THE REALITY OF MARTYRDOM IN THE CHRISTOLOGY
OF JON SOBRINO

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Abstract

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This dissertation examines the Christology of Jon Sobrino by using martyrdom as a lens. Sobrino deliberately expands the concept of martyrdom beyond the traditional definition. This dissertation shows how Sobrino expands the concept of martyrdom. Martyrdom arises within Sobrino’s Christology and marks it in a unique way, especially as Sobrino has refined his theological voice over the last decade. An expanded definition of martyrdom changes his Christology. This is evidenced by the differences between his work Christology at the Crossroads, the later works Jesus the Liberator and Christ the Liberator, and his writings on martyrdom since the early 1990's. There is a dialectical relationship within Sobrino’s Christology. The idea of the Jesuanic martyr influences Sobrino’s Christology, and his Christology marks his idea of what constitutes a martyr, pushing both the concept of martyrdom and his own Christological questions in new and interesting directions.
The initial chapter outlines three main areas: 1) the traditional notion of martyrdom 2) a 20th century understanding of martyrdom and 3) an initial placement of Sobrino’s understanding of martyrdom in the current debate. The second chapter gives a brief history of martyrdom in Latin America in the 20th century, eventually focusing on the history of El Salvador during the 1980's in relation to Sobrino’s life. This illuminates the context from which his Christology emerges. Four examples of martyrs are developed: Rutilio Grande, S.J., Archbishop Romero, the U.S. churchwomen, and the UCA Jesuit community. The third chapter outlines the key elements present in Sobrino’s Christology before the death of his companions in 1989. Basic elements from Christology at the Crossroads serve as a bridge to analyze his later work. The final chapter examines Sobrino’s Christology after the death of his companions in 1989. Key elements identified in his earlier work show substantial development in Jesus the Liberator and then Christ the Liberator. This fourth chapter shows how the reality of martyrdom serves as an optimal lens for viewing Sobrino’s Christology.
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With the advent of Liberation Theology and the increasing political strife in Latin America, theologians begin to question what constitutes a martyr and whether the traditional definition is sufficient. Conflicts throughout Latin America create social strife for all Christians living there. Military actions in Brazil and Argentina in the 1960's and 1970's and Pinochet’s famous military coup in Chile in 1973 create a new problematic. Military officials target purported communists and leftists. But grouped in this number are also hundreds of Christians who are killed when they disagree with the government. For the first time, Catholic Christian governments target even priests who associate with the poor, since governments view them as instigators of insurgencies and as collaborators with communists and leftists. The country of El Salvador is one example of a Catholic country where government officials targeted priests and fellow Christians for elimination. Thousands of Catholic Christians were killed during a decade long civil war. Prominent priests and even a prominent bishop were killed by government troops. Since all of the participants are Catholic, can we really say that those killed might be martyrs?

Jon Sobrino, S.J. is one theologian who was deeply affected by the thousands killed in El Salvador. After the deaths of Archbishop Romero and his entire Jesuit community in 1989 he makes an attempt to expand the concept of martyrdom. Marked by the sacrifices of priests, bishops and laity in El Salvador, Jon Sobrino wants to expand the idea of martyrdom, perhaps even presenting a case for an “anonymous” martyr, one who does not even realize they are dying for the Christian faith. Certainly Sobrino would
support the idea that a martyr dies for a cause, someone like Rutilio Grande or
Archbishop Oscar Romero, who believed that he might die and yet continued forward.
But Sobrino also wants us to remember those who died at El Mozote, simple people
whose deaths also brought about an increasing awareness of the injustice present in El
Salvador. According to Sobrino, many of these men and women were also martyrs for
the kingdom.

Sobrino’s Christology lends itself to a serious examination of how it interrelates
to the reality of martyrdom. Many of Sobrino’s key theological concepts might be
examined through the lens of these Christian martyrs. One cannot dispute that Sobrino
deliberately expands the definition of martyrdom. This expansion has many implications
for theologians today and warrants further study and examination. I will show how
Sobrino expands the traditional definition of martyrdom and how martyrdom can be used
as a lens for examining Sobrino’s Christology. The argument of this dissertation will
proceed in four stages. After discussing the traditional definition of martyrdom, the first
chapter will discuss recent scholarship on martyrdom and briefly note how Sobrino fits
into the current milieu.

The second chapter provides a brief history of martyrdom in Latin America in the
20th century and shows the impact of the Salvadoran martyrs on the life of Jon Sobrino.
Four exemplary martyrs, Rutilio Grande, S.J., Archbishop Romero, the U.S.
churchwomen, and the UCA Jesuit community, provide a backdrop for Sobrino’s
Christology and the reality of martyrdom. The third chapter outlines the key elements
present in Sobrino’s Christology before the death of his companions in 1989. Basic
elements from *Christology at the Crossroads* are examined. Looking at key elements like the Cross, Discipleship, etc. gives us a bridge to look at his later work.

Chapter four briefly summarizes Sobrino’s Christology after the death of his companions in 1989. Key elements identified in his earlier work show substantial development in *Jesus the Liberator* and then *Christ the Liberator* and the novel idea of the Jesuanic martyr emerges. This fourth chapter shows how the reality of martyrdom influences Sobrino’s Christology and can be seen as a lens for viewing Sobrino’s Christology. I conclude with the following assertions. First, Sobrino’s Christology has evolved over time, especially since the events of the 1980’s. Second, Sobrino works to expand the concept of martyrdom. Third, the reality of martyrdom has influenced his Christology, and the idea of the Jesuanic martyr proves to be a key lens for interpreting Sobrino’s Christology. Finally, Sobrino causes us to expand our definition of martyrdom by creating a new category of martyr compelling future theologians to both account for a broader definition of martyr and reflect upon the more anonymous cases of martyrdom.
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CHAPTER ONE:
MARTYRDOM — TRADITIONS AND TODAY

1. The Search for a Definition

“Traditionally the criterion of what counted for martyrdom was simple enough. If a person died as witness to the truth of Christianity that person counted as a martyr; such persons died, as the traditional phrase had it, in odium fidei.”

“If spirituality has to do essentially with our union with God in Christ through the Holy Spirit, martyrdom provided in the earliest centuries of the Church an ideal means to such union. Martyrdom’s importance was rooted in it close connection with Christ’s own death and resurrection. To be put to death for the faith, that is, to be martyred (literally to become a “witness”), was to experience ahead of schedule the final eschatological event.”

The history of martyrdom finds its roots in nascent Christianity. Tradition holds that almost all of the apostles died for their faith. The Acts of the Apostles relate the tale of the proto-martyr Stephen, and Roman writings document the death of early Christians. From the Coliseum to the Cross, until the acceptance of Christianity by the Roman Empire, thousands of early Christians died for their faith. Patristic authors such

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3The account of Stephen as the first Christian to die for professing faith in Jesus Christ can be found in Acts 6:8-7:60.

4For an interesting look at a Gospel view of martyrdom see Craig Hovey’s To Share in the Body: A Theology of Martyrdom for Today’s Church. He examines Mark’s Gospel for a New Testament
as Polycarp and Justin Martyr begin to shape the theological justification for dying for the faith, and early martyrologies recount numerous gruesome deaths in order to honor those who died for their faith. The word martyr comes from the Greek (Μαρτυρ) meaning witness. Simply put, a martyr is a person who dies for the faith. Perpetua and Felicity and countless others died for their Christian faith.

Larry Cunningham, in his *A Brief History of Saints*, outlines the history of the martyrs, what constitutes a martyr, and the resurgence of interest in martyrs today. The history of the martyrs can be traced to the earliest Christian experience. Cunningham writes, “It is an incontestable fact that the early Christian movement suffered persecution at the hands of the authorities of the Roman empire, which continued in fits and starts within the generation after the earthly life of Jesus and continued down until the early fourth century.” The severe persecution the Christian community experienced tended to be regional. It wasn’t until the third century that Decius insisted upon an Empire wide persecution of the Christian community. The period of the martyrs did not come to a close until the Edict of Toleration issued by the emperor Constantine in Milan in the early fourth century.

Cunningham reports that an enormous amount of literature survives from this period. The literature began as a response to Roman persecution and takes many forms.

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6Ibid.

7Ibid, 13.
Many of the writings took the form of a defense of the Christian faith, an apology. One well-known defense was written by Justin Martyr, who was executed around the year 165. A second kind of literature is known as the Passio or the Martyrium. Cunningham writes, “These are elaborated texts that describe the sufferings of the martyr(s) in some detail . . .” Some of these texts can now be considered classics, such as The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity, a third century text which describes the condemnation of a Christian noble woman, Perpetua, and her servant, Felicity. Both were devoured by wild beasts at the circus in Carthage. Another famous text written in the second century is The Martyrdom of Polycarp. The text commemorates not only Polycarp but all who suffered martyrdom. The purpose of the book is to commemorate the death of the martyr. The book also compares life of the martyr Polycarp to “the supreme martyr of the Christian faith, Jesus, who died on the cross under a sentence also pronounced by the Roman authorities. The text is written in such a fashion that it is studded with narrative parallels to the passion of Christ. Hence, the martyr’s death was seen against the template of the passion of Christ who provides the template for giving up one’s life.”

2. Polycarp

The martyrdom of Polycarp provides an example of an early Christian martyr who was venerated by many. Saint Polycarp of Smyrna (ca. 69 - ca. 155) was a second

9Ibid, 15.
10For brevity’s sake we will not examine the life of Justin Martyr, and instead focus on Polycarp. Most of what is known about the life of Justin Martyr comes from his own writings. He was born at Flavia Neapolis (ancient Shechem in Judaea/Palaestina, now modern-day Nablus). According to church tradition Justin suffered martyrdom in Rome under the Emperor Marcus Aurelius when Junius Rusticus was prefect.
century bishop of Smyrna. He died a martyr when he was stabbed after an attempt to
burn him at the stake failed Polycarp is recognized as a saint in the Roman Catholic,
Eastern Orthodox, Anglican, and Lutheran churches. With Clement of Rome and Ignatius
of Antioch, Polycarp is considered one of three chief Apostolic Fathers. The Letter of the
Martyrdom of Polycarp purports to have been written by the Church at Smyrna to the
Church at Philomelium, and through that Church to the whole Christian world, in order to
give a succinct account of the circumstances attending the martyrdom of Polycarp. It is
one of the earliest of all the Martyria, and has generally been considered the most
interesting and authentic. Not a few, however, deem it interpolated in several passages,
and some refer it to a much later date than the middle of the second century, which most
scholars accept. The letter hopes to address the martyrdom of Polycarp, as well as
providing a path of resistance to those who followed the teachings of the bishop “who put
an end to the persecution, having, as it were, set a seal upon it by his martyrdom. For
almost all the events that happened previously [to this one], took place that the Lord
might show us from above a martyrdom becoming the Gospel.” The letter makes the

of the city (between 162 and 168). He called himself a Samaritan, but his father and grandfather were
probably Greek or Roman, and he was brought up a pagan. It seems that St Justin had property, studied
philosophy, converted to Christianity, and devoted the rest of his life to teaching what he considered the
ture philosophy, still wearing his philosopher's gown to indicate that he had attained the truth. He probably
traveled widely and ultimately settled in Rome as a Christian teacher. See the Early Church Fathers series
Volume One for more on the life and writings of Justin Martyr.

11 For more on the biography of Polycarp see online sources, Wikipidia or New Advent. See also
1970.

12 See the online Christian classics library for an interesting interpretation on the Life of Polycarp:
www.ccel.org/ccel

Inc., 1970, 149.
claim that all martyrdom is blessed and noble especially when conforming to the will of God. Polycarp purportedly had a premonition in a vision of his own martyrdom. He envisioned himself burning alive before it actually happened.\textsuperscript{14} When he was arrested, he was asked to renounce his faith, but he claimed he could not saying, “Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never did me any injury: how then can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?”\textsuperscript{15} He was in fact burned alive for confessing to the crime of Christianity. The author writes,

“When the fire was ready, and he had divested himself of all his clothes and unfastened his belt, he tried to take off his shoes, thought he was not heretofore in the habit of doing this because the faithful always vied with one another as to which of them would be first to touch his body. For he had always been honored, even before his martyrdom, for his holy life. Straightway then, they set about him the material prepared for the pyre. And when they were about to nail him also, he said: ‘Leave me as I am. For he who grants me to endure the fire will enable me also to remain on the pyre unmoved, without the security you desire from the nails.’”\textsuperscript{16}

The letter hopes to inspire other Christian witnesses through the example of Polycarp.

Early Christians often revered the martyrs as models of exemplary faith. Cunningham describes the veneration of the martyrs when he writes, “There is no doubt that those who did die for the sake of the faith were highly venerated in the Christian community. The literature that grew up about them is proof enough of that fact.”\textsuperscript{17} One of the martyrs whom we know was venerated was just mentioned above, St. Polycarp.


\textsuperscript{15} Ibid, 152.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, 154.

\textsuperscript{17} Cunningham, Lawrence S. \textit{A Brief History of Saints}. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005, 16.
Early Christians venerated Polycarp’s tomb in order to remember his commitment and sacrifice for the Christian community. This veneration of martyrs rose out of cultural norms. Pagans worshiped their ancestors, and the Romans customarily memorialized their dead on an annual basis. Christians did add the idea of a martyr’s “birthday,” the day which they entered into heaven. The text of the martyrs of Polycarp reminded Christians to observe the cult of the martyrs and more perfectly imitate Jesus as disciples.

The cult of martyrs developed so extensively that

“By the middle of the fourth century, we have a list of those martyrs who were commemorated in Rome on an annual basis (the so-called Deposito Martyrum) with similar lists compiled in cities like Antioch and Carthage. It is from this practice that, in time, there developed a cycle of saintly veneration that meshed with the larger liturgical cycle of the church. One scholar has pointed out the Roman Deposito Martyrum begins, fittingly enough, on December 25 with the birthday of Jesus – the model for all Christian martyrs.”

The venerated martyrs find their center in the proto-martyr — Jesus.

3. Martyrdom after Constantine

After Constantine the veneration of the martyrs continued as a well-established part of Christian life. Cunningham writes, “Constantine himself paid fair tribute to the practice by, among other things, underwriting the erection of a large basilica over the tomb of Saint Peter on the site of the shrine (tropheum) where his remains were venerated.” The veneration of the martyrs would later shift to a veneration of martyrs and saints. But Cunningham asserts that if one wanted to categorize history into ideal

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19 Ibid, 17.
20 Ibid, 19.
types, “then the first four centuries comprised the age of the martyrs.”

Prayers and litanies surrounded the veneration of the martyrs, and the relics of saints were thought to hold a sacred power. In the Life of Polycarp, for example, the martyrs’ relics are characterized as more precious than gems or gold. While the age of the martyrs may have come to an end by the end of the fourth century, their veneration continued, and the devotion transferred to the ascetic saints. When Christianity became the religion of the state and persecution ended, moves to address more doctrinal concerns shifted the focus from surviving as a church and the age of the martyrs. Logically then, the martyrs were remembered by some Patristic authors but martyrdom was not a pressing concern. The church had simply moved on to address other needs and concerns. Augustine does briefly examine the issue of martyrdom. In the middle ages, Thomas Aquinas only briefly treats the issue of the martyrs, in his mention of the Holy Innocents for example, but we will explore his views later when examining Karl Rahner and Leonardo Boff’s opinions concerning martyrdom.

At the end of the middle ages, and the beginning of the Catholic Reformation the number of martyrs appreciates a resurgence. On the Catholic side of the Reformation, a number of martyrs are added to the books, after having been put to death at the hands of Protestants. Most famous in this period are the English martyrs who died at the hands of the Anglican head of state. St. Thomas More may be the most well known example, but

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21 Ibid.

22 Cunningham develops this idea further, noting the historical process. See especially the end of the first chapter of A Brief History of Saints.

23 While we will not take the time to develop Augustine’s thoughts on martyrdom, one should note that a number of author’s have written on Augustine’s perspective.
Catholics in Britain were killed in large numbers. Priests who were forbidden to live in England, nevertheless came to minister to the Catholic faithful. Robert Southwell, Edmund Campion, and other Jesuit priests and brothers died in this period, and were later declared Saints or Blesseds and Martyrs. While some Catholics were martyred at the hands of the Protestant Reformers, many more died in the missions, especially in the Far East and the Americas. The Jesuits, Dominicans and Franciscans all claim large numbers of saintly martyrs in this period. In the Americas, we find examples of the North American martyrs in New France who died at the hands of the Iroquois. Jean de Brebeuf, Isaac Jogues and companions all died as Christian martyrs during this missionary expansion. In the Jesuit reductions, made famous by the movie The Mission, many Jesuits were killed as they attempted to bring Christianity to the new Spanish and Portuguese territories in the Viceroy of Peru for the Spanish, and Brazil for the Portuguese. The aggressive missionary effort brought Christianity to many different parts of the world. But the effort also produced a large number of men and women who

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24 Robert Southwell and Edmund Campion are the most well known martyrs from this period, but hundreds of Catholics were put to death in this period for refusing to accept Anglicanism or the King as the head of the church. For examples of the Protestant martyrs during this period, see Cunningham’s A Brief History of Saints, especially pages 68-71 and the discussion of the Anabaptists in England, and the Quakers in the United States.

25 Large number of Catholic Christians were also killed in India, Indochina, and Japan during this time.

26 The movie centered on the Jesuit reductions with the Guarani in modern day Paraguay and Argentina, but the model for the reductions extended throughout South America, and the system of the reductions extended from modern day Peru, through Bolivia, Paraguay, Argentina, and southern Brazil, and included many different tribes. One of the most famous Paraguayan martyrs is San Roque Gonzalez. His heart is kept in the Jesuit church in Asunción, and is still an object of veneration today. David Block has an interesting study of the Moxos reductions in Bolivia entitled Mission Culture on the Upper Amazon. Frederick Reiter writes a history of the Paraguayan Jesuit mission in They Built Utopia, to cite just two of the numerous sources.
died for the faith.\textsuperscript{27}

4. Twentieth Century Martyrs

The twentieth century brings a new breed of martyr, one who fights for justice, usually against a government or oppressive regime. Blessed Miguel Pro serves as one example of a martyr who was later canonized.\textsuperscript{28} The case for a new typology of martyrs comes from the twentieth century. Cunningham writes, “It has been argued by more than one scholar that more Christians died because they were Christians in the twentieth century than all those who died over the course of the three centuries of Roman persecution.”\textsuperscript{29} Some of these Christians died in violent attacks, Christians who died in the Russian gulags, Polish priests killed in concentration camps in World War II Germany, or Christians suppressed in China, Japan, and India, or Islamic countries such as Albania. But a new phenomenon seen in the last century also includes violence against Christians in purportedly Christian countries.

Throughout Latin America many Christians died at the hands of their fellow

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\textsuperscript{27}This dissertation will not delve into the myriad of martyrs of other faiths and Christian denominations. Our Jewish brothers and sisters count the Maccabean period as one when many died for their faith, and in modern times the Holocaust saw many witnesses. Our Orthodox brothers and sisters also have a separate but notable martyrology, which differed even before the split with Rome. And our Protestant brothers and sisters count their martyrs starting during the time of Luther, Calvin and Zwingli and the many who died for their Protestant faiths in Germany and Switzerland, and as they grew as denominations throughout the world.

\textsuperscript{28}Blessed Father Miguel Pro, S.J. died at the hands of a firing squad in northern Mexico in 1927. His famous words were “\textit{Viva Cristo Rey}” or “Long Live Christ the King.” He was executed after he continued to celebrate mass and the sacraments in spite of the government edict prohibiting all Church activities. His death coincides with the famous Mexican church movement, \textit{Los Cristeros}, loosely translated “The Christ bearers.” For an interesting literary link with Graham Greene’s novel \textit{The Power and the Glory} see Larry Cunningham’s \textit{A Brief History of Saints}, pages 108-109.

