reality. “Impatience and a desire for results,” declares the Congregation, “has led certain Christians, despairing of every other method, to turn to what they call “Marxist analysis.” / Their reasoning is this: an intolerable and explosive situation requires ‘effective action’ which cannot be put off. Effective action presupposes a ‘scientific analysis’ of the structural causes of poverty. Marxism now provides us with the means to



make such an analysis, they say. Then one simply has to apply the analysis to the third-world situation, especially in Latin America” (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1984, section VII, paragraph 1-2). The Cold War overtones here are palpable; indeed it was in the face of rising revolutionary foment and a concomitant surge in the organization of faith-inspired communities (i.e. Ecclesial Base Communities), particularly in Central America, that this criticism was issued. The tone is likewise notably pejorative, and one almost gets the impression that those of the Congregation would equate faith-based reflection employing Marxist analysis to Communist ideology. And such was indeed the concern on a number of levels, as the Congregation’s statement indicates:

. . . the thought of Marx is such a global vision of reality that all data received from observation and analysis are brought together in a philosophical and ideological structure, which predetermines the significance and importance attached to them. The ideological principles come prior to the study of the social reality and are presupposed in it. Thus no separation of the parts of this epistemologically unique complex is possible. If one tries to take only one part, say, the analysis, one ends up having to accept the entire ideology. That is why it is not uncommon for the ideological aspects to be predominant among the things which the “theologians of liberation” borrow from Marxist authors (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1984, section VII, paragraph 6).

Responding concretely to the concern that employing Marxist scientific methodologies may expose faithful theological reflection to harmful ideologies, however, Boff (1993) responds that theology, in fact, when it elects not to engage with the temporal question of human liberation, leaves itself open to becoming overly abstract and disengaged and as such, all the more vulnerable to such collusion with negative ideologies. “Henceforth,” he declares, “all theology will have to confront *faith* (and its power for liberation) with *history* (and its contradictions, or injustices). Were any theology not to do so, it would be suspect of

alienation, it would be vulnerable to all manner of manipulation and could become “opium religion.” It is becoming ever more difficult to understand how a theology could close its eyes to the real history of the oppressed” (p. 60). Gutiérrez goes even further, nominating unequivocally the worldview that would submit theology to its own exigencies. “To claim that theological reflection ought to be practiced on some “neutral ground,”” he articulates, “is tantamount to placing it in the service of the great economic and political powers of the laissez-faire capitalistic system. Theological reflection is a matter of objectivity and intentionality. It must be at the service of the liberative activity of the poor and their efforts to construct a society of sisters and brothers” (1971, p. 11). The theology of liberation, then, while taking a clear stand at the side of the oppressed, does so not in a partisan effort in favor of a determined ideology or politics but rather in a clear effort to be true to itself as a faithful reflection on such central themes as sin and salvation, the reign of God, and Christ himself.

### **Here and now**

So where does all of this leave us, then? In a world broken by injustice, might the theology of liberation represent a novel reflection hopeful to the dispossessed majority of humankind? Most certainly it can, and it already is. While the theology of liberation is and is likely to remain a marginal movement in the institutional Church, its impact on the wider theological discussion can hardly be ignored. By bringing the concrete reality of the here and now to the forefront, it has forced the institutional Church into a closer dialogue with the poor majority and into a deeper self-reflection on the role of the Church in the world today. It is thrusting the Church into a greater reckoning of itself as a material and social power in the world which, as a power, cannot help but be engaged—for the better or to the detriment

of—the historic struggle of the oppressed majority. By way of summary it is worth quoting Ellacuría at length:

The theology of liberation understands itself as a reflection from faith on the historical reality and action of the people of God, who follow the work of Jesus in announcing and fulfilling God's Reign. It understands itself as an action by the people of God in following the work of Jesus and, as Jesus did, it tries to establish a living connection between the world of God and the human world. Its reflective character does not keep it from being an action, and an action by the people of God, even though at times it is forced to make use of theoretical tools that seem to remove it both from immediate action and from the theoretical discourse that is popular elsewhere. It is, thus, a theology that begins with historical acts and seeks to lead to historical acts, and therefore it is not satisfied with being a purely interpretive reflection; it is nourished by faithful belief in the presence of God within history, an operative presence that, although it must be grasped in grateful faith, remains a historical action. There is no room here for faith without works; rather, that faith draws the believers into the very force of God that operates in history, so that we are converted into new historical forms of that operative and salvific presence of God in humanity" (Ellacuría, 1977, as cited in Burke, p. 186-187).

A faith that does justice, the theology of liberation is a theology which seeks to make operative the truth of the Gospel and the salvific message of Christ. Finding God in the face of the poor, it commits itself to the service of the Reign of God through the active construction of a human community that is qualitatively more human and, as such, qualitatively closer to a full engagement with God. Reflecting on history and the dialectics of wealth and poverty, it commends itself to the realization of God's will in history. "The future of history," Gutiérrez tells us, "belongs to the poor and the exploited. True liberation will be the work of the oppressed themselves; in them the Lord saves history" (1971, p. 120).

## **Filosofía de la realidad histórica: laying the foundations for a philosophy of liberation**

“There is much left to do. Only with hope and utopianism can one believe and have the energy to attempt, hand-in-hand with the poor and the oppressed of this world, to turn history around—to subvert it and launch it in another direction.”

Ignacio Ellacuría, *The challenge of the popular majorities*

To cultivate reality in such a way that it might *give more of itself*—this is the radical notion underpinning Ellacuría’s praxis-oriented philosophy. The philosophy is radical in the etymological sense: rooting itself firmly in a scrupulous understanding of the material basis of reality—that is, retreating firstly to basic metaphysical questions in order to lay its radical foundation—only then does it proceed to project itself into the concrete spheres of the social and the historical, unifying them in the same rigorous apprehension. Ellacuría’s philosophy is as such praxis-oriented for, having thus based itself in a judicious and integral appreciation of reality, it then goes on to demand a concrete historical praxis in favor of the oppressed. As his original contribution to the field of philosophy, Ellacuría’s *filosofía de la realidad histórica* forms the critical foundation upon which the Jesuit martyr builds his particular formulation of liberation theology and likewise gradates the canvas upon which he sketches his particular model of the university, to be treated in the next chapter.

In order to ground our understanding of this keystone to Ellacuría’s thinking we will take as the key point of our analysis his seminal essay *El objeto de la filosofía*, first published in 1981 in the Universidad Centroamericana’s monthly journal *Estudios Centroamericanos*

and which was chosen to serve as the introduction to his masterwork *Filosofía de la realidad histórica*, published posthumously in 1991 by UCA Editores.<sup>3</sup> While it does not equal the in-depth treatment of the *Filosofía* that is to be found in the greater work, working from the early essay has the advantage that the document subdivides Ellacuría's overriding statement into a series of five theses which elucidate concisely the fundamental tenets of his thinking. The five theses expounded in the 1981 essay, interestingly, while they certainly parallel in their contents the explanation elaborated at length in the book, do not in fact mirror the subdivisions utilized at length in the volume *Filosofía de la realidad histórica*.

### **Ignacio Ellacuría: “an intelligence moved by mercy”**

Before diving into the deep waters of Ellacuría's thinking, however, it would be well to first situate his philosophic- and theological production within its proper context and to illustrate from where derive his central insights. But it must be understood that the path he traversed in his formation as a committed Christian intellectual was not, in the first moment, an intellectual experience. The tendency, in surveying Ellacuría's intellectual and theological contributions, would be to locate the fundamentals of his thinking in the work of

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<sup>3</sup> Ellacuría had been working on the manuscript up to the time of his assassination. Explaining the telling circumstances surrounding the writing—telling in terms of the ultimate horizon of Ellacuría's life and work—Ellacuría's brother from the UCA Jesuit community Jon Sobrino (1990) recalls: “. . . I remember that while on exile in Spain you wrote a manuscript that would have made you famous in the world of philosophy, but nonetheless you neither prioritized it nor finished writing it when you returned to El Salvador because you always had more important things to do: from helping to resolve a national problem to attending to the personal issues of and employee of the UCA. The conclusion for me is very clear: service was more important to you than the cultivation of your intelligence and the recognition that that cultivation might bring you.” Translation: mine. The original citation reads “. . . recuerdo que en un exilio en España escribiste un manuscrito que te hubiera hecho famoso en el mundo de los filósofos, y sin embargo no le diste mayor importancia ni lo terminaste de escribir cuando viniste a El Salvador porque siempre tenías otras cosas más importantes que hacer: desde ayudar a resolver algún problema nacional hasta atender a los problemas personales de algún trabajador de la UCA. La conclusión para mí es muy clara: más importante que el cultivo de tu inteligencia y el reconocimiento que esto te podría acarrear era para ti el servicio.”

the great teachers under whom he studied and with whom he collaborated in his varied and manifold academic pursuits. And it is indeed vitally necessary to study the insights borne of those fructiferous dialogues. But Ellacuría's experience—and I contend that from here derives the radical thrust of his thinking—was most principally an experience of conversion. His defining moment, as it were, was a “shaking of the heart”—to once again employ Oliveros' term—a *turning to* the marginalized poor and an engagement with their daily struggle for dignity in the face of a savage world order. His extensive intellectual formation arrived at its ultimate horizon in this encounter and, in turn, equipped his fertile mind with the critical perspective necessary to order his experience into a philosophical and theological articulation uniquely suited to the time and place of its inception. In order to demonstrate this, Ellacuría's metanoia must be at one and the same time related to its intellectual precedents *and* situated within the concrete human experiences from which it emerged, foremost among them his experience among the oppressed poor of El Salvador. Writing to the memory of his martyred Jesuit brother in the first of what were to become his annual *Cartas a Ellacuría*, Father Jon Sobrino, S.J. (1990), of the Universidad Centroamericana intimates:

You served at the UCA but your service was not, in the final sense, to the university. You served in the Church but your service was not, ultimately, to the Church. You served in the Society of Jesus but your service was not, in the end, to the Society. The more I came to know you, the more I came to the conviction that you served the poor of this country and of all the Third World and that this service is what gave ultimacy to your life. You were a faithful disciple of Zubiri, philosopher, liberation theologian, and theorist of popular political movements, but you didn't fight for such theories as if they were a “dogma.” More, you changed your point of view—you, inflexible—and when you did there was only one thing that made you change: the tragedy of the poor. Thus I think that if you did have

any unmovable “dogma,” it could only have been one: the pain of the crucified peoples (p. 17-18).<sup>4</sup> Ellacuría first arrived in El Salvador in 1949 at the age of eighteen, a Jesuit Novice assigned to the newly-founded novitiate of Santa Tecla. It was the beginning of an encounter that would shake him at his fundament as a human being and which would culminate in the radical commitment to the poor that precipitated his assassination at the hands of the repressive Salvadoran authorities. For while his academic pursuits as a Jesuit in formation were to profoundly shape his worldview—in particular his engagement with the Spanish philosopher Xavier Zubiri—it was in the end his intimate encounter with the dolorous reality of El Salvador that would ground his philosophical and theological production at its most cardinal level.

Ellacuría’s early philosophical project: “the search for a Christian philosophy”

This encounter was by no means a discrete event, however, and the seeds were sown early on which would gradually blossom into the novel Christian worldview Ellacuría ultimately articulated as he committed himself, even unto death, to the cause of the poor and the oppressed. Shortly after his arrival in Central America he left for Quito, Ecuador, where he continued in his Jesuit formation as a student at the Pontificia Universidad Católica.

There he studied humanities and philosophy under the Jesuit Aurelio Espinoza Pólit and metaphysics and aesthetics under the Nicaraguan poet Ángel Martínez, also of the Society of

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<sup>4</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “Serviste en la UCA, pero no últimamente a la UCA. Serviste en la Iglesia, pero no últimamente a la Iglesia. Serviste en la Compañía de Jesús, pero no últimamente a la Compañía de Jesús. Cuanto más llegué a conocerte, más llegué a la convicción de que serviste a los pobres de este país y de todo el tercer mundo, y de que este servicio es lo que dio ultimidad a tu vida. Eras discípulo fiel de Zubiri, filósofo y teólogo de la liberación, teórico de movimientos políticos populares, pero no peleabas por esas teorías como si fuesen un "dogma". Más bien, cambiabas tus puntos de vista -tú, inflexible-, y cuando lo hacías una sola cosa era lo que te hacía cambiar: la tragedia de los pobres. Por eso, pienso, que si algún "dogma" inamovible tuviste, éste fue sólo uno: el dolor de los pueblos crucificados.”

Jesus. Of his relationship with the former, drawing upon an article he published on the occasion of Espinoza's death, the UCA's official biography of Ellacuría states that he "recognized [Espinoza's] lack of orthodoxy, but what most impressed him was his integration of serious intellectual work with immediate public efficacy; his having preferred education to erudition and vital forms to material contents," (Universidad Centroamericana "José Simeón Cañas," *Biografía completa*).<sup>5</sup> Ellacuría's interlocution with the latter in turn also proved consequential in terms of the student's nascent intellect, as the biography indicates:

What most impacted Ellacuría was the personal synthesis that Ángel Martínez had made of poetry, philosophy, and theology, as well as the unity evident between his poetic production and his life. For Ángel Martínez, poetry was indeed a way of life: his life was his poetry and his poetry was his very life. Ellacuría apprehended this essential unity of word and life: all of the dimensions of his existence were unified "in this pledge to the effective word, sought with absolute sincerity and in every aspect of his life" (Universidad Centroamericana "José Simeón Cañas," *Biografía completa*).<sup>6</sup>

For it was, in the end, Ellacuría's public denunciation of the social injustice proper to El Salvador—a denunciation emanating from a critical and rigorous apprehension of the social reality—and his word made operative in the concrete reality of the Universidad Centroamericana which so threatened the repressive Salvadoran authorities that they ordered him assassinated in 1989. The parity between these early reflections and Ellacuría's comportment as a mature intellectual are hardly debatable, but in these formative years he

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<sup>5</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads "Ellacuría reconocía su falta de ortodoxia, pero lo que más le impresionó fue la combinación del trabajo intelectual serio con la eficacia pública inmediata; el haber preferido la educación a la erudición y las formas vitales a los contenidos materiales"

<sup>6</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads "Lo que más impactó a Ellacuría fue la síntesis personal que Ángel Martínez había hecho de la poesía, la filosofía y la teología, así como también la unidad de su obra y su vida. Para Ángel Martínez, la poesía era una forma de vida: su vida era la poesía y su poesía era su propia vida. Ellacuría supo ver esta unidad esencial de palabra y vida: todas las dimensiones de su existencia estaban unificadas "en este empeño de palabra eficaz, buscada con toda sinceridad y en toda su vida"."



still had yet to arrive at the comprehensive expression of a liberating faith and philosophy which would come to impel both his work as university rector and his later philosophic- and theological enterprise. And so the seeds thus sown for a deeper reflection on Christian praxis and the role of the academic in the greater society, the fledgling intellectual set forth on what Roberto Valdés Valle has called “the search for a Christian philosophy” (1996).

In this germinal stage of Ellacuría’s thinking, which Valdés situates between the years 1955-1967, the Jesuit-in-formation explored extensively the tension intervening in the dialogue between faith and reason—and began to look in serious terms at just how faith and reason must enter into dialogue with reality. Having himself taught scholastic philosophy for three years at the San José de la Montaña seminary in San Salvador upon his return from Quito, Ellacuría resumed his own studies in 1958, this time at Innsbruck University under the German theologian Karl Rahner, S.J., noted for his pivotal influence in the doctrinal formulations employed at Vatican II.<sup>7</sup> “In Rahner,” Jesuit Martin Maier (2005) comments on Ellacuría’s time at Innsbruck, “Ellacuría had as his teacher one of the central theological actors of the council, and one can imagine that Rahner shared his thoughts on the preparation for that new theological and ecclesial openness with his class. There is no doubt that the young Ellacuría attentively followed the preparation for this new theological and ecclesial openness (p. 129). There can likewise be little doubt that this “openness” exercised a pivotal influence in Ellacuría’s theology as it was manifested in later years—a theology of and for the concrete reality of Latin America—for as Maier concludes, “Rahner’s skill consisted in making theology confront the questions posed by life itself” (p. 129). The reality to which

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<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, very little in the literature provides any insight as to what impact Rahner’s formulations may have had on Ellacuría’s own theology. One possible explanation, albeit a very simplistic one, would be to suggest that Ellacuría’s encounter with Zubiri, landmark as it was, simply eclipsed his prior experience under the German theologian.

Rahner's theology was intended to respond, it must however be noted—quite distinct from the theology and philosophy Ellacuría was poised to elaborate, having yet to return to El Salvador—was above all the intellectual landscape of modern Europe. Maier (2005) expounds on this key point, stating:

Rahner's fundamental concern, in effect, is to create a new theological discourse that confronts the challenges of modernity with its denial of knowledge or even the existence of God. His principle interlocutor is the European who has been strongly influenced by the Enlightenment and by modern science (p. 130).

Ensnared firmly within the European worldview, this is to say, Ellacuría's thinking had yet to confront head-on the conflicted reality of the Third World. Valdés characterizes Ellacuría's intellectual production during this formative period as "Neo-Thomist," a contribution to a burgeoning effort to integrate the insights of Aquinas with those proper to the sciences and to the respective philosophies of Kant, Heidegger, and in the case of Ellacuría's own Neo-Thomist pursuits, Ortega y Gasset.<sup>8</sup> "What was being looked for," Valdés summarizes the horizon of the movement, "was a *synthesis* between Thomism and Modernism" (1996).<sup>9</sup> It is significant, in differentiating between the young and the mature Ellacuría and in outlining the transformations underway in the mind of the thinker, to note this initial engagement in the Neo-Thomist project. For although he never did fully discard the effort towards an integrated philosophy, we will see, his thinking was poised to take a radical turn and as he immersed himself in the reality of El Salvador Ellacuría would ultimately wax highly critical of the patently idealist underpinnings proper to Modern

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<sup>8</sup> Although it would be somewhat ancillary to my discussion to treat it at length, it merits mention that Valdés brings to bear an insightful discussion on Ellacuría's engagement with the philosophy of José Ortega y Gasset.

<sup>9</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads "Lo que se buscaba era una *síntesis* entre tomismo y modernismo."

thought.<sup>10</sup>

We certainly see the seeds of a shift taking root already in his time at Innsbruck, suggested on an external level by the nature of his studies but marked perhaps more saliently in the trajectory of his personal negotiation with faith and reason. In an early text titled *The Problematic of a Christian Philosophy*,<sup>11</sup> Ellacuría cites that “According to Heidegger, the question as to being does not arise while one is secure and comfortable. He who relies on the faith of the Bible cannot ask authentically because he has the answer before he asks. One cannot ask without ceasing to be a believer. Therefore, there cannot be as such a Christian philosophy except, at the most, as an *als ob*” (Ignacio Ellacuría, *La problemática de una filosofía cristiana*, cited in Valdés, 1996).<sup>12</sup> That this citation would be in any way indicative of Ellacuría’s own posture at the time might seem doubtful given his twin commitment to the Jesuit order and to the Neo-Thomist project, not to mention his studying under such a noted theologian as Rahner, but in his first *Carta a Ellacuría*, Father Jon Sobrino reflects “I remember one day, in 1969, when you told me something that I have not forgotten: that your great teacher Karl Rahner carried his doubts very elegantly, with which you went on to say that faith was not something obvious to you, either, but rather a victory” (1990, p. 18).<sup>13</sup> The point here is by no means to paint Ellacuría as some sort of agnostic, and we can really only estimate as to where he stood on the question of the rational engagement with faith; the point

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<sup>10</sup> It is worth noting here as well Valdés’ observation that Neo-Thomist scholasticism, such as it was, represented in fact a progressive movement within a conservative Church, and one that played a role in the radical changes initiated at Vatican II.

<sup>11</sup> Translation: mine. The original title reads “*La problemática de una filosofía cristiana*.”