\textsuperscript{29}Cunningham, Lawrence S. \textit{A Brief History of Saints}. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005, 115.
Christian brothers and sisters, often for political ideology and not Christian tenets. While these men and women died defending their beliefs, they were not martyrs in the technical sense of the word. Cunningham asserts, “In the Roman world the case for martyrdom was clear. Christians suffered and died because in the minds of the Romans they did not show pietas to the Roman pantheon of gods and in that refusal, seemed to be a treacherous fifth column undermining the legitimacy of the Roman state. . . . In our times, the matter is more complex."

The matter is complex, and one must question whether or not a new definition of martyrdom might be helpful. Cunningham begs the question, “Finally, were those lay people, religious sisters, priests and bishops (like Oscar Romero) who were assassinated by the death squads in El Salvador Christian martyrs or the targets of political assassins?” One could say that they were martyrs in a broad sense. One could make the claim on the grounds that they did witness against false claims, and sought to love others in the midst of regimes or political instruments of destruction and hate.

Some theologians want to broaden the concept of martyrdom. Cunningham states, “Theologians as early as Thomas Aquinas and as recently as Karl Rahner have asked for a more generous understanding of martyrdom as a complex response to death involving fortitude, faith, love, and a willingness to die for truth.”

Our modern times may lead us to look for new definitions as Christians continue to die for their faith. In

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Cunningham, Lawrence S. *A Brief History of Saints.* Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005, 116. Latin America is not the only example cited by Cunningham. He also mentions Northern Ireland, Yugoslavia, and the case of Edith Stein and Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

Ibid.

Ibid, 117.
fact, Cunningham sets down a set of criteria for what might constitute a modern martyr. He writes,

“Following up on Rahner’s challenge, some contemporary commentators have set out expanded criteria for the assessment of martyrdom. They generally indicate three such criteria: (1) The person must have been executed or died as a direct result of mistreatment; (2) the person responsible for the death must have either had a hatred for the faith of some virtues annexed to, and flowing from the faith; and (3) the putative martyr must have had some sense that his or her activities might well cost them persecution at a minimum with the probability of death. Even using those criteria one must act with subtlety and discrimination.”

Pope John Paul II also argued for a broadened sense of the term. Of the hundreds canonized during his papacy, one finds many examples of martyrs, both traditional and non-traditional. In his 1995 encyclical he writes, “In a theocentric vision, we Christians already have a common martyrology. This also includes the martyrs of the present century, more common than one might think, and it shows at a profound level, God preserves communion among the baptized in the supreme demand of faith, manifested in the sacrifice of life itself.”

One need not look far to find examples of the many modern day martyrs canonized by John Paul II. Edith Stein proves an interesting case, since some assert she died a martyr as a nun, but officially she was killed because she was born Jewish. Cunningham also utilizes the example of the 27 Ukranian men and women who were killed between 1923 and 1963 at the hands of both the Soviets, and the Nazis during

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34Ut Unum Sind. Paragraph number 84.
World War II.35

A large number of recent martyrs died for their prophetic stance. Cunningham writes, “Those who did die precisely as Christians protesting the inhumanity of tyrannical political systems function as prophetic figures who stood for the teachings of Jesus against either the passivity of those who acquiesced to regnant power (Nazi Germany) . . . or as solitary figures who made up a small voice in a near totally hostile culture (the Christian minority in Pakistan).”36 Here Cunningham affirms Sobrino’s concept of the Jesuanic martyr which we will examine after we see Rahner’s thoughts on martyrdom. Cunningham sees Sobrino as providing a helpful term with the word Jesuanic, “that is, those who died like Jesus alone and at the hands of hostile powers.”37 This term encompasses those who actively died for their beliefs, as well as the more passive martyrs who simply disappeared or who remain nameless. While Pope John Paul II may not have accepted the idea of the nameless martyr, he was keen on promoting martyrs who died witnessing to the Gospel truths, even if it expanded the traditional idea of what constitutes a martyr. He mentions the Polish priests who died for their faith in prison, and spoke about the death of Father Jerzy Popieluszko, the priest who died in the Solidarity movement, and whose grave site today is venerated and honored as a martyr’s shrine.38

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36 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid, 122.
Cunningham makes the case for expanding the traditional definition of a martyr. He notes that Romero’s grave in El Salvador is already venerated as one who might be canonized a saint and a martyr.\(^{39}\) He remarks,

“Martyrs like Romero and others have clearly understood that allegiance to the faith in places where this allegiance could mean their death at the hands of the political powers entailed a different kind of martyrdom and a different kind of Christian witness. Such persons were living in a kind of postmodern world in which the lingering echoes of the old Christian order were only present in shadowy and vague forms of sentimentality.”\(^{40}\)

But examples of this different kind of martyr continue even in our present day. The Sicilian priest who is killed while trying to reconcile different mafia factions, the priest beheaded and made an example of in India, the Jesuit superior of the Russian region murdered in Moscow: all of these cases beg for an expansion of the concept of martyrdom, or at least an expanded definition. In his essay on the Universal Call to Holiness, John Paul II seems to agree. He argues that the martyr is the one who willingly risks his or her life itself as a witness to immutable truth and as a witness to Christian love and charity. He sees the martyr as a testimony against the horrors of the age and a sign of hope for those who resist the culture of death in contemporary life, serving as a moral witness.\(^{41}\)

5. Martyrdom Today

The movement to expand the concept of martyrdom began in a 1983 book entitled


\(^{40}\) Ibid, 142. This question of the post-modern martyr is an interesting one, but too involved to be treated sufficiently in this dissertation.

\(^{41}\) Ibid, 144.
Martyrdom Today. Metz and Schillebeeckx edit a number of composite essays revisiting the topic of martyrdom. In this book, Karl Rahner called for just such an expansion in his essay on martyrdom, written just one year before his death. In this essay, Rahner makes a plea to broaden the concept of martyrdom. He begins the essay by affirming that the traditional concept of martyrdom is not in dispute, and is in fact well known. He writes, “Here we presuppose the concept of martyrdom that is traditional in the Church today: what is meant by this concept of dogmatic and fundamental theology is the free, tolerant acceptance of death for the sake of the faith, except in the course of an active struggle as in the case of soldiers.”

Rahner wants to make a distinction between martyrdom and simple fighting, since the traditional concept of martyrdom accepts only the martyr who dies as an act of faith and not one who dies in military service. But Rahner does want to explore the concept of martyrdom in the face of some worthy struggles. He takes the life of Jesus as an example when he writes, “First of all, the death Jesus passively endured was the consequence of the struggle he waged against those in his day who wielded religious and political power. He died because he fought: his death must not be seen in isolation from his life. Putting this argument the other way around, someone who dies while fighting actively for the demands of his or her Christian convictions can also be said patiently to endure his or her death. It is not a death directly sought in itself. It includes a passive element, just as the death of a martyr in the usual sense includes an active element since by his or her active witness and life this kind of martyr has conjured up the situation in which he or she can only escape death by denying his or her faith.”

So for Rahner, the action of martyrdom is important, but so is the intention. A martyr

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43 Ibid, 10.
might die for the faith, but they may not intend to. Their active witness is not a suicidal intention, but one which takes place as a consequence of their faith. Rahner is also careful to note that not every Christian who dies in a religious war dies as a martyr.  

But what Rahner really wants us to examine is the situation in Latin America. What happens when Christians are killing fellow Christians? He asks the question, “But, for example, why should not someone like Bishop Romero, who died while fighting for justice in society, a struggle he waged out of the depths of his conviction as a Christian – why should he not be a martyr? Certainly he was prepared for his death.” In this question he shifts the focus from the traditional idea of what constitutes a martyr. The modern problematic brings an inconceivable case: a Christian bishop killed by soldiers, ordered by a lieutenant and perhaps even a general who were purportedly devout Catholics. Rahner affirms, “We should not simply conceive of passively tolerating one’s death only in the manner we are used to in the case of early Christian martyrs brought before a court and sentenced to death. There are quite different ways in which the passive but intentionally accepted toleration of death can occur.” What Rahner points out as strange are that contemporary Christians don’t have a death sentence, and can sometimes be killed anonymously. Many of those killed in Latin America, religious, priests and laity, were never sentenced in a court. They were just systematically slain.

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44 One only needs to think about the sack of Constantinople during the Crusades to find examples of soldiers who may have thought they were dying for the faith, when in truth they were killing Orthodox Christians. Ironically the Orthodox have a greater case for martyrdom here! Metz, Johann Baptist and Schillebeeckx, Edward, ed. Martyrdom Today, Concilium. New York: The Seabury Press, 1983, 10.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.
These anonymous forms of death clash with the old school concept of a martyr. But Rahner does see these more complicated cases as qualifying for martyrdom. He takes a case familiar to him when he remarks, “What is in fact strange is that the Church has canonized Maximillian Kolbe as a confessor and not a martyr. An unprejudiced approach would pay more attention to how he behaved in the concentration camp and at his death than to his earlier life and would see him as a martyr of selfless Christian love.” Even Rahner admits it is difficult to distinguish between an active struggle which leads to death for the faith, and a more passive endurance which leads to martyrdom. But what the two cases hold in common is that ultimately both explicitly and decidedly accept death for Christian reasons. Rahner writes, “In both cases death is the acceptance of the death of Christ, an acceptance which as the supreme act of love and fortitude puts the believer totally at God’s disposal, which represents the most radical unity in action of love and of enduring the ultimate helplessness in the face of man’s incomprehensible yet effective rejection of God’s self-revealing love.” In his plea for broadening the concept of martyrdom, Rahner does appeal to St. Thomas Aquinas. He claims that Thomas would define a martyr as someone who is clearly related to Christ because he or she is defending society against the attacks of enemies of the Christian faith. When those enemies are trying to damage the Christian faith, and the Christian

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47 One could ask here if Rahner is thinking of Aquinas’ idea of the anonymous Christian. Is he proposing the category of an anonymous martyr? He does not state this explicitly here, nor is he able to expand on the idea since he dies the year after this essay was published.


49 Ibid, 11.
suffers death, she is a martyr. Rahner argues,

“Damage to the Christian faith as is opposed by this kind of defender of society can of course be concerned with a single dimension of Christian belief, because otherwise even the passive toleration of death for the sake of a single demand of Christian faith or morals could not be termed martyrdom. In this way in his commentary on the Sentences Thomas is defending a more comprehensive concept of martyrdom such as is proposed here.”

Rahner suggests a path for political and liberation theologians with regard to this concept. He suggests that they should work toward enlarging this concept of martyrdom, and that the concept has practical significance: a responsibility for peace and justice in the world.

Essays by Leonardo Boff and Jon Sobrino follow Rahner’s essay which advocates expanding the concept of martyrdom. Boff attempts to tackle martyrdom from a systematic perspective. Similar to Cunningham, Boff begins with a historical approach to martyrdom, and views Jesus as the proto-martyr. Boff echoes St. Augustine, when he claims “not the punishment but the cause makes the martyr.” The resurrection of Jesus holds theological significance for the martyr since whoever loses her life, receives life in fullness. Boff claims, “to the martyr is reserved full participation in the meaning of life, that is, enthronement in its immortal kingdom.” For Boff, we only need to look at the preaching of Jesus to find the main elements of martyrdom. The gospels affirm that we

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50 Rahner refers here to Thomas’ Commentary on the Sentences, specifically in IV Sent. Dist. 49 q. 5 a.3. quaest. 2 ad 11.
53 Ibid.
For the early Christians, martyrdom occurred because they followed the teachings of Jesus the Christ. Because of this Christian discipleship, Boff emphasizes the subversive nature of early Christianity. He claims, “So the Christian faith became politically subversive, since it attacked the foundations of the political-religious apparatus of the Empire and its leaders.”

Thus, for Boff, it is not too much to stretch the old concept of a martyr to modern times. Just as the early martyrs died for their faith because of their practice of the faith, so too do Christians today die for their faith. He claims that many Christians in the third world continue to carry out actions based in faith and the Gospel message. He asserts, “Not a few Christians . . . because of the Gospel, make a preferential option for the poor, for their liberation for the defence of their rights. In the name of this option they stand up and denounce the exercise of domination and all forms of social dehumanisation. They may be persecuted, arrested, tortured and killed. They too are martyrs in the strict sense of the word.”

He also appeals to Thomas, claiming that any human good can be the cause of martyrdom, in so far as it is referred to God. For Boff, the numberless Christians who die for their faith in the attempt to liberate their brothers and follow Jesus Christ are no less martyrs than those who confessed their faith before a Roman tribunal and joyfully accepted their death.

In his 1983 essay Sobrino takes a slightly different approach to martyrdom from

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54 See Matthew 10:17-36 for multiple examples, as well as Acts 1:12, 2:32, 3:15 etc..


56 Ibid.
the perspective of political holiness. He argues that holiness has a place in the political sphere, and uses Mons. Romero as a concrete example of this holiness. He claims that this kind of political holiness is derived from the call of the episcopal conferences at Medellín and Puebla. The response to this call is love, and the response to the enormous number of people suffering he terms political love. Sobrino writes, “This political love has certain specific characteristics which differentiates it from other forms of love. In this first place it requires a *metanoia* to see the truth of the world as it is, in the manifestations of death, which are visible, and its structural causes, which are hidden and care to be hidden, to see in this generalised death the largest fact and the most serious problem of humanity . . .” For Sobrino political love necessitates a conversion of heart, but also an awareness of the surrounding suffering. Political love then calls for a response, an attempt to transform the world around the lover. When performed correctly this love is poured out, a kenosis, which leads to recognition of the world of the poor.

The expression of political love also makes a person subject to persecution. Sobrino claims, “This is the inexorable fulfilment of Jesus’ preaching. Political love, unlike other forms of love, unleashes the specific suffering of persecution by all the powers of this world. Not all Christians, but political Christians are attacked, vilified, threatened, expelled, arrested, tortured and murdered.” In this essay on political holiness, Sobrino does make a personal call to action. But he does not characterize these


58Ibid.

political Christians who die for their faith explicitly as martyrs. He calls Romero an example of political holiness, but stops short of characterizing him as a martyr. However, he does make the claim for political saints. He writes, “Political saints are a reality. Suffering peoples recognize as saints those who embody themselves through love in the political and they only recognize as saints of today those who take the risks of this incarnation. This may be done in different ways and the sacrifice of their lives is their ultimate justification.”

Sobrino acknowledges the holy sacrifice of Jean Donovan and the U.S. missionaries, and the ministerial work of Mons. Romero. He also recognizes that this form of sainthood does not necessarily coincide with what the church means by holiness or the process of canonization. But Sobrino does insist that this gift of political holiness, this sacrificing sanctity, does come from God. He ends with a famous quoter from Romero, “Brothers, I rejoice that our Church is persecuted because it has chosen the poor and because it has tried to become incarnate with the poor.”

6. Rethinking Martyrdom

Twenty years later, Sobrino will help edit a response to the book *Martyrdom Today*, in a Concilium edition entitled *Rethinking Martyrdom*. This book revisits the Concilium articles of 1983 taking on the task of recharacterizing what constitutes a martyr. Sobrino’s hand is evident in the introduction. The introduction asserts that it is indeed important to return to the same subject since “the present situation once more

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requires a general re-think, and this by its nature involves ‘re-thinking martyrdom’.”

This Concilium edition will have three main tasks. First, these articles will show that 20 years after the first volume on martyrdom, the world as a whole remains cruel. Ethnic conflicts, poverty and oppression produce people who respond with mercy “and for this reason they are violently and unjustly killed without being able to mount any defence.” Those who die from within the Christian tradition will be called “Jesus martyrs” because “they die like Jesus, and because they have lived, worked and struggled as he did.”

Second, this Concilium edition will show the effects of suicide and terrorism in our world. The fanaticism of suicide can generate an extreme sort of ambiguity in what consists of a martyr. One could call into question whether a church that speaks about martyrs is on the side of the victims or the victimizers. Others will question whether theologians might be seen as persecuted in the twentieth and present centuries. Third, this edition will attempt to give a name to the crucified peoples. Crucial here is the issue of whether or not the deaths of millions of human beings due to poverty, war, hunger and AIDS are being taken seriously by church and society. Sobrino will argue that those who give up their lives in the attempt to take these people down from the cross may be martyrs. In this way, “if we take the ‘Jesus martyrs’ and the ‘crucified peoples’

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63 Ibid.

64 Ibid.


66 Ibid, 10.
together, this martyrial reality provides the world with light, hope and an appeal.”\textsuperscript{67}

In his chapter on Cruelty and Compassion, Sobrino asserts that martyrdom is a historical concept.\textsuperscript{68} One could depict the 20\textsuperscript{th} century as a time of suffering, a time in which victims and victimizers come to the forefront. In this world some are moved to compassion. As Sobrino asserts, “there are people who, faced with victims, react and defend them in various ways – solidarity movements, human rights movements, anti-globalization protests — and sometimes do so to the very end.”\textsuperscript{69} Bluntly, many times those who defend the victims, wind up dying for their compassionate action. These deaths are sometimes not the same as the traditional definition of the martyr. That is to say, their deaths do not occur “in the course of witnessing to faith.”\textsuperscript{70} For this reason Sobrino makes a bold claim:

“In our time, ‘martyrdom’ has, then, taken on a new form. Many men and women have suffered violent deaths not on account of their witness to faith but because of the compassion that stems from their faith. In the church, these have been bishops and sisters, catechists and delegates of the word; in civil society, they have ranged from peasants and indigenous inhabitants to students, lawyers, and journalists. In one way and another, they have unmasked the lie used to cover over the death of the poor and have struggled against injustice. They have been people of compassion against cruelty.”\textsuperscript{71}

But Sobrino will go even further to say that we need to take into account hundreds of thousands of human beings who have been slaughtered without the chance to flee. He


\textsuperscript{68}Ibid, 15.

\textsuperscript{69}Ibid, 16.

\textsuperscript{70}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{71}Ibid, 17.
cites as examples, El Mozote in El Salvador, the genocide in Rwanda, and the millions of refugees who live in permanent destitution which leads to death. This new historical context forces us to rethink our concept of martyrdom. The Vatican II concept “the signs of the times” applies to the concept of martyrdom in the Third World.

Sobrino himself recognizes the semantic problem of applying the concept of martyrdom to this new situation. He remarks, “To describe the individual victims we have made novel use of the traditional term ‘martyr’.” People in El Salvador immediately used the terms pastor and martyr to describe Romero at the time of his death. Martyrdom could be seen in Romero in a true sense, a man who died for a greater love of God’s people. But neither Church nor society has a word for the second group, those who were massacred violently or experienced a lingering death. Comparing them to the Holy Innocents does not seem to do justice. Romero called these people “the pierced Christ.” Sobrino notes that Ellacuria’s phrase “the crucified people” is especially applicable here “since it shows that the victims are re-creating the reality of Jesus today.”

Here Sobrino introduces the concept of the “Jesus Martyrs.” Sobrino claims, “Those men and women who have given their lives out of reactive compassion for the

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73 Ibid. Italics used by the author.
74 Ibid,18.
75 Ibid.
76 Ibid.
victims recall Jesus.”77 Sobrino makes a distinction between simply loving the poor and the marginalized through works of charity, and actually defending them by giving up one’s life. In this way these martyrs are in fact “Jesus martyrs” because they die like Jesus and their following Jesus leads them to suffer a violent death.78 For this reason Sobrino admits that “Jesus martyrs are not, strictly speaking, those who die for Christ, but those who die like Jesus and for the cause of Jesus. Their martyrdom does not result from fidelity to some mandate of Jesus’, or even from a desire for mystical identification with the crucified Jesus, but arises out of their effective following of Jesus.”79 Just as Jesus served as a witness to the truth so too do the ‘Jesus martyrs’ witness to the truth. Their martyrdom is not produced out of odium fidei but out of a sense of compassion which leads them to a greater love. For this reason Sobrino admits that “These martyrs can be martyrs in the church, but they are not martyrs of the church.”80 Sobrino will claim that one has to go back to St. Thomas Beckett to find a case similar to that of Archbishop Romero. But “Thomas was killed for defending the rights, legitimate or otherwise, of the church, whereas Romero was killed for placing himself on the side of the poor.”81 Sobrino ends this argument by stating that the reasons for giving preference to the theological concepts of martyrdom are not only historical but theological. By relating the

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78 Ibid, 19.

79 Ibid.

80 Ibid, 20.

81 Ibid. Juan Luis Segundo will make the argument that these poor are the church, but we will let this distinction go unchallenged here.
‘Jesus martyrs’ to the reality of Jesus Christ, they become ‘a hermeneutical principle, a mystagogy, for understanding the martyrdom of Jesus.’

Perhaps most important to rescue from Sobrino’s writing concerning martyrs is his link between martyrdom and the crucified peoples. We will examine this link more deeply in Chapters Three and Four, but for now, suffice it to say that Sobrino will push for a new definition for the masses. In his words, ‘Calling these masses ‘crucified people’ and ‘suffering servant of Yahweh’ is an act of reparation that should have taken place a long time ago. . . . It means not only conferring dignity on the dead but seeing a saving power in them . . .’ Sobrino argues that by naming all of those peoples who died anonymously, we both dignify their deaths, and in doing so take their lives and their reality seriously.

Sobrino thus gives us two forms of death. First, he introduces the concept of the “Jesus martyrs.” Second, he equates them with the ‘crucified peoples.’ He questions which of the two is ‘more martyr.’ By asking the question, Sobrino sets up an interesting problematic, but he does not answer the question. He simply suggests that “there are two basic types of unjust violent death, both of supreme historical importance and supreme Christian excellence.” By introducing these two basic types, he accounts for those nameless people who were oppressed during their lifetimes, and massacred in death. He concludes,

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83 Ibid, 21.
84 Ibid, 22.
85 Ibid, italics from the author.
“Whether they are called ‘martyrs’ or not – those human beings on whom God looks with infinite tenderness in their suffering, even before considering their personal or moral situation (Puebla n. 1142) - though they often have the basic holiness of living and laying down their lives so that all the poor may be reached by just a little life. Nevertheless, over them there descends an inhuman and anti-Christian silence, while the great ones of this world, including the saints are exalted - ‘eliteistly’ if I may be allowed the word – in a way that a Francis of Assisi or Romero of America would be the first to condemn.”  

Sobrino obviates the necessity to rethink what constitutes being a martyr. But it is not possible to separate the individual from the masses. Sobrino claims that this is not only wrong but dangerous. If we concentrate only on a few exceptional martyrs, “we abandon the crucified people to their fate.” Rethinking martyrdom goes beyond seeking new definitions. It also makes us rethink our world, and to ask ourselves “whether the cries of the crucified people have reached us and whether the Jesus martyrs move us to compassion.”

Compassion for the crucified peoples leads Sobrino to make an appeal. He wants to include both the Jesus Martyrs and the Crucified People in his definition of what constitutes a martyr. In doing so, Sobrino makes a methodological move toward the incarnational. He wants to confess a Jesus who is present, not distant, from the people. When the church confesses that Christ is present in the Eucharist, it also confesses that Christ is present in the word, in its pastors, and in its community. Sobrino affirms

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87 Ibid.

88 Ibid.

89 Ibid, 140.
Matthew 25 here by claiming “there is a final bastion of the presence of God and his Christ: ‘And with particular tenderness he chose to identify himself with those who are poorest and weakest.”

The poor too, embody the presence of Christ. The poor can also be good news, evangelizers, and a metanoia, a call to conversion. In describing the poor Sobrino simply states, “They are the presence of Christ.”

But Sobrino wants to take the question of martyrdom a step further. He claims, “The poor and their clamors reach their highest expression in the martyrs – in the Jesus martyrs and above all the crucified peoples — and this is what gives the greatest capacity for appealing to the church.” In terms of numbers, the Jesus martyrs and the crucified peoples cannot be ignored. In addition, the horrors which they experience spur us to conversion. The appeal of the Jesus martyrs may be made more concrete at specific moments in history. But their appeal also lives on in our collective memories. Sobrino hopes that his appeal comes from the victims themselves, and that “this basic appeal will relate not to just anything but to the essence of Christian faith: mercy, love, defence of the poor, and identification with the victims.”

This appeal also leads us to ask if it comes from Jesus, whether it “follows Jesus in his incarnation, mission, cross and resurrection.” Sobrino will analyze this “seguimiento” or following of Jesus in four different ways.

First, Sobrino appeals to the incarnation of Jesus. He questions whether the

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91 Ibid.
92 Ibid.
93 Ibid, 141.
church really wants to encounter the real and whether or not his appeal corresponds to the incarnation of Jesus. He claims, “This incarnation is not easy for the church, even though, according to its faith, it is an obvious and primary requirement. John’s prologue expresses the will of God himself to be real in our world, a will that consists not simply in becoming actual flesh but in becoming weak flesh.”

In some ways it is easier for the church just to remain in the ethereal realm, and not touch the reality of many. But for Sobrino, avoiding the reality of so many people verges on the heretical. Sobrino asserts, “For the church (and not just for christology), the greatest problem here is docetism (Walter Kasper), that is creating its own sphere of reality (doctrinal, liturgical, canonical), which distances it and so defends it from the real world, and above all from its crosses.”

Emphasizing the divinity of Jesus allows the church to forget about the weak human flesh of the incarnate Word, this flesh which died on the cross. The challenge becomes whether or not we can overcome the lethargic sleep of docetism. The role of the martyrs proves to be the key factor to overcoming this sense of complacency. The answer to the challenge comes from the cry of the poor themselves. Sobrino writes, “The miracle can be worked by the crucified peoples, who are crying out with inexpressible cries and calling us to come down. And the Jesus martyrs, who provide an example of doing so.”

Jesus martyrs such as Martin Luther King, Archbishop Romero, and even Ignacio Ellacuría can show the way. We remember Romero’s words that a church which stands

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95 Ibid, 141. Italics are the author’s emphasis.

96 Ibid, 142.
with the preferential option for the poor becomes incarnate in the concerns of the poor, and witnesses to a church incarnate in the people’s problems. Sobrino allows for the fact that even Romero’s church has its limitations of error and sinfulness, and that overcoming our “docetistic” tendency does not happen easily. But, “The martyrs appeal to us and encourage us to move beyond it (our docetism): the crucified peoples themselves are a call for us to open our eyes to reality, the Jesus martyrs show us how to get involved in it.” The martyrs show us a way to act in response to the call of the crucified, and help us rescue the humanity of Christ evidenced in the New Testament.

Sobrino’s second appeal leads us to a mission of compassion. Sobrino rescues two aspects of the liberating message of Paul VI and the episcopal conference at Medellín. The first concerns “the salvation of a whole people.” Sobrino sees the role of Romero as someone who was sent by God to save everyone, rich and poor. Sobrino stresses, “the ultimate purpose of mission, which covers and embraces all aspects of the life and dignity of the oppressed majorities: the kingdom of God, the human family.” The second prong of the mission concerns a “dialectical, prophetic pathos.” Sobrino claims that the church must reclaim its prophetic stance in proclaiming both the kingdom and the anti-kingdom. The church must struggle on behalf of the majority, the poor. If

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98 Ibid. Brackets are my addition.

99 Ibid, 143. Italics from the author.

100 Ibid.

101 Ibid, Italics are the author’s emphasis.
not, the church will become “a closed sect or, indeed, a massive institution, but one detached from reality, a new attempt at socio-cultural Christendom.”\textsuperscript{102} A prophetic pathos encourages church members to respond compassionately to the crucified peoples. Otherwise the discourse of the preferential option for the poor leads us to empty platitudes. Sobrino claims that sustaining a “pathos” from Medellín and Vatican II can be a problematic which the martyrs help us to overcome. He writes, “The Jesus martyrs gave their lives not simply for good causes but for something deeper: the salvation of a whole people. The crucified peoples go on looking to the church for compassion, for it – together with many others – to work and struggle to take them down from the cross.”\textsuperscript{103} Both the Jesus martyrs and the crucified peoples help the church to realize its identity, to include all people in the mission of the church.

Sobrino advocates the cross or the taking on of the burden of the reality in his third appeal. He claims, “Reality is a heavy burden for the millions of victims and becomes a heavy burden for those who take their part.”\textsuperscript{104} The martyrs show us how heavy this real burden really is. But the reality of the martyrs does not lie in some mystical identification with Christ. Instead, martyrdom comes as a result of following Christ. Sobrino sees the martyrs as examples of men and women who follow the command to take up the cross most literally. He writes, “In this sense, ‘cross’ means the

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\textsuperscript{103}Ibid, 144. Italics show Sobrino’s emphasis.
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suffering and death that follow from defending the oppressed and struggling against injustice, and it derives from the will to immerse oneself in the conflictivity inherent in unjust situations.”\textsuperscript{105} The martyrs encourage us to take up the burden of reality in the cross, and in doing so provide the church a great service. Sobrino will argue that taking on the cross brings renewed credibility to the church. It evidences following Christ in a concrete manner. In this way we become a “church of Jesus.”\textsuperscript{106} In this way the Jesus martyrs lead us to bear the burden of reality to “hacernos cargo de nuestra realidad,” so as to convince us that a greater love is possible when we follow Jesus and take up the Cross.\textsuperscript{107}

The resurrection of Jesus forms the final piece of Sobrino’s appeal. Sobrino claims that the martyrs also invite us to share in Jesus’ resurrection. While our sinful reality causes us to take on many burdens, the martyrs show us that we may also find grace in this reality. Sobrino is careful to point out that our reality is also impregnated with love and truth. The resurrection should then also be a reality in our lives.\textsuperscript{108} The martyrs help us to remember our freedom and our hope in the resurrection. He writes, “Living with hope against resignation, so that the mystery of iniquity, the not-yet, the certainly-not, and disappointment do not bury the promise . . . In this freedom, joy, and


\textsuperscript{106}Ibid, 146.

\textsuperscript{107}The literal translation of the Spanish phrase which Sobrino adopts from Ignacio Ellacuría is “to make us carry our own reality.” It bears the sense that every Christian is responsible for carrying his or her own burdens, the burdens of historical reality.

hope there is already a sort of reverberation of resurrection. This is the invitation the martyrs offer the church. And on all accounts their final appeal is not to forget them.\textsuperscript{109} We can live then as resurrected beings in part, because of the hope and freedom which the martyrs instill in us. These four appeals of Sobrino show the importance of the link between the Jesus martyrs and the crucified peoples. The Jesus martyrs “have not concealed the face of God but have revealed it through their lives and deaths.”\textsuperscript{110} We should be grateful for the sacrifice of these martyrs. They are affected by the call of the crucified peoples, moved to model the cross of Jesus more intimately than most people, and so instill in us the hope to remove the crucified peoples from their crosses.

In this chapter we have investigated the roots of the word martyr and traced some of the historical background which produced the martyrs. Next, we suggested that the old definition of a martyr may not be sufficient to encapsulate all of the nuances for the martyrs of today. By rethinking the definition of martyrdom, Sobrino suggests the possibility of a new definition, and even the possibility of an anonymous martyr. But what is at the root of this thought? One might suggest that in order to understand why Sobrino wants to expand this definition, one must understand where he comes from. In the next chapter we will briefly examine a portion of the Latin American context in general, and the situation in El Salvador in particular which shapes Jon Sobrino’s thinking.


\textsuperscript{110} Ibid.
CHAPTER 2:
LATIN AMERICA AND THE DEFINITION OF MARTYRDOM

“My other fear is for my life. It is not easy to accept a violent death, which is very possible in these circumstances, and the apostolic nuncio to Costa Rica warned me of imminent danger just this week. You have encouraged me, reminding me that my attitude should be to hand my life over to God regardless of the end to which that life might come; that unknown circumstances can be faced with God’s grace; that God assisted the martyrs, and that if it comes to this I shall feel God very close as I draw my last breath; but that more valiant than surrender in death is the surrender of one’s whole life — a life lived for God.”

1. Introduction

In the first chapter, I have shown how some theologians have pushed for an expansion of the concept of martyrdom. This second chapter will show how the changing times in Latin America give cause for the expansion of the definition of martyrdom. This chapter will begin with a brief look at the Latin American context and show how the political climate affected the church and what it means to be a martyr. Next, we will focus on the situation in Central America, and particularly El Salvador. Four exemplary cases of martyrs in El Salvador will then be examined. The goal of this chapter is to set the stage for understanding what it means to be a Latin American martyr. As we saw in Chapter One, Sobrino will make the claim for an expansion of this

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111 Sobrino, Jon. Monseñor Romero. 3rd ed. San Salvador, El Salvador: UCA Editores 1995. See especially his personal recollections, 41. This reference is taken from a conversation Romero had with his spiritual director Fr. Azcue and occurred shortly before his last formal homily on March 23.

112 Of course these martyrs were chosen due to their relation to Sobrino, his concept of martyr, and his Christology.
concept, and as we will see he grounds this concept in the reality he sees around him. In this chapter we will explore this reality in depth.

2. Latin America

We begin with a broad view of the Latin American reality, both on the political and ecclesial levels. In the 20th century many historical changes take place which give rise to a central theme: the conflict between church and state. However, before tackling the recent 20th century history, perhaps a short disclaimer is necessary. Admittedly, the Catholic Church has a checkered history in Latin America, from the conquest of the Americas in the time of Columbus, to officially siding with the slave owners in the time of Bartolomé de Las Casas in the 16th century.113 While many priests came from Europe to the new world and blessed the imperial ways of their European sovereigns, there were also examples of prophetic voices. Las Casas, the Jesuit provincials who founded the reductions in South America, Saint Peter Claver, and Blessed Miguel Pro, all showed the ability to stand up and fight for the cause of justice.114

In the 20th century we find examples of priests and bishops who stand up for the poor, and in particular the worker, as countries begin to industrialize. Catholic Action played a major role in setting up a dynamic of both cooperation and tension in many


114While Las Casas and the Jesuit reductions serve as great examples, for sake of brevity this dissertation will just examine a few early 20th century examples before moving on to the history of El Salvador.
Latin American countries.\(^{115}\) Alberto Hurtado, S.J. a member of Catholic Action founded a program of social service in Chile, Hogar de Cristo. This organization would later connect with the founder of the Fe y Alegría schools\(^ {116}\) and basic housing projects like Un Techo para Chile, which today are found in most Latin American countries, but are especially strong in South America.\(^ {117}\) But in forming Catholic leaders, Catholic Action also ran into trouble with many governments. State and federal governing bodies were not always open to receiving criticism from ecclesial bodies, regarding education, unions, and rights for all peoples. These conflicts were not exclusive to South America but were found in Central America and Mexico as well.

Before moving the historical and political situation in El Salvador I would like to just briefly mention those countries which previously colored some of the history in Latin America. In the past century, Mexico serves as one example of a contentious relationship between the church and the government. The well documented history of the Cristeros rebellion and Miguel Pro, S.J. exemplify a time in the 20\(^{th}\) century when the government did not support church activities. In fact, many church leaders were killed for opposing


\(^{116}\)Fe y Alegria schools, loosely translated Faith and Joy schools, are a network of Jesuit schools, which aim to educate the rural poor in South America. The Andean network extends from Bolivia, Peru and Ecuador, but was founded in Caribbean countries of Venezuela and Colombia and now extends to the Southern cone of Argentina and Chile. Its expanded opportunities now hope to give even the urban poor resources for education, especially in countries where the government does not always provide educational opportunities.

\(^{117}\)Alberto Hurtado, S.J. was recently canonized a saint by the Catholic Church. He died in 1952 but founded many works. Hogar de Cristo, meaning Home or Place of Christ, started as an outreach to homeless street boys but has now expanded to shelters for men, women and families. Un Techo para Chile, literally means “A Roof for Chile” and focuses on constructing small houses for those without shelter. For a great collection of the life and writings of St. Alberto Hurtado see *Escritos de San Alberto Hurtado* published by the Centro de Estudios San Alberto Hurtado in the Pontificia Universidad Catolica de Chile, Santiago, 2007.
the government, or simply for celebrating Mass or praying in church. Robert Royal recounts, “Countless other priests met terrible ends: shot in their vestments during Mass, thrown from trains, executed and dragged behind vehicles, tortured for information, ‘disappeared’ – a term that would commonly be used decades later for similar cases all over Latin America.”\(^{118}\) One of the principal figures of this time period was Miguel Pro, S.J. who despite many obstacles returned to his country from Europe in order to serve the many Catholics who were suffering repression. In order to minister he disguised himself to blend in with his surroundings and avoid arrest by the state and local police. Royal notes, “Photographs from this time period show him in various disguises . . . When it was a women’s association, he dressed in a stylish suit and straw boater. For the workingmen, he put on overalls and a worker’s cap; he looked like a fellow driver for a meeting of chauffeurs, a mechanic among mechanics. By various subterfuges he was able to hear confessions even in jails.”\(^{119}\) In the end Pro’s great ministerial successes would lead to his downfall. Under the pretext that they were aiding an assassination attempt, Miguel and two of his brothers were arrested and thrown in prison. Miguel Pro walked bravely to his execution, and asked to pray before dying. Royal relates, “After a few minutes, he stood up, extended his arms in the form of a cross, a traditional Mexican

\(^{118}\) Royal, Robert. *The Catholic Martyrs of the Twentieth Century*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2000, 33. This term “disappeared” while perhaps coined during the time of Miguel Pro, was made common throughout the horrible history of violence in Latin America. As we will see shortly, thousands of people were “disappeared” in the various dictatorships, especially in Brazil, Argentina and Chile. Pinochet’s regime had a plan to make any political opposition leaders “disappear.” If they were foreign nationals they were deported, but others were buried in mass graves, or bodies were simply dumped off the ocean shores, often after long torture sessions. William Cavanaugh speaks of the effects of this treatment in his book, *Torture and the Eucharist: Challenges in Contemporary Theology*, ed. Gareth Jones and Louis Ayres. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998.

posture in prayer, and with a steady voice, neither defiant nor desperate, movingly intoned words that have since become famous, ‘Viva Cristo Rey,’ ‘Long Live Christ the King.’ To date, Miguel Pro has not been canonized or officially named a martyr for the faith. But popularly he is accepted by many as a martyr in his native Mexico and elsewhere. He fits into the same problematic of categorization that the church has with naming those martyrs who died for political reasons in predominantly Christian countries.

3. South America: Brazil and Argentina

In the 1950's and 1960's many Catholic groups in Latin America found themselves in the line of fire. When members of Catholic Action organized they often protested the conditions of many workers. These organizations were not well received in the cold war period, and many were branded Communists. Also increasing in frequency throughout Latin America, many repressive governments targeted church leaders. Following the repression of the Cristero movement in Mexico, the 1950's and 1960's abound with stories from a number of different countries. During this time period in South America, the repression occurred first in Brazil and Argentina. In the case of Brazil, Dom Helder Camara serves as an exemplary model for a bishop, predating Archbishop Romero in El Salvador.

Gustavo Gutiérrez remarks that the repression in Brazil began long before the conflicts in most Spanish speaking countries in Latin America. The conflict in Brazil began in 1968 and lasted until 1979. Some scholars claim the conflict came about

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121 Interview with Gustavo Gutierrez, November, 2008.
because of the differing traditions which existed in Brazil at the time, a kind of “Church of Two Christendoms.”\textsuperscript{122} Over time the official church position changed to see itself as a voice for the voiceless, a voice for the poor.\textsuperscript{123} This sparked conflicts, especially when wealthier parishes representing the status quo clashed with Christian base communities\textsuperscript{124}. Some of these disputes were not easily resolved and lead to the targeting of priests and religious by some para-military forces who used brute force. One priest in northern Brazil was tortured, killed and then dragged by a jeep through a small town to serve as an example for what happened to those who sided with the poor.\textsuperscript{125} The list of martyrs in Brazil continues to accumulate even today. Sister Dorothy Stang is perhaps the most recent example of someone who died for her faith, and for her defense of land rights of indigenous peoples and farmers in the Amazon Rain Forest.\textsuperscript{126}

During the 1970's, the Republic of Argentina experienced a period of political violence which continued until a constitutional government was established in 1983.\textsuperscript{127} While the violence perhaps never escalated into a full civil war, the armed forces did

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\textsuperscript{122} Keogh, Dermot, ed. \textit{Church and Politics in Latin America}. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990, 301. \\
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid, 304. \\
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid, 309. \\
\textsuperscript{125} Interview with Gustavo Gutierrez, November, 2008. \\
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overthrow the constitutional government in March of 1976. When the coup occurred, some of the bishops sided with the military, most noticeably the bishop of Paraná, but also the Vicar of the Armed Forces, Monsignor Adolfo Tortolo. He could not have been unaware of the repressive methods the armed forces decided to use. Anyone associated with the progressive youth group Acción Catolica (Catholic Action) was in grave peril. More than 4000 people were “disappeared,” likely tortured and then killed, their bodies never found. Among them were two French nuns, Sisters Alice Domón and Léonie Duquet. Emilio Mignon writes, “The bodies of those assassinated were thrown out of planes belonging to the armed forces into the Plata river and the Atlantic ocean.” During the clandestine repression many of the military bishops and chaplains “publicly and privately justified the torture, assassinations and abuses by the armed forces exempting its members from moral responsibility. They even developed a supposed doctrine with that meaning.”