<sup>12</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “Según Heidegger, la pregunta sobre el ser no irrumpe mientras se está en la seguridad y la comodidad. El que cuenta con la fe de la Biblia no puede preguntar auténticamente, porque tiene la respuesta antes que la pregunta. No se puede preguntar sin dejar de ser creyente. Por tanto, no es posible un filosofar cristiano sino a lo más como un *als ob*.”

<sup>13</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “Recuerdo un día, en 1969, en que me dijiste algo que no he olvidado: que tu gran maestro Karl Rahner llevaba con mucha elegancia sus propias dudas, con lo cual venías a decir que tampoco para ti la fe era algo obvio, sino una victoria.”

is to simply underline the fact that his intense philosophical and theological questioning during this period was becoming much more than an intellectual exercise carried out for its own sake. He found himself in a very real process of discernment in regards to his faith and was likewise searching actively for the horizon that would ground his academic efforts.

And he did as such, at this time, demarcate the sphere of his efforts clearly within the confines of the academy. For, as Valdés asserts, “it is undeniable that at this time Ellacuría considered himself a scholastic, an open adherent to the perennial philosophy” (1996).<sup>14</sup> We have thus, to say the least, something of a complex and even contradictory picture of Ellacuría as a young intellectual: cognizant, on the one hand, of the socially engaged academic activity of the Jesuits Espinoza and Martínez and of Rahner’s overriding effort to orient the theological task towards questions of immediate import, Ellacuría was meanwhile committed, on the other, *as a self-avowed scholastic*, to furthering the inveterate dialogue between the classical and the contemporary, the secular and the spiritual. Driven and prolific in his philosophical production, he was at the same time grappling with himself and groping for a firm axis along which to align his efforts. It was precisely this deep struggle, however, and this apparent “lost horizon” which would impel him onward to the next step in his trying journey.

#### Ellacuría and Zubiri: the critical ground for a Latin American philosophy

Ellacuría was ordained a priest in 1961 and shortly after decided to seek out Xavier Zubiri, in the hopes that he might obtain the Basque philosopher’s counsel in the writing of

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<sup>14</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “. . . es innegable que durante este tiempo, Ellacuría se consideraba a sí mismo un escolástico, un abierto partidario de la filosofía perenne.”

his doctoral thesis. Having received no response to his written inquiries, he finally went to visit Zubiri in his home. Writing of the interview, which took place on September 8, 1961 in San Sebastián, Ellacuría recalls: ““I told him succinctly that I saw in him a model of the union between the Classic and the Modern, between the essential and the existential. He smiled and said that this, effectively, had been the intent of his work”” (Ignacio Ellacuría, Letter to Vice-Provincial Luis Achaerandio, 1961, as cited in Valdés, 1996).<sup>15</sup> But this exchange does not convey the full import of the shift underway in the Ellacuría’s thinking, however, let alone the kind of departure from the straightforward integration of old and new actually expressed in Zubiri’s philosophical project. Valdés indicates further the repositioning of Ellacuría’s focus evident at this initial stage of the encounter, declaring that the Jesuit’s reading of Zubiri’s seminal text *On Essence* had “. . . allowed him to entertain for the first time the real possibility of talking about a new type of Christian philosophy that would go beyond the mere *synthesis* between Thomism and Modernism. The possibility had been posed of a trans-scholastic and trans-existentialist Christian philosophy” (1996).<sup>16</sup> These are the seeds of a radical shift indeed. More than a reorientation of Ellacuría’s Neo-Thomist project, then, what is to be observed—even at this introductory stage in his encounter with Zubiri—is in reality the abandonment of that prior effort aimed simply at the integration of old and new. Indeed, Valdés maintains that “. . . while the majority of the critics saw in *On Essence* a clear regression on the part of Zubiri back to Scholasticism,

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<sup>15</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “Le dije [dice Ellacuría] sucintamente que veía en él un modelo de juntura entre lo clásico y lo moderno, entre lo esencial y lo existencial. [Zubiri] sonrió y dijo que efectivamente ése había sido el intento de su obra.”

<sup>16</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “*Sobre la esencia* le permitía por primera vez plantearse la posibilidad real de hablar de un nuevo tipo de filosofía cristiana que fuera más allá de la *síntesis* entre el tomismo y el modernismo. Se planteaba la posibilidad de una filosofía cristiana trans-escolástica y trans-existencialista.”

Ellacuría to the contrary saw from his first reading of the book that it dealt with a radical overcoming of both Scholasticism and Neo-Thomism.”<sup>17</sup> Indeed, Valdés even goes so far as to assert that in the course of their collaboration “Ellacuría found in Zubiri a very powerful weapon for attacking the respective postures of the Neo-Thomists and the Neo-Scholastics” (1996).<sup>18</sup>

But Ellacuría’s turn to Zubiri in this period of discernment and the landmark encounter that resulted—landmark because it marked the beginning of the collusion that would from then on constitute the ground, the theoretical base, of Ellacuría’s own philosophical elaboration—cannot be explained simply in terms of his “search for a Christian philosophy.” Certainly it marked a new stage in that same project, even as it represented a radical departure from Ellacuría’s prior Neo-Thomist production, but it wasn’t simply a growing awareness of the affinity between Zubiri’s philosophy and his own that drove him to seek out the aging intellectual. Much more, UCA professor of philosophy Jordi Corominas argues, it was a shared “passion for truth.” This contention is not quite the platitude it might at first seem. Recognizing that yes, quite obviously, all philosophers and all philosophies are to varying degrees united in this same overriding passion for the truth, Corominas maintains that:

The most interesting and piquant [quality] of the Zubirian method and philosophy is that they lead us to an atmosphere where to defend one or another philosophic thesis is completely contingent. What is decisive is to be permanently disposed to remove all kinds of prejudice with the aim of discovering new evidences which we achieve as we go. The passion for truth is of such a caliber that it is

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<sup>17</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “. . . mientras la mayoría de los intérpretes vieron en *Sobre la esencia* un claro regreso de Zubiri al escolasticismo, Ellacuría, desde la primera lectura del libro, vio, por el contrario, que se trataba de una superación radical del escolasticismo y del neotomismo.”

<sup>18</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “Ellacuría encontró en Zubiri un arma muy poderosa para atacar las posturas de los neotomistas y neoescolásticos.”

preferable to stay out in the cold than to seek refuge in any construction whatsoever. The skepticism which accompanies this passion is a productive skepticism, a skepticism which comes to the point even of doubting skepticism itself when this, instead of being the fruit of a failure in the search, is the fruit of a dogmatic assumption (1998).

Ellacuría was leaving behind the security of a well-defined, however difficult, task and taking on an altogether more nebulous project—all in the favor of getting closer to what was concretely more important. To speak of the Zubirian method is to go very far beyond mild terms of the synthesis between old and new, then, the mere integration of varied and disparate philosophical formulations. It is a commitment to the truth—and more concretely, as we will see, a commitment to the reality of things—so patently radical that it refuses to subordinate itself to any dogma. And thus it is neither idly nor equivocally that Father Jon Sobrino (2004), in the introduction to the published edition of his *Cartas a Ellacuría*, goes so far as to characterize the martyr's thinking as “metaparadigmatic” and “transparadigmatic” (p. 8).

Such declarations as to the skepticism proper to the Zubirian method should by no means be taken to suggest that this radical intellectual modality is in any way incapable of making firm assertions of its own as to the true nature of things, however. Indeed, it was in fact, and very patently so, Ellacuría's rigorous employment of the Zubirian method—effectively an exactingly materialist approach to understanding reality at its most fundamental, relentlessly critical of any explicatory ideology—which enabled him to denounce so incisively the same murderous military regime that ultimately saw to his assassination. “The great intellectual lesson of X. Zubiri and I. Ellacuría is their integrity,” continues Corominas, “The passion for the truth is so consubstantial with the Zubirian

method that as one enters into it he becomes susceptible to being marked in his own life by it” (1998). But not only was Ellacuría marked by his engagement with Zubiri. The encounter conversely left him possessed of a singular capacity to mark profoundly, in the favor of justice, the reality of his time and place.

And the historical moment in which Ellacuría quickly found himself immersed—his time and place—was the very same deeply broken Latin America which was simultaneously giving rise to a pervasive revolutionary foment and to the theology of liberation. And in the tiny Central American nation of El Salvador, where the tumultuous currents endemic to the continent were quickly coming to a head, the moment was also soon to give rise to the singular figure of Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero. Ellacuría, having now found in Zubiri firm ground for the elaboration of his own philosophy, was still searching for the horizon which would animate his own production and grant it the ultimacy it was even still, as yet, lacking. But his experience in El Salvador through the course of these key years was to shake him in a way which would send shockwaves through his intellectual endeavor.

Ellacuría returned to El Salvador in 1967, to serve at the newly-founded Universidad Centroamericana “José Simeón Cañas.” Established in 1965 under the auspices of conservative ecclesial and state authorities, the UCA was intended to counteract the supposed revolutionary currents flowing out of the National University. But with the entrance of the increasingly progressive Ellacuría and other like-minded Jesuits and laypeople into the scene, the Catholic university was soon to undergo a radical reorientation of its ultimate horizon: committed at its inception to the training of professionals who would go on to solidify and corroborate the status quo, the university was to become in very short order, as its official motto indicates, a “university for social change.” This fundamental shift in focus on the part



of the institution—a shift to be explained more fully in the next chapter—parallels closely the shift in perspective undergone by Ellacuría as he immersed himself ever more deeply into the problematic reality of El Salvador.

The turn towards a “crucified people”

Valdés cites marked reorientation in Ellacuría’s philosophical project as having taken place during the interval from 1967 to 1972, and characterizes it as a turn “. . . from a Christian philosophy to a theology of revolution” (1996).<sup>19</sup> Three changes become evident here in terms of his thinking. The first is precisely the shift, on Ellacuría’s part, from the production of philosophy—albeit an effort towards a Christian philosophy—to an increasing concentration on the elaboration of theology. Second, and more importantly, it becomes clear that he was no longer entering into dialogue with European intellectuals only but was instead turning his focus to the reality of Latin America. Third, and most importantly, Ellacuría was no longer engaging solely in abstract discourse but was instead bringing his intellectual efforts to bear in the concrete spheres of the social and the political. Somewhere in his interlocution with Zubiri and in his ever-deeper engagement with the tensions overtaking the Latin American continent, this is to say, he had ceased to consider himself in blanket terms “a scholastic, an open adherent to the perennial philosophy.” The theology of revolution, which Valdés connotes as “the direct antecedent to the theology of liberation”<sup>20</sup> consisted for Ellacuría in “submitting the revolution to the theological *logos*, with the end of

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<sup>19</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “. . . desde una filosofía cristiana a la teología de la revolución”

<sup>20</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “el antecedente directo de la teología de la liberación”

analyzing it from the perspective of the Christian God” (1996).<sup>21</sup> Ellacuría’s scholarly production, then, was turning on a progressively more concrete axis. He was beginning, in the way proper to a priestly intellectual, to take upon himself the struggles of the Latin American people.

But the change underway, this very concreteness attests, was much more than a shift from one intellectually detached pursuit to another. It would of course be a gross inaccuracy to characterize Ellacuría’s philosophical endeavor as having ever been wholly divorced from larger societal concerns, but it is clear that prior to this point his academic production had not come to turn upon the axis of a defined social or political commitment. Now it had. In a conference directed by Ellacuría in Madrid in the early 1970s, Valdés indicates, he advocated not only for a philosophy that would take as its primary concern problems of broad social import, but moreover “a necessarily politicized philosophical project” (1996).<sup>22</sup> Ellacuría was proposing, in his own words, ““an effective mode of thinking, undertaken from the most concrete real situation, concerning the concrete entirety of reality”” (as cited in Valdés, 1996).<sup>23</sup> He was proposing a philosophy which would take sides, not only in the inveterate and transhistorical discussion proper to the “perennial philosophy” but in the concrete struggles of the historical moment. On whose behalf this philosophy was to be exercised, and to what concrete historical end, were to become for Ellacuría central categories in his philosophical enterprise. All of this, to say the least, is a far cry from the Scholastic project of Ellacuría’s youth. Two interplaying factors bear the responsibility for this shift.

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<sup>21</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “. . . someter la revolución al *logos* teológico, con el fin de analizarla desde la perspectiva del Dios cristiano”

<sup>22</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “un filosofar debidamente politicizado”

<sup>23</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads ““un pensar efectivo desde la más concreta situación real sobre la realidad más total y concreta””

On the one hand, and quite evidently, there is Ellacuría's continued collaboration with Zubiri. This notion, "the concrete totality of reality" apprehended "from the most concrete real situation," is a patently Zubirian formulation, as we will see in our analysis of the five theses of Ellacuría's *El objeto de la filosofía*. The impact of this engagement on his mind cannot be underestimated. On the other hand, however, the "concrete real situation" from which Ellacuría was undertaking his "necessarily politicized philosophy" was necessarily the reality of Latin America, and his commitment to that reality cannot be explained as a simple outgrowth of his adoption of the Zubirian outlook. Something more was happening. Ellacuría—and here our discussion returns to one of the central insights proper to the theology of liberation—was admitting the painful struggle of the Latin American people into the deepest part of his human person and allowing it to configure his outlook on the world. "In my opinion," Sobrino relates of his Jesuit brother's historic commitment to this reality, "Ellacuría allowed himself to be affected by reality, from a primordial honor before it, letting it be what it is" ("El pueblo crucificado" y "la civilización de la pobreza": "El hacerse cargo de la realidad" de Ignacio Ellacuría).<sup>24</sup> To paint a starker picture, he was undergoing an experience of conversion. Of Ellacuría's metanoia, Gustavo Gutiérrez affirms that:

The people compelled him to learn about the scandal of their poverty and their unending suffering. Thus he came to understand the central role that justice has in the Gospel message and that without it there is no authentic peace. His choice made him see that he couldn't follow in Jesus' footsteps without walking with the people in their aspiration to dignity, life, and liberation from all that marginalizes and oppresses them (2005, p. 69).

Ellacuría's commitment to the Latin American people, then, wasn't simply the next step in

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<sup>24</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads "En mi opinión, Ellacuría se dejó afectar por la realidad, desde una honradez primordial ante ella, dejándola ser lo que es"

his intellectual journey, the logical move dictated by his philosophical inclinations. Indeed, his increasingly “revolutionary” theology and his progressively “politicized” philosophy were the necessary outcomes of this fundamentally spiritual and human commitment. Ellacuría, having struggled with his faith through the years of his Jesuit formation, had now come to know God in a qualitatively new way: in the face of the poor. Indeed, he began to see in the popular majorities the crucified figure of Christ the Savior himself, and in a landmark contribution to the theology of liberation, began as early as 1977 to frame the object of historical Christian praxis in terms of the mandate: “we must take the crucified people down from the cross.”<sup>25</sup>

Now, it may seem incongruous and perhaps even something of a disservice to Ellacuría’s thinking to so subordinate our analysis thereof to a shift occurring in his spiritual person. But having now sketched (albeit nebulously) Ellacuría’s formation as a Christian intellectual up to this point, it will now be most faithful to the revolutionary quality of his intellect to illustrate the mature stage of his thinking in terms of his conversion to the Church of the Poor and, where the concrete reality of El Salvador is concerned, to the Church of Romero. For it was Ellacuría’s faith experience, in the end—his encounter with a “crucified people”—which granted his intellectual endeavor its ultimate horizon. Sobrino clarifies this novel terminology of the “crucified people,” explaining that “With those words Ellacuría wants to name the *immense majorities* (for this the language of “people,” “peoples,” etc.) who are overwhelmed with *death*—and not a natural death but rather a historical death which takes the form of a *crucifixion*: murder, active historical privation of life, slow or quick” (“*El*

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<sup>25</sup> Translation: mine. The phrase, employed perhaps first in the 1977 discourse *El pueblo crucificado: ensayo de soteriología histórica* but repeated throughout Ellacuría’s mature production reads “hay que bajar de la cruz al pueblo crucificado.”

*pueblo crucificado*” y “*la civilización de la pobreza*”: “*El hacerse cargo de la realidad*” de Ignacio Ellacuría).<sup>26</sup> And for Ellacuría a key symbol of the “crucified people,” brutally slain along with some 75,000 others in the horrific civil strife which engulfed El Salvador for more than twelve years, was the martyred Archbishop of San Salvador Oscar Arnulfo Romero. While it is far beyond the pale of this work to relate all that truly ought to be said in relation to the profound influence Romero exercised on Ellacuría—let alone to indicate as to the archbishop’s impact on the Church and on the Salvadoran people—suffice it to say here that it is impossible to explain Ellacuría’s intellectual project and the ultimacy it finally attained without making reference to Monseñor.

Óscar Arnulfo Romero y Galdámez was born in 1917 in eastern El Salvador and was ordained a priest in 1942 after studying at the Jesuit seminary in San Salvador. He ascended to the position of Archbishop in 1977 amid controversy pertaining to his apparent traditionalism. Seen by conservative state and ecclesial authorities as an utterly conventional clergyman who would serve well in the defense of the status quo, Romero generated more than a little apprehension among more liberationist sectors of Salvadoran society with his rise to the archiepiscopate. That fear soon gave way to a widespread love and veneration, however, as Romero proved himself a faithful defender of the poor. His outspoken denunciation of the military government’s brutally repressive tactics quickly brought him into wide renown, and just as quickly made him one of the prime targets of that government’s violent measures. While there is no clear consensus as to the succession of

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<sup>26</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “Con esas palabras Ellacuría quiere nombrar a *inmensas mayorías*, de ahí el lenguaje de “pueblo”, “pueblos”, etc., que están transidas de muerte, y no de una muerte natural, sino de una muerte histórica que toma la forma de *crucifixión*, asesinato, activa privación histórica de la vida, lenta o rápidamente.”

experiences which transformed Romero into the figure he is remembered as today—his tenure as auxiliary bishop had won him his prior reputation as a conservative committed to keeping things as they were—it is widely suspected that he underwent a profound change in his perspective following the assassination at the hands of military a death squad of his close friend Rutilio Grande, a progressive Jesuit priest. Whatever the case, with Monseñor Romero’s rapid self-revelation as an ecclesiastic committed—even unto death—to working hand-in-hand with the poor in their struggle against rampant structural injustice and murderous military repression, there ensued a close collaboration between UCA authorities and the archbishop. Ellacuría, for his part, became one of Romero’s closest advisors on theological and socio-political matters and frequently assisted the archbishop in the elaboration of statements pertaining to such issues. But even as Ellacuría was putting his piercing intellect at the service of this great defender of the poor, he was finding himself profoundly affected by the singular example of Monseñor, as a human person and furthermore as a Christian. “It wasn’t the first time that Ellacuría found himself with a person who would exercise an important influence in his life,” Sobrino writes of Ellacuría’s intellectual formation under Rahner and Zubiri, “Nonetheless, my conviction is that to encounter Monseñor Romero meant something distinct from encountering other teachers. And the radical distinction was that he encountered Monseñor’s *faith*” (2004, p. 9).<sup>27</sup> It is not easy, and well may be impossible, to illustrate in definite terms just what this encounter meant for Ellacuría and how he found his own interior life shaped by his interaction with the archbishop. But writing to the memory of his slain Jesuit brother in another of his *Cartas a*

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<sup>27</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “No era la primera vez que Ellacuría se encontraba con una persona que iba influir importantemente en su vida. Sin embargo, mi convicción es que encontrarse con Monseñor Romero significó algo distinto a encontrarse con otros maestros. Y eso distinto radica en que se encontró con la *fe* de Monseñor.”