Some members of the episcopate did side with human rights groups at the time, and the bishop of La Rioja, Enrique Angelelli, was killed by the armed forces in a simulated traffic accident August 4th, 1976. The Vatican was well aware of the

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129 Ibid.
131 Ibid, 358.
132 Ibid. Gustavo Gutiérrez also remarks that the killing of Angelelli was significant. For many years the Argentinian military denied any involvement, but today both U.S. and Argentine military documents show that he was a target of elite special forces and right wing paramilitary groups. Interview, October 2009.
persecution and John Paul II referred to the disappearances on three separate occasions. The Argentine cardinals and bishops tried to scale down and reinterpret his allocutions. In the end, two bishops, sixteen priests, and a number of brothers, nuns and seminarians were killed. Most of the priests and religious who were killed were told that they had identified too literally with the Gospel. One naval Admiral purportedly remarked to a priest, “Your mistake is having interpreted too literally Christ’s doctrine. Christ speaks for the poor, but it is the poor in spirit and you have gone to live with the poor. In Argentina, the poor in spirit are the rich, who are those who are spiritually in need.”

4. Chile

Besides the recent entry of grapes and wines into the U.S. markets, Chile is perhaps most known for Augusto Pinochet’s long dictatorship which lasted from 1973 to 1990. But the relationship between the church and the state began to change much earlier, in part due to the influence of Catholic Social Action groups and political leaders. In Chile, when a known socialist, Allende, took office, the U.S. backed Pinochet regime staged a coup. Leading up to 1973, the era of Christian democrats with the first President Frei, there were a number of different approaches to the conflicts between labor leaders and business owners, between agrarian reforms and large landowners and the growing

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134 Ibid, 367.

135 Ibid, 369.
social concern of the great disparities between rich and poor.\textsuperscript{136} Many Christian base communities were formed during this period, and usually contained a component of social justice.\textsuperscript{137} As the 1970's approached, the church remained neutral in the upcoming political elections. Cardinal Silva “declared that the Church favoured no party or candidate, and that clerics should not publicly support any political ideology or movement.”\textsuperscript{138} When Salvador Allende won the popular vote, a plurality of only 36.2 percent, support of Catholics in Santiago jumped from 10 to 22 percent. The relationship with the church and Allende’s government later deteriorated over the program of social humanism in all schools, public and private, but while the relations were strained they never completely broke down.\textsuperscript{139}

The Catholic church’s reaction to the military coup in 1973 was a mixture of concern and relief. Because of this cautious support of Pinochet’s regime the church was allowed to set up coup emergency relief programs for foreign refugees and Chileans suffering from the repression.\textsuperscript{140} The social service arm, COPACHI, became the most reliable source for information on what was happening throughout the country and its

\textsuperscript{136}I note that this was the first President Frei, because his son would become President in the 1990's. In Chile they refer to the first President Frei as Frei the elder to avoid confusion.

\textsuperscript{137}Christian Base Communities or “Communidades de Base.” From here forward we might abbreviate them as CEB’s.


\textsuperscript{139}Ibid, 327.

\textsuperscript{140}Ibid, 329. The Church arm was later named COPACHI or the Committee of Co-Operation for Peace. This would be established in 22 of 25 provinces, and lend legal aid service to prisoners or those unemployed because of their associations with the Allende’s government.
reports would later attest to the human rights violations.\textsuperscript{141} Archbishop Silva of Santiago would later found the Vicaría de la Solidaridad in 1976.\textsuperscript{142} The church, however did remain divided. In 1975 three fifths of the bishops interviewed did not support liberation theology, and most of those supported the Pinochet regime. Many priests and local leaders thought otherwise, however. Almost 50\% of all priests and nuns disagreed with the government policies and practices, and many were trying to combine their work in the CEB’s with a critical reflection on church social teachings and political problems.\textsuperscript{143} Brian Smith concludes that “The Chilean Church has significantly shifted the fulcrum pont of its strategy of relating to society and fulfilling its religious mission over the past half-century. It has definitely rejected the traditional Christendom approach, and in so doing no longer identifies so closely with the interests of State nor of upper-class groups.”\textsuperscript{144} In Chile today, even twenty years after the dictatorship, major work on reconciliation must still take place to heal the vast divisions within the Catholic Church.

The church in Chile can be criticized on a number of fronts for its actions in the dictatorships. For those with more progressive politics, the hierarchy and church leaders did not respond quickly enough to the repression of a purportedly Roman Catholic government. For Pinochet, who considered himself a faithful Catholic and even went to


\textsuperscript{142} Ibid, 16. Vicariate of Solidarity.

\textsuperscript{143} Ibid, 336.

\textsuperscript{144} Ibid, 338. Though from personal experience this still is an issue today. The church of the poor and the upper class can appear quite different, and wealthier parishes might have two or three priests while poorer parishes might have one priest who serves four or five “\textit{capillas}”, small churches or chapels with over 10,000 families. The ratio 3:10,000 vs. 1:50,000 is telling.
daily Mass, some church elements were aligning themselves with Leftist politicians, and in his opinion the church hierarchy needed to control its members. Priests became targets, just as lay ministers of CEB’s were targetted. Or, church leaders were simply rounded up along with other Communists or Socialist party members. They joined the ranks of the disappeared. Lay leaders in Pudahuel at the Capilla Jesus Vida Nueva still speak about the roundups. Some mothers never saw their children again. Men and women in the community simply joined the ranks of the desaparecidos, the disappeared. 145

This chapter started broadly to show that a history of violence and political unrest is not limited to Central America and El Salvador. I realize that the examples used above are not exhaustive, but many other examples of political strife, martyrs and the disappeared could be utilized from many different countries. In fact, almost all of Latin America has been affected at some point. The goal of this chapter is to set the stage for discussing what it means to be a Latin American martyr. As we saw in chapter one, Sobrino will make the claim for an expansion of this concept, and as we will see he wants to root this concept in the reality he sees around him.

5. El Salvador

While South America endured forceful dictatorships and strong tensions between church and state, the social strife in Central America led to an even greater problematic, that of civil war. While Chile, Brazil, Argentina and other countries experienced violence and conflict included the military and heavy arms buildup, Guatamala,

145 Interview with pastoral team of Capilla Jesús Vida Nueva in Pudahuel Chile, January 2009.
Nicaragua, and finally El Salvador would experience hand to hand combat in the streets, armed conflict, and especially in the case of El Salvador, civil war. While we focus our attention on El Salvador as the setting for the context of Jon Sobrino’s Christology, Guatemala and Nicaragua also warrant further study. Much of the violence in these countries erupted due to similar social problems. Since El Salvador most directly relates to Sobrino’s life and experience we will focus on this small Central American country.

El Salvador’s problems can be traced to the early 20th century. While the country lagged behind some of the Catholic movements like Catholic Social Action in the more European influenced Southern cone, nevertheless a change in the political and ecclesial scene erupted in violent conflict over a period of years. In the ecclesial sphere, much occurred in El Salvador between 1977 and 1989. The death of Rutilio Grande in 1977, the assassination of Archbishop Romero, the deaths of the U.S. nuns and laywoman, Ita Ford, Maura Clarke, Dorothy Kazel, Jean Donovan in 1980, and the murders of the Jesuits on the lawn outside their community in 1989, all serve as examples of martyrs in this checkered history. For the purposes of this dissertation we highlight these exemplary martyrs, but there were many others also killed at this time. We must not forget that thousands of everyday people also lost their lives, in addition to the lay catechists, Salvadoran and missionary priests, brothers and women religious who were also killed.. I have chosen these particular martyrs for the following reasons. I start with Rutilio

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146 For a history of El Salvador that leads up to the Civil War there are numerous worthy accounts to read, Phillip Berryman’s Stubborn Hope: Religion, Politics and Revolution in Central America. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1994, and Anna Peterson’s Martyrdom and the Politics of Religion. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997, both diagram the problems that erupted when an elite few in El Salvador owned most of the land. Agrarian reformers long complained about the injustices, decades before the eruption of civil war. For brevity’s sake we will examine the late 1970's until the death of the Jesuits in 1989 which most influences Sobrino’s life, work and theology.
Grande because of the effect of his death on the Salvadoran church, and the fact that he was the first native Salvadoran priest killed for political reasons in the 1970's. His death coincides with start of Oscar Romero’s appointment as archbishop and he attended Grande’s funeral and preached a long homily against the perpetrated violence in the rural areas of El Salvador. Next, we will briefly look at the extensive impact of the short tenure of Romero as archbishop, and the impact, both national and international of his death on civil war, politics and church life in El Salvador. The four U.S. churchwomen will also receive mention. While perhaps nationwide in El Salvador they do not enjoy the same reverence as the other martyrs, their deaths did make a tremendous impact, especially because their deaths brought attention to the civil war in El Salvador in the United States and internationally. Finally, we will see the impact of the deaths of the Jesuit martyrs in 1989. This event can be seen as a bookend to Romero’s death, in that it marks the beginning of the end of the war. Local and international outcry was strong, especially since five of the six priests killed were Spanish citizens. The international outcry helped bring about the end of the war. All of these martyrs in different ways helped shape Sobrino’s life and impact his Christology. Some in a more personal way, but all shape the sense of what it means to be a martyr in the 20th century.

Before we delve too deeply into the effects of the Salvadoran civil war on the church, a brief sketch of the political landscape might be helpful. Much of the recent checkered history of El Salvador revolves around the ARENA party, the Nationalist Republican Alliance. Ignacio Martin-Baró and Rodolfo Cardenal co-author an article

looking back at the years before the coup d’etat. In October of 1979, a group of young officers put an end to an era. The group, members of the Salvadoran army, ended a regime which served “a social minority which had become increasingly dependant on the bloody repression of the masses and of any opposition group.” This group of soldiers formed a Junta, an elite group which staged a coup d’etat and took over power, responding to the country’s instability. Martín-Baró notes that it would be misleading to insinuate that everything returned to the status quo or that nothing in El Salvador substantially changed between 1979 and 1989. He writes, “ARENA’s electoral victory did not completely return to the Salvadorean capitalist sector its previous control over the full apparatus of the state, much less its control over where and how people lived. It did return a divided state and a country in civil war.” The triumph of ARENA can therefore not be simplified as a return to a capitalist state nor the traditional Salvadoran regime or the order of the “Fourteen Families.” One main problem with ARENA was that it did not have complete control of the Armed Forces. It did not return the

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148 Rodolfo Cardenal & Ignacio Martín-Baró, “Introduction,” in Montgomery, Tommie Sue. Revolution in El Salvador: From Civil Strife to Civil Peace. 2nd ed. San Francisco: Westview Press, 1995, 1. In the introduction to the book, Rodolfo Cardenal notes that this article was originally written by Ignacio Martín-Baró as an introduction to his book which he was unable to finish due to his death in 1989. Cardenal adds the last two years as the war ended to his draft.

149 Ibid. They note that Tommie Sue Montgomery documents the political project of the Christian Democratic Party, and its corruption by the corruption of the Armed Forces of El Salvador.


151 Ibid, 2. The fourteen families refers to the elite ruling class of families which predates the civil war and dominates the history of the 20th century. The fourteen family theory may not be an exact number, since Salvadoran historians, notably the socialist Roque Dalton, reference as many as eighteen families. See Dalton, Roque. El Salvador. San Salvador, El Salvador : UCA Editores, 1989. Either way, the families form the oligarchy in El Salvador.
Salvadoran oligarchy to power, nor did it control U.S. government representatives, nor the FMLN, its rival force. ARENA did not have control over the U.S. operatives in El Salvador, but the United States may have interfered in the politics of the country, starting with the dictator José María Lemus, and the coup d’etat against General Carlos Humberto Romero. Cardenal claims that from 1980 to 1992 the United States “embassy” constituted “the principal fighting force in the Salvadoran conflict: U.S. advice and financing defined the direction of the war from the government’s side.” Martín-Baró accurately includes a third player in this dangerous and explosive civil war scenario— the FMLN. The fact that the FMLN was able to accumulate military power even without U.S. aid, and the giant development of the Salvadoran military and paramilitary forces is astounding. They conducted a prolonged counterinsurgent war when the army could dispatch an air transport to any part of the country in twenty minutes.

After Napoleon Duarte’s Presidency the violence again escalated at the end of the 1980's. Daniel Santiago writes, “A decade after the death of Oscar Romero and after ten years of United States military aid, El Salvador has become a kingdom without justice – a

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152 One still hears rumors alleging CIA activity in El Salvador. Perhaps one day when documents are declassified these rumors will be confirmed. The fact that many of the elite Salvadoran forces were trained at Fort Benning in Georgia is now indisputable. See Doggett, Martha. Death Foretold: The Jesuit Murders in El Salvador. Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1993, and the UN Truth Commission Documents for evidence. The FMLN is the abbreviation for the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional and had both a rebel fighting force as well as political representation throughout the country.


154 Ibid., 2.

155 Montgomery, 3.
large band of robbers.” Santiago claims that what the country lacked was a renewed sense of hope, and pastors who could accompany the people in their spiritual liberation.

The Salvadoran military never did follow the peace accords brokered at different times during the 1980's. Santiago claims that “While constitutionally bound to follow the peace accords, the Salvadoran military have never subjected themselves to civilian control . . . The armed forces also remain locked in deadly combat with the church of El Salvador.” One of the biggest problems lie in the fact that the military and security forces operated outside of the elected government. Many of the atrocities are well documented, as we will see later with the massacres of El Mozote and the River Sumpul.

Santiago describes a hermeneutics of death utilized by the National Guard and special forces. He writes, “Most Americans were numbed by the news that came out of El Salvador during the war — 75,000 victims, the bombing of poor barrios, the disappearance, capture, torture and killing of students and union leaders, the assassination of an archbishop, the massacre of priests and rape of nuns. But the scale of the killing in El Salvador was so large it prevented us from appreciating its grim artistry— its aesthetics.” Both before the start of the war and into the early 1980's thousands of

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157 Ibid, 5. Rumors of illicit arms and drugs deals also litter many leftist pamphlets from this time period. One FMLN pamphlet claims that the AK 47's used were acquired in Nicaragua, but that also when arms shipments came from the U.S. some Salvadoran military leaders sold their inferior weapons to the FMLN so that the war would keep going. An interesting business model for the Colonels and Generals to say the least.

158 Ibid, 7. Santiago mentions a number of atrocities and tells the story of Tonita whose entire family was murdered and seated around a macabre table of death in their own home.

159 Santiago, Daniel. The Harvest of Justice: The Church of El Salvador Ten Years after Romero. New York: Paulist Press, 1993, 11. El Mozote was a small village in Morazán, where an entire village was slaughtered by the Atlacatl Battalion, some estimate as many as 800 people. 600 people were massacred at
non-combatants were violently slaughtered. But they not only killed people, they attempted it with style and brutality.\textsuperscript{160} From a church perspective one wonders how priests, religious and lay catechists could have ministered to the civilian population in rural El Salvador in the seventies, eighties and nineties. But, that is just what some church workers did, and the countryside was filled with heroic stories of priests, brothers, sisters and catechists who tried to form CEB’s or simply brought the most basic of sacraments to the faithful.

Another way of looking at the history of El Salvador, would be to mark the time period with certain dates and events which were significant for those faithful to Catholic Church. I have established four potential markers as the death of Rutilio Grande in 1977, the assassination of Archbishop Romero in 1980, the deaths of the women religious Ita Ford, Maura Clarke, Dorothy Kazel, and lay missioner Jean Donovan in 1980, and finally, the murders of the Jesuit community and the two women at the UCA in 1989.\textsuperscript{161} All of these murders serve as place markers, and these publicized violent deaths led to investigations by the U.N. Amnesty International, the U.N Truth Commission and other organizations, both in the United States and abroad. While in this dissertation we will only examine their violent demise, it is with the recognition that thousands more people

\textsuperscript{160}Perhaps most famous for this brutality and aesthetic of massacre was Colonel Monterossa, head of the now infamous Atlacatl battalion. He hoped to not only hurt his enemies, the FMLN, but also to make examples of civilian populations who helped them. The brutality of the massacres he presided over amazed even hardened members of the U.N. Truth Commission. See also Santiago’s chapter on “The Myth of Power” which diagrams Monterossa’s methods, and attempts to make some sense of his insipid reasoning.

\textsuperscript{161}The UCA is the abbreviation for the Jesuit University of Central America.

the Rio Sumpul, some by the Salvadoran National Guard, and others by Honduran troops who were there to “discourage” Salvadorans from fleeing their own country.
died anonymous deaths. If Sobrino writes about Rutilio, Romero, Ellacuría, and others it is for good reason. They were his friends. But one cannot forget that he also asks us to remember the thousands of people who died anonymously. The deaths of his colleagues and companions account for just part of the story. Martyrdom increasingly marks his Christology after the deaths of his community, especially in the view of martyrdom, the poor and the anonymous are present throughout. I will now turn our attention to these violent place markers in the story, while attempting not to lose sight of all the marginalized, the anonymous martyrs, and the crucified peoples.

6. Four Salvadoran Martyrs
6.1. Rutilio Grande

While some might start the story of the war in El Salvador with the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero, they would be mistaken. The war in El Salvador started arguably five years earlier. In terms of the conflict between the paramilitary forces and church lay catechists and leaders, church leaders began to be killed as early as 1976. This dissertation will start an in-depth look at the martyrs in El Salvador with Rutilio Grande for the following reasons. One, he was one of the first Jesuit priests to be threatened with death, was a target of paramilitary groups and was eventually killed. Second, his death caused church authorities to further investigate what was happening in the “campos,” or the countryside, in the far reaches of El Salvador. Finally, there is an easy link between

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163 U.N. Truth commission documents, Anna Peterson, and Berryman all date the war from 1980 to 1992. But the violence broke out years earlier, military responses to community organizing and the formation of unions in the coffee, sugar cane, and fruit export regions.
the death of Rutilio Grande, Romero and the Jesuits killed in 1989. One could argue that
the murder of Rutilio Grande started an ugly chapter in church history in El Salvador.
But that chapter ends with his death, and his life is one worth mentioning and celebrating.

Rutilio Grande was born July 5, 1928, in the village of El Paisnal, in El Salvador. His father was an important small business person and was politically important in the town.\textsuperscript{164} He lived a fairly normal life, and was especially close to his godfather Vicente Tejada, who would later help support his seminary studies.\textsuperscript{165} He was also close to another “padrino” Facundo Barrera, in whose home the visiting priests stayed. In this house young Rutilio probably met the future Archbishop of San Salvador, Mons. Luis Chávez, with whom he maintained a close correspondence even after he became a Jesuit.\textsuperscript{166} When Rutilio was only twelve, he wrote to the Archbishop for the first time telling him about his desire to become a priest.\textsuperscript{167} After he completed elementary school, Rutilio entered the minor seminary, and finished high school there. During his studies for his bachelor’s degree he felt called to enter the Society of Jesus, and with the approval of the archbishop, he entered the novitiate on September 23, 1945.

Rutilio Grande completed two years of the novitiate when he was 19, and took

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\textsuperscript{166}Ibid. That they met is not at issue, where they first met is conjecture.