*Ellacuría*, and drawing once again upon a statement made by *Ellacuría* during his tenure at the Universidad Centroamericana, *Sobrino* tellingly recalls: ““With Monseñor Romero God came through El Salvador,” you said in a classroom at the UCA four days after his death. God, the ultimate mystery of our lives, made Godself present and was embodied to you in Monseñor. The more God was hidden in the tragedy of the reality [of El Salvador], the more God was shown to you in the truth and love of Monseñor Romero” (1996, p. 54).<sup>28</sup> As he gave himself over more and more to the painful and broken reality of El Salvador, permitting the pain of the “crucified peoples” to “shake his heart” and even, I would submit, *break* his heart, *Ellacuría* found in *Romero* a singularly incandescent guiding light, a faith and a love so profound, so human and Christian, that it proved capable of overcoming the death to which the “crucified peoples”—once again, the overwhelming majority of human peoples—are so sinfully relegated. “If I am killed,” *Romero* once said, foreseeing his own immanent assassination at the hands of the Salvadoran authorities, “I will be resurrected in the Salvadoran people.” And indeed, in the years intervening since his assassination—a murder which a U.N. Truth Commission later confirmed to have been ordered by Ex-Major of the Salvadoran Armed Forces *Roberto D’Aubisson*, the founder of the (still) ruling party *ARENA*—*Romero* has passed his legacy on to legions of Salvadorans working for a more just order. With his own martyrdom in 1989, an assassination likewise ordered by high-ranking military officials (and carried out, it must be emphasized, by U.S.-trained soldiers), *Ellacuría* confirmed his commitment to the legacy of *Monseñor Romero* and to the popular

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<sup>28</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “<<Con Monseñor Romero Dios pasó por El Salvador>>, dijiste cuatro días después de su muerte en una aula magna de la UCA. Dios, el misterio último de nuestra vida, se te hizo presente y encarnado en Monseñor. Cuanto más se escondía Dios en la tragedia de la realidad, tanto más se mostraba para ti en la verdad y el amor de Monseñor Romero.”

majorities. Commending himself to the historic task of “taking the crucified people down from the cross,” Ellacuría ended giving his life on a cross of his own.

This, then, was the fruit borne of Ellacuría’s intellectual and spiritual journey, the culminating outcome resultant of a praxis-oriented philosophy grounded in a concrete love for the oppressed majority of humankind. To live and even to die in solidarity with the “crucified peoples,” working hand-in-hand with them in their historic struggle against the “social sin” of massive structural injustice: this is the singular example and the ultimate legacy left us by Ignacio Ellacuría. Reflecting on this life and the radical commitment which precipitated its premature end, Gustavo Gutiérrez writes:

We cannot know with scientific accuracy how many tensions and perplexities, vacillations and inconsistencies, bad moods and painful impasses he experienced along the path he chose to follow. Naturally, his could be neither a tranquil nor a triumphal journey. It never is. What is certain is that he put his intelligence, his analytical acumen, and all his intellectual talent to work doing the discernment necessary for finding the correct path amid the jumble of events taking place in El Salvador and Latin America. Not only did he not forget his philosophical formation; he used it as a source of criteria for acting in a changing situation full of surprises. Thus he gave his academic formation its due and, going against one of the most subtle forms of intellectualism, made clear the role it can play in the daily life of individuals no matter how conflictual the situation in which they find themselves (2005, p. 69).<sup>29</sup>

No, we cannot gauge with quantitative certainty the difficulties endured by Ellacuría as he struggled to find the ultimate horizon that would guide his intellectual production, nor can we comprehend the pain he felt as he took upon himself the crushing weight of the Latin American reality. No, we cannot know these things, but we can open ourselves to learning from his extraordinary example. Bearing witness to his life, a life lived in singular solidarity

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<sup>29</sup> Translation: James B. Nickoloff.



and which exacted a singularly sanguinary price, we can undertake an earnest investigation of his life's work and ask ourselves—with the gravity that the question demands—what it means to bear the burden of reality and engage in the crucial struggle of our times.

### **The philosophy of historical reality as summarized in the five theses**

#### The human in reality

Having now traced the tumultuous trajectory of Ignacio Ellacuría's formation as Jesuit priest, an intellectual, and most finally as a champion of the downtrodden, we now have something of a lens through which to evaluate critically his *Philosophy of historical reality*. Far from a disinterested "ivory tower" academic inquiry, it has been illustrated, Ellacuría's is a philosophy radically engaged in the concrete exigencies of the historical moment. It is furthermore a philosophy which, in painfully real terms, he lived to the very death. The philosophical project of Ellacuría's maturity depended heavily upon his collaboration with Zubiri, this much we know, but we understand at the same time that the martyr's location of an overarching horizon in the oppressed Latin American majorities granted that project a finality and a concreteness beyond that acquired in the interlocution with his mentor. Carrying forward key insights from Zubiri's "trans-scholastic and trans-existentialist Christian philosophy" and animated by the same radical "passion for the truth," Ellacuría profoundly nuanced the contributions of the Basque philosopher and employed them not to abstract but to concrete, historical ends. "For Ellacuría," a 2003 editorial in the UCA's monthly journal *Estudios Centroamericanos* summarizes his approach to intellectual investigation, "philosophy is, above all, a way of knowing which has to confront historical reality and apprehend its most essential truth; it is also a liberating activity. It is the search

for the real truth of history which itself demands of the philosophical enterprise the undertaking of a liberating task” (Editorial: Ellacuría y la función liberadora de la filosofía).<sup>30</sup> Clearly, the weighty term here is this “historical reality,” and the question of the “liberating activity” tied up in confronting it philosophically will in turn depend upon the particular apprehension conceded to the “real truth of history” likewise involved the central term. We will treat this crucial terminology with more depth in our analysis, still pending, of the five theses of the *filosofía de la realidad histórica*. But by way of introduction to the *filosofía*, suffice it here to conclude that in turning to the poor majorities of El Salvador Ellacuría learned something about the “truth of history” that neither Zubiri, nor any of his mentors could have shown him. “If the most fundamental truth of history is oppression,” the *ECA* editorial continues, “the knowledge which apprehends this truth must orient itself inexorably toward the liberation of this oppression (2003).”<sup>31</sup>

It is in this vein that I asserted at the beginning of this chapter that having “based itself in a judicious and integral appreciation of reality” Ellacuría’s *filosofía de la realidad histórica* proceeds then to “demand a concrete historical praxis in favor of the oppressed.” This is no small leap—it is precisely the leap from the acknowledgement of what *is* to the formulation of a statement as to what *ought* to be—and to submit that that selfsame acknowledgement of reality solicits *of itself* a concrete historical praxis in favor of a particular population is a weighty assertion indeed. But to so recognize that the mandate

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<sup>30</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “Pues bien, para Ellacuría, la filosofía es, ante todo, un modo de saber que tiene que enfrentarse a la realidad histórica y dar cuenta de su verdad más real; también es una actividad liberadora. Es la búsqueda de la verdad real de la historia la que exige de suyo al quehacer filosófico desempeñar una tarea liberadora.”

<sup>31</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “Si la verdad más fundamental de la historia de la humanidad es la opresión, el saber que da cuenta de esa verdad tiene que apuntar inexorablemente hacia la liberación de esa opresión.”

towards a liberating action so manifest in Ellacuría's philosophy emanates patently from this prior apprehension of reality is a crucial key to understanding the contents of the *filosofía de la realidad histórica*. That Ellacuría's commitment to transforming the social reality of El Salvador came about not as a result of some detached philosophical musings but rather in lieu of his own heart-breaking encounter with the oppressed Salvadoran majorities is illustrative. We have by now seen that this was indeed the case. And so while this making of an *ought* from what *is* might ring at first like a simplistic recalculation of the classic concept of Natural Law, given our knowledge of Ellacuría's intellectual formation we may proceed cognizant that in so pigeonholing his thinking we would run the risk of drastically truncating the radical statement that he was formulating. This said, we would do well now to look more closely at what Ellacuría meant when he spoke of the human confronting reality. In the 1975 *ECA* article "Hacia una fundamentación filosófica del método teológico latinoamericano," Ellacuría declares that:

The act of facing up to real things as real has a threefold dimension. It involves realizing the weight of reality, which implies a being-in the reality of things, and not merely a being-before the idea of things, or a being-in their meaning. It presumes a "real" being-in the reality of things, which in its active character of being-in-existence is quite the opposite of being thing-like and inert, and implies being among them through their material and active mediations. It involves shouldering the weight of reality, an expression that points to the fundamentally ethical character of intelligence, which has not been given to humanity so that it might evade its real obligations, but rather so that it might shoulder upon itself the weight of what things really are, and what they really demand. And it involves taking charge of the weight of reality, an expression that points to the praxis-oriented character of intelligence, which only complies with what it is, including its character as something that knows reality and comprehends its meaning, to the degree it undertakes really doing something (Ellacuría, Ignacio, "Hacia una fundamentación filosófica del método teológico latinoamericano," *ECA* no. 322-3,

1975, p. 419 as cited in Sobrino, 2005, p. 19).

Confronting reality, then—acknowledging it for what it is—means for Ellacuría being moved (and allowing oneself to be moved) intellectually, emotionally, and even spiritually *by reality*. This apprehension arises as the necessary antecedent to the resultant reciprocal commitment to move reality; that commitment, in its ethical and praxic dimensions, in turn completes that apprehension. The way to know reality, as per Ellacuría, is to take its burden upon oneself, to feel its weight for what it is and to furthermore carry that weight, making of oneself the bearer of reality itself, the one responsible for conducting it in a new and better direction. Again, and crucially, the assertion is not simply that the genuine encounter with reality can and may inspire one to some kind of reciprocal engagement with that reality but rather that the *real encounter with the real*, of itself, forces one into a concrete commitment with regards to that reality. Sobrino (2005) clarifies further this crucial and difficult concept, declaring that “Ellacuría demands *objectivity* in order to come closer to reality, to grasp it, and to analyze it just as it is. It is here, of course, that the option for the poor originates as an objective demand of reality” (p. 6). This is a heavy statement. Yes, indeed, to assert that reality itself, genuinely—and furthermore, *objectively*—apprehended by the human being, exacts the commitment of that human interlocutor is something of a radical proposition. It is moreover a proposition that is deeply counter to much of the philosophical establishment. But Ellacuría was not one to shy away from making radical, countercultural statements, even when those statements directly antagonized the repressive military authorities of El Salvador.

All of this, however, still begs the central question: what, precisely speaking, *is* reality for Ellacuría? That is, we have seen by now that in his view the task of philosophy is to come to terms with reality—and moreover that the intellect’s very grappling with reality

as reality entails allowing the understanding of what is to conduce the human person to a concrete commitment to that reality. But it still does not stand expressly clear what form (*form* understood here in the sense of a systemic configuration) reality takes for Ellacuría and precisely how it is that reality of itself demands such a commitment. What *is* this “historical reality” and how is it that upon truly apprehending it the human simply cannot remain neutral? Ellacuría summarizes his overriding philosophical insight in the final pages of *La Filosofía de la Realidad Histórica*, declaring that:

Definitively, historical reality, dynamically and concretely considered, has a character of praxis, which along with other criteria leads to the truth of reality and likewise to the truth of the interpretation of reality. . . . The truth of reality is not that which has already been made; that is only a part. If we don't return to what is being made and to what there is to be made, the truth of reality escapes us. We have to make truth, an action which doesn't suppose primarily putting into execution and making real what is already known, but rather making reality that which in the play of praxis and theory reveals itself to be true (p. 599, 1990).<sup>32</sup>

We have by now an image, albeit a rough one, of what Ellacuría saw as the “real truth of history”—the painful reality of the human majorities relegated to a life of privation, even a privation of live itself—and we likewise have an idea of what it meant for Ellacuría to apprehend this truth—to take upon oneself the painful weight of reality and become responsible to and for that reality. But to get to the heart of this statement, to see how the human being truly apprehends reality by engaging in a historical praxis of “making truth,” we need to comprehend the basic metaphysical interrogation he undertakes as to the formal

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<sup>32</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “En definitiva, la realidad histórica, dinámica y concretamente considerada, tiene un carácter de praxis, que junto a otros criterios lleva a la verdad de la realidad y también a la verdad de la interpretación de la realidad. . . . La verdad de la realidad no es lo ya hecho; eso sólo es una parte de la realidad. Si no nos volvemos a lo que está haciéndose y a lo que está por hacer, se nos escapa la verdad de la realidad. Hay que hacer la verdad, lo cual no supone primariamente poner en ejecución, realizar lo que ya se sabe, sino hacer aquella realidad que en juego de praxis y teoría se muestra como verdadera.”

nature of reality antecedent to making such weighty comments. This, then, is the time to undertake our analysis of “El objeto de la historia.”

The “object of philosophy” in Ellacuría

Ellacuría frames his discussion—prior to addressing the contents of the five theses—making initial reference to a problem perennial to the philosophical undertaking. “Contrary to other ways of knowing,” he acknowledges in his 1981 essay *El Objeto de la filosofía*, “philosophy has this initial indefinition: not only does it not know precisely what it is that it deals with, but moreover it has to make of itself the initial question of that which it is going to treat or, at the least, what it is concretely that it wants to study” (1990, p. 15).<sup>33</sup> Emerging from a generalized incertitude as to what constitutes its object, then, the philosophical enterprise must from the outset undertake a self-interrogation as to what it, itself, purports to be. Ellacuría initiates the discussion in this manner in order to explore a number of serious questions central to the discipline and with an end to advocating for a greater self-awareness on the part of philosophers as to the presuppositions guiding their formulations. Citing a prevailing norm in Western philosophy to “look to speak of all things insofar as all things coincide in something or are brought together and totalized by something,” he brings to bear the critical question as to whether this radical unifying principle would be as such real—that is, that all reality would be unified in the material and physical sense—or whether this unity would be of a strictly conceptual nature (1990, p. 15).<sup>34</sup> The particular approach taken will

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<sup>33</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “A diferencia de otros modos de saber, la filosofía tiene esta inicial indefinición: no sólo no sabe cómo es aquello de que trata, sino que tiene que hacerse cuestión inicial de qué es lo que va a tratar o, al menos, de qué es concretamente aquello que quiere estudiar.”

<sup>34</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads: “. . . buscan hablar de todas las cosas en cuanto todas ellas coinciden en algo o son abarcadas y totalizadas por algo.”

be highly repercussive in terms of the type of metaphysical elaboration that results, and in exploring the question Ellacuría demonstrates precisely where he stands and undertakes a philosophy which reveals itself highly self-aware and cognizant of the fundamental assumptions undergirding its more developed formulations.

Ellacuría situates himself firmly within the first camp, metaphysically speaking, submitting that philosophy should find its object in the physical and not simply the conceptual unity of intramundane reality. To so argue, he first brings into dialogue the respective insights pertaining to two philosophers of decidedly different stripes, Hegel and Marx, recovering the essential contributions of the disparate approaches represented and finally conducting them into a discussion with his own mentor and primary influence, Xavier Zubiri. Before entering into the distinct assets of the Hegelian and Marxist approaches, however, Ellacuría first cites a fundamental commonality uniting Hegel and Marx: both thinkers treat the unity of reality as a real and not an intellectually-manufactured quality. “Whatever may be the distinct sense which the two authors give to the concrete determination of the formal conceptualization,” he affirms, “it is possible to see in both the same fundamental thesis: reality is a systematic and dynamic whole.” (p. 18, 1990).<sup>35</sup> This is important, for while Ellacuría is cited as owing a great deal to Marx in the overarching statement he articulates—that is, he is conceived as tending toward a conception of reality that may be more Marxian than it is Hegelian—his intent is by no means to univocally demonstrate the validity of the Marxian interpretation over that of Hegel. Likewise important, as we will see, is this shared ideation of reality as “systematic and dynamic.”

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<sup>35</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “Cualquiera sea el sentido distinto que ambos autores dan a la determinación concreta de la conceptualización formal, podría verse en ellos una misma tesis fundamental: la realidad es un todo sistemático, la realidad es un todo dinámico”

Sharing this same initial insight as to the nature of the object of philosophy, however, Hegel and Marx nonetheless depart drastically from one another in their respectively idealist and materialist approaches to understanding the nature of this dynamic unity. Hegel, Ellacuría tells us, conceptualizes “the whole of reality” as “ideally unified in the Absolute” (1990, p. 18-19)<sup>36</sup> while Marx, for his part, sees in economic reality “the ultimate instance of all social and historical reality, as such making a single reality of all natural and historical reality” (1990, p. 19).<sup>37</sup> Having acknowledged this profound difference in perspective, he then proceeds to identify a second deep parity between the Hegelian and Marxian approaches: both rely on a common dialectic method in offering up their respective reflections on the formal functioning of reality, dynamically considered. Indeed, Ellacuría affirms that Marx has inherited this essential insight from Hegel, declaring that “the same dialectic method, that of the metaphysicist and idealist Hegel, is used by the scientist and materialist Marx” (1990, p. 19).<sup>38</sup> For both thinkers, then, the dialectic is a key quality pertaining to the dynamism of the unitary system which is reality. Ellacuría expounds on Hegel's original understanding of the negatory quality of the dialectic, explaining that:

Negation, instead of functioning as a principle of division, is a principle of unity—although of a dialectic and surpassed unity—for in the unity of the whole in movement there is given the identity of both identity and of nonidentity. The resultant identity is a higher form which encompasses that which each thing at the same time has of itself and what it has that is not of itself: each thing is what it is in the present and immediate sense, but at the same time is that which it still is not and struggles to stay before what it is currently as a "moment" of a processual totality—a "moment" which must cease to be

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<sup>36</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “. . . todo de la realidad unificada idealmente en el Absoluto”

<sup>37</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “. . . la última instancia de toda la realidad social e histórica, haciendo por tanto de toda la realidad, natural e histórica, una sola realidad.”

<sup>38</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads: “. . . un mismo método dialectico, el de un Hegel metafísico e idealista, es usado por un Marx científico y materialista.”



so that the whole realizes itself processually ( 1990, p. 21).<sup>39</sup>

This, as per Hegel, is how it is that reality can indeed be a unitary whole while exhibiting itself as a plurality of distinct things. This also goes a long way in illustrating how Hegel conceived of reality as a “systematic and dynamic” unity, an insight finally retained, although highly nuanced, in Ellacuría’s philosophy. So while Ellacuría does not accept part and parcel the Hegelian understanding of the dialectic, and much less his vision of intramundane reality as unified in an ideal absolute, we will see that echoes of this conception are clearly to be seen in the vision brought to bear in his *filosofía de la realidad histórica*. While Marx borrows his essential insight as to the dialectic from Hegel, however, the formal structure assumed by that dialectic in the Marxist interpretation departs from the original in accordance with Marx's decidedly more materialist approach. That is to say, despite their common conceptualization of the fundamental unity of reality as “a unity of contraries”<sup>40</sup> in which “movement is the only thing that is permanent”<sup>41</sup> (Ellacuría, 1990, p. 20) and their common employment of Hegel's dialectical method, their respective conceptions of the fundamental basis of reality lead them to very different conclusions as to the ultimate quality of the functioning of that dialectic in reality. Ellacuría summarizes the distinct approaches, declaring:

For Marx, the identity of opposites is conditional and depends on historical circumstances, while their non-identity, their struggle, their antagonism and breaking apart are inevitable. The complete contrary

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<sup>39</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads: " La negación, en lugar de ser principio de división, es principio de unidad, aunque de unidad superada y dialéctica, porque en la unidad del todo en movimiento se da la identidad de la identidad y de la no-identidad. La identidad resultante es una identidad superior que engloba lo que cada cosa tiene a la vez de sí mismo y no de sí mismo: cada cosa es lo que es presente e inmediatamente, pero al mismo tiempo es realmente lo que todavía no es y pugna por ser frente a lo que ya está siendo como “momento” de una totalidad procesual; “momento” que debe dejar de ser para que el todo se realice procesualmente”

<sup>40</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “una unidad de contraries”

<sup>41</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “El movimiento es lo únicamente permanente”

of what we find in Hegel. It is the difference between a conciliatory and harmonizing dialectic and a revolutionary and subversive method (1990, p. 24).<sup>42</sup>

It is along this line that we ultimately see the interplay of the Marxist and the Hegelian in Ellacuría's own philosophical elaboration. The struggle of diametrically opposed interests so patently proper to the Marxist conception of reality shines clearly through in Ellacuría's "necessarily politicized philosophy," and the conception of a dialectical unity of reality which allows simultaneously for difference and identity within that same unity is, we will see, a fundamental assumption of the *filosofía de la realidad histórica*. As much as he may owe to these prior traditions in this respect, however, Ellacuría ultimately owes a great deal more to Zubiri in the articulation of his own philosophy, and to Zubiri's overcoming of the idealist underpinnings characteristic not only of Hegel's but of the majority of Modern thought.

It is at this point in the discussion, then, that Ellacuría brings in his mentor, clarifying that "The "object" of philosophy for Zubiri is the totality of reality dynamically considered. . . . The whole of reality would form a single unity resulting from a process in virtue of a structuring and structural dynamism incumbent upon reality as such" (1990, p. 25).<sup>43</sup> Initially, this may not seem a radical departure from the postures articulated by Hegel and Marx. And indeed, Zubiri's initial intuition does not differ substantively with the fundamental position common to the German philosophers, outlined above. He argues along the same line, contending that reality is indeed, in the material sense, one, and that it exhibits an intrinsic dynamism. He promptly departs from Hegel on a key contention, however,

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<sup>42</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads "Para Marx, la identidad de los opuestos es condicional y depende de circunstancias históricas, mientras que su no-identidad, su lucha, su antagonismo y ruptura son inevitables. Todo lo contrario que en Hegel. Es la diferencia entre una dialéctica conciliatoria y armonizante y un método revolucionario y subversivo."

<sup>43</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads: "El "objeto" de la filosofía es para Zubiri el todo de la realidad dinámicamente considerado. . . . La realidad entera formaría una sola unidad resultado de un proceso en virtud del dinamismo estructurante y estructural que le compete a la realidad en cuanto tal."

rejecting the notion that reality finds its ultimate unity in an ideal absolute. "Zubiri," Ellacuría explains, "sustains that there is possible a strictly intramundane metaphysics which in and of itself doesn't become a question of God, precisely because the "world" is a strictly physical unity, which as such doesn't allow for possible realities not of this world" (1990, p. 26).<sup>44</sup> This is the "incumbent upon reality as such;" the essential "systematic and dynamic" structure of reality is for Zubiri a fundamentally material quality of reality, and the physicality of the unity of intramundane reality would prohibit that reality from finding its ultimate guiding principle in any sort of transcendental ideal. The parity with Marx's interpretation would seem almost complete, then, but Zubiri doesn't stop there. Fr. Burke, S.J., elucidates Zubiri's departure from both the Marxian and Hegelian traditions, saying:

Like Hegel and Marx, Zubiri views reality as a single, unified whole. Furthermore, the structuring and structural dynamism implicit in reality serves as the principle of this unity. But Zubiri sets himself apart from both Hegel and Marx by the way he inserts a strict commitment to the physicality of intramundane reality within a radical openness to extramundane reality (2000, p. 51-52).

How can this be? That is, how can one maintain a genuine commitment to the material nature of reality and at one and the same time propose that there exists in that fundamentally material nature an aperture towards the absolute? This is the heart of Zubiri's contribution to the great body of philosophical and theological work produced by Ellacuría over the course of his unnaturally shortened life, and this is the question that frames properly our analysis of the five theses of his *El objeto de la filosofía*.

The five theses

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<sup>44</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads "Zubiri sostiene que cabe una estricta metafísica intramundana que en sí misma no se haga cuestión de Dios, porque precisamente el "mundo" es una unidad estrictamente física, que como tal no abarca posibles realidades no mundanas."

We have thus far indicated that for Ellacuría, as for Hegel and Marx, reality consists of a radically material and systemically dynamic unity. Distancing himself from both Hegel and Marx, however, Ellacuría in his Zubirian interpretation insists that intramundane reality, given its basal materiality, does not find its unifying principle in a transcendental ideal but nonetheless exhibits an openness toward the absolute. Additionally, however, we insisted at the beginning of this chapter that Ellacuría's philosophy is cardinally a "praxis-oriented" philosophy which turns upon an integral insistence that reality may and indeed must be cultivated "in such a way that it might *give more of itself*." It is in this central formulation that we find the cipher to understanding his open materialism—how it is that intramundane reality can at once emanate from a radically material origin *and* open itself in a definitive way to the transcendent. Indeed, the five theses of Ellacuría's *El objeto de la filosofía* demonstrate how this openness originates from the very materiality of reality. The key is in the materiality of reality's "giving of itself." Ellacuría explains:

There is certainly discoverable in the world a processual unity. The unity of the world is demonstrable, which as of a material origin—one must maintain strictly here the distinction between origin and principle—has gone giving of itself until becoming what today is called "the world;" it is even demonstrable that this 'giving of itself' does not consist in a separating 'giving of itself,' in which that which results of this giving would remain separate from that which occasioned its distinct reality. Reality shows us the contrary: the new reality, the superior reality, subsists in and of none other than the old reality—the inferior reality. There is no life without material, no sensibility without life, there is no intelligence without sensibility, etcetera. That which is superior does not abandon that which came before, but rather reassumes it without annulling it; to the contrary, what comes before dynamically undergirds that which follows (1990, p. 29).<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>Translation: mine. The original citation reads: "Ciertamente, en el mundo es descubrible una unidad procesual. Es demostrable la unidad del mundo, que a partir de un origen—mantengamos aquí estrictamente la

There is a palpable Darwinism here, a key component of Ellacuría's statement being that higher forms of material reality emerge from lower. He profoundly nuances this basic supposition, however, insisting that in the assumption of higher forms reality does not simply surpass the lower while retaining vestiges of those forms; prior forms of reality are fundamentally retained in the higher—new, higher forms of reality are in their essence more maximal realizations *of the lower reality*. This insight becomes more patently consequential when Ellacuría theorizes more concretely about social reality: not only do higher and qualitatively better forms emerge, but reality can indeed regress to lower forms. But Ellacuría builds his formulation from the ground up, as it were. And thus the first thesis of *El objeto de la filosofía*.

First Thesis: *All of intramundane reality constitutes a single, complex and differentiated physical unity, such that neither does the unity annul the differences nor do the differences annul the unity*" (Ellacuría, 1990, p. 31).<sup>46</sup>

Ellacuría, as we have said, stands with Hegel and Marx in his conception of reality as a material unity. He is likewise in agreement that the plurality expressly evident in intramundane reality does not preclude that there be such a material unity. Ellacuría's departure from the Hegelian understanding becomes clear, however, when he explains that

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división entre origen y principio—material ha ido dando de sí hasta llegar a ser lo que hoy es el mundo; incluso puede demostrarse que este dar de sí no consiste en un dar de sí separador, en el cual lo que resulta de ese dar de sí quedaría separado de aquello que ocasionó su realidad distinta. la realidad nos muestra lo contrario: la nueva realidad, la realidad superior no subsiste sino en y por la realidad antigua, por la realidad inferior. No hay vida sin materia, no hay sensibilidad sin vida, no hay inteligencia sin sensibilidad, etc. Lo superior no abandona lo anterior, sino que lo reasume sin anularlo; al contrario, es lo anterior lo que subtiende dinámicamente lo posterior."

<sup>46</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads "*Toda la realidad intramundana constituye una sola unidad física compleja y diferenciada, de modo que ni la unidad anula las diferencias ni las diferencias anulan la unidad.*"

“The transcendental principal of the unity is the very reality of each real thing, which for being real is intrinsically and constitutively particular to any real, intramundane and material thing; any ulterior form of unity, be it relational or functional, is founded on this respective character of reality” (1990, p. 31).<sup>47</sup> For Ellacuría the unity of intramundane reality comes prior to the evident plurality, such that the distinct and differentiated reality of each and every individual “thing” emanates directly from that antecedent material unity and from nothing other than that unity. Each particular thing derives its unique identity from its fundamental material relation to each other thing within the concrete unity of reality. Burke illustrates the way that this Thesis is reflected in Ellacuría’s greater body of work, affirming that “His approach to reality (*realidad*) proceeds by way of the real exigencies of specific historical situations (*realidades*) in order to develop the tools needed for analyzing and unmasking them” (2000, p. 54). The fact that reality presents itself to us in a multitude of distinct moments does not preclude the certitude that reality is indeed, and fundamentally, one, and likewise the fact that we approach reality via those distinct moments does not mean that we do not, in a meaningful sense, approach reality. In fact, Ellacuría’s understanding suggests, this is the only way that we approach reality.

Second Thesis: “*Intramundane reality is intrinsically dynamic, such that the question as to the origin of that movement is false or, at least, secondary*” (Ellacuría, 1990, p. 33).<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “El principio transcendental de la unidad es la realidad misma de cada cosa real, que por ser real es intrínseca y constitutivamente respectiva a cualquier otra cosa real intramundana y material; sobre este carácter respectivo de la realidad en tanto que realidad se funda toda otra ulterior forma de unidad sea de tipo relación sea de tipo funcional.”

<sup>48</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “*La realidad intramundana es intrínsecamente dinámica, de modo que la pregunta por el origen del movimiento es o una falsa pregunta o, al menos, una pregunta secundaria.*”

Things are constantly in flux, and the fact of the intractable mutability of intramundane reality is simply that: a fact. In this second thesis Ellacuría essentially explains further the modality proper to the functioning of the first. He clarifies:

Reality is always dynamic and its type of dynamism corresponds to the type of reality it is. There are no static realities, clearly identical to themselves. . . . In the very reality of things a certain circularity would have to be recognized: the dynamism breaks the identity and the non-identity actualizes the dynamism (p. 33, 1990).<sup>49</sup>

Reality, then, exhibits a plurality that is in no way abrogated by its constitutive unity precisely because reality is, at its fundament, dynamic. Moreover, the dynamism of reality performs this real differentiating function without precluding the unity of intramundane reality expressly because it is manifestly fundamental to reality. Burke explains further, indicating that “. . . the intrinsic dynamism of reality cannot in the first place be identified with either movement or process. It is prior to both. The intrinsic dynamism of reality belongs to reality in a most basic and fundamental way” (2000, p. 56). This observation furthermore affirms Ellacuría’s assertion in the First Thesis that each particular thing within the differentiated unity of reality draws its real character fundamentally from its concrete relation to each other thing in that unity. The nuance is that that respective character is in itself dynamic. “Each real thing,” Ellacuría elucidates, “is intrinsically respective to all others in its very character as real, and this intrinsic respectivity is constitutively dynamic. In this way arises the functionality of that which is real as real, the functionality of each thing

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<sup>49</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “La realidad es siempre dinámica y su tipo de dinamismo corresponde a su tipo de realidad. No hay realidades estáticas, plenamente idénticas a sí mismas. . . . En la realidad misma de las cosas habría que reconocer una cierta circularidad: el dinamismo rompe la identidad y la no identidad actualiza el dinamismo.”

with respect to all others” (1990, p. 43).<sup>50</sup> The repercussions of this crucial insight are to be seen in the Third Thesis.

Third Thesis: “*Reality, being in and of itself systematic, structural, and unitary, is not necessarily dialectic or, at least, is not univocally dialectic*” (Ellacuría, 1990, p. 35).<sup>51</sup>

In this thesis Ellacuría recovers and integrates the contents of the first two—that is, the assertions as to the dynamic and differentiated unity of intramundane reality—while providing a crucial further insight as to the functioning of these systemic qualities. Most crucially, he is posturing himself in contraposition to any stance which would unduly reduce the workings of reality to a single dialectic principle. Ellacuría clarifies: “This thesis does not presume to deny that, in fact, all intramundane dynamism is dialectic; rather, it is simply to distrust the thesis which would sustain that all intramundane dynamism, in principle and as a rule, is dialectical in the same way” (1990, p. 35).<sup>52</sup> Ellacuría hereby takes, to put it in very basic terms, a complex view of reality: the dynamically differentiated unity of reality, in its real functioning, simply does not subordinate itself to any single uniform and regulating law. This being said, Ellacuría then expounds as to his conception of the dialectic, a quality which he does indeed believe to be at work in reality:

Normally, any reference to the dialectic subsumes two dimensions; the unity of all reality and the dynamism (movement) of all reality. . . . But those two dimensions do not express that which is

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<sup>50</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads. “Cada cosa real es intrínsecamente respectiva a todas las demás en su carácter mismo de realidad, y esa respectividad intrínseca es constitutivamente dinámica. Surge así la funcionalidad de lo real en tanto que real, la funcionalidad de cada cosa respecto de todas las demás.”

<sup>51</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “*La realidad siendo en sí misma sistemática, estructural y unitaria, no es necesariamente dialéctica o, al menos, no es unívocamente dialéctica.*”

<sup>52</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “Esta tesis no quiere negar que, de hecho, todo dinamismo intramundano sea dialéctico, sino tan solo pone en guardia contra la tesis que sostuviera que, en principio y de derecho, todo dinamismo intramundano es dialéctico de la misma forma.”



specific and formal to the dialectic. The specific and formal is more in admitting not only the existence of contraries as the principle of the movement, but rather the predominance of negation, as much in that which refers to the movement as in that which refers to the unity (1990, p. 36).<sup>53</sup>

Having denied firmly the predominance of any single dialectical relation in reality, Ellacuría nonetheless takes special care to make room in his interpretation for Hegel's insight as to the function of the dialectic. The point is to make special recognition of what he dubs the "Christian dialectic," a distinct manifestation of the dialectic—again, Ellacuría is firmly arguing against the absolute prevalence of any single dialectical relation in reality—which “. . . achieves its full meaning when it comes face to face with sin and/or with a self-enclosed end that makes an absolute of each thing or each human. That is, it recovers its full meaning before a reality that is itself negation” (*Filosofía de la realidad histórica*, 1990, p. 37, as cited in Burke, 2000, p. 57). Ellacuría's making of an opening towards this understanding is crucial in light of his understanding of human intelligence as the act of first “realizing the weight of reality,” then “shouldering the weight of reality,” and finally “taking charge of the weight of reality.” As per Ellacuría the profound negativity at work in reality—the overwhelming pain of the crucified peoples” is something which the reality of Christianity must confront and overcome. Christianity for Ellacuría overcomes the negativity of reality in a basically dialectical way, and furthermore according to the negatory modality outlined by Hegel: “It is clear, then, that this will be the negation which overcomes negation, that which gives way to the positive and the creative. Although the expression may sound somewhat overdone, it ought to be said that the positive negation of the negative negation constitutes

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<sup>53</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads: “Normalmente, cuando se habla de dialéctica se subsumen esas dos dimensiones: la unidad de todo lo real y el dinamismo (movimiento) de todo lo real. . . . Pero esas dos dimensiones no expresan lo específico y formal de la dialéctica. Lo específico y formal está más bien en admitir no sólo la existencia de contrarios como principio del movimiento, sino la predominancia de la negación tanto en que se refiere al movimiento como en lo que se refiere a la constitución de la unidad.”

the radical process of conversion and creation of a new creature” (1990, p. 37).<sup>54</sup> The “new creature” is a qualitatively more human, qualitatively more Christian creature, forged in the dialectical overcoming of a negative reality. And while Ellacuría does not purport in the first place to employ the Christian dialectic in a totalizing way in his metaphysics of intramundane reality—once again, he is taking a very explicit stand against any such totalization—this emergence of a qualitatively higher human reality out of the dynamic and, in this case, dialectical workings of reality is emblematic of yet another cardinal quality of reality, which he treats in the next thesis.

Fourth Thesis: “*Reality not only forms a dynamic, structural and, in a way, dialectic totality, but is rather a process of realization in which are given ever higher forms of reality which retain the prior forms, elevating them*” (Ellacuría, 1990, p. 38).<sup>55</sup>

Here we arrive at the central articulation of reality’s “giving of itself,” the quality which, we have asserted, is the crucial key to understanding Ellacuría’s *Filosofía de la realidad histórica* and which grounds the philosophy’s essential praxic orientation. There is to be seen here, as we have already indicated, a distinctly Darwinist quality at work in this axial component of Ellacuría’s overarching statement, however a decidedly nuanced Darwinism—the idea is not simply that in reality higher forms emerge from lower, but rather that lower forms give of themselves, thereby becoming more fully realized in the higher

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<sup>54</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “Es claro, entonces, que será la negación superadora de la negación, la que dé el paso positivo y creador. Aunque la expresión suene un tanto recargada, debería decirse que la positiva negación de la negación negativa constituye el proceso radical de conversión y de creación de la nueva criatura.”

<sup>55</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “*La realidad no sólo forma una totalidad dinámica, estructural y, en algún modo, dialéctica, sino que es un proceso de realización, en el cual se van dando cada vez formas más altas de realidad, que retienen las anteriores, elevándolas.*”

forms. The insight is, in fact, patently Zubirian in its formulation, and as such Ellacuría owes a great deal to his mentor in the articulation of a central component of his philosophy. Burke (2000) affirms that “This thesis brings us into the very heart, the dynamic core, of Zubiri’s thought. Its truth does not rest upon the theory of evolution, although in the empirical verification which that theory provides, the philosophical truth of reality can be sensed” (p. 58). And again, as we have suggested above, Ellacuría departs from the Darwinist ideation in a very key respect: in the emergence of new and higher forms of reality the old forms are not being overcome and left behind, vestigially suggested in the new form. The lower form gives of itself in a greater self-realization in order to assume the form of the higher. It is in this vein that Ellacuría declares that:

Even had there not been evolution, it can be shown how the realities which we recognize as higher contain in themselves the lower realities and contain them not as a residue which must be borne, but as a positive and operative principle. In this way, the dynamisms of the purely material make themselves present and operative in the dynamisms of life, the dynamisms of life in animality, those of sentient animality in those of human reality, and those of human reality in those of social and historical reality (1990, p. 39).<sup>56</sup>

Basically, Ellacuría is speaking of something much bigger than the theory of evolution. Not only are new things evolving and emerging out of the intrinsic dynamism of reality, out of this dynamism are emerging *new realities*. Ellacuría elaborates further:

Life is not only a reality distinct from pure matter, but is rather another form of reality and a form of reality which comes after and which is higher. This means that there is given a strict process of

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<sup>56</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “Aunque no hubiera habido evolución, puede mostrarse cómo las realidades que llamamos superiores contienen en sí mismas las inferiores y las contienen no como un residuo con el cual hay que cargar, sino como un principio positivo y operante. Así, los dinamismos de lo puramente material se hacen presentes y operativos en los dinamismos de la vida, y los dinamismos de la vida en los de la animalidad, y los de la animalidad sensible en los de la realidad humana y los de la realidad humana en los de la realidad social e histórica.”

realization, understanding such as a process in which reality gives of itself, such that higher forms of reality appear from lower. The world of real things is not only open to new real things, but to new forms of reality as such (1990, p. 40).<sup>57</sup>

Out of the dynamism of reality's giving of itself there arise qualitatively new realizations of the real, such that out of the concrete material totality of reality there is created something which did not exist before. This would seem somewhat paradoxical, the assertion that out of the material unity there could emerge something not originally present in that unity, without the introduction of an animating force from outside of intramundane reality. But the creative capacity of reality lies in the dynamism with which reality is essentially imbued. "The movement from lower to higher forms of reality," Burke (2000) illuminates Ellacuría's essential insight, "springs from the intrinsic dynamism of reality itself. It involves a more radical interlacing of connectedness and newness. This flies in the face of a static view of reality that maintains that there is nothing new under the sun. Something new is being given, but within the same unified totality of the real" (p. 58). This insight furthermore contradicts philosophical formulations which serve to demonstrate that something more and higher cannot emerge from something less and lower. This is a crucial and consequential assertion on the part of Ellacuría, and he expounds further, saying:

What philosophy does is conceptualize why one reality is more reality than another and why this process is a process of realization and not simply the appearance of new and higher realities. This would not be possible if reality were something empty which indicated nothing more than the fact of

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<sup>57</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads "La vida no es sólo una realidad distinta que la materia pura, sino que es otra forma de realidad y otra forma de realidad posterior y superior. Esto significa que se da un proceso estricto de realización, entendiendo por tal un proceso en el cual la realidad va dando de sí, de modo que van apareciendo formas de realidad superiores a partir de las inferiores. El mundo de las cosas reales no sólo está abierto a nuevas cosas reales, sino a nuevas formas de realidad en cuanto tal."

existence purely as the contrapositive of non-existence (1990, p. 39).<sup>58</sup>

But Ellacuría has clearly demonstrated that reality is not empty in this way and that it does indeed exhibit in its formal functioning this modality of “realization” whereby there emerge qualitatively higher realities directly and unmitigatedly out of the lower. He elucidates as to how this can be true, clarifying that the emergence of superior realities from inferior “. . . is completely possible if reality is a formality which in itself admits of degrees, modes or forms . . . of reality” (1990, p. 39).<sup>59</sup> This is a substantial amendment to Ellacuría’s fundamental assertion as to the material unity of the totality of reality. Reality for Ellacuría is a concrete whole in which each thing receives its real character via its real relation to every other real thing, but within the whole some realities are *more real* than others. How can this be? Ellacuría explains, declaring that: “If, for example, the degree of reality is measured by the degree of self-possession of reality, it is clear that there is greater or lesser self-possession in some realities and others; that which will have to be shown in each case is why such self-possession is a measure of reality and not simply of something else” (1990, p. 40).<sup>60</sup> It is clear that for Ellacuría such greater and lesser degrees of self-possession do indeed exist and that they do indicate as to the degree of reality exhibited by a given particular reality. The process of realization whereby reality is successively realized in higher forms attests to this; while all real things in the complex, differentiated and dynamic unity of reality are just that—real—certain things represent a higher realization of reality than others. This is precisely the

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<sup>58</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “Lo que la filosofía hace es conceptualizar por qué una realidad es más realidad que otra y por qué ese proceso es un proceso de realización y no sólo de surgimientos de realidades nuevas y superiores. esto no sería posible si realidad fuera algo vacío que no indicara más que el hecho de existir como contrapuesto puramente al no-existir.”