\textsuperscript{167}Ibid, 15.
vows in Los Chorros, Venezuela on September 24, 1947. He studied science and humanities in Quito, Ecuador, but due to health issues interrupted his studies to work for a while in Central America. He taught for a year at Colegio Javier, the Jesuit high school in Panama. Afterwards, he was transferred to the seminary in San Salvador, where he was a professor of Latin, Spanish, Geography and History. In 1953, he was sent to philosophy studies in Oña, Spain where he received his licentiate in 1956. In October, he went straight to theology studies and was ordained a priest on July 30, 1959. He said his first mass in Oña, and some Salvadoran families were present including the “Consúl” who brought a Salvadoran flag which was placed next to the altar. Father Grande had planned for a fourth year of theology in the United States, but due to health reasons he had to remain in Spain. In August of 1962, he finished his

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171 Ibid, 18. The head of the consulate brought the flag, and one of the Salvadoran families present included the parents of a Jesuit classmate of Rutilio’s who left the Society after doing regency at the seminary in El Salvador.

172 Cardenal, Rodolfo. *Historia De Una Esperanza: Vida De Rutilio Grande*. San Salvador, El Salvador: UCA Editores, 1985. See especially pages 77-80 regarding his ordination and final vows. Cardenal delves into long historical descriptions throughout his book, and here intricately describes Rutilio’s battles with depression and anxiety. He suggests that “Tilo”, who did not feel worthy to be ordained, battled more than just spiritual scruples, but perhaps battled a perfectionism in which he saw a world of all or nothing, or in his words “de todo o nada.”
Jesuit formation in the tertianship program in Córdoba, Spain.\textsuperscript{173} Afterwards, in a brief period of special studies in Brussels, at the International Pastoral Institute \textit{Lumen Vitae}, he developed an initial pastoral action plan, which he would later utilize more when he returned to pastoral work in Aguilares.\textsuperscript{174} After making his final vows in Brussels, on August 15, 1964, he was missioned to work at the Seminary in San Salvador.\textsuperscript{175}

The return to work at the seminary, this time as a finally vowed priest proved bittersweet. On the one hand, the return to El Salvador must have been welcome. But returning with new ideas from Belgium and on the cusp of a Second Vatican Council which would take longer to be received in El Salvador, Padre “Tilo” would be hurt by some of his interactions with the local hierarchy and some of the more conservative seminary staff.\textsuperscript{176} Rutilio himself would describe it as a theological crisis between a pre-conciliar theology and new ideas from the Council like the common priesthood of the people of God.\textsuperscript{177} Some of his ideas, formulated during his studies in Belgium, also conflicted with the pastoral plan for the poor. Rutilio advocated a change, and vocally

\textsuperscript{173}Rutilio Grande: Martir De La Evangelizacion Rural En El Salvador. San Salvador, El Salvador: UCA Editores, 1978, 19. Tertianship, the last stage of Jesuit formation consists of making the 30 day Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius again, studying the Constitutions of the Society, and preparing for final vows through various pastoral works and common activities with others in the program.

\textsuperscript{174}Ibid. This pastoral plan would come to full fruition later in Aguilares.

\textsuperscript{175}Rutilio Grande: Martir De La Evangelizacion Rural En El Salvador. San Salvador, El Salvador: UCA Editores, 1978, 26. There is a great chart on this page which outlines the major events in his life from birth until death.

\textsuperscript{176}Tilo was the common nickname for someone named Rutilio.

\textsuperscript{177}Rutilio Grande: Martir De La Evangelizacion Rural En El Salvador. San Salvador, El Salvador: UCA Editores, 1978, 40. Rutilio termed it “un crisis teológico” which he tried to resolve through some debate with the bishops. His Jesuit superiors were more receptive to the “new theology” erupting from the Council.
supported more work with the poor for the seminarians. He cited the ideas of Paul VI in *Populorum Progressio* especially emphasizing the scandal when a very few enjoy all of the goods, but while he proved a student favorite, others both inside the seminary and in the oligarchy accused him of a “reheated Marxism.”\(^{178}\) In the end, Tilo would ask for a change of ministry from his Jesuit superiors, and would eventually resign from his duties in the seminary when he felt he had lost the confidence of the bishops.\(^{179}\)

The change of ministries allowed Rutilio to take a short sabbatical. He went to the Institute for Latin American Pastoral Work in Ecuador for some studies, and was also allowed a trip to visit the grave of his deceased Salesian brother, who had served as a priest in Costa Rica.\(^{180}\) In 1972, Grande was missioned by his provincial to head the new area of pastoral ministry for the Central American province. He had many new ideas for this ministry, starting with his training in Belgium, continuing in his pastoral work in the countryside while teaching at the seminary, and finally crystallizing during his time at the pastoral institute in Ecuador. He wrote to the Vice Provincial asserting that the primary and fundamental option for this work should be: “a pastoral work in teams, in a rural zone of peasants or a marginalized semi-urban zone oriented to an integral promotion (of

\(^{178}\) *Rutilio Grande: Martir De La Evangelizacion Rural En El Salvador*. San Salvador, El Salvador: UCA Editores, 1978, 43. Rutilio wrote during this period of “el escandalo cuando un poco tienen el goce de los bienes” in several letters. The term “marxismo recalentado” was not reserved solely for R. Grande, S.J. but for anyone who spoke out against social injustices or social structures controlled by the oligarchy.

\(^{179}\) Ibid, 46. Cardenal notes that this was a painful process for Rutilio, especially since many of these bishops he had previously considered friends, or at least worked with and enjoyed a fraternal spirit. The expulsion from the seminary of three seminarians who had worked with Padre Grande pastorally on weekends didn’t help either. See Cardenal’s *Historia de la Esperanza*, 134. Cardenal uses the nickname Tilo predominantly in his book.

\(^{180}\) Ibid, 48. The Institute in Quito was called *El Instituto de Pastoral Latinoamericano*. Rutilio was in Europe when his brother died in 1964, and was unable to return for the funeral or visit the grave site in Costa Rica before this time.
values) based in a Christian consciousness." Rutilio imagined that he and his Jesuit brothers were the ideal group to carry out this plan. He saw them as an agile group, who could set up an apostolic mission in a remote area, which would not be restricted by outside constraints. He hoped that their pastoral plan would fit the difficult reality of the great majority living in El Salvador at the time.

From the very beginning of his arrival in Aguilares in early 1973 his pastoral plan met with resistance from the wealthy landowners, and the families representing the oligarchy in San Salvador at the time. But his time in Aguilares, just before the beginning of the civil war, was greeted with great rejoicing among the people there. In some ways, this was the story of the prodigal son returning home after many years away. While he had visited home many times while at the seminary, it was the first time in his Jesuit life he had worked full time in the area where he had grown up. But while Rutilio saw himself as a servant of all and wanted to find ways of liberating the people both spiritually and economically, he was branded as a “communist priest.” One photo from a rally on the feast of Corpus Christi in Aguilares shows a group of campesinos

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181 Rutilio Grande: Martir, 49. Translated from the original Spanish “un trabajo pastoral en equipo, en una zona rural campesina o sub-urbana marginada en orden a una promoción integral a partir de una concientización cristiana.” I insert “of values” because an integral promotion literally translated has little meaning in English. Letter to Vice-Provincial June 27, 1972, and the idea copied in a letter to an Ecuadorian Jesuit July 23, 1973.

182 Rutilio Grande: Martir De La Evangelizacion Rural En El Salvador. San Salvador, El Salvador: UCA Editores, 1978, 51. For more on the pastoral plan of Rutilio Grande see his pastoral plan as elaborated in the 1970 issue of Buscueda, the journal of the archdiocese of San Salvador. Tom Kelly from Creighton University will include this pastoral plan in his new book on Rutilio Grande, When the Gospel Grows Feet: Rutilio Grande and the Church of El Salvador, University of Scranton Press, awaiting publication.

183 Rutilio Grande: Martir De La Evangelizacion Rural En El Salvador. San Salvador, El Salvador: UCA Editores, 1978, 55. “Curas comunistas” or communist priests was part of the rhetoric of right wing groups. Rutilio’s initial response to the charge: “Jesús también era subversivo” or “Jesus was also subversive.”
holding a sign which says, “Jesus is with us when we denounce the injustices.”

The powers that be, most of whom were practicing Catholics, couldn’t have appreciated the thought that Jesus was on the side of their coffee pickers, and the rural work force in general.

Before coming to Aguilares, Grande had made his eight day annual retreat at Santa Tecla with at least one Jesuit who would be a member of his pastoral team. Here, Grande replanted the idea of the first and fundamental option for pastoral ministry. He decided on a method which was personalized, “dialogal,” and rooted in a sphere of “action-reflection-action.” Rutilio hoped that the method’s fundamental base would be found in the Gospel, and in making that Gospel accessible and relevant to the campesinos who lived in Aguilares and the surrounding countryside. When Rutilio arrived at the parish in September of 1972, he found that most of the local economy was sustained by the growth of sugar cane. But the majority of the people living there, over 90% only had 22% of the available land to farm, and that only 140 days of the year. Most of the large “haciendas,” the name for the largest privately owned farms with sugar cane, coffee, and

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184 Rutilio Grande: Martir De La Evangelizacion Rural En El Salvador. San Salvador, El Salvador: UCA Editores, 1978, 54. In Spanish, “Jesús está con nosotros cuando denunciamos las injusticias.” Throughout this dissertation I will simply use the Spanish word, because the dictionary translation “simple peasants” has a derogatory sense in the English, and “those from the countryside” does not fully sum up their social reality.

185 Rutilio Grande: Martir, 59.

186 Ibid. This circle of “acción-----reflección---- and acción,” was conceived over many years, though not tested. The editor also notes that hints of the influence of Paulo Freire can also be seen in Grande’s methodology.

cotton, were geared toward export. In the years before Grande arrived, conditions were worsening for the majority of the people, as small farmers were manipulated or pushed out by the larger haciendas. As a result, many people were malnourished or even starving. Rutilio took great exception to the fact that more and more products were being exported, while Salvadoran citizens were dying of hunger, or malnourishment.

Rutilio Grande ministered in an area which contained a small town Aguilares, with 10,000 inhabitants, a small village El Paisnal, with 2,000 inhabitants, and a large rural sector of 170 square kilometers (102 sq. miles) where 18,000 people lived on or near 35 large haciendas. Rutilio saw in this rural land a major problem of exploitation. The large landowners and some town politicians and local police lived fairly comfortably, while the large majority struggled to make a living wage. Rutilio saw first hand the effects which were denounced in papal documents as early as *Populorum Progressio*.

Rutilio and his pastoral team “entered the explosive and conflictive area just at the moment in Salvadoran Society when the contradictions were becoming even

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188 *Rutilio Grande: Martir*, 61. The census results between 1961 and 1973 indicate that the average person’s calorie intake decreased from 1,797 to 1683. The minimum daily calorie intake should be 2,200 for the average person.

189 *Rutilio Grande: Martir*, 64. As one can decipher from the numbers, 60 % of the people lived in rural zones, and even today, El Paisnal does not have a lot of amenities, while Aguilares is not what one would term a city. Prof. Tom Kelly of Creighton University emphasizes the significance of Rutilio Grande’s pastoral ministry in El Salvador, in the proofs of his forthcoming book *When the Gospel Grows Feet: Rutilio Grande and the Church of El Salvador* which should go to press in the fall of 2012.

190 See Grande, Rutilio ’Violencia Y Situación Social.” *ECA* 262 (1970): 369-375, a short article which Rutilio writes in 1970 and led to some tough conversations with some of the more conservative seminary faculty and seminarians. He argues in the article that the social sphere is also a church sphere, and cites Leo XIII, Pius X, Pius XI, and Paul VI, especially the idea that the right to private property cannot outweigh the common good. In fact, papal teaching sides with the common good and limits private ownership of property when it promotes inequality, or injustice.
more sharp.”

The pastoral team’s first task was to attempt to create space for the nourishment and spiritual growth of the Catholic community in the area. The pastoral team divided the town and village into ten mission centers, and the country into 15 mission centers. They created Christian base communities in each area, and formed local leaders to be responsible for liturgies and pastoral councils. Rutilio’s preaching also became sharper as he delved deeper into the lives of the people and listened to their stories of despair and injustice. He became known for the explosiveness and passion in his preaching. When preaching once on the Magnificat he praised Mary as an example of a beautiful yet typical women. He went on to say, that she “was the opposite from all of those who live in the center of the wasp’s nest, who have bought votes . . . those who celebrate over there in the Sheraton hotel.” In his homily he spoke out against the political corruption, and the exorbitant expense of hosting the Miss Universe pageant in the Hotel Sheraton when people were dying of hunger. When the pastoral team confronted the unjust social structures in and around Aguilares, they were denounced, and farm workers were warned not to organize into cooperatives or unions. Rutilio utilized an idea which also

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192 Ibid, 68.

193 *Rutilio Grande: Martir De La Evangelizacion Rural En El Salvador*. San Salvador, El Salvador: UCA Editores, 1978, 71. The excerpt from his homily on Mary as Servant in Spanish “la que ha sido elegida por los siglos como Reina, como la mujer bella y tipa, porque no le irán a tomar medidas, de cintura de avispa, ni ha comprado votos, de esos que mercan por ahí, en las fiestas y allá en el hotel Sheraton.”

194 One of the Jesuits who worked with Pd. Grande in Aguilares spoke about his fiery homilies. He would warn the Jesuit regents not to get too involved in controversy on the one hand, and then give these critical homilies of local government and police which were blasted over the loud speakers and could be heard in the city square. Interview with Pd. “Chichu” Rivera, UCA Jesuit community November 25, 2009.
appeared in Sobrino’s 1976 book Cristología desde Latinoamérica. He preached about being in the midst of “a crisis in Galilee,” just as Jesus was persecuted by the powerful, and the disciples failed to understand his teaching.\textsuperscript{195} Through this prophetic preaching, Rutilio became the most visible symbol of a religious movement which advocated not only a reform of the rural parishes, but also social change.\textsuperscript{196} From 1973 until his death, Rutilio lived through an internal struggle between the purity of his ideas and the harsh reality of life around him.\textsuperscript{197}

During this time, the political landscape in the country grew more and more conflictive. Other groups came into the area to organize the campesinos.\textsuperscript{198} When accusations came up tying his pastoral work to Marxist influences, Grande traveled to the capital to speak with both the President and Archbishop Chavez about the accusations. He made the argument that everything that they were doing was in line with the Gospels and the papal teachings and claimed that his only political affiliation was to the common good of the great majority of people in the area.\textsuperscript{199} But the good relationship with the

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\item \textsuperscript{195}Rutilio Grande: Martir De La Evangelizacion Rural En El Salvador. San Salvador, El Salvador: UCA Editores, 1978, 79. The phrase “una buena crisis galilea” appears multiple times in the homilies of Grande. While the idea is not Sobrino’s own, it does show that Grande had contact with the UCA university Jesuit community, and that both he and the theologians there were mutually enriched. Sobrino himself still states publicly that he was personally inspired by “Tilo.” The “crisis in Galilee” also appears in Chapter Three “Jesus in the Service of God’s Kingdom” in Christology at the Crossroads.
\item \textsuperscript{196}Ibid, 83.
\item \textsuperscript{197}Rutilio Grande: Martir De La Evangelizacion Rural En El Salvador. San Salvador, El Salvador: UCA Editores, 1978, 84.
\item \textsuperscript{198}Ibid. The most prominent of these was FECCAS, Federation of Salvadoran Christian Campesinos, a non-partisan Christian group which tried to helped workers organize into collectives and helped them advocate for better pay and better working conditions.
\item \textsuperscript{199}Ibid, 85-87. Rutilio had direct access to both the Archbishop and to President Arturo Molina at the time. Rutilio may even have made an arrangement with Molina to keep him informed about things to avoid a possible repression against the people in the parish.
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President would not last long. In May of 1975, President Molina claimed that there were “communist priests” in the area, and Fr. Rafael Palacios, who worked in the parish next to Grande, was severely beaten that month.  

Rutilio Grande and his pastoral team were faced with three main alternatives: flee the area due to the conflict, look for a compromise solution with local politicians and opposition forces, or continue to grow the parish openly running the risk of conflict both in the parish and nationally. In the end, they made the decision to continue growing the parish, deciding that a good pastoral initiative must take on the risks. In the elections of 1977, General Romero won the presidency almost two to one, with allegations of fraud. Archbishop Chavez helped mediate a solution where the opposition candidate and other party leaders could seek asylum and leave the country. The government initiated a concerted campaign against some priests, and some priests and religious were expelled from the country.

A mass protest was organized by the local Vicariate which ended in a Eucharist, and Rutilio Grande preached the homily which would eventually lead to his death.

Soon after, authorities detained and tortured with electric shock a Spaniard, Juan José

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200 Rutilio Grande: Martir, 87. A right wing group Falange, stated that its objective was to rid the country of communist priests. This group was suspected in the beating, but no one was ever charged with the crime. Fr. Rafael ministered in the parish next to Aguilares.

201 Ibid, 89.


203 Ibid, 93. Two ex-Jesuit students who had worked in Aguilares were expelled from the country, as were three priests from the parish next to Aguilares, Mario Bernal from Columbia, Guillaume Denaux, Belgium, and Bernardo Servil, North America.

204 Ibid, 94.
Ramirez, for 10 days, not knowing he had left the Jesuit Order. Also, Archbishop Chávez resigned due to age, and Archbishop Romero took possession of the diocese in a private ceremony. Rutilio changed his tack, trying to emphasize how the parish goals were in line with that of the Republic, and he denounced human rights violations and injustice in the area. He tried to explain his position at all levels, to the new Archbishop, the Ministry of the Interior and even the President. He asked the President to come to Aguilares to inform himself about the situation and stated he wanted to dialog with anyone, even those who disagreed with him. In Rutilio’s homily on February thirteenth in Apopa, he preached about a common humanity, and spoke out against the government’s expulsion of Mario Bernal. He claimed that “the hour of the martyr” had arrived, that the Gospel message was subversive, and it was dangerous to be a Christian.

Rutilio Grande began to see an increase in the fervency and number of personal death threats over the next month. Rumors circulated that even some of his own relatives were angry with him, and planning something against him. On Saturday March 12,

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205 Rutilio Grande: Martir, 94.

206 Ibid, 104. Cardenal notes that John Murphy, a Benedictine priest from the U.S. was also forced to leave the country at this time, due to pressure from the nuncio, and in order to avoid arrest and torture before deportation. Historia de una Esperanza, 555.

207 Rutilio Grande: Martir De La Evangelizacion Rural En El Salvador. San Salvador, El Salvador: UCA Editores, 1978, 107. In this homily, Tilo uses the phrase “los Caines” referring to the Genesis account of Cain and Abel. He preached against those who would act against their brother with violence both overt and covert. This phrase was picked up and used by other Jesuit priests and religious in the years to come, “the Cains” of the El Salvador who kill their brothers and sisters. Mario Bernal was the parish priest who served in Apopa and was deported.

208 Cardenal, Rodolfo. Historia De Una Esperanza: Vida De Rutilio Grande. San Salvador, El Salvador: UCA Editores, 1985, 570. Cardenal names Venancio Grande as one relative who perhaps held a grudge. His wife apparently burned some of Rutilio’s possessions he had left at their home. Rutilio also
barely one month after Apopa, Rutilio Grande himself joined the list of the martyrs in Latin America. He left to preside at the Eucharist in El Paisnal, with Manuel Solórzano, 72, Nelson Rutilio Lemus, 16, and two or three children who accompanied him on the trip as they crossed the sugar cane fields.\textsuperscript{209} They drove right into an ambush. The bullets which rained down on the vehicle came from the front, side, and even from behind.\textsuperscript{210} The bullets entered Rutilio’s neck at two different points, various bullets struck the lumbar region, others broke his pelvis. Twelve of the wounds were deemed mortal wounds by the coroner.\textsuperscript{211} When the bullets hit, Tilo lost control of the vehicle, and when it left the road it turned on its side with the motor running, so the children in the back were able to escape the vehicle. Don Manuel and Nelson Lemus were also dead at the scene.

News of the deaths were immediately sent to the Cathedral and the Jesuit Provincial. The deaths were officially reported as being produced by firearms.\textsuperscript{212} The Provincial asked that the three bodies be placed in identical coffins. The Provincial, three

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\item stopped staying in the homes of parishioners overnight, and instead stayed by himself at the parish house, so as not to put anyone in danger.
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\textsuperscript{209}\textit{Rutilio Grande: Martir De La Evangelizacion Rural En El Salvador}. San Salvador, El Salvador: UCA Editores, 1978, 109. Accounts differ as to the identities of these children. Dean Brackley, S.J. claims that the identity of at least one of these children is known, but since the killers may still be at large, no one has come forward to testify. Interview November 25, 2009.

\textsuperscript{210}Ibid, 110. Cardenal notes that the vehicle was a Safari (jeep/truck), and that Don Manuel sat in the front middle, because they picked up Nelson Lemus, who sat next in the right front seat next to the window, \textit{Historia de una Esperanza}, 572.

\textsuperscript{211}\textit{Rutilio Grande: Martir De La Evangelizacion Rural En El Salvador}. San Salvador, El Salvador: UCA Editores, 1978, 110. Cardenal’s account differs slightly, and claims that Benito Estrada was clearly involved. When Benito got to the vehicle the children were screaming, and he let them out. They all ran away and one of them claims to have heard one more gunshot. Cardenal also notes that Manuel’s body was inclined over Rutilio as if to protect him. \textit{Historia De Una Esperanza}, 574.

\textsuperscript{212}Ibid.
Jesuits, Archbishop Romero, and auxiliary Bishop Rivera all arrived that evening. The President promised an independent investigation, an investigation which to this day remains open, with no one charged in the deaths. Some suspect that there were many different parties responsible and some may still be living in the Aguilares area today. Many people came into the village when they heard of the news, and the church was overflowing at the vigil. The bodies were then transferred to the cathedral where the Jesuit provincial presided at the funeral mass, accompanied by the bishops and over 100 priests concelebrated. Both the provincial and Archbishop Romero gave stirring homilies. The cadavers were led in three hearses in procession back to Aguilares for burial, with a long string of vehicles trailing behind. One participant would later write a song based on the experience whose refrain repeats: “Walking with Rutilio on the road to El Paisnal, like Christ walked his way to the Cross.”

The homily which Archbishop Romero gave that day was perhaps one of the most stirring of his early homilies. In the homily, and perhaps since the provincial gave a more personalized homily about Rutilio’s life, the new Archbishop chose to focus on the reality in El Salvador. He began the homily by stating that if it were a simple funeral he would

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213 *Rutilio Grande: Martir*, 110. Cardenal notes that the bodies were taken to an independent investigator, so more could be learned about the deaths. No official autopsy was ever performed. *Historia De Una Esperanza*, 575.

214 Ibid, 111. Dean Brackley, S.J. asserts that at least one of the children currently lives in the United States, and fled due to fear for his or her personal safety. Since the perpetrators of the crime have still not been charged, nor convicted, the details of this conversation cannot be put in writing. Interview with Dean Brackley, November 26, 2009.


216 Ibid, 117. “Caminar con Rutilio su camino de El Paisnal como Cristo camino su camino de la cruz.” The author is unknown, but the song is still sung in popular masses.
speak about the human and personal relations with Fr. Rutilio Grande with whom he felt close to like a brother. But Romero declared that the funeral was not a time to speak personally, rather a time to reflect on the significance of Rutilio’s death. He cited Paul VI, and asked the question “What does the church offer in this universal fight for the liberation of all this misery?” The liberation which the church offers is the same as Fr. Grande offered, a preaching filled with solidarity for the faith, and given to the joy of God, and a message which is in union with the Church. Romero claimed that Rutilio Grande, S.J. died preaching the social doctrine of the faith, and this message would be of great importance for all who want to work together with the Gospel message. He made a personal plea to those responsible for the murders, “I want to tell you, criminal brothers, who already are in excommunion with the church, and are listening on the radio . . . I want to tell you, criminal brothers, that we love you and we ask God for forgiveness for your hearts, because the love of the church is not capable of hating, it does not have enemies. The love of the Lord inspired the action of Rutilio Grande.” Clearly, Romero was affected by the death of Rutilio Grande, the first native Salvadoran priest to

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218 Ibid, 32. “Qué aporta la Iglesia a esta lucha universal por la liberación de tanta miseria?”


220 Ibid, 33-34.

221 Ibid, 35. “Queremos decirles, hermanos criminales, que cayeron ya en la excomunión, están escuchando en un radio . . . queremos decirles, hermanos criminales, que los amamos y que le pedimos a Dios el arrepentimiento para sus corazones, porque la Iglesia no es capaz de odiar, no tiene enemigos. El amor del Señor inspira la acción de Rutilio Grande.”
be murdered in the 1970's for political reasons. In fact his homilies during 1979 are littered with references to Tilo. In one reference he thanked the Society of Jesus for assigning men like Rutilio to El Salvador, and “illuminating so many on the roads to Aguilares.” Jon Sobrino would later write an article calling Rutilio Grande the “proto-martyr” of El Salvador, referring to his death as the one that would signal the rupture between the Catholic church and the state, and marking the start of the greatest conflict in El Salvador. On a national level, Rutilio Grande is still remembered as a martyr for justice, and one can still find pictures of him in Aguilares, the capital of San Salvador, and as far north as Chalatenango. Sobrino is not alone in celebrating his martyrdom. Sobrino still looks at Rutilio Grande as one of his “brothers,” and his picture hangs on the wall facing his desk, along with Oscar Romero and Ignacio Ellacuría. We will examine the importance of Rutilio in Sobrino’s theological writings in the following

222 It is perhaps important to note that there were priests killed previously in El Salvador, but they were all of differing nationalities, Spanish, Panamanian, etc. But Rutilio was in this way, a proto-martyr, at least of the conflict in the 1970's. For more on the link between Grande and Romero see: Carranza, Salvador. Romero-Rutilio: Vidas Encontradas. San Salvador, El Salvador: UCA Editores, 1992.


226 Interview with Jon Sobrino, November 27, 2009.
6.2. Archbishop Romero

Martin Maier, S.J. claims that one can find many similarities between the life of Oscar Romero and Jesus of Nazareth.²²⁷ It is for that reason Sobrino uses the life of Monseñor Romero as an example of a Jesuanic martyr.²²⁸ Maier categorizes the years between 1917 and 1943 as the path to presbyteral ordination for Oscar Arnulfo Romero.²²⁹ He was born August 15, 1917, the second of eight children, in Ciudad Barrios, a rural mountain city in the northeast of El Salvador, on the Honduran border. His parents were both considered “mestizos” meaning that their blood lines were mixed with both native and Spanish blood. The main agricultural work in Ciudad Barrios was tied to coffee, and Romero’s mother had a small piece of land which she used to cultivate coffee to help support the family. His father ran the telegraph in town, and his mother also helped with the mail.²³⁰ As a boy, Oscar was very devoted to the church, and would leave from morning mass to help his mother distribute the letters.²³¹ He also learned how


²²⁸ Interview with Jon Sobrino, November 27, 2009. Sobrino highlighted Rutilio Grande, Romero, the U.S. sisters, and the Jesuits at the UCA as examples of Jesuanic martyrs. We will explore the theological implications of the term in Chapter Four.


²³¹ Maier, 25.
to play the flute and his nickname in town was “the flute boy.” Due to a childhood illness at age four, Oscar was undersized, and was known for his timidness. After completing the third grade, he began an apprenticeship to be a carpenter, but showed little or no aptitude. But he did show great aptitude with all things spiritual and was known for his piety, so at age 13, he went to the minor seminary in San Miguel, run by the Claretian Fathers. During this time, Oscar was always active in church, prayed often, and regularly read the *Imitation of Christ*, by Thomas a Kempis.

In 1937, Romero transferred to the major seminary in San Salvador, run by the Jesuits. He was selected to go to Rome, in great part due to his rhetorical talent. Romero studied at the Gregorian University in Rome and made the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises for the first time. He showed a special interest in spiritual theology, and was especially dedicated to St. Augustine, John of the Cross, and Theresa of Avila. He was ordained to the priesthood on April 4, 1942. He began a doctoral thesis in Rome, but his bishop recalled him to El Salvador in 1943 before he could finish, in part because of

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234 Ibid, 27.

235 Ibid. Martin Maier notes that Romero excelled in a panegyric competition in the seminary. These panegyrics were prepared expositions and common in Jesuit formation. Often the person was asked to prepare a discourse on particular saint or blessed of the Society of Jesus or the Catholic Church.

236 Maier, 28.

World War II. During this period he wrote a short article about priesthood, in which he describes a priest as “being with Christ, a crucified person who redeems. To be with Christ is to be a resurrected person, who gives out resurrection and life.” Both Jesus Delgado and Maier note that many of Romero’s ideals early in his priesthood revolved around the idea of a Christ crucified, a Christ who redeems, and a priest who lives a simple life of pastoral care.

After celebrating his first mass in Barrios, Romero became the pastor of the parish in San Miguel, where he served from 1944-1967. Here, Romero befriended both the poor and the rich. He was inspired by St. Vincent de Paul and lived by the following rule: “I collect donations from the rich to give to the poor. In this way, it alleviates the problems of the poor, and the consciences of the rich.” For many years, the church used this philosophy to justify and to help unjust social situations, not just in El Salvador. Later in his life, Romero would criticize this attitude, and distanced himself from it, especially as archbishop.

In 1967, rumors circulated that Romero would be made auxiliary bishop with the right of succession in his local diocese, but instead, he was “promoted” to San Salvador,

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239 Ibid, 28. “ser con Cristo, un crucificado que redime. Con Cristo ser un resucitado que reparte resurección y vida.” Maier does not cite where he found this short article written in 1940.


241 Ibid, 31. Maier notes that for this reason, many biographers characterize him as a traditional priest, Delgado included. But Maier notes that Romero also experienced a tension with his brother priests, in part because he was intolerant of their faults, but also because he had studied in Rome he had few friends in the local diocesan clergy.
and made secretary of the Episcopal Conference.\textsuperscript{242} The goodbyes in San Miguel were very difficult for him, and it was not an easy departure. He wrote in the last bulletin, “Obedient to the service of the church, I must leave for San Salvador . . . from where I will continue to love and do the good that I can for San Miguel . . .”.\textsuperscript{243} Monseñor Romero would live first in the seminary Saint Joseph of the Mountain, where he met and befriended Rutilio Grande, S.J.\textsuperscript{244} Rutilio would be the one to serve as master of ceremonies when Romero was ordained bishop April 21, 1970.\textsuperscript{245}

After being named bishop, Romero was named secretary of the Episcopal Conference of Central America and Panama. During this time, Romero found himself caught in the middle of the debate concerning the application of Vatican II and the episcopal conference at Medellin. The archbishop Luis Chávez and his auxiliary bishop Arturo Rivera y Damas promoted the Council and Medellin, and attacked the inequality between rich and poor, as well as the issue of land ownership.\textsuperscript{246} Martin Maier notes that in 1971 “Romero made a 180 degree turn and distanced himself from the priests socially

\textsuperscript{242}Maier, Martin. \textit{Monsenor Romero: Maestro De Espiritualidad}. San Salvador, El Salvador: UCA Editores, 2005, 31. The word in Spanish is “ascendido” literally to ascend, or raise one’s stature or position. He was also given the title of a prelate, and from this time forward called “Monseñor Romero.”

\textsuperscript{243}Ibid, 32. “Obediente al servicio de la Iglesia, debo partir a San Salvador . . . desde donde seguiré amando y haciendo.”

\textsuperscript{244}Ibid. “Seminario San José de Montaña.” Both Maier and Delgado report that Grande and Romero maintained a close friendship, and it was difficult for Romero when he had to tell Rutilio that he would not be the new rector of the seminary. Delgado also confirms that it

\textsuperscript{245}Delgado, Jesus. \textit{Oscar A. Romero: Biografía}. 2nd ed. San Salvador, El Salvador: UCA Editores, 1994, 39. Delgado also notes that the seminarians grew to appreciate Romero, and that he was known as a hard worker, typing to all hours of the night.

\textsuperscript{246}Maier, Martin. \textit{Monsenor Romero: Maestro De Espiritualidad}. San Salvador, El Salvador: UCA Editores, 2005, 35. Maier notes that most of the other Salvadoran bishops tended to resist the new reforms, and mostly were critical about too abrupt a change.
and politically committed.” In May of 1975, Romero was named consultor for the Latin American Pontifical Commission. Here he spoke critically of the activities of the Jesuits in the University, especially the political theology of Ellacuría and the “new Christology” of Sobrino. At the time, Romero was speaking as the bishop of the diocese of Santiago de María, and took this opportunity to cement a more conservative line. Maier argues however that between 1975 and 1977 he began to be transformed by his experience with the people as bishop. He cites two Passionist priests who claim that direct contact with the poor, the repression he experienced with a massacre in his diocese, and contact with a center created after Medellín began to transform some of his more conservative leanings.

Before naming a new Archbishop to replace Chavez, the nuncio consulted forty people in the government, private enterprise and women of the higher classes. The consensus choice was Romero who was considered “one of them” and who would guide the church back to a more spiritual place. The nuncio did not consult Archbishop

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247 Maier, Martin. Monsenor Romero: Maestro De Espiritualidad. San Salvador, El Salvador: UCA Editores, 2005, 36. “Romero realizó un giro de 180 grados y se distanció de los sacerdotes comprometidos social y políticamente.” He also wrote a letter of support for the military occupation of the national university, and caused a sensation in 1973 when he wrote a letter reproaching the Jesuits in the Externado San José for teaching marxism. The accusation ended up being investigated and found false, and later as Archbishop he asked for forgiveness.


249 Ibid, 39-41. Maier notes that Romero encountered extreme poverty in some rural parts of the diocese. The massacre took place in Tres Calles in 1975, where members of the National guard tortured and killed six campesinos who were catechists. Instead of denouncing the killing publicly Romero sent a personal letter to General Molina. The Center was “Centro Los Naranjos,” and was founded on the principles of evangelization and formation of social consciousness.

250 Ibid, 43. “Uno de los suyos.”

Chavez, who certainly would have recommended his auxiliary bishop, Rivera. During this time, Jon Sobrino, as well as many others, feared that Romero would be conservative, strongly influenced by *Opus Dei*, against a more progressive stance in line with Medellín.\(^{251}\) For this reason, Archbishop Romero received a rather cold reception when he was ordained on February 22, 1977, but Romero soon began winning people over. He appeared at the seminary and asked for everyone’s help, even Ricardo Urioste who had not attended his ordination, yet was made Vicar General of the new Archbishop.\(^{252}\)

As mentioned earlier, the death of Rutilio Grande on March 12, 1977, greatly impacted the new Archbishop. John Dear, S.J. writes that his conversion really occurred with the death of Rutilio Grande in 1977, and describes it as a “moment of conversion.”\(^{253}\) Sobrino, present at the funeral mass which Romero insisted on celebrating in the middle of the night, said that the death of Rutilio opened the eyes of the Archbishop.\(^{254}\) Salvador Carranza compares the significance of Rutilio to Romero, as

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\(^{252}\) Ibid, 46.


similar to that which John the Baptist had for Jesus.\(^{255}\) The killing of the first native Salvadoran priest caused Romero to celebrate only one Mass in the entire Archdiocese on the 20\(^{th}\) of March as a sign of protest. Over 100,000 people attended the Mass, which spilled out from the cathedral into the main square and surrounding streets.\(^{256}\) In this Mass, Romero preached that it is Christ who evangelizes and gives his body and blood for the world in the Eucharist and “The only force that can save is Jesus who speaks to us of the real liberation.”\(^{257}\)

But Romero also tried to be a force of reconciliation at this time. When a government minister was kidnapped, Mauricio Borgonovo Pohl, the Archbishop tried to help in the negotiations. When the minister’s body was found, Romero presided at the funeral, as well as at the funeral of Fr. Alfonso Navarro the following day.\(^{258}\) Maier claims that within the first three months, Archbishop Romero had transformed into a


\(^{256}\) Ibid, 49. The editor of Romero’s homilies notes that he wanted to show unity, a sign of hurt, and to protest the assassination of Rutilio Grande. He also announced that he would refuse to participate in any official government act until they acknowledged the crime.


\(^{258}\) Maier, Martin. *Monsenor Romero: Maestro De Espiritualidad*. San Salvador, El Salvador: UCA Editores, 2005, 50. The government would assert that the church had something to do with the death of Borgonovo Pohl, and Navarro was apparently killed in retaliation. The killers of Navarro allegedly cried out “Be a patriot, kill a priest.” “Haga patria. ¡Mate un cura!”
different bishop, one who looked to encounter the people and to suffer as they suffered.\textsuperscript{259}

In December of 1978, Romero was nominated for the Nobel prize by 118 members of the British parliament, but Mother Theresa of Calcutta would win the prize in 1979. In 1978 and 1979, Monseñor fought many battles, but mostly with the conservative government, bishops in El Salvador who didn’t support him, and even with Rome. Sobrino writes about Romero during this time period, and was impressed by the way he confronted the repression. After a young Jesuit was captured Romero refused to sign a letter saying he was not mistreated.\textsuperscript{260} After the army entered Aguilares expelling three Jesuits and killing hundreds of \textit{campesinos}, he went there to denounce the atrocities. In his homily in Aguilares Romero prophetically preached, “You have converted the town into a jail and a place of torture.”\textsuperscript{261}

Sobrino claims that Romero made a great impact on his own theology at this time. He reflects back on the Eucharistic Procession in Aguilares, when people paused in front of the soldier’s guarding the mayor’s office, the Archbishop yelled out “Go Ahead” and they walked right past the soldier and the mayor’s office.\textsuperscript{262} Sobrino remarks, “I also remember that day the impact Mons. Romero had for my own theology. The way he

\textsuperscript{259}Maier, Martin. \textit{Monsenor Romero: Maestro De Espiritualidad}. San Salvador, El Salvador: UCA Editores, 2005, 51. He notes that Romero turned down the offer of some businessmen to build a new palace for the archbishop, instead he moved out of the Archbishop’s traditional residence and into a small room in the cancer section of the hospital. The sisters who lived there would construct a special set of rooms for him on the 1\textsuperscript{st} floor, which he moved into on August 15, his birthday.


\textsuperscript{262}Maier, Martin. \textit{Monsenor Romero: Maestro De Espiritualidad}. San Salvador, El Salvador: UCA Editores, 2005, 36. Romero cried out “Adelante” and all of the people took courage and kept walking. For Sobrino, this moment was another example of Mons. Romero’s transformation into a Salvadoran leader.
celebrated the Eucharist was for me a revelation; and was . . . a kind of (Eucharistic) theology class. All of the theological themes were known, but Mons. Romero elaborated them in actu with such truth and creativity that he explained what the Eucharist is better than many long years of study.”

Gustavo Gutierrez says the main task of the theology of liberation is to tell the poor that God loves them. Romero had a great love for the poor, and attempted to explain how much God loves them through his teaching office as bishop.

The last time Sobrino saw Mons. Romero was on Sobrino’s return from a meeting of bishops and theologians in Sao Paulo, Brasil, in February of 1980. Pedro Casaldiglia sent words of encouragement with Sobrino back to El Salvador and Romero sent a letter back on March 24 just a few hours before his death. In the letter, he thanks Mons. Pedro for his backing and hopes their fraternal mission continues “to be an expression of the hopes and anguish of the poor, happy to run with Jesus the same risks, for identifying ourselves with the causes of the dispossessed. In the light of the faith, I feel completely united in affect, prayer, and the triumph of the Resurrection.”

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263 Maier, Martin. Monsenor Romero: Maestro De Espiritualidad. San Salvador, El Salvador: UCA Editores, 2005, 37. “Y también recuerdo de aquel día el impacto que me causó Mons. Romero para mi propia teología. La forma como celebró aquella eucaristía fue para mí muy reveladora; fue también . . . como una clase de teología. En aquella celebración fueron apareciendo los temas tradicionales de la teología de la eucaristía . . . pero Mons. Romero los elaboró in actu con tanta verdad y tanta creatividad que me esclarecieron qué es la eucharistía mejor que largos años de estudio.” Italics Sobrino’s emphasis.