<sup>59</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “. . . es completamente posible si realidad es una formalidad que en sí misma admite grados, modos o formas . . . de realidad.”

<sup>60</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “Si, por ejemplo, se mide el grado de realidad por el grado de autoposesión de la realidad, es claro que hay mayor o menor autoposesión en unas y en otras realidades; lo que habrá que mostrar en cada caso es por qué la autoposesión es medida de realidad y no sólo de otra cosa.”

key point Ellacuría exemplifies when he attests that life is a higher reality than “pure matter.”

Ellacuría in his discussion returns once more to the assertion that new and higher realities emerge from prior and qualitatively lower realities without leaving behind those lower forms, this time with an aim to making a point which will find its most terminal consequentiality in the fifth and final thesis. Speaking to the formality of the process of realization operative in reality Ellacuría insists that “. . . in superior forms of reality all of the prior forms of reality make themselves actually present” (1990, p. 40). The contention, then, is not simply that new forms emerge from the old while maintaining structures from the old, but rather that *all* of the prior structures are in a way present in the new. This becomes consequential, summarily, when understood in light of Ellacuría’s ultimate apprehension of what he dubs “historical reality.”

Fifth Thesis: “*“Historical reality” is the “ultimate object” of philosophy understood as intramundane metaphysics, not only for its inclusive and totalizing character, but as the supreme manifestation of reality*” (Ellacuría, 1990, p. 42).<sup>61</sup>

To forward historical reality as the maximal realization of reality is a submission of no small weight, and we have gone so far as to submit that for Ellacuría, the human being’s objective apprehension of historical reality as it is in turn demands a historically concrete praxis on the part of the human. Further, we have by now said a great deal concerning Ellacuría’s understanding of the nature of reality. But how is it that historical reality, as the “supreme manifestation of reality” in its very essence as reality exacts a commitment on the

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<sup>61</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “*La “realidad histórica” es el “objeto último” de la filosofía entendida como metafísica intramundana, no sólo por su carácter englobante y totalizador, sino en cuanto manifestación suprema de la realidad.*”

part of the human being immersed in that reality?

A final key to understanding Ellacuría's comprehension of reality, we concluded our analysis of the Fourth Thesis by indicating, is that in the emergence of higher forms of reality there are retained *all* of the prior forms, each of which makes itself present in a real way in the new form. Ellacuría summarizes:

. . . intramundane reality constitutes a dynamic, structural, and dialectic totality. This unique totality is the object of philosophy. What occurs is that this totality has gone making itself in such a way that there is a qualitative growth of reality, but in such a manner that the higher form, the "more" reality, doesn't emerge as separate from all of the prior moments of the real process, of the process of reality. Rather, to the contrary, a dynamic "more" reality gives itself from, in, and of the inferior reality, such that this "more" makes itself present in many ways and always necessarily in the higher reality (1990, p. 42-43).<sup>62</sup>

The consequences of this position are manifold. For one, insofar as historical reality subsumes and makes manifest all prior and lower forms of intramundane reality, to take historical reality as "the object of philosophy" is, in effect, to take on as the ultimate horizon of the philosophical task the totality of intramundane reality. Additionally, and importantly, this "more"—while endemic to each successive form of reality as it gives of itself into a higher form—reaches in historical reality its consummate capacity for so giving. For Ellacuría, then, the ever-higher realization of reality exhibits both a finalistic and an indeterminate quality: that is, reality reaches as such a final stage in which it does not exhaust its capacity for giving itself into greater possibilities but instead achieves its maximal

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<sup>62</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads ". . . la realidad intramundana constituye una totalidad dinámica, estructural y dialéctica. Esa única totalidad es el objeto de la filosofía. Lo que ocurre es que esa totalidad ha ido haciéndose de modo que hay un incremento cualitativo de realidad, pero de tal forma que la realidad superior, el "más" de realidad, no se da separada de todos los momentos del proceso real, del proceso de realidad, sino que, al contrario, se da un "más dinámico de realidad desde, en y por la realidad inferior, de modo que ésta se hace presente de muchos modos y siempre necesariamente en la realidad superior."

capacity for so doing:

This last state of reality, in which all the others make themselves present, is that which we call historical reality: in it, reality is more reality, for within it is found all prior reality, according to that modality which we have come to call historical. It is the entirety of reality, assumed in the social reign of liberty. It is reality showing its richest virtualities and possibilities, even in a dynamic state of development, but reaching already a qualitative metaphysical level from which reality will continue giving of itself, but already from the same subsoil of historical reality and already without ceasing to by intramundane historical reality (1990, 43).<sup>63</sup>

Historical reality, then, is a uniquely human reality which, precisely in its human historical character circumscribes and presupposes all prior and lower forms of reality; those forms, for their part, come to their consummate fruition in the maximal realization of human potential. ““What does human history add to reality?”” reflects Robert Lassalle-Klein, ““For Ellacuría, it adds praxis, understood as a new level of reality (historical reality). History evolves from, incorporates, and transforms (within limits) all of reality’s other aspects (including the systemic and material properties of matter, biological life, sentient life, and human life). It also adds the content of history itself”” (Lassalle-Klein, “The Body of Christ,” 2005, p. 65, as cited in Burke, 2000, p. 59). Concrete human praxis in the historical sphere, then, is an integral part of historical reality’s giving of itself—its character as the maximal self-disclosure of reality. Ellacuría clarifies further, averring that:

In effect historical reality, before anything, includes all other kinds of reality: there is no historical reality without purely material reality, without biological reality, without personal and social reality; in

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<sup>63</sup>Translation: mine. The original citation reads “A este último estadio de la realidad, en el cual se hacen presentes todos los demás es al que llamamos realidad histórica: en él, la realidad es más realidad, porque se halla toda la realidad anterior, pero en esa modalidad que venimos llamando histórica. Es la realidad entera, asumida en el reino social de la libertad. Es la realidad mostrando sus más ricas virtualidades y posibilidades, aún en estado dinámico de desarrollo, pero ya alcanzado el nivel cualitativo metafísico desde el cual la realidad va a seguir dando de sí, pero ya desde el mismo subsuelo de la realidad histórica y sin dejar ya de ser intramundamente realidad histórica.”



the second place, all forms of reality which give more of themselves and which receive their factic reason for being—not necessarily finalistic—exist in historical reality; in the third place, this form of reality which is historical reality is the place where reality is “more” and where it is “more itself”—where it is “more open” (1990, p. 43).<sup>64</sup>

This openness, clearly fundamental to the character of historical reality, is thereby perhaps its most crucial quality, concretely speaking. For not only does historical reality represent the highest level of reality on theoretical terms, it is here that human reality in a very real way passes into the possibility of realizing itself in higher and better forms, where human reality acquires the capacity to become, in a word, more human. Furthermore, it is in human historical reality that intramundane reality opens itself to the transcendent. Indeed, it is precisely for these reasons that Ellacuría declines to formulate the highest manifestation of reality as “the person or human life or existence, etc.” and instead selects historical reality as the ultimate category (1990, p. 44).<sup>65</sup> That is, Ellacuría recognizes that “. . . although the relations between history and person are mutual, although not univocal, historical relations appear to be more inclusive.” This, he asserts, is demonstrated in the painful reality that “we have talented people who have not been able to give all of themselves because they have lived in historical moments which made it impossible for them to do so” (1990, p. 44).<sup>66</sup>

This is crucial, and this is necessarily where our discussion comes full-circle. For Ellacuría, while historical reality represents the final and qualitatively highest stage of a process

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<sup>64</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “En efecto, la realidad histórica, ante todo, engloba todo otro tipo de realidad: no hay realidad histórica sin realidad puramente material, sin realidad biológica, sin realidad personal y sin realidad social; en segundo lugar, toda forma de realidad donde da más de sí y donde recibe su para qué fáctico—no necesariamente finalístico—es en la realidad histórica; en tercer lugar, esa forma de realidad que es la realidad histórica es donde la realidad es “más” y donde es “más suya”, donde también es “más abierta”.”

<sup>65</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “la persona o la vida humana o la existencia, etc.”

<sup>66</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “. . . aunque las relaciones entre historia y persona sean mutuas, pero no unívocas, parecen más englobantes las de la historia. Así tenemos que personas egregias no han podido dar todo de sí por cuanto han vivido en momentos históricos que no lo posibilitaban.”

whereby reality has given of itself, realizing itself in ever-higher forms, historical reality thereby by no means presupposes the human community's having reached a final and consummate stage of realization in which each member gives of him- or herself in a historical praxis demonstrative of his or her respective capacity to do so. Ellacuría's *filosofía de la realidad histórica*, in other words, is by no means a positivist affirmation of humanity's inexorable march towards a better future. To assert that reality gives of itself into higher forms and that human history plays itself out in the phase of historical reality in which reality is disposed to give the most of itself by no means implies the tandem assertion that contemporary historical reality is, as such, giving of itself completely. The full realization of reality, at this point, does not happen on its own but depends upon agency: there is no inexorability presupposed here and human beings and human societies are responsible for maintaining things as they are in their present, deplorable state.

For Ellacuría, then, while we have reached in historical reality the maximum disclosure of reality's potential for giving of itself, we aren't seeing the consummate realization of this potential as the majority of human people are relegated to living under inhuman conditions whereby their capacity for self-realization as creative human agents is suppressed. It is in this way that Ellacuría's *filosofía de la realidad histórica* ultimately refers back to the reality of the crucified peoples and finds its ultimate horizon their pain. Any historical human praxis—human praxis comprising as such the disclosure of reality's maximum potential for giving of itself—which ultimately works to the detriment of the self-realization of human people in the construction of a more harmonious human community, concomitantly works to the detriment of reality's self-giving. It is in this way that the human person immersed in reality, upon apprehending it for what it is—a human reality which turns

upon an axis of profound injustice—becomes charged with the task of a liberating praxis in favor of the oppressed. This is how it is that, as Sobrino has noted “the option for the poor originates as an objective demand of reality.” Historical reality, on its own terms, obligates us to take on the historic task of “taking the crucified people down from the cross.” This is a presumption that is fundamental, as we have noted, to Ellacuría’s elaboration of a theology of liberation and we can likewise see, now, the way in which the *filosofía de la realidad histórica* constitutes the grounds for a true philosophy of liberation. It is furthermore a presumption which, beyond his rigorous theoretical elaboration, is corroborated in the very life of Ignacio Ellacuría, martyr of the Salvadoran people who gave his life in the effort to cultivate a more human reality.

The path Ellacuría chose in this guiding effort to humanize humanity and to cultivate a culture counter to the exploitative system in which we live, we have seen, was the path of an academic and, more specifically speaking, that of a university person. Just as Ellacuría saw that the human being, upon apprehending reality, is charged with the task of transforming that reality, he likewise saw that the university, in its self-avowed commitment to the search for truth, must confront reality as it is and in so doing take on the historic task of transforming the society of which it is a part. This central insight will form the starting place for our analysis of Ellacuría’s idea of the university, the central focus of the next and final chapter of this thesis.

## **¿Qué se entiende por universitariamente?**

“The preoccupation for the injustice and the irrationality of the social structure of El Salvador and the struggle to overcome such things are not only the legitimate right but the peremptory obligation of the university.”

Ignacio Ellacuría, *20 Years of Service to the Salvadoran People*

### ***Universitariamente: in the way proper to the university***

In the spring of 1982, some 17 years after the founding of the Universidad Centroamericana “José Simeón Cañas” in San Salvador, Ellacuría was called upon to deliver the commencement address for the graduating class at Santa Clara University. By that point in time the people of El Salvador had endured two years of bloody civil war—a war preceded by some three years of brutal repression by the military authorities of the small Central American nation and which, as of 1982, would persist for ten more. The Reagan Administration was actively supporting the Salvadoran government in spite of its documented human rights abuses, providing weapons, military trainers, and millions of dollars to the dictatorial regime. Implicitly taking as his starting point the controversial issue of U.S. policy in Central America, Ellacuría issued a call to the educational establishment of the capitalist superpower. Having graciously thanked Santa Clara for its tacit support of the unique effort underway at the UCA—an effort which it will be our task to examine below—he went on to declare:

I believe that North American universities as well are called to play an important role in order that the inevitable presence of the United States in El Salvador and in Central America might be a rational and just presence. This role should be undertaken in a special way by those universities which are inspired

in some way by the desire to make the Reign of God more present each day in humankind. This is the invitation that I make to you, in the name of our university and also, with some measure of audacity, in the name of the popular majorities of El Salvador who today live a crucified life but, nonetheless, hope for better days—days which, although still imbued with the pain of the cross, will begin to shine with the glory of the resurrection (1982, p. 222).<sup>67</sup>

Audacious to presume to speak on behalf of the Salvadoran people, hardly, for the reality is that in the wake of the assassination of Monseñor Romero on March 24, 1980, Ellacuría had emerged as one of very few prophetic voices possessed of a moral authority in any way comparable to that of the martyred archbishop. Ellacuría had taken on a new role as rector of the UCA some five months prior to Romero's assassination, and as the violence of the civil strife escalated he became, in the truest sense of the term, a voice for those without voice. Accordingly, in his 1982 discourse he was calling universities in the U.S.—particularly those institutions avowedly of Christian inspiration—to stand with the poor and to contribute actively to the effort to “take the crucified peoples down from the cross.” By 1982, U.S.-sponsored security forces had killed thousands of Salvadoran peasants in a scorched-earth campaign intended to cut the popular base of support of the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN) guerrilla army—itsself composed primarily of poor *campesinos* from the Salvadoran countryside—as it attempted to overthrow the military government.

For its own part, the UCA became a target of government-sponsored violence very early on in the armed conflict. In the 1982 address Ellacuría applauded the dedicated efforts

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<sup>67</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “Creo que también a las universidades norteamericanas les toca jugar un papel importante para que la presencia inevitable de Estados Unidos en El Salvador y en Centroamérica sea una presencia racional y justa. Este papel debería ser cumplido de manera especial por aquellas universidades que están inspiradas de algún modo por el deseo de que el reino de Dios se haga cada día más presente entre los hombres. Es la invitación que les hago a ustedes, en nombre de nuestra universidad, y también, con algún atrevimiento, en nombre de las mayorías populares de El Salvador, que hoy llevan una vida crucificada y que, sin embargo, esperan días mejores, días en que, sin desaparecer por completo el dolor de la cruz, empiece a brillar más la gloria de la resurrección.”

of the faculty and staff of the university, people who had continued faithfully with their institutional work in the face of such violence and had “. . . turned down brighter, more worldly, and more lucrative alternatives to vocationally commend themselves to the university effort towards the liberation of the Salvadoran people (*la liberación universitaria del pueblo salvadoreño*).”<sup>68</sup> The effort had been costly in every sense of the word, and Ellacuría proceeded to recount that:

For this work we have been harshly persecuted: no fewer than ten bombs exploded on the university campus between 1976 and 1980, tens of professors and students have had to abandon the university and even the country; on some occasions we have been surrounded, searched, and have had our campus overrun by the armed forces; one defenseless student was shot to death by members of the police force who had trespassed onto the campus; we have sustained incarcerations and threats, cuts in the financial support provided us by the state. . . . We have followed, in the end—although on a distinct level—the same path walked by a good part of the Salvadoran people (Ellacuría, p. 227, 1982).<sup>69</sup>

It was certainly the path that the university rector followed himself; Ellacuría was forced into exile on several occasions after having received death-threats from the Salvadoran armed forces and right-wing paramilitary groups. All this said, it should not thereby be presumed that Ellacuría and the institution which he served became the butt of government repression for having espoused one political line over another; indeed, Ellacuría began taking flak from all sides of the political spectrum when, in 1981, shortly following the FMLN’s failed “final offensive,” he began to call for a negotiated settlement to the armed struggle. He held

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<sup>68</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads: “. . . dejado otras alternativas más brillantes, más mundanas y lucrativas para entregarse vocacionalmente a la liberación universitaria del pueblo salvadoreño”

<sup>69</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads: “Por esta labor, hemos sido duramente perseguidos: no menos de diez bombas han explotado en el recinto universitario, desde 1976 a 1980, decenas de profesores y estudiantes han tenido que abandonar la universidad y el país; en algunas ocasiones, hemos sido cercados, cateados e intervenidos militarmente; un estudiante fue abatido a tiros, indefenso, por la fuerza policial, que se introdujo en el recinto universitario; hemos recibido presiones y amenazas, recortes en el apoyo financiero del Estado . . . Hemos seguido, en fin, aunque de lejos, el mismo destino que una buena parte del pueblo salvadoreño.”

staunchly to this position and worked actively towards its realization until his very assassination at the hands of U.S.-trained soldiers of the Salvadoran army's Alacatl battalion in 1989.