264 Sobrino, Jon. Monseñor Romero. 3rd ed. San Salvador, El Salvador: UCA Editores 1995, 46. Sobrino claims that the Archbishop was also invited to this gathering, but did not want to leave the country because of the intensifying violence.

265 Ibid, 47.

266 Sobrino, Jon. Monseñor Romero. 3rd ed. San Salvador, El Salvador: UCA Editores 1995, 47. “siendo expresión de las esperanzas y angustias de los pobres, alegres de correr como Jesús los mismos riesgos, por identificarnos con las causas de los disposeídos. A la luz de la fe, siéntame estrechamente unido en el afecto, la oración y el triunfo de la Resurrección.”
last month of his life, Romero consciously chose to run the same risks as the poor. By standing in solidarity with the poor, Romero would make the ultimate sacrifice.

Starting in February of 1980, Romero received almost continuous death threats. In spite of these death threats he continued to denounce the repression in the Sunday homily on February 24. He preached,

“I take advantage of this first Sunday of Lent . . . to energetically protest for this new repressive act, which is not only against the Church, but also goes directly against the people, already what the authors of this attempt want to avoid is that the people will know the truth, that they have criteria to judge what is happening in the country, and reach a unity to say definitively, ‘Enough!’, and to put an end to the exploitation and domination of the Salvadoran oligarchy.”

Near the end of the homily he challenged the rich and claims that with real liberation comes human dignity and human rights. He explains, “When (the powerful) try to torture, kill, massacre so that the powerful might subjugate, what tremendous idolatry they are offering to the god of power, the god of money. So many victims, so much blood, that God, the real God, the author of life of the people, will collect from them a great sum for the idolatry of power.”

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267 Delgado, Jesus. *Oscar A. Romero: Biografía*. 2nd ed. San Salvador, El Salvador: UCA Editores, 1994, 185. All of these threats were anonymous. But even the nuncio, while in Costa Rica caught wind of these death threats and on February 23 told Romero that he thought these new threats should be taken seriously.


269 Cavada, Miguel, ed. *Homilias: Monsenor Oscar A. Romero*. Vol. 6. San Salvador, El Salvador: UCA Editores, 2009, 309. “Cuando se trata de torturar, de matar, de masacrar para que se subyuguen los hombres al poder, qué tremenda idolatría que le está ofreciendo al dios poder, al dios dinero. Tantas víctimas, tanta sangre, que Dios, el verdadero Dios, el autor de la vida de los hombres, se lo va a cobrar bien caro a esos idólatras del poder.” I add the phrase (the powerful) because it is inferred from the context of the previous sentence, “los poderosos.”
last months made some people, especially those rich in wealth or with ties to right wing political power, very uncomfortable. Delgado reports that the very rich and powerful in the country, many in the military, and even some bishops who accused Romero of being a subversive, were all in agreement — Romero had to go.270

Forty eight hours before his death, a team of Romero’s closest counselors met to discuss his Sunday homily and a letter he had received signed by 40 priests asking if he would soften the tone of his denouncements, and instead concentrate on a message of hope.271 Delgado asserts that he was with a group of people who lunched with Romero the day before the homily, and at one point tears formed in Romero’s eyes, as he spoke about his closest friends, both priests and laity, and shared with them about the seriousness of the death threats.272 Many had never seen him so sad, and one women suggested he take more precautions for his own safety.273 Near the end of his last Sunday homily, Romero made a special plea to the military. He spoke gravely,

“I would like to make a call in a special manner to the men of the Army, and concretely to the bases of the National Guard, to the police, and to the jails: Brothers, you are of our same people, you kill your own campesino brothers and, against the order to kill another man, should prevail the law of God which says: ‘Do not kill.’ No soldier is obligated to obey an order against the law of God. An immoral law, no one should complete it. Already it is time to recover your conscience . . . In the name of God, then,

270 Delgado, Jesus. Oscar A. Romero: Biografía. 2nd ed. San Salvador, El Salvador: UCA Editeores, 1994, 186. Delgado insinuates that even some conservative bishops backed the plan to assassinate the Archbishop, though he cites no letters or testimony as evidence.

271 Ibid, 195.

272 Ibid, 198.

and in the name of this suffering people, whose wailing rises to the heavens each day more tumultuous, I beg you, I pray to you, I order you in the name of God: Stop the repression!"\textsuperscript{274}

The next morning, Romero went to pray and celebrate mass for the sisters in the hospital as was his usual custom. Delgado reports that he vested for mass in a lightweight white alb, which normally was the signal that he was going to the beach.\textsuperscript{275} The sisters joked with the Archbishop that he should take them with him. He purportedly responded, “Where I am going, you cannot go.”\textsuperscript{276} That morning the death threats increased, and even the Jesuit radio station at the UCA received threats for airing the homily, one official saying that the Archbishop’s words were in fact a crime.\textsuperscript{277} The sisters were right, and the Archbishop did in fact spend the day at the beach with some priest friends. On the way back he stopped by Santa Tecla, and went to confession with his spiritual director who lived there.\textsuperscript{278} They dropped him off at the sisters’ place at the hospital of the Divine Providence, and he just had enough time to shower before mass. The mass began promptly at six, and during the offertory as he was elevating the host, a

\textsuperscript{274}Cavada, Miguel, ed. Homilias: Monsenor Oscar A. Romero. Vol. 6. San Salvador, El Salvador: UCA Editores, 2009, 453. To date, no one has done a complete analysis of the great theological treasure found in Romero’s homilies, pastoral letters, and spiritual diary. Perhaps one day, if and when Archbishop Romero is declared a saint, more theological analysis will be done. The focus on Romero tends to be on his martyrdom, and some in El Salvador for political and ecclesiological reasons still don’t want to acknowledge his importance in the church.


\textsuperscript{276}Ibid, 202. While Delgado is the only one to report this banter between him and the sisters, I have no reason to doubt it. Maier does not quote it, but notes that many in El Salvador speak of the similarity between Jesus’ last hours, knowing he would die, and Romero’s last hours.


\textsuperscript{278}Maier, Martin. Monseñor Romero: Maestro De Espiritualidad. San Salvador, El Salvador: UCA Editores, 2005, 84. Maier does not mention if this confession was an aberration, or a normal occurrence for his day off.
shot rang out which would take his life.\textsuperscript{279} He fell to the ground and several sisters rushed to his side attempting to revive him. He was rushed to the clinic, but it was too late.\textsuperscript{280} During mass the next day, Fr. Ricardo Urioste expressed what most people were feeling. “They have killed our father, they have killed our pastor, they have killed our prophet and killed our guide. It is as if each one of us has lost a part of our own self.”\textsuperscript{281}

Sobrino speaks of the death of Romero as if it were the death of a mentor or spiritual father. For now, I want to assert that at the very least the life and death of Monseñor Romero greatly influences Sobrino’s theology. Sobrino sees Romero as following in the line of Medellín and Puebla, especially concerning the liberation of all types of slavery and the preferential option for the poor.\textsuperscript{282} In Oscar Romero, we find an example of the word of God who wants to unify the church and its people. For Sobrino, Romero was “word of God” for El Salvador.\textsuperscript{283} In addition, Mons. Romero’s actions and words continue to inspire theologians to find meaning in his death. Sobrino suggests that theologians should be inspired to find “the presence of God in the poor, and the faith of the poor and the martyrs.”\textsuperscript{284} By situating Christian theology in the place of the poor, we

\textsuperscript{279}Delgado, Jesus. \textit{Oscar A. Romero: Biografía}. 2nd ed. San Salvador, El Salvador: UCA Editores, 1994, 205. Romero did not normally celebrate this mass, proof that the assassins had intimate knowledge and access to his comings and goings that day.

\textsuperscript{280}Maier, Martin. \textit{Monseñor Romero: Maestro De Espiritualidad}. San Salvador, El Salvador: UCA Editores, 2005, 85. In El Salvador, they distinguish between public hospitals, and private clinics. Since it was the archbishop, they rushed him to the closest clinic so he would receive the best care.

\textsuperscript{281}Ibid, 86. Mons. Urioste is in charge of Romero’s canonization process.


\textsuperscript{283}Ibid, 173. “Mons. Romero fue \textit{palabra de Dios} para El Salvador.” Italics are Sobrino’s emphasis. Obviously, Sobrino does not suggest that Romero was Jesus, the Word of God, but rather spoke prophetically to the people of El Salvador, and incarnated the word of God in an exemplary fashion.

\textsuperscript{284}Ibid, 178.
find a different methodological approach. Sobrino suggests that because of Romero we have an example of where theologians should start their reflection. Christian theology should be done with and for the poor.  

Finally, Sobrino suggests that Romero shows the importance of a life of conversion. Theologians should consider that they are providing a service to others, and one which requires humility, gratitude, and the enjoyment of truth and evangelization.  

Romero always hoped his time as Archbishop would affirm that God loves us and wants to save us.  

With his life and death, Romero gives theologians a starting point, a location and a trajectory.

6.3. The U.S. Churchwomen

With the election of Ronald Reagan in the 1980 November elections, the violence again escalated sharply in El Salvador. The army looked forward to the promise of more military aid, and a more favorable President than under the Carter regime, known for its human rights record. Hundreds of campesinos were killed by the death squads, who even targeted lay church leaders such as catechists, parish council members, and leaders in Christian Base communities. Since the mid-70's foreign missionaries from Spain,

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285Sobrino, Monseñor Romero, 182-183.


287Sobrino, 187. Sobrino quotes Romero’s homily from February 23, 1979. “Simplemente quiero ser el constructor de una gran afirmación: la afirmación de Dios que nos ama y nos quiere salvar.” An ex-CIA psy-ops agent admitted to me that church leaders were listed as targets if they were “subversive” or as a last resort if they opposed U.S. interests. The agent asked for anonymity. Interview November 27, 2009.

288Often these lay church leaders were also preaching a message of social justice, peace and non-violence. They were targets because of their leadership. The death squads wanted to instill fear in the general population. The base communities are known as “Comunidades de Base” in Spanish.
France, the United States and other countries had been harassed and were at risk for deportation. Parishioners, and even kids in their youth groups were sometimes stopped by army patrols or right-wing paramilitary groups and interrogated as to whether priests and religious were training members of the guerrilla or harboring weapons.\(^{289}\)

Four U.S. churchwomen were missioned to El Salvador and attempted to work and minister in the midst of this civil war in El Salvador. Since books have been written about the lives of Ita Ford, Jean Donovan, Dorothy Kazel, and Maura Clarke, I will focus on the events leading up to their deaths, and the significance of their deaths in El Salvador, and for Jon Sobrino.\(^{290}\) Ita Ford and Maura Clarke, Maryknoll Sisters, were missioned to work in Chalatenango in the remote northern region of El Salvador, one of the hardest hit regions before and during the civil war. In 1980 the region also suffered greatly from the effects of a hurricane. Dorothy Kazel, an Ursuline sister, and Jean Donovan, a Maryknoll Missioner, worked in the areas surrounding the port city of La Libertad, a parish which even today has one main parish in town with over 50 countryside chapels and 50,000 parishioners, with only four priests to attend them.\(^{291}\) All of these church women knew each other since they attended national and diocesan

\(^{289}\) Interview with Fr. Paul Schindler, Diocese of Cleveland, pastor of La Libertad parish 1972-1982, 2005 to present, December 2, 2009. Fr. Paul asserts that the soldiers knew the foreign missionaries had nothing to do with the guerrilla forces and never found any weapons at their parish or any of those run by Maryknoll missioners. The soldiers and right-wing paramilitary forces simply used it as an excuse for harassment.


\(^{291}\) Interview with Fr. Paul Schindler, December 2, 2009. The city of La Libertad and the surrounding region has long been associated with the “Cleveland Team” a mission team made up of priests from the Cleveland Diocese, religious sisters, and lay volunteer missioners.
meetings of religious and lay missionaries. In fact they had a small reunion in La Libertad, when Maura arrived in the country after having served in Nicaragua for many years. In November, after the drowning death of Sister Carla a Maryknoll sister who worked with Ita Ford in Chalatenango, Dorothy, Jean, Maura and Ita all gathered at a little beach house near La Libertad, to grieve, recoup, and plan their next mission strategies. While they were all aware of the escalating violence, they did not believe that they themselves were in immediate danger. The thought was since Jean and Maura were blonde haired and blue eyed, they would not have any trouble with roadblocks.

In the meantime, the Assumption sisters working in Chalatenango began receiving death threats, and moved out of their convent and into the residence of Maura and Ita. In late November, Ita and Maura made plans to attend a regional conference for members of their order. Dorothy and Jean agreed to pick them up at the airport on December 2nd.

Meanwhile back in Chalatenango on December first, the sacristan of the parish

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293 Ibid, 115. Dorothy and Jean welcomed Maura to the country in La Libertad, and Ita came down from Chalatenango. After a series of meetings, Ita dropped Maura off at her new home in the Chalatenango region, and continued on to her remote community site, where she lived with Sister Carla. Carla would drown when their truck foundered in a rainy Chalatenango river in November of 1980. Ita Ford survived when Carla pushed her out of the car as it submerged.


295 Ibid, 130. Some of the sisters said they were going to bleach their hair, after seeing how easy Jean and Maura passed through roadblocks. Fr. Paul Schindler noted that while Ita was very quiet, she was fearless in terms of advocating for people in her parish, and that Jean Donovan was equally fearless when it came to driving in the most desperate parts of the country.

296 Ibid, 132. The Sisters house was right next to the police station, so besides the death threats, they were afraid that the police station might be bombed by the rebel forces.

297 Ibid, 133.
where the sisters served was discreetly called aside by a friend and shown a death list which had his name, the names of the parish driver, cook, Fr. Efraim Lopez, the Assumption Sisters, Maura and Ita. That same day, Fr. Lopez received a letter accusing all the Church workers of being communists, stirring up trouble, and turning the people against the government. After a meeting of 22 Maryknoll sisters from Panama, Nicaragua and El Salvador, Maura and Ita, unaware of the threats, started their trek back to El Salvador. Four Maryknoll sisters, Teresa Alexander, Madeline Dorsey, Maura Clarke and Ita Ford were inconveniently booked on separate flights. Unfortunately this poor scheduling would mean an extra round trip to the airport for Sister Dorothy Kazel and Jean Donovan. At four o’clock on December second, Dorothy and Jean picked up Madeline and Teresa and took them back to their jeep, which they had left in La Libertad. Unbeknownst to them, a National Guardsmen on duty was watching the women, and placed a call to his local commander. When Jean and Maura returned to meet the 6 o’clock flight, they found it was delayed an hour. The local guardsmen made another call, and the local commander dispatched five guardsmen for an unspecified mission.

Finally at about seven o’clock, the flight from Managua arrived, and as soon as Ita

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298 Noone, Judith M. *The Same Fate as the Poor*. New York: Maryknoll Sisters Publication, 1984, 139.

299 Ibid. The great irony of course is that the government needed no help turning people against them. More death squads were active in Chalatenango and more massacres occurred there than in any other region except Morazán, site of the famous El Mozote massacre in December 1981 where over 800 people were killed by the death squads.

300 Noone, Judith M. *The Same Fate as the Poor*. New York: Maryknoll Sisters Publication, 1984, 1.

301 Ibid.

302 Ibid.
and Maura cleared customs, the four churchwomen piled into the church van and drove off for La Libertad. They were never seen alive again.\footnote{Carrigan, Ana. \textit{Salvador Witness: The Life and Calling of Jean Donovan.} New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984, 245. This is the official version of what happened, they left in a van, and were stopped at a road block, then taken to a nearby station for questioning. Fr. Paul Schindler, who testified at the trial of the Guardsmen, claims that they never got into the van. Parishioners at the airport claim that the Guardsmen were waiting for them at the airport, and they were taken straight into custody. The van was later disposed of. Ita and Maura were likely the targets, and Jean and Dorothy were taken to leave no witnesses.}

Most likely they were taken to a nearby guard station, where they were raped and tortured. From the guard station, they were driven up a remote road past the village of San Pedro Nauhalco.\footnote{Carrigan, Ana. \textit{Salvador Witness: The Life and Calling of Jean Donovan.} New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984, 247. Probably the women were taken to the National Guard station in Zacatecaluca where they were raped and tortured, then driven up past San Pedro.} About six kilometers up this remote dirt road, they were ordered out of the vehicle, shot and killed, and left alongside the road. The next morning local police were called, and they came and buried the bodies.\footnote{Interview with Fr Paul Schindler, December 2, 2009. To have a vehicle coming up the road at that late hour was so unusual people notice, and after the National Guard had left some of the locals went out and saw the bodies, but were afraid to call any local authorities. Instead, after seeing the bodies buried, they called the local parish priest, who called the Archbishop. Fr. Paul was with the first church delegation who came to identify the bodies.}

In the early morning hours of December 4th, 36 hours after the women had disappeared, the parish at La Libertad received the horrible news. Since parish and Maryknoll officials had been planning to meet with Ambassador White that day, they called him to see if he would meet them at the burial site. Two of the embassy security men went down to the local justice of the peace to get permission to dig up the bodies.\footnote{Carrigan, Ana. \textit{Salvador Witness: The Life and Calling of Jean Donovan.} New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984, 249. Fr. Paul commented that it was illegal in El Salvador to touch a grave site without official permission.} The first body they found was Jean Donovan, then Maura, then Dorothy and
finally Ita. Finally Ambassador White was fuming with rage and remarked, “We’re going to do this one right. We’re not going to let the military get away with this.” In fact, Salvadoran government officials never really cooperated, and once Carter left office, the case was never fully investigated by the government, military or national guard, who were of course complicit in their deaths. In the tradition of the Maryknoll Missioners, Maura and Ita are buried in Chalatenango, the place where they ministered. Dorothy Kazel is buried in Cleveland near her Mother House, and Jean Donovan was buried in Sarasota, FL where her parents had retired.

The deaths of these four religious women had an immediate effect on the international awareness of the problems in El Salvador and especially in the United States. While the official State Department position, submitted as testimony to the Senate Committee by Alexander Haig, claimed that the sisters had run a road block, we now know that Ita Ford and Maura Clarke were most likely the targets, and that they probably never even got in the van. While U.S. military aid was slowed because of the attention for a time, as early as January of 1981 the portion of military aid which had

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307 Carrigan, Ana. **Salvador Witness: The Life and Calling of Jean Donovan.** New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984, 250. Eyewitnesses report that Jean’s face was unrecognizable because of the bullet wound, Jean and Ita were badly bruised all over their bodies, and that the stench of all four bodies was terrible. Today there is a small chapel constructed on the site, and a memorial marker placed where the bodies were found. A mass of memorial is celebrated each year there on December second and the chapel is now used regularly by the local parish.

308 Ibid, 251. This quote was also caught on tape in the film “Roses in December” a documentary about the events. Because Fr. Paul Schindler had been giving interviews to CNN, BBC and other news services, several camera crews came with them to document the events.

309 While Jean Donovan was a member of the Cleveland Team since she met the missionary group while at Case Western, she actually grew up in Connecticut. Fr. Paul Schindler notes that the Reagan Administration added insult to injury when they sent the Donovan family a $3500 dollar bill for transporting the body back to the States using a government plane. Interview December 2, 2009.
been suspended in December was resumed. While the deaths of these committed missionaries did bring international attention for a time, the attention did not greatly impact the death squads and government forces who continued to carry out a mission of intimidation, torture and massacre. These four women are still remembered and revered in the communities where they ministered, and by various groups in the United States. But outside of Chalatenango, La Libertad, the small community near San Pedro, and intellectual communities like the UCA, in the city of San Salvador and in many regions of the country, these four women have been like many anonymous martyrs, largely forgotten.