But Ellacuría's initial reference to North American intervention in Central America in the 1982 address wasn't only a denunciation of the military presence of the U.S. in El Salvador. The point of the allusion, as we have already indicated, was to bring to bear for a First World audience the suffering of "the crucified peoples" and to call upon U.S. universities to take before them in a substantive way the pain of that crucifixion. So while Ellacuría's statement was indeed, to an appreciable degree, a call to the people and institutions of the United States to take a measure of responsibility for their government's active backing of a murderous military regime, more importantly it constituted a starkly-painted picture of what it looks like for an institution of higher learning to take responsibility for the reality in which it is situated and take up the struggle of society's downtrodden. He went on to characterize the fundamentals of the approach taken by the UCA, declaring that:

The starting place for our conception of what a university should be comes from a double-consideration. The first, and more evident, is that the university has to do with culture, with knowledge, and with the determined exercise of intellectual rationality. The Second, not so evident and common, is that the university is a social reality and a social force, marked historically by the society in which it is found and at the same time determined to illuminate and transform—in the way proper to the social force that it is—that reality in which it exists, of which it exists and for which it must exist. From all of this arises the fundamental question: In what does it consist to serve, in the

manner proper to the university (*universitariamente*), in the transformative illumination of the social reality, of society and of the people in which the institution is situated? (1982, p. 223-224).<sup>70</sup>

This, then, is the critical question. We have seen by this point the way in which Ellacuría committed himself, as an intellectual, to the people of El Salvador and how his philosophical and theological efforts, while imbued with the influence of European mentors such as Xavier Zubiri, found their ultimate guiding horizon in the effort to transform the tragic reality of Latin America, marked as it was (and still is) by a profound structural injustice. We are seeing concretely here in the 1982 address how Ellacuría, as rector of the UCA, was looking for the university to do the same. What does it mean for the university, in the way proper to the university (again, *universitariamente*), to engage in the struggle of the poor for more just, more human order? This constitutes the overriding question of this chapter and, moreover, the guiding inquiry of this very thesis. In the first chapter we surveyed broadly the burgeoning effort underway in Latin America towards the articulation of a Christian perspective that would come to meaningful terms with the reality of oppression lived by the majority of humankind, illustrating some of the insights particular to this controversial position and illustrating the fundamentals of the liberation theological perspective to which our focal example, Ignacio Ellacuría, was an adherent. In the second chapter we delved more directly into the life and work of Ellacuría, giving special attention to the experience of conversion he underwent in El Salvador and examining how his prodigious thinking was

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<sup>70</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “El punto de arranque para nuestra concepción de lo que debe ser una universidad viene dado por una doble consideración. La primera y más evidente, que la universidad tiene que ver con la cultura, con el saber, con determinado ejercicio de la racionalidad intelectual. La segunda, ya no tan evidente y común, que la universidad es una realidad social y una fuerza social, marcada históricamente por lo que es la sociedad en la que vive y destinada a iluminar y transformar, como fuerza social que es, esa realidad en la que vive, de la que vive y para la que debe vivir. De ahí surge la cuestión. ¿En qué consiste el servir universitariamente a la iluminación transformadora de la realidad social, de la sociedad y del pueblo, quen que está inserta?”



radically shaped by his encounter with the crucified people of Latin America. Now we turn our attention to the philosophy guiding Ellacuría's work at the UCA, arguably the most concrete and impactful instance of his commitment to the poor and likewise the most complete realization of his thinking: in elaborating and putting into practice his idea of the university Ellacuría brought to bear all of his intellectual resources, theological as well as philosophical, and effectively lived the same message which he expressed on the theoretical level in his prolific writings. Ellacuría lived by his word, that is to say, and in order that we, as students of his liberative effort, might ourselves be transformed by his illuminating example, we are charged with the task of examining at the same time both his comprehensive formulation of a philosophy of the university and the consequences incurred by his attempts at implementing that philosophy within the conflicted reality of El Salvador. For in the end it was the wrath that ensued which corroborated the university's incisive claims against the injustice of the social order. "The UCA will engage in the struggle through its minds and its data, with committed teachers and researchers," U.S. Jesuit Charles Beirne (1996) indicates as to the meaning of laboring *universitariamente* for a more just order, "The powerful, unable to match these arguments, will reply with calumny and bullets" (p. 67). The 1989 assassination of Ellacuría and his comrades certifies this claim.

It is far beyond the scope of this project to truly bring to bear all that might be said in relation to Ellacuría's idea of the university; to take up and scrutinize all of the various threads woven into his complex statement—a statement elaborated at length over the course of some 22 years—would require an analysis of the theological and philosophical underpinnings of his thinking much deeper than that which we have made it our business to undertake here. Likewise, it would demand a much broader systematic analysis of his

university model than we can offer in this chapter. And so we must now content ourselves, taking as a base the statements we have thus far made concerning liberation theology and the *filosofía de la realidad histórica*, to sketch only in broad strokes a select few of the primary currents flowing throughout the body of work pertaining to his understanding of the role of the university in this broken world.

The university as a social force and the knowledge which takes sides

The first consideration in the telling statement from Ellacuría's 1982 address cited above, the affirmation that the university task pertains to the cultivation of rational knowing, seems at first a common generalization that might be applied by anyone to any institution of higher learning. We recognized such to be the case in the preface to this document. The second aspect referenced, however—that the university represents as such a “social force” which must participate actively in the “transformative illumination” of the human society in which the institution is necessarily a participant—challenges in key ways the commonly-held notion that the intellectual search for the truth may be undertaken on some neutral playing field. That is to say that knowledge, generally conceived as a good unto itself, is not so commonly understood as a force which must necessarily take sides where ethical questions are concerned. Ellacuría is not as such rejecting the notion that knowledge is, indeed, fundamentally good,<sup>71</sup> but insofar as he is acknowledging that a principal task of the university has to do with knowledge, however—and he is of course explicitly doing so—he

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<sup>71</sup> In his seminal discourse *The Idea of a University*, Cardinal Henry Newman argued that knowledge and, more specifically, the kind of liberal knowledge cultivated in the university is a good unto itself. Ellacuría does not pick up this issue in his university writings. As Jesuit Charles Beirne suggests, “Ellacuría does not deny Cardinal Newman's thesis in *The Idea of a University* on the value of knowledge as an end in itself; essentially, he ignores it, because he is so intent on responding to the urgent, life or death reality of El Salvador, and the tack of the university could and should assume in transforming this terrible reality” (p. 66).

is furthermore asserting that knowledge cannot rightly be sought without a concomitant commitment to justice. This contention rests on the thoroughly realistic observation that the university inevitably places its knowledge at the service of someone or some body within the greater society; from this recognition there arises the question as to whom the academy, in its rational inquiry, is going to serve. This is a contentious point. To assert that knowledge is not *simply* a general good—and concordantly that the university is not so inevitably a benefactor to society but instead a force utilized by distinct sectors of a social structure—necessarily makes of the question of knowledge an essentially political question. Of the political character of the knowledge cultivated by the university, Ellacuría (1980) reflects in the discourse “University and politics”<sup>72</sup> that:

. . . perhaps the deepest reason for its politicization stems from the fact that the university, in the Western countries as well as in the Socialist bloc, isn’t intended to make itself into an instrument of knowledge but rather an instrument of domination. Knowledge is cultivated, but principally as a means of domination—definitively, socio-political and economic domination (p. 171).<sup>73</sup>

In this statement, delivered publicly in Antigua, Guatemala and which later found its way onto the pages of the UCA journal *Estudios Centroamericanos* (ECA) in 1980, Ellacuría goes on to describe the myriad ways in which university knowledge, far from a detached knowledge pursued in the name of truth, turns out in fact to be a tool of the dominant political and economic structures operative in a given society. The knowledge cultivated in the academy, all too often, is fundamentally compromised as it is inevitably employed to further the ends of those dominant bodies (Ellacuría, 1980, p. 171). We don’t have to look

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<sup>72</sup> Translation: mine. The original title reads “Universidad y política”

<sup>73</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “Pero quizá la razón más profunda de la politicización estriba en que la universidad, tanto en los países occidentales como en los socialistas, está dirigida a convertirse no en instrumento de saber, sino en instrumento de dominación. Se cultiva el saber, pero principalmente como medio de dominación. En definitiva, de dominación socio-política y económica.”

very far to confirm that this is the case. That the global capitalist system centered in the United States turns on technologies and theoretical models developed within the university setting is no secret; the underlying dogmatic presumption on the part of the proponents of that system, however—and here we observe directly a masking of the political nature of knowledge—would be that the global capitalist superstructure is a good unto itself that will inexorably extend its benefits to the better part of humankind. Clearly, Ellacuría does not find this to be the case.<sup>74</sup> Situating himself among those marginalized by the prevailing system—looking from the periphery of the structure as opposed to looking from its center—he can see that an increasingly large majority of human people are living in an increasingly desperate state of poverty as a result of the predominant structure. It is in this vein that Ellacuría goes on in the 1982 statement to declare that that “I think that this question”—the question as to how the university might respond, in the way proper to the university, to its call to exact a change in the operation of the wider society—“cannot be answered with sufficient criticism in an abstract and universal way, as if the university could be the same in all times and places. We should be guided in our search for the answer by that which is the historical reality, that which we are trying to illuminate and transform” (Ellacuría, p. 224, 1982).<sup>75</sup> Historical reality doesn't paint a pretty picture, however, and Ellacuría continues, declaring that “Our intellectual analysis finds that our historical reality the reality of El Salvador, of the Third World and of the greater part of the world—the most universal

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<sup>74</sup> See the reference to Ellacuría's apprehension of the global capitalist system in the first chapter, p. 12.

<sup>75</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads "Pienso que a esta pregunta no puede responderse con suficiente crítica de una manera abstracta y universal, como si la Universidad pudiera ser siempre y en todas partes lo mismo. Debemos ser regidos en la búsqueda de la respuesta por lo que es la realidad histórica, la realidad de la mayor parte del mundo, la realidad histórica más universal, se caracteriza fundamentalmente por el predominio efectivo de la falsedad sobre la verdad, de la injusticia sobre la justicia, de la obresión sobre la libertad, de la indigencia sobre la abundancia, en definitiva, del mal sobre el bien."

historical reality—is characterized fundamentally by the effective predominance of falsity over truth, of injustice over justice, of oppression over liberty, of indigence over abundance: definitively, of bad over good” (1982, p. 224).<sup>76</sup> Clearly, then, the reality with which the university must grapple and which it must work to “illuminate and transform” is a painful reality profoundly broken by injustice. There follows the recognition that that knowledge which would serve to corroborate a global order which relegates the masses to a dehumanizing poverty cannot be considered any kind of good.

We would do well, additionally, to reiterate that Ellacuría’s stark indictment of the global structure of poverty and wealth, made at a point of high tension in the Cold War, extended not only to the Capitalist Western world but covered also the historical reality of the Socialist Bloc. Both the dominant powers were, in Ellacuría’s mind, just that—dominant—and as such were wont to subvert the intellectual means at their disposal in order to further their own interests and none other.

This is a first step then. For the university to serve the poor majorities in their struggle for liberation, and do so in the way proper to the university, the institution must first apprehend its own reality as a social force engaged—be it tacitly and inadvertently, or expressly and with an intentional commitment—in the historic struggle of the oppressed. The university is, to plant it in stark terms, either a part of the problem or a part of the solution, and it needs to decide whose side it is on—that of the downtrodden many or those who exploit.

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<sup>76</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “Pues bien, nuestro análisis intelectual encuentra que nuestra realidad histórica, la realidad de El Salvador, la realidad del tercer mundo, es decir, la realidad de la mayor parte del mundo, la realidad histórica más universal, se caracteriza fundamentalmente por el predominio efectivo de la falsedad sobre la verdad, de la injusticia sobre la justicia, de la opresión sobre la libertad, de la indigencia sobre la abundancia, en definitiva, del mal sobre el bien.”

## **Being in historical reality**

Both in this chapter and in the previous, we have recognized that the historical reality of the human community, in the most final analysis, is characterized on a fundamental level by a state of mass privation in which the vast majority of human persons are denied the possibility of realizing themselves fully as creative cultivators of their own potentialities. In the world of today, most people are simply too poor to be all that they might be. But this state of mass privation so central to historical reality—central certainly to the reality of El Salvador, but also to the entire world globally considered—is by no means an independent historical phenomenon explicable in itself, however. There are concrete historical, and therefore, human reasons for the poverty of the world's masses, such that Ellacuría goes on to declare in the 1982 discourse that: "We find ourselves like this, without having looked for it, immersed in a dialectically structured historical reality. There is not simply a coexistence of contraries behind which is given a simple coexistence of human groups; there is to be found here a truly dialectical structural relation and, often, a causal interaction" (p. 224, 1982).<sup>77</sup> There is a massive poverty, all this is to suggest, precisely because there is a massive concentration of wealth in the hands of a few; there are have-nots because there are haves, there is privation for the many because a few have too much. The pronouncement might seem at first a reiteration of an insight proper to Marxist ideology, but Ellacuría (1982) foresees the possible accusation and declares that "There is to be seen here neither a Hegelian nor a Marxian dogmatism. If one wants to talk of sources, observe in this statement an

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<sup>77</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads "Nos encontramos así, sin haberlo buscado, inmersos en una realidad histórica dialécticamente estructurada. No hay una mera coexistencia de contrarios, tras la cual se diera una mera coexistencia de grupos humanos; hay una verdadera relación dialéctica estructural entre los mismos y, con frecuencia, una interacción causal."

experience and an illumination that is biblically Christian, rationalized later by Hegel and converted into scientific analysis by Marx" (p. 224-225). This is not to suggest that the conception of reality as dialectically structured is a patently biblical formulation, precisely. Rather, as his employment of the words "experience" and "illumination" suggests, Ellacuría is affirming that the observation as to the dialectical nature of reality subordinates itself to no prior ideological construction. Reality collapses itself neither into Hegel's idealism nor into Marx's materialist conception of the world, and he proceeds to affirm that ". . . for us it has been neither dogmas, nor doctrines or theories, but rather reality which has obliged us to critically revise the theories of others in order to construct our own" (p. 225, 1982).<sup>78</sup> Ellacuría is submitting, basically, that to observe reality's dialectical nature is to truly apprehend reality as it is and not, conversely, the outcome of an ideologized worldview dogmatically applied prior to engaging with reality. It is reality's imposing of itself upon us as a dialectically structured reality that forces us to recover the insights of Marx and Hegel and not, to the contrary, an uncritical prior acceptance of Marxian and Hegelian thought which forces us to understand reality as dialectical. This statement stands in strong contraposition to the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's determination, referenced in our chapter dealing with the theology of liberation, that any use of Marxist analysis presupposes the tacit or explicit acceptance of an all-subsuming ideologized worldview.

To assert that reality—a reality exhibiting a certain dialectical quality, no less—imposes itself upon us in this way concords closely as well with what we have said in

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<sup>78</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads ". . . para nosotros no han sido los dogmas, ni las doctrinas, ni las teorías, sino que ha sido la realidad, la que nos ha obligado a revisar críticamente teorías ajenas para construir la nuestra propia."

relation to Ellacuría's *filosofía de la realidad histórica*, in particular his understanding of the human being's apprehension of reality. More expressly, there are to be heard here echoes of his summation of human intelligence as a real "being-in the reality of things," combined with a "shouldering the weight of reality," and its concomitant "taking charge of the weight of reality," three elements which together point to the conclusion that "historical reality, dynamically and concretely considered, has a character of praxis." Insofar as the university is truly engaged in the reality of things, it must engage reality in a concrete, historical praxis. And this recognition of the dialectical nature of reality, as Ellacuría asserts, not simply a recapitulation of Hegelian and Marxian insights, leads in any case to the conclusion that the university, as an institutional power, must engage reality on behalf of one of the conflicting camps—the oppressors or the oppressed. There is really only one acceptable option, however, and Ellacuría (1975) attests in a public discourse given on the tenth anniversary of the founding of the UCA that:

A university of Christian inspiration cannot have any doubt as to whose side it must take. There being no possibility, in a determined historical moment, of the overcoming of differences which would annul those differences, the university must place itself at the side of those sectors which, while not only for the quantitative reason of comprising the majority—the *overwhelming* majority, and as such the authentic representation of the common good—represent the majority of humanity unjustly dehumanized. In this sense, the dominant classes must not form the criteria of the orientation of the university, but rather the objective interests, scientifically processed, of the oppressed majorities (p. 50.).<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads "Pues bien, una universidad de inspiración cristiana no puede tener duda sobre el partido que ha de tomar. No siendo posible, en un determinado momento histórico, la superación anuladora de las diferencias, tiene que ponerse de parte de aquellos sectores, que no sólo son la mayoría, una mayoría tan aplastante, que ya sólo por esta razón cuantitativa puede considerarse como la auténtica representativa de los intereses generales, sino que son la mayoría injustamente deshumanizada. En



The departure from Hegel's understanding of the dialectic is palpable here. Quite basically, reality just doesn't sum itself up in an ideal, conveniently harmonious, fashion. Concretely, those who exploit don't coexist congenially with those whom they exploit. Furthermore, Ellacuría is attesting that in this conflicted reality, it is qualitatively more objective to side with the oppressed in the university's intellectual endeavor precisely because it is in the reality lived by the marginalized majority—the crucifixion of the crucified peoples—that the truth of reality is to be found. This presupposition, while clearly referencing the *filosofía de la realidad histórica*, likewise concords closely with the hermeneutic proper to liberation theology. And yes, quite patently, the adoption of this contentious conception dictates that the university will cease to be “neutral” in the common sense of the term and will enter into direct conflict with the dominant powers of the day. This is what Ellacuría (1975) is talking about when he goes on to declare in the tenth anniversary discourse that:

The fundamental mode of that university activity which has as its horizon the real situation of the oppressed majority can be neither conformist nor conciliatory. It has to be a belligerent mode.

Belligerence is, in our situation, an important characteristic of the university task. The university is, in our situation, one of the few institutions which can truly be belligerent. And it should be so (p. 63)<sup>80</sup>

Seeing, then, that the university must enter into open conflict (this is, of course, a reality which impresses itself even more acutely in the historical reality of a place like El Salvador during Ellacuría's tenure at the UCA—a historical reality of revolutionary war), the question

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ese sentido, no pueden ser las clases dominantes el criterio de su orientación, sino los intereses objetivos, científicamente procesados, de las mayorías oprimidas.”

<sup>80</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “El talante fundamental de la actividad universitaria, que tiene por horizonte la situación real de las mayorías oprimidas, no puede ser el del conformismo o el de la conciliación. Tiene que ser un talante beligerante. La beligerancia es, en nuestra situación, una característica importante del quehacer universitario. La universidad es, en nuestra situación, una de las pocas instituciones que puede de verdad ser beligerante. Y debe serlo.”

arises once more, and even more intensely: What does it mean for the university to take part, in the way proper to the university, in this historic struggle?

The answer, to refer back to Ellacuría's conception of the university as expressed in the Santa Clara discourse, lies also in this central notion of culture. Ellacuría engages in the tenth anniversary discourse the same argument he addressed in 1982, expressing that;

When we speak here of culture, we conceive it in the sense which it carries in expressions such as agriculture. That is, we conceive it as the cultivation of reality, as an action of cultivating and transforming reality. What the culture of the university should look for is to make of its members rational cultivators of reality. (1975, p. 57).<sup>81</sup>

Beyond the mere accumulation of civilizational artifacts, that is to say, Ellacuría's conception of culture encompasses his formulation of historical reality as the stage in the dynamic development of reality in which reality enters into its maximal capacity for giving of itself. It is in the cultivation of this capacity that the university assumes its role in the struggle for a more just order. Thus, Ellacuría takes a decidedly nuanced approach to the "common" recognition that "the university has to do with culture." The distinction that becomes evident in this decidedly concretized and contextualized expression of Ellacuría's *filosofía de la realidad histórica*—a contention not addressed in the Five Theses of his *El objeto de la filosofía*—is the assertion that this cultivating praxis, where the university is concerned, should be undertaken from a *rational* base. Institutions working from other situations within society may be charged with cultivating reality according to other criteria specific to their

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<sup>81</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads "Cuando hablamos aquí de cultura la concebimos en el sentido que tiene en expresiones como agri-cultura, esto es, como cultivo de la realidad, como acción cultivadora y transformadora de la realidad. Lo que debe buscar la cultura de la universidad es hacer de sus miembros cultivadores racionales de la realidad. La cultura tiene un esencial sentido práctico, por cuanto proviene de una necesidad de acción y debe llevar a una acción transformadora del propio sujeto y de su contorno natural e histórico."

respective situations, but the cultivation of a consciousness by which the members of a society will in turn become *rational* cultivators of the historical reality thereby becomes a principle task of the academy. This is the case precisely because this is the mode of cultivation available and appropriate to the university, in accordance its historical reality as an institution of higher learning. Ellacuría delivered yet another discourse one year after the decennial anniversary, this time on the occasion of a seminar conceived to rethink and concretize the mission of the UCA within the conflicted context of El Salvador. In the speech, titled “A Central American university for El Salvador,”<sup>82</sup> Ellacuría (1976) declared that “The university is born in a determined historical moment to respond to a determined set of needs and to do so with a determined set of methods” (p. 94).<sup>83</sup> The university, itself a historical reality, takes shape within a wider historical reality to which it must respond, according to the concrete possibilities afforded by that reality. The method of struggle at hand proper to the university, insofar as it is an institute of learning, is necessarily the cultivation of culture via rational inquiry.

All this is not to simply say that the university should enter the struggle of the poor via rational inquiry simply because rationality is the tool most readily available. Insofar as the university takes its identity from its historical reality as an institution devoted to the rational pursuit of knowledge, were it to engage society in any other way it would cease to be a university. “The university *is* a historical reality,” he explains further in the 1976 discourse, “insofar as it is conditioned by the reality in which it is situated, and *should be* a historical reality, insofar as it struggles not to be pulled along by its historical context and

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<sup>82</sup> Translation: mine. The original title of the discourse reads “Una Universidad centroamericana para El Salvador.”

<sup>83</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “La universidad nace en un momento determinado de la historia para responder a unas necesidades determinadas y con unos medios determinados.”

insofar as it tries to reshape this context from its own character as a university,” (Ellacuría, p. 94).<sup>84</sup> When the university becomes a platform for political or military struggle, to put forth an example, it ceases to be a university because it ceases to engage the wider historical context from its own specific historical reality *as a university*. This contention, while it may seem straightforward enough, was in fact very counter to the university culture prevailing in El Salvador during Ellacuría’s tenure at the UCA. The foundation of the UCA in 1965 under conservative Church and state authorities, we noted in the previous chapter, and underwritten financially by a powerful oligarchy, was intended to counter the kinds of revolutionary activities taking place at El Salvador’s Universidad Nacional. The Nacional, for its part, became a primary hub for political organizations and a recruiting ground for the various guerrilla armies that came into being in El Salvador through the 1970s. The UCA, eschewing such affiliations, saw that its place in the struggle of the poor for a better order was precisely *as a university*—as a university and in nothing other than a university.

There is, then, a kind of a tension at work in Ellacuría's conception of the historical reality of the academy. He was explicit in his insistence that the university recognize itself as a political and social reality within its historical context and that it act from that reality in order to transform the broader context of institutionalized injustice; at the same time, however, he advocated for an institution which would not subordinate its university activity to a particular political agenda. In the 1976 discourse he goes on to implore that “. . .

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<sup>84</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “La Universidad *es* una realidad histórica, en cuanto está condicionada por lo que es la realidad en la que se da, y *debe ser* una realidad histórica, en cuanto se esfuerza en no ser arrastrada por lo que es su contexto histórico y en cuanto intenta reconformar ese contexto desde su propio carácter de universidad.”

university work be oriented and animated by a clear political intentionality,”<sup>85</sup> but affirms that:

. . . the university should not understand itself as a political party or as a supporter of determined political parties. Its intent is not primarily that political or social power be exercised by one group or another, but that those powers be exercised correctly, distributed correctly, and function as they should. Its methodology and instrumentation are not those of affiliation and propaganda, but rather that of the creation of a science and a collective conscience pertaining to what ought to be and what ought to be done (1976, p. 95).<sup>86</sup>

It is in this way that the university performs its essential liberating task in the way specific to its own institutionality. It is in the cultivation of this “science and a collective conscience” that the university can work *universitariamente* to “illuminate and transform” this reality characterized by the overwhelming predominance “of bad over good.”

### ***Proyección social: the practice of putting the poor first***

We have thus far touched upon what Ellacuría saw to be the role of the university as a historical reality situated within a broader historical reality defined by the interplay of dialectically opposite and even diametrically opposed societal forces. Namely, we have seen that Ellacuría understood the university as a vital vessel for combating unjust structures and transforming a society broken by a violent disparity into a society founded upon more just, more human values. We have furthermore seen that Ellacuría saw the university’s capacity

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<sup>85</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “. . . labor universitaria esté orientada y animada por una clara intencionalidad política”

<sup>86</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “. . . la universidad no ha de entenderse como un partido político ni como favorecedora de partidos políticos determinados. Su intento no es primariamente que el poder y los poderes sociales los tengan unos u otros, sino que sean los correctos, estén distribuidos correctamente y funcionen como deben funcionar. Su metodología y su instrumental no son el de la afiliación y la propaganda, sino el de la creación de una ciencia y de una conciencia colectiva sobre el deber ser y el deber hacer.”

to so shape society as emanating from its social weight as an institution within society and its capacity for the cultivation of knowledge, a weight and an aptitude which confer it the capacity to cultivate a more human culture via its cultivation of rational understanding. We have not as yet seen, however, precisely how such a “university for social change” functions from the inside. That is, all that we have thus far addressed leaves us with the question: What does it actually look like for the university, in its formal functioning, to take as its guiding horizon the oppressed majorities of society?

Upon the occasion of a university-wide reflection as to the purpose of the UCA, undertaken between April and May of 1978, Ellacuría elaborated a detailed article outlining the theory undergirding the institutional activities of the university. In the document, titled *Fundamental functions of the university and their operativization*,<sup>87</sup> Ellacuría explains that “The UCA realizes its mission via three functions: *proyección social* (roughly, “social projection” or “social outreach”), research, and teaching. Even when these three functions are realized via mechanisms peculiar to each one and which distinguish them, they interrelate and have a single finality— that being is nothing other than the real and effective incidence of the UCA in the social change of the society” (1978, p. 112).<sup>88</sup> That two of the university’s primary tasks would be research and teaching is, of course, in no way counter to traditional understandings of the academy. That the university undertaking, holistically considered, had for Ellacuría its ultimate instance in the transformation of society, we have already seen.

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<sup>87</sup> Translation: mine. The original title of the document reads *Funciones fundamentales de la Universidad y su operativación*.

<sup>88</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “La UCA realiza su misión a través de tres funciones: la proyección social, la investigación y la docencia. Aun cuando estas tres funciones se realicen a través de mecanismos, peculiares de cada una, que las distinguen entre sí, las tres funciones se interrelacionan y tienen una última finalidad única, que no es otra que la incidencia real y eficaz de la UCA, en orden al cambio social de la sociedad.”

This first aspect he references, however, this “*proyección social*,” is a terminology particular to him and to the UCA, and it is likewise the key to interpreting how he conceived of the formal functioning of the academy on the concrete level. And so while Ellacuría does go on in this extensive document to detail how he understood the operation of the integral functions of teaching and research, what interests us here is this central aspect of social projection, and the way that it concretizes the functioning of the research and teaching aspects with relation to the ultimate finality of the university undertaking.

### *Proyección Social*

“*Proyección social*,” relates UCA Jesuit Dean Brackley, “refers to all the ways in which the UCA directly impacts on the society at large” (1992, p. 7). Social projection, considered in light of the UCA’s ultimate instance in transforming the social reality of El Salvador, is a weighty term encompassing all of the concrete ways in which the university enacts its mission. It defines both the particular way in which the university should make its presence felt in the greater society, and the way in which its diverse internal operations should be coordinated. Warning that “*Proyección social* should not be confused with the ultimate finality of the university, that which has been defined as “social change,”” Ellacuría goes on to explain in the 1978 discourse that “*Proyección social* is a function through which an ultimate finality is brought about. It supposes a set of distinct activities which directly influence society and work positively and exclusively towards this [social] change” (p. 113).

<sup>89</sup> *Proyección social*, then, as a function of the university, does not stand on its own as

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<sup>89</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “La proyección social no se confunde con aquella finalidad última de toda la universidad, que se ha definido como “cambio social”. . . . La proyección social es una

something distinct from the other functions. Indeed, it not only presupposes them but is embodied within them. Brackley (1992) explains this, indicating that among the educational and investigative occupations of the institution “. . . *proyección social* is considered the most important of the three functions of the UCA and the function which should permeate and integrate the other two” (p. 7). In other words, both the education imparted and the research performed at the academy should be undertaken with an explicit intentionality as to the impact on the social reality that will precipitate thereof; *proyección social* refers to the way in which that intentionality is made manifest. *Proyección social*, then, considered in the context of the finality towards which it functions according to its coordinating capacity, is a term of no small import; it implies a clear call to a radical engagement with a reality of injustice at all primary levels of the university enterprise. It is not enough that the university train professionals who will comport themselves ethically according to the norms of the contemporary order and undertake research that will facilitate the functioning of that same system. The university, as we have seen, needs to be countercultural and contentious; the conceptualization of the university’s essential activity as *proyección social* indicates that that belligerence must be present in every sphere of its fundamental functioning.

The UCA, to offer a concrete example, exerts a decisive presence in the national dialogue that few universities in other places can claim. Throughout the civil war of the 1980s and into today, editorials published in the university journal ECA and other publications have incisively criticized the unjust structures at work in Salvadoran society, along with the institutional bodies that work to perpetuate them. In 1976, when the Molina

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function, a través de la cual se pretende conseguir aquella finalidad última. Supone un conjunto de actividades peculiares, que inciden directamente sobre la sociedad y pretenden positive y exclusivamente ese cambio.”



administration reneged on a promised agrarian reform, Ellacuría published an incendiary commentary chastising the Salvadoran government. Laconically titled “At your orders, my capital” (“*A sus órdenes, mi capital*”), the article was one of many which earned the UCA its reputation as a defender of the interests of the poor and, consequently, an enemy of the established order. This kind of denunciatory activity is exemplary of the outward way in which the UCA puts its rationally cultivated knowledge at the service of the least of society. Brackley explains this further, saying that “The most characteristic forms of *proyección social* are those by which the UCA injects itself into public debate and allows the voiceless a platform to have their own voices heard” (1992, p. 7). But we have also suggested that *proyección social* governs the interior activities of the university, its formation of students and its rational cultivation of knowledge, and Brackley has indicated that it is this fundamental function of *proyección social* which should guide these functions.

In terms of the formation of students, Brackley (1992) cites that “The UCA wants to train professionals who will favor change—or at least not oppose it” (p. 6). This latter recognition, rather than suggesting a watering-down of the UCA’s commitment to social change, is strongly indicative of the radically unjust structures operative in Salvadoran society. Brackley goes on to comment that “Although the student population mixes social classes, upper- and especially middle-class students predominate,” while “The poor generally lack the necessary financial means and educational background to attend” (1992, p. 6). Brackley is not pointing to some kind of institutional resignation on the part of the UCA, a facile acceptance of the social stratification as it is. The fact that the majority of El Salvador’s poor lacks the education, let alone the financial resources, to study at the UCA is strongly suggestive of the kind of structural injustice at work in Salvadoran society; when

few students have the resources to complete their secondary education, even fewer can be expected to study at the UCA. It is precisely this kind of structural injustice which the university has made it its business to combat.

For his part, Brackley has shown himself far from apt to resign before this reality. Following the 1989 massacre of the UCA's Jesuit community, Brackley was one of the first to answer the call to serve in the conflicted reality of El Salvador; he left his post at Fordham University following the assassination and has served at the UCA ever since. During his tenure, he has proven instrumental in developing both the Casa de la Solidaridad<sup>90</sup> and Romero programs. The Casa brings students from across the United States to live and study in El Salvador while the Programa Romero provides a living community near the UCA and educational opportunities to scholarship students from some of the poorest rural communities of El Salvador. Students from the two programs live together in a group of houses near the UCA campus; North American students—predominantly from Jesuit universities in the U.S.—share in the daily lives of Salvadoran scholarship students from the poor *cantones* of El Salvador's exterior and vice-versa. Again, however, the Casa and Romero programs that Brackley has been so instrumental in developing are only marginally reflective of the wider reality of the UCA's student body, and he reflects that “. . . relatively few students identify with the UCA's official philosophy.” He goes on to say that “A minority of students are contrary, closed, or hostile to the UCA's philosophy, but most simply drift along in their middle-class world, oblivious to the social reality of the poor” (1992, p. 6). There is certainly work to be done in this respect at El Salvador's “university for social change;” the point here

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<sup>90</sup> It was through the Casa program that I had the opportunity to live and study in El Salvador over the spring of 2007.

is by no means to hold the UCA up as a perfect example. We would do well to remember, however, in regards to the particular university model which we are here studying, that Ellacuría's tenure at the UCA coincided with El Salvador's civil war. And so although he did elaborate with great care a vision of how students ought to be formed, the exigencies of day-to-day university activity in such a conflicted context limited the possibility of putting that vision into action. And finally, before leveling the accusation that there is a serious discrepancy in the UCA's application of its mission where the formation of students is concerned, we would do well to take a close look at the makeup of student bodies at universities here in the U.S. and elsewhere, and ask seriously whether the students we are forming take seriously the values our institutions purport to cultivate. In any case, taken in the wider context of the guiding principle of *proyección social* and the particular kind of coordination of the university's various functions operative at the UCA, we have a picture the kind of effort that is underway to form students who will go on to challenge the unjust structures at work in Salvadoran society.

Of the other primary function of the UCA, research, Brackley (1992) cites that "The research carried on by the UCA students and professors seeks to analyze and criticize the national situation and to propose rational solutions. Students cannot select arbitrary themes for their research theses; these must somehow conform to subject matter which the university has been researching in the interests of the national good" (p. 6-7). To put it bluntly, UCA students and faculty are expected to undertake research that really matters and which will impact the reality of injustice prevailing in the Salvadoran context. Rational inquiry at all levels must address seriously the pressing problems of the historical reality in which the university is situated; the UCA recognizes the pressing problems to be those of the state of

marginality and privation to which the majority of Salvadoran society is unjustly relegated. But Ellacuría would remind us that the Salvadoran situation, taken as a microcosm, is highly reflective of the global situation. While universities in the first world may not have to contend directly with such a broken society as that of El Salvador, there is no academy anywhere that can escape the overwhelming reality that the majority of the world's people are relegated to the same crippling poverty as are the people of El Salvador. Many, however, would choose to ignore that reality.

All this said, it should not thereby be assumed that Ellacuría would have the university invest the entirety of its resources in the researching of social problems. Yes, the university should direct the entirety of its institutional undertaking toward the finality of the liberation of the oppressed majorities, but that overriding finality does not as such preclude the undertaking of disciplinary studies not so directly pertinent to the social reality. He was not advocating, for example, that the university rid itself of programs related to the arts and to the hard sciences. Of scientific study, to further explain, Ellacuría declares in his comprehensive 1978 statement that "It is obvious that the university has to do with science as a specific form of form of rationality. But this science must direct itself toward obtaining a conscious knowledge pertaining to the people, their reality and their problems, and which will at the same time put itself to use so that these people may walk towards liberation" (p. 109).<sup>91</sup> Ellacuría's understanding of the essential task of the university as "cultivating culture" via the cultivation of rationality, this is to say, necessarily referred to the broad range of rational approaches to reality implied in the different disciplines. His insistence was

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<sup>91</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads "Es obvio que la universidad tiene que ver con la ciencia, como forma específica de racionalidad. Pero esa ciencia quiere estar dirigida a conseguir un saber consciente sobre el pueblo, su realidad y sus problemas, que sea al mismo tiempo un saber útil para que ese mismo pueblo pueda caminar hacia su liberación."

simply that the different disciplinary studies underway at the academy be undertaken with an intentionality as to the overriding objective of “social change” to which the institution must direct its effort.

Of course, Ellacuría was likewise acutely conscious of the varying degree of pertinence that these disciplines demonstrate in relation to the university's ultimate finality in the transformation of society. "Obviously," he continues in the 1978 statement, "not each and every discipline, not each and every university activity can refer itself in the same way and with the same immediacy to the general ultimate object of contributing, in the way proper to the university, to the improvement of the national reality" (p. 109).<sup>92</sup> Not all university activities carry the same potential to impact the reality lived by the poor majorities. There is something of a tension, then. Ellacuría is insisting, on the one hand, that the university be arranged in such a fashion as to exercise the maximum impact on the “national reality,” and yet at the same time asserting that there is a place in the academy for university activities that do not bear directly on transforming that reality. He even goes so far as to declare in the 1978 discourse that "The character of the university, in which are assumed plurality and difference in ways of knowing, and in which are assumed technical, methodological and instrumental demands, makes it impossible that that every single university task can and should be directed towards transforming the social reality" (p. 109).<sup>93</sup> This would seem to beg the question, given the insistence on the primacy of *proyeccion*

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<sup>92</sup> Translatin: mine. The original citation reads "Obviamente, no todas y cada una de las disciplinas, no todas y cada una de las actividades universitarias, pueden referirse del mismo modo y con la misma inmediatez al objetivo general y último de contribuir universitariamente al mejoramiento de la realidad nacional."

<sup>93</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads "Precisamente, el carácter de la universidad, con lo que tiene de pluralidad y diferencia de saberes, con lo que tienen de exigencias técnicas, metodológicas e instrumentales, hace imposible que cada uno de los quehaceres universitarios pueda ni deba dirigirse a transformar la realidad social."

*social*: why keep the disciplines and activities that have less bearing on the ultimate instance of the university in changing the society? The answer, at the risk of repeating what we have said before, is that the university should engage in the struggle for a more just order from the specificity of its own historical reality *as a university*—via the cultivation of rational knowing, that is to say—an action which implies the cultivation of varied and different ways of knowing. Were the university to leave to the wayside the cultivation of the varied kinds of rational knowing implied in the different disciplines, it would put itself in jeopardy of reneging on the responsibility to work, *in the way proper to the university*, in changing a wider historical reality predicated on injustice. Therefore, there are admitted university activities which, even while they exercise no direct impact on the social reality of the society in which the university is situated, still contribute to the effort to *universitariamente bajar de la cruz a los pueblos crucificados*.

### **The Christian inspiration of the university**

Apprehending the social power of the university and taking responsibility for that power in a society marked by injustice, and coordinating the educational and investigative activities of the university under the focal concept of *proyección social*—the university’s formal orientation toward impacting the society of which it forms a part—all of these things characterize the way that the university may work, in the way proper to the university, to cultivate a qualitatively better reality in which the poor majorities may be allowed to realize their potential as agents in society. But there is another key concept underpinning Ellacuría’s insistence that the academy take the poor as its ultimate horizon. In our opening reference to Ellacuría’s 1982 discourse at Santa Clara University, we made note of his call to universities

in the U.S. to take responsibility for the historical reality of which they are a part and, consequently, the historical reality of the crucified people of El Salvador, to which they are connected. Ellacuría directed his call with a specific intentionality towards Christian universities, however, those institutions which “. . . are inspired in some way by the desire to make the Reign of God more present each day in humankind.” This reference to the Reign of God was by no means idle. It was not that Ellacuría saw Christian universities as bearing more responsibility to shift the social reality as per their historical reality as Christian, precisely; his recognition of the university’s reality as a social force that must put its rational inquiry to work to humanize the society in which it is found would extend to any institution of higher learning. But he did expect Christian universities to take special responsibility for the struggle of the poor because that is what their identity as Christian demands of them. All other things equal where Christian and secular universities are concerned, Ellacuría was calling upon Christian institutions of higher learning to take on a special responsibility for realizing the Reign of God on earth because that is precisely what they purport to do.

The Reign of God, God’s will actualized on earth—this is the qualitatively better historical reality towards which Ellacuría worked and the overriding vision toward which he impelled the university at which he labored. As a “university for social change” of Christian inspiration, the UCA orients itself toward the realization of the Reign of God in its act of working, in the way proper to the university, to take the crucified people down from the cross. Ellacuría enumerates in the 1978 discourse that:

The Christian faith recognizes history as the process in which are realized God’s revelation and the salvation of humankind via the construction of a community bound in justice, freedom, and loving solidarity among people. Upon opening this history to transcendence, Christian inspiration gives place

to all concrete human realization, but turns critically upon all attempts to absolutize that realization (p. 111).<sup>94</sup>

Ellacuría's vision, then, the ultimate finality toward which he labored to orient the UCA, was both a dynamic and a decidedly utopian one. Utopian, certainly, but not one to be facilely dismissed as quixotic or uncritically idealistic. Ellacuría's conception of the Reign of God, elaborated in the language of liberation theology, was far from an abstract, de-historicized vision. It was much less a dogmatic vision. Because for all its utopian qualities, for the loftiness of the picture it paints, Ellacuría's vision was one firmly grounded in both the pressing exigencies and the possibilities afforded in the context of the historical reality of El Salvador during the 1980s. Looking towards the future, towards the more just human order yet to be realized, Ellacuría remained fully rooted in the historical moment and sought out—in the way proper to a university person—the concrete steps that would lead towards the construction of that order. We have observed that for Ellacuría apprehending historical reality necessarily meant coming to terms with the reality of the crucified peoples and engaging in a historical practice directed toward taking those people down from their crosses. The ultimate instance of historical Christian praxis, in a word, is liberation.

This, in turn, implies that the Christianity of a university is to be measured not so much in terms of its affiliation with the institutionalized Church or in terms of its overtly religious activities, but rather in terms of its concrete commitment to the poor and the unjustly oppressed. For its part, and this is not widely known, the UCA does not in fact

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<sup>94</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads: “La fe cristiana reconoce la historia como el proceso en el que se realiza la revelación de Dios y la salvación de los hombres, mediante la construcción de una comunidad cimentada en la justicia, la libertad y el amor solidario entre los hombres. Al abrir esta historia a la transcendencia, la inspiración cristiana de lugar a toda realización humana concreta, pero se vuelve crítica a todo intent por absolutizarla.”



answer to the Church hierarchy. In terms of the university's avowed Christianity, Ellacuría explains in the 1978 discourse that:

The UCA was founded and oriented out of a Christian inspiration. The people call it a Catholic university. This does not mean that it is so in the juridical sense, for it does not depend legally, administratively, economically, or academically upon the ecclesial authorities; rather, it is legally, administratively, economically, and academically autonomous (p. 110).<sup>95</sup>

Likewise, with the signing into a contract with the International Development Bank in 1970, the UCA went a long way in divorcing itself from the financial support of both the oligarchy and the Salvadoran state. The autonomy of the UCA, so carefully cultivated over the years and which at times has estranged the institution from both ecclesial and state authorities, was for Ellacuría something essential to the university's Christian identity and likewise to its historical reality as a social force dedicated to employing its primary tools of rationality to the dismantling of unjust structures and the construction of just ones. Cultivating such an autonomy consisted in the necessary act of distancing the UCA from the dominant powers operating in Salvadoran society, powers that by and large served to maintain a status quo stained by a massive injustice. "A historical world configured by antichristian values," Ellacuría continues in the 1978 discourse, "cannot help but see in this position a challenge to its egotistic interests. It is from this reality that the Christian university can, and likely will, come to provoke difficulties and persecutions by those who are not in favor of the social change that is needed" (p. 112). A university, standing upon its Christian values and working in a university fashion to dismantle the unjust structures pervading a broken society, is bound

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<sup>95</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads: "La UCA fue fundada y orientada desde una inspiración Cristiana. El pueblo la llama universidad católica. Esto no significa que lo sea jurídicamente, porque no depende ni legal ni administrativa ni económica ni académicamente de la autoridad eclesial, sino que es legal, administrativa, económica y académicamente autónoma."

to come under attack by those bodies actively perpetrating the injustice. In a reality that turns upon an axis of exploitation, in a world characterized by the oppression of the majority by a minority possessed of vast resources, material and monetary, standing side-by-side with the marginalized and struggling alongside them for a more just order will inevitably provoke a repressive reaction on the part of the powers that be.

## A modo de conclusión

Just ten days before his assassination, Ellacuría delivered his final public discourse in Barcelona. Titled “The challenge of the popular majorities,”<sup>96</sup> it constituted an incendiary denunciation of a world order predicated on injustice and a singularly prophetic annunciation of the order that is to come. Emanating from his apprehension of human history as a dialectically structured arena of opposing interests, his lancing statement struck for the heart of the system relegating the majority of humankind to a dehumanizing poverty. “Up until now and with greater determining force,” he initiates his invective, “of the two grand, dialectically interlaced processes operative in the march of history—work and capital, each understood in all its amplitude—in the countries of private capitalism just as in the countries of State capitalism, capital is predominating over work” (1989, p. 299).<sup>97</sup> No simple observation, this was indeed the leveling of an accusation. He continues:

That which actually imposes the rules governing almost all [historical] processes, in some cases more than in others, is the dynamism of capital. It is not primarily that human beings, classes, social groups, nations, or groups of nations have decided to put themselves at the service of the production and accumulation of capital; it is that capital itself, overall in its international but also intranational dimension, puts human beings, social classes, and nations—if not the entire economic apparatus, which is the most determinant part of the social organism—at *its* service (p. 299).<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Translation: mine. The original title reads “El desafío de las mayorías

<sup>97</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “Hasta ahora y con mayor fuerza determinante, de los dos grandes procesos dialécticamente entrelazados en la estructura y en la marcha de la historia, el trabajo y el capital, entendidos cada uno de ellos en toda su amplitud, la predominancia, tanto en los países de capitalismo privado como de capitalismo estatal, es del capital sobre el trabajo.”

<sup>98</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “Quien impone realmente las leyes de casi todos los procesos [históricos], en unos con mayor peso que en otros, es el dinamismo del capital. No es primariamente que los hombres, clases o grupos sociales, naciones o grupos de naciones hayan decidido ponerse al servicio de la producción y acumulación del capital, es que el capital, sobre todo en su dimensión internacional, pero también

In his denunciation, then, Ellacuría was moving well beyond the simple critique of the proliferation of global capitalism. Capital is indeed the agent culpable for having broken the human family, but not simply as it manifests itself in the form of the neoliberal global market—a phenomenon decidedly less predominant in 1989 than today. The issue is that capital has really assumed a kind of agency in the process of history and, having thus taken on a life of its own, bends itself to no human interest. It is the onward march of capital that has landed us in the utterly deplorable historical reality in which we find ourselves immersed. Ellacuría (1989) does recognize that the accumulation of wealth and resources among certain human groups has of course resulted in important advances in knowledge and technology, advances that cannot of themselves be deemed harmful (p. 300), but he nonetheless proceeds to condemn the world order generated of “the dynamism of capital.” He cites that:

. . . that which this civilization of capital has achieved up to now and what it portends for the future, valued in universal terms, has conduced and is conducting (a) not only to the widening in the breach between rich and poor, be they regions, countries, or human groups, a widening which implies that there will be increasing numbers of poor—to the arithmetic growth in the number of rich there corresponds a geometric growth in the number of poor; (b) not only to the solidification of the processes of exploitation and oppression in more sophisticated forms; (c) not only to the progressive worsening of the ecology of the planet; (d) but to the palpable dehumanization of those who prefer to abandon the hard work of making of their beings and take up instead the stressful and worrisome productivism of possessing and the accumulation of wealth, power, honor, and of the ever-changing gamut of consumable goods (1989, p. 300).<sup>99</sup>

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intranacional, pone a su servicio a los hombres, a las clases sociales, a las naciones y ya no digamos a todo el aparato económico, que es la parte más determinante del organismo social.”

<sup>99</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “. . . lo alcanzado hasta ahora y lo previsto para el futuro por esta civilización del capital, valorado en terminos universales, ha conducido y está conduciendo (a) no sólo a la ampliación a la brecha entre ricos y pobres, sean regiones, países o grupos humanos, lo cual implica que la distancia es cada vez mayor y que cada vez sea más grande el número de pobres—al crecimiento aritmético de

Ellacuría is not only suggesting that things are bad in the world today; he is suggesting that on several substantive levels things are worse than they've ever been and that they are worsening still. Not only does the onward march of "the civilization of capital" subjugate the majority of humanity to a dehumanizing poverty, but those few who come out on top are themselves dehumanized. Ellacuría is implicitly relating the phenomenon of a rampant consumerism in the First World to the misery of the masses.

Few would want to believe that this is indeed the case—those of a First World audience might demonstrate a particular aversion—and many would prefer instead to trust that Ellacuría is speaking erroneously. Some would cite the lack of scientifically researched figures backing this prophetic statement, and would use rational arguments to tear down his damning denunciation. But would they do so, perhaps, not out of a demand for rigor so much as a desire to disbelieve? It would be easy, particularly for those in the so-called developed nations, to contend that Ellacuría is pessimistic and not, in fact, thoroughly realist in his apprehension of reality. It is, after all, very hard to see past the confines of our First World walls to just how broken the world outside is. It may be equally difficult, through the unrelenting deluge consumer capitalism rained upon us every day, to see to just how broken we are. But ours is indeed an exceedingly broken human family, and every day that the historical process marches onward along the path it has thus far taken—every day that the interests of capital continue to dominate over the interests of human beings—we break ourselves apart even more. We are walking on a veritable path of destruction.

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los ricos corresponde un crecimiento geométrico de los pobres—; (b) no sólo al endurecimiento de los procesos de explotación y de opresión con formas es sí más sofisticadas; (c) no sólo el desmejoramiento ecológico progresivo de la totalidad del planeta; (d) sino a la deshumanización palpable de quienes prefieren abandonar la dura tarea del ir haciendo su ser con el agitado y atosigante productivismo del tener, de la acumulación de la riqueza, del poder, del honor y de la más cambiante gama de bienes consumibles.”

But in articulating his apprehension of the historical reality in which we find ourselves, Ellacuría in his 1989 discourse did not stop simply with the denunciation of a global order dominated by the interests of capital. Ever the realist, but also ever the believer, he went on to express his firm belief that a change is indeed possible. The change necessary, however, is a change of truly historical proportions.

Insistent in his denunciation of a historical order configured by capital and the poverty to which it has condemned the majority of humankind, but with a pronounced shift in the modality of his discourse, Ellacuría proceeds in his 1989 speech to say that:

It should not be said hastily that poverty itself is that which gores, and that one must dominate or be dominated, and that those who have not are they, themselves, nothing. This is for the simple reason that the critique of the civilization of capital comes not from a moralist idealism but from a rigorous materialism. The poverty that gores is that which results from a civilization of capital, but not that which results from a civilization of work (p. 300).<sup>100</sup>

Upon a cursory glance, this would seem a marked departure from Ellacuría's overriding message. It would seem counter to his commitment to the poor and to lifting them from their misery, for he seems here to be insinuating that—given certain qualifying conditions—poverty itself may not be entirely a bad thing. And this is, albeit on a *very* particular level, what he *is* saying; the qualification, clearly, hinges upon what is meant by this “civilization of work.” Just as the specific type of poverty Ellacuría is referring to can be understood in terms of its contrapositive in the “poverty which gores” precipitant of the civilization of capital, the civilization of work can be understood in terms of its contrapositive in the

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<sup>100</sup> Translation: mine. The original text reads “No se diga apresuradamente que más cornadas da la pobreza y que hay que dominar para no ser dominado y que el que nada tiene nada es. Y esto por la sencilla razón de que la crítica a la civilización del capital no se hace desde un idealism moralista, sino desde un materialsimo comprobante. La pobreza que da cornadas es la que surge de su contraposición dialéctica con la capital, pero no la que resulta de una civilización del trabajo.”

“dynamism of capital” central to the prevailing system. To speak of a civilization of work, basically, is to speak of the opposite. It is to speak of a civilization in which work is not simply a means to the accumulation of wealth and thus, fundamentally, a subordination of human interest to the interests of capital. Ellacuría (1989) elucidates this crucial distinction, stating that this original term, the “civilization of work”:

. . . deals with a work that is neither exclusively nor predominantly, neither directly nor indirectly, governed by the dynamism of capital and accumulation but governed rather by the real dynamism of the perfecting of the human person and the humanizing empowerment of the vital environment of which the human forms a part and which should be respected (p. 301).<sup>101</sup>

In so referring to the civilization of work, Ellacuría is speaking of a system in which human value ceases to be measured in economic terms and in which, concordantly, humans cease to measure value in economic terms. Work, understood in any case as a necessary human function, ceases to be fundamentally a vessel for the acquisition of capital and becomes instead a means by which humans realize themselves more fully in accord with their human communities and with their wider environment. Ellacuría is speaking, to plant it concretely, of the kinds of values that he has seen at work among poor of El Salvador.

In the highly polarized political landscape of El Salvador in the 1980s, where the ideological battle between Capitalism and Socialism took on a deadly corporeal form, to speak as Ellacuría did was to mark oneself for all sorts of attack from interested parties. In his second *Carta a Ellacuría*, Jesuit Father Jon Sobrino (1991) recalls an instance in which Ellacuría appeared on Salvadoran television in conjunction with Ex-Major of the armed

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<sup>101</sup> Translation: mine. The original text reads “. . . se trata de un trabajo no regido exclusiva ni predominantemente, directa o indirectamente, por el dinamismo del capital y de la acumulación, sino por el dinamismo real del perfeccionamiento de la persona humana y la potenciación humanizante de su medio vital del cual forma parte y al cual debe respetar.”

forces Roberto D'Aubisson, the agent later proven responsible for both the assassination of Archbishop Óscar Arnulfo Romero and the founding of the first of the right-wing paramilitary death squads in El Salvador. "After the program the majority of the telephone calls accused you of being a communist," Sobrino recounts, "and you repeated again and again that you were a Christian" (p. 22).<sup>102</sup> And in denouncing the civilization of capital and proposing as an alternative the civilization of work, Ellacuría was certainly advocating for something much larger, not to mention fundamentally different from, communist ideology. Sobrino (1991) continues in his recollection as to Ellacuría's affirmation of his own Christianity, declaring:

But the important thing is that you did so not only using the word "Christian," which would not have been important, but rather in using words and ideas drawn from those of Jesus, whether textually—in talking about the Reign of God, God's preference for the poor, following, the readiness to give one's life—or indirectly—in talking about the need for honesty in talking about historical reality, prophetism and utopia, and the civilization of poverty (p. 22).<sup>103</sup>

For in the end, Ellacuría's annunciation of the civilization of work (Sobrino here nominates it the "civilization of poverty")—while emerging in tandem with a denunciation of the civilization of capital that is based in a "rigorous materialism,"—is in its essence the enunciation of a Christian idea. To speak of the "civilization of poverty" is to speak of the human community approaching its fullest realization in Reign of God, and the actualization in historical reality of this alternative to the civilization of capital is an act which must

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<sup>102</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads: "Después del programa la mayoría de las llamadas telefónicas te acusaban de ser comunista, y tú repetías una y otra vez que eras cristiano."

<sup>103</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads: "Pero lo importante es que eso lo hacías no sólo usando la palabra <<cristiano>>, lo cual sería lo de menos, sino al usar palabras e ideas calcadas de las de Jesús, bien sea textualmente, al hablar del reino de Dios, la preferencia de Dios por los pobres, el seguimiento, la disponibilidad a dar la vida, bien sea indirectamente, al hablar de la necesidad de honradez con la realidad histórica, profetismo y utopia, la civilización de la pobreza."



necessarily be carried out starting from an option for the poor.

To work in the construction of the civilization of poverty is, to say the least, an act that is utterly countercultural given the course of Western civilization, the trajectory of that civilization governed as it is by the dynamism of capital. And so a truly countercultural act, Ellacuría tells us, is precisely what is needed. “There is much left to do,” he continues in the 1989 discourse, “Only with hope and utopianism can one believe and have the energy to attempt, hand-in-hand with the poor and the oppressed of this world, to turn history around—to subvert it and launch it in another direction” (p. 301).<sup>104</sup> To speak of actualizing the civilization of poverty, then, is not to speak in warm platitudes of aseptically acting out some abstract “Christian values;” it is to speak of forcing a civilizational U-turn, and doing so from the ground up. It is most certainly an act requiring of a radical kind of hope.

A revolution was most certainly needed as per Ellacuría, but his was not the revolution advocated by the Marxist guerrilla leaders with whom he was so often equated. Recognizing that “Helping prophetically and in a utopian way to nourish and provoke a collective consciousness of substantial changes is in and of itself a large step” (1989, p. 302),<sup>105</sup> Ellacuría went on to declare in his final discourse that “There is left another fundamental step as well, and it is that of creating economic, political and cultural models that can make a civilization of work possible as a substitution to a civilization of capital” (p.

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<sup>104</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “Lo que queda por hacer es mucho. Sólo utópica y esperanzadamente puede uno creer y tener ánimos para intentar, con todos los pobres y oprimidos del mundo, revertir la historia, subvertirla y lanzarla en otra dirección.”

<sup>105</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “Ayudar profética y utópicamente a alimentar y provocar una conciencia colectiva de cambios substanciales es ya de por sí un primer gran paso.”

302).<sup>106</sup> Overcoming the civilization of capital, this is to say, rather than dismantling forcibly the old order and imposing a new one in its place according to the dictates of a dogmatic socio-political ideology, entails an essentially creative act. It entails working imaginatively in community to find ways to live God's Reign on earth, an act perhaps more subversive than that of fighting to impose a communist or other order.

In order that there might be real justice and in order that the dehumanized majority of humanity might again be humanized—in order that the crucified peoples may be taken down from the cross—what is required is that we turn history around. In other words, the problem is a lot bigger than we had thought. In Ellacuría's final discourse, the prophetic and patently countercultural statement that may have precipitated his assassination, we see in singularly stark terms the gravity of the crisis with which humanity must first meet if it is to project itself fully into the dynamic range of possibilities for civilization's self-realization offered in this, our historical reality. In Ellacuría's final discourse we see how far we have to go, but he leaves us with a concrete picture of how to get there. Recognizing the injustice central to the prevailing order requires not only that we denounce the injustice fundamental to the prevailing order but that we work in concrete and historical ways towards realizing an alternative. A revolution is needed but it is a revolution of the human spirit; we need to transform the culture in which we live, we need to cultivate using the creative means at our disposal a culture counter to the one in which we have ourselves stuck. We need to cultivate a culture based upon the values which prevail in the communities of humble poor marginalized by the capital-oriented superstructure, and we need to paint for ourselves

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<sup>106</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads "Queda otro paso también fundamental y es el de crear modelos económicos, políticos y culturales que hagan posible una civilización del trabajo como sustitutiva de una civilización del capital."

concrete pictures of what this alternative culture looks like. It is here where the discussion returns to the university. Referring to the notion of the creative cultivation of a culture counter to the civilization of capital, Ellacuría declares in his final discourse that “. . . it is here where all types of intellectuals, that is, the critical theorists of reality, have a pressing task and challenge. Criticism and destruction are not enough; there is needed a critical construction which will serve as a real alternative” (p. 302).<sup>107</sup> So the university has a very special role to play in the revolution.

What does it mean to be university in solidarity with the oppressed majorities? It means, firstly, taking seriously the problem at hand and apprehending historical reality—that is, not only acknowledging but taking upon itself the burden of the oppressive reality lived by the majority of humankind—an act which implies taking responsibility for the creation a better world and doing so in the way proper to the historical reality of the university as an institution dedicated to the cultivation of a rational knowing. It means doing as Ellacuría did in his own life and bringing the entirety of the intellectual endeavor to bear under the horizon of the crucified peoples. It means taking the radical path, taking seriously the option for the poor, aligning the academy with the interests of the least of society and accepting with courage and with hope the persecutions that come. It means standing perhaps alone as an institution but always hand in hand with the least of society against an order predicated on exploitation. It means putting rationally cultivated knowledge at the service of those poor who, in the liberating God they make manifest on earth and in the humanizing values they offer to the world will save humanity from itself. To be a Christian university true to its

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<sup>107</sup> Translation: mine. The original citation reads “. . . es aquí donde los intelectuales de todo tipo, esto es, los teóricos críticos de la realidad, tienen un reto y una tarea impostergables. No basta con la crítica y la destrucción, sino que se precisa una construcción crítica que sirva de alternative real.”

inspiration means reorienting radically right now.

This is Ellacuría's lasting contribution to the field of university education, the light that he shone—as a person committed mind, body, and soul to the university—into a world darkened by the oppressive pain of an inhuman order. It is a demanding vision, and exacts a steep price of the institution that chooses to actualize it, but in a world configured by a consuming capital and which turns upon an axis of utter subjugation, the only Christian thing to do is to walk as Jesus did and as Ellacuría attempted to do—with the poor, through persecution and always onward toward the Reign of God.

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