Sobrino does include them in his litany of martyrs, as exemplary women who died for their faith. He claims that they form part “of an interminable list of priests, seminarians students, campesinos, workers, professionals and intellectuals.” Sobrino writes with indignation as he paraphrases the psalm “How Long, Oh Lord” and at the same time a decisive resolve in the promise of what is to come: “Be Joyful Jerusalem, liberation is at hand.” In this article, Sobrino both laments the loss of these four

310 Carrigan, Ana. Salvador Witness: The Life and Calling of Jean Donovan. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984, 277. The author notes that the increase of military aid coincided with the FMLN offensive on January 10, which was quickly put down by the Salvadoran army. Carter was also given erroneous information about “boatloads of arms and volunteers” entering the country from Nicaragua, an assertion which later proved unfounded. Fr. Paul Schindler is even more precise, saying that Ita Ford was probably the target, since she publicly criticized the local police and National Guard for their practice of torture and leaving dead bodies in the streets. Interview with Fr. Paul Schindler, December 9, 2009.

311 After the deaths of the sisters, the number of deaths and disappearances slowed for a time. But then the repression continued. For example one of the worst massacres in the history of the Civil War occurred at the River Sumpül in Chalatenango, when at least 600 civilians were killed attempting to flee government forces.

313 Ibid. “¿Hasta Cuándo, Señor?” “Alegrate Jerusalén, la liberación está cerca.”
missionary women, while hoping for the coming liberation of all Salvadorans. In these four women, we have another example of just and innocent people who are assassinated, so we see Christ crucified in these women. He writes, “This time Christ who has died (can be seen) in these four women, religious, and North American. And for this (reason) the darkness of this crime is accompanied by a special light . . . These four women are Christ who died.”

The bodies of these four women represent all the men and women who have been deprived of their human rights and oppressed in El Salvador. They show us the path to liberation. In a special way, these four sisters “have united the Salvadoran people by uniting with the Salvadoran woman. A woman who is the creator of fortitude does not abandon the one who suffers, just as these four sisters did not abandon the people, in spite of serious threats.”

For Sobrino, these four religious women are Christ, and give the people of El Salvador an example of the good the United States can bring to El Salvador. Instead of the almighty dollar, imperial goals, and exploitation, they brought faith in Jesus, love of neighbor, and a search for justice. The Maryknoll sisters reminded the highest dignitaries sent by President Carter to El Salvador, that not only an investigation into the deaths of these four women is needed, but also an investigation into

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315 Ibid, 4. Las cuatro hermanas se han unido al pueblo salvadoreña al unirse a la mujer salvadoreña. La mujer es creadora de fortaleza, que no abandona al que sufre, como no abandonaron a su pueblo las cuatro hermanas, a pesar de las serias amenazas.

316 Ibid, 5.
the genocide of 10,000 Salvadorans!\textsuperscript{317} In this way, Sobrino welcomes all Christians who are like the sisters, and, for the attitude that led to their martyrdom, the Church in El Salvador can “only thank them from the deepest part of its heart.”\textsuperscript{318} But Sobrino sees not just Christ crucified, but also the Risen Christ in these four women. They give the Salvadoran people hope in their eventual liberation. They are a visible sign of the presence of God and so the last word should be one of thanks. He writes, “Our last word must be thanks. With Maura, Ita, Dorothy and Jean, God passed through El Salvador.”\textsuperscript{319} For Sobrino, these four women represent both Christ crucified and Christ resurrected. For this reason they are examples of Jesuanic martyrs.\textsuperscript{320}

6.4. El Mozote

In December of 1981, the FMLN warned people of the area of Mozote in Morazán that a military invasion was imminent. Because the people were largely evangelical Christians and were not FMLN sympathizers they felt they had nothing to fear from the army.\textsuperscript{321} But on December 11, “the U.S. trained Atlacatl Brigade rounded up the people, separated the men, women and children, and executed them. The number

\textsuperscript{317}Sobrino, Jon. "El Martirio De Maura, Ita, Dorothy Y Jean." Diakonia 16 (1980): 5. Sobrino quotes Peggy Healey, a Maryknoll sister here, who presented to the embassy officials a letter demanding justice not only for the four U.S. churchwomen, but for all of the Salvadorans who were killed or made to disappear in the first year of the civil war.


\textsuperscript{319}Ibid. “Nuestra última palabra tiene que ser: gracias. Con Maura, Ita, Dorothy, y Jean, Dios pasó por El Salvador.”

\textsuperscript{320}Interview with Jon Sobrino, November 27, 2009.

\textsuperscript{321}Berryman, Phillip. \textit{Stubborn Hope: Religion, Politics and Revolution in Central America}. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1994, 69. The FMLN as mentioned above, was a left-wing political party, but also responsible for the guerrilla military force. Most of these guerrillas had no more than an elementary school education, while the leaders tended to be university elites.
of people killed in Mozote and the surrounding villages number over 700.”322 This massacre, and others which did not lessen in frequency until the change of government in 1984, terrorized the civilian population.323 Most of those killed in the massacres were not active guerrilla fighters but civilians. With the election of a more centrist President in Duarte in 1984, some of the human rights violations stopped and there were fewer recorded massacres. The Catholic Church also softened its criticism of the new government.

But U.S. involvement, with Reagan’s bias of fighting the cold war on all fronts, deepened. Berryman reports, “The 1984 military aid of $243.5 million was equal to the total of the previous three years. With that aid the Salvadoran military shifted to a new strategy aimed at halting the FMLN’s ability to mass large forces . . . As death squad-style killings declined, the numbers of civilians killed by air and artillery attack increased, although these were harder for human rights monitors based in El Salvador to document.”324 In 1985, the kidnaping of President Duarte’s daughter, friend, and a

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322 Berryman, Phillip. *Stubborn Hope: Religion, Politics and Revolution in Central America*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1994, 69. Forensics experts from Argentina who examined the remains estimate the numbers to be much higher but at least 800. When one visits the site today, the museum has a collection of all the bullets, some of which still have the U.S. manufacturers name on them. One museum tour guide claims that there may be a mass grave in the forest near the town, but up until now the government has not permitted any excavation in the surrounding area. One eyewitness claims that the torture and killing started before December 11 and actually lasted three days.

323 There are more than 30 reported massacres between 1980 and 1984, and these are the documented cases, and do not represent even more remote areas which could account for even more cases. El Mozote in Morazán and Rio Sumpúl in Chalatenango are the most infamous because at least 600 people were massacred in each place. For a history of the massacres see Guillen, María, ed. *Masacres: Trazos De La Historia Salvadorena Contados Por Las Víctimas*. San Salvador, El Salvador: Centro de Derechos Humanos, 2006. For an eyewitness account of the Mozote massacre see Rufina Amaya, Mark Danner, and Carlos Henriquez. *Luciernagas En El Mozote*. San Salvador, El Salvador: Ediciones Museo de la Palabra, 1996.

number of small town mayors paralyzed the government for 40 days. Archbishop Rivera, Romero’s successor, and Ignacio Ellacuría, rector of the UCA, both helped negotiate a settlement and his daughter was returned, but “Duarte’s effectiveness was plainly diminished. After ignoring the plight of the mayors, he had suspended all other matters to rescue his daughter.”

In early 1986, members of the UCA published a collection of analytical articles summarizing the situation of the country. One of the reports suggested that “having poured $2 billion dollars into El Salvador the United States was operating as a kind of ‘super-government.’ The country’s formal rulers were simply managers . . .

Berryman reports that in 1985 and 1986 government troops lodged major offensives in what was called “Operation Phoenix.” He writes, “(Archbishop) Rivera himself witnessed A-37 attacks against civilians in the village of Guarjila, Chalatengo, on a pastoral visit there in December. He later commented that this area now had only a few hundred occupants whereas there had once been 10,000.”

Throughout 1986 numerous peace initiatives were tried but none lead to any positive results. In 1987, a U.S. Congress study found that the mainspring of the Salvadoran economy was not its production of coffee and other exports but U.S. aid.

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326 Ibid, 83.

327 Ibid, 85. Similarly the population of nearby Guazapa had declined from 15,000 to 2,000 during this time.


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elections, Duarte’s Christian Democratic party received a resounding defeat from the ARENA party. With ARENA now in power, violence against labor and popular organizations increased. Berryman reports, “During the first four months of 1988, sixty four union labor leaders were murdered, captured, or ‘disappeared.’” When Duarte was diagnosed with cancer in May of 1988, he had already lost most of his power to govern effectively. The 1989 presidential campaign featured Alfredo Cristiani, a businessman educated at Georgetown University. But many feared Cristiani was a front for D’Aubisson who a priest reportedly saw at a rally saying he would “take care of this Archbishop, these Jesuits, these other priests and especially these foreigners who are ruining the minds of our children.” During the first few month of 1989, the FMLN murdered several right-wing or military figures, and ARENA party officials stepped up their accusations against church officials. Berryman gives evidence that Vice-President elect Merino accused Fr. David Sánchez of associating with a commando group, and ARENA politicians accused Jesuit Segundo Montes of defending FMLN terrorism. Near the end of 1989, the guerrillas were gaining more and more territory near the city,

329 Berryman, Phillip. Stubborn Hope: Religion, Politics and Revolution in Central America. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1994, 92. Even Duarte’s son was defeated in this election. ARENA was a right wing political party.

330 Ibid. Just as in Chile, Argentina and other countries described earlier, those who disappeared, most often never reappeared, at least alive.

331 Ibid, 94. He also referenced the 30,000 killed in 1932 by government troops, and said he was willing to kill even more today. D’Aubisson was linked in U.S. government documents as the one behind the death of Archbishop Romero. Many in El Salvador believe that it was his bodyguard who was the sharpshooter who killed Romero. Interview with Regina Mendes, December 4, 2009, Carmelite Hospital and Romero Foundation board member.

and appeared to be preparing for a major offensive on the capital of El Salvador. The Salvadoran military controlled important areas of the city, but became alarmed when the rebel forces descended from the nearby volcano into the upper class neighborhood of Escalón.\footnote{Berryman, Phillip. \textit{Stubborn Hope: Religion, Politics and Revolution in Central America}. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1994, 98. Likely many families of government officials and high-ranking military officers lived in this neighborhood. This ability of the guerilla forces to attack a neighborhood considered safe, caused many in the government and the military to think they were losing the war.}

6.5. Martyrs of the UCA

On November 13, Salvadoran military forces entered the UCA, the Jesuit University José Simeon Cañas under the pretext of looking weapons. They entered the Jesuit community and conducted a room by room search. The soldiers left, having done minimal damage to the Jesuit residence.\footnote{It was later suspected that this was in fact a reconnaissance mission, and they were looking for Ignacio Ellacuria, the university rector’s room. Ellacuria was not home at the time of the search.} In the following days, the number of troops increased in the area, and especially around the UCA.\footnote{UCA Centro Romero Archives. There is a map in the museum of the Centro Romero which details the location of Salvadoran Army troops in the days leading up to November 16. One can clearly see that members of the infamous Atiacatl Battalion controlled the area around the UCA and were supported by Puma and Jaguar Battalions, also elite troops. More than half of the Atlacatl members were trained at the now infamous School of the Americas at Fort Benning, while the rest were trained by U.S. military advisors in El Salvador. See also Jack Nelson-Pallmayer’s \textit{School of Assassins: Guns, Greed, and Globalization}. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2001.} Joe Mulligan, S.J. notes that on November 15, “an army officer posted in the UCA neighborhood commented to a Jesuit that there was going to be a lot of movement in the afternoon or evening. About 3 p.m. some 120-130 members of the Atiacatl (battalion) entered Loyola Center, the Jesuit retreat house . . . At about 7 p.m., after the fall of curfew, the men moved out and headed
down to the UCA campus.” At 11 P.M. on November 15th, a small group stayed after a meeting of the Joint Command at their headquarters. The Defense Minister’s report states that all of the members of the high command were present, including President Cristiani. At the same time, Lt. Espinoza was ordered to report to Col. Benavides in the Military Academy where he was told, “This is a situation where it is us or them; we are going to begin with the ringleaders. Within our sector we have the university and Ellacuría is there.” Over fifty soldiers would enter the UCA campus that night, though not all played a direct part in the assassination. Some of the soldiers entered the Theological Reflection Center, now the Centro Monseñor Romero, and burned parts of the offices, machine gunned computers, shot up a portrait of Romero, and burned another in effigy. Between one and two A.M. they pounded at the outside door of the Jesuit residence. Segundo Montes, the superior of the community, cried out to them that they could enter at the main door and he would open it for them. Five of the Jesuit

336 Joseph E. Mulligan, S.J. *The Jesuit Martyrs of El Salvador: Celebrating the Anniversaries.* Baltimore, Maryland: Fortkamp Publishing Company, 1994, 7. Mulligan also utilizes the Jesuit provincial’s report at the time, and comments that an eyewitness in the retreat center overheard the soldiers speaking, that they wanted to rid the country of foreigners, and that Ellacuría was the target.

337 Ibid, 10. What is not confirmed is how much Cristiani was informed about the raid. There are also conflicting reports as to whether or not two or three U.S. “advisors” were present at the meeting.

338 Ibid, 11. Espinoza was a graduate of the Externado San José, the Jesuit high school in San Salvador. He was later horrified to learn that the operation would put his former high school rector Segundo Montes in grave danger, and much of the later eyewitness testimony comes from him. Jesuits at the UCA say he has never gotten over the guilt of what occurred that night.


340 This information was provided on a tour of the Romero Center, the Jesuit Garden, and the old Jesuit residence. This is also provided to each guest of the center in written form in a small tour pamphlet. The Jesuits had held a community meeting late that night, but all of the Jesuits were sleeping, except Martin-Baró, a known night owl, who was still fully dressed.
community members were led out to the lawn outside the community, while Lopez y Lopez the head of Fe y Alegría remained asleep. The soldiers began to search the rest of the house, and found Elba and Celina Ramos the daughter and wife of the caretaker, who had asked if they could sleep in the Jesuit community because the caretaker’s house had taken some shrapnel from a bombing near the UCA wall just a few days earlier and they were afraid to stay the night there when they saw an increase in the number of soldiers around the campus.\textsuperscript{341}

The five Jesuits were ordered to lie down on the grass outside the community. Martin-Baró cried out in a loud voice, “This is an abomination, and you are all scum.”\textsuperscript{342} When the order was given, all five Jesuits were fatally shot in the back of the head and some were also shot multiple times in the torso as well, and Elba and Celina were also shot by soldiers outside their rooms simultaneously.\textsuperscript{343} The Jesuits were all fatally wounded by the head shots, the other bullets only added to the effect. Upon hearing the shots, Fr. Lopez y Lopez, the only native Salvadoran priest home at the time, woke up

Elba Ramos was the cook at the Jesuit theologate, a residence for Jesuits completing the theology requirements for priesthood, which is about a kilometer uphill from the UCA campus.\textsuperscript{341} The Jesuit housekeeper was staying in a nearby guest house with her husband, and witnessed all of the events of that nights. She went undetected because it was not a house normally used, and the lights were all off since they had been asleep. She would later be questioned for seven consecutive days, when she was intercepted by U.S. government officials in Miami on her way to Spain. She was subjected to as many as four polygraphs per day, some in front of Salvadoran security forces. Her testimony was later thrown out at trial since it was “inconsistent” Lecture at the UCA, 20\textsuperscript{th} Anniversary Commemoration, November 15, 2009.\textsuperscript{342}

Apparently the two women were not mortally wounded, and a soldier riddled them with bullets on his way out when he heard them moaning. The photos show that Elba tried to shield sixteen year old Celina’s body with her own. The photos also show the tremendous wounds of the women, and the blood loss. In the second round of shooting Elba’s face was horribly disfigured. One can see some photos between pages 76 and 77 of Mulligan’s book, but copies of the official photos taken by the police and other Jesuits are kept on file in the Romero Center at the UCA. These graphic photos are not for the faint of heart.
and walked out the door to see what was happening. He cried out to the soldiers and
pleaded for his life saying he was not important and they did not need to kill him. He
was shot once in the heart, and as the soldier approached, he grabbed his ankle.

Apparently in fear, the soldier then emptied his gun into the priest’s chest. The
soldiers dragged Fr. Moreno, S.J. back into the house, but into the wrong room, the room
of Jon Sobrino. When they found the body, a copy of the book *The Crucified God* by
Jurgen Moltmann had fallen from Sobrino’s desk, and was soaked in Moreno’s blood.

At the end of the shooting, the soldiers shot off a Bengal light, which was the signal to
withdraw. Some of the soldiers in the Theological Center hastily wrote FMLN on some
of the walls, attempting to blame the rebel forces for the deaths.

The horrific tale of the murder of these six Jesuits and these two women, Ignacio
Ellacuría, Segundo Montes, Ignacio Martín-Baró, Amando Lopez, Juan Ramón Moreno,
Joaquín Lopez y Lopez, Elba and Celina Ramos, quickly spread throughout Latin
America and the world. Both Pope John Paul II and Fr. General Peter Hans Kolvenbach,
S.J. immediately sent letters expressing their shock and dismay at the murders.

Fr. José María Tojeira, S.J. preached at the funeral mass on November 19:

“Because they sought the truth and proclaimed that part of the truth they

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344 Lopez y Lopez was much older than the rest, and was dying of cancer at the time he was killed. There are many accounts of the death of these Jesuits and their collaborators, some with minor inaccuracies. Mulligan, S.J. and Martha Doggett, as well as the U.N. Truth commission statements have the most consistent accounts. See Doggett, Martha. *Death Foretold: The Jesuit Murders in El Salvador*. Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1993.

345 This detail was confirmed in an interview with Jon Sobrino, S.J. on November 27, 2009. The book is now on display at the Romero Center Museum at the UCA. The rest of the bodies were left as they lay, either because the soldiers were afraid, or in response to FMLN troop movements that evening.

were finding, they were assassinated, like so many others in El Salvador, like Archbishop Romero. They were killed because that truth helped the poor . . . Their testimony to the truth has now been sealed with blood in their death. This is the last word which our brothers have spoken, as a community, as martyrs . . . Their death, in the midst of the blood of the people, has joined them to that suffering face of the Lord Jesus which is seen today in Latin America in the faces of the marginalized of our cities, the peasant without land . . . the persecuted and those killed because they worked so that the gospel would become life in our people.”

Just like some of the earlier murders in El Salvador, great lengths were taken to cover up the perpetrators of the crimes. Initial reports claimed that the FMLN was responsible for the deaths, since Ellacuría had recently criticized them. But this later backfired, when Major Eric Buckland, the senior U.S. military advisor attached to C-5 (Psych-Ops) caused Cristiani to release a statement in January announcing that the Salvadoran Armed Forces were responsible for the murders.

The day of the murders three members of the Jesuit community were not present. Rodolfo Cardenal, S.J. had decided to stay in Santa Tecla with the Jesuit community there when he saw the number of soldiers and government troops surrounding the UCA. Jon Cortina, S.J. had tried to return from Chalatengo, but local community leaders would not let him leave the city because they feared for his safety. The third member not present was Jon Sobrino, S.J. who was in Thailand when he heard about the deaths. Sobrino said he was first awakened by an Irish priest and when asked to sit down to take


348 Mulligan, 24. The U.N. Truth Commission would later find Lt. Col. Rivas was involved in the cover-up.

349 Interview with John Giuliano, community organizer in Chalatenango, December 12, 2009. Giuliano said that Cortina would probably never have made it past the roadblocks leaving his small village, and that some of the local leaders knew of the offensive the FMLN had planned in San Salvador. Between the FMLN and government roadblocks, Cortina never would have made it to the UCA. Cortina heard his own name, along with Sobrino’s, announced by the right wing radio stations as being among the dead.
the call from London, he expected to hear that Ellacuría had been killed. But when he heard each name he began writing them down one by one, and could not believe that almost his entire community had been murdered. The last two names of the women, simply outraged him.\footnote{Interview with Jon Sobrino, November 27, 2009.} One cannot imagine how Sobrino must have felt to know that had he been home, he would have been one of the victims. Sobrino himself found it difficult to cope during those days. He writes, “I spent several hours, or rather several days, unable to react . . . The distance made me feel helpless and alone. And the six murdered Jesuits were my community, they were really my family. We had lived, worked, suffered, and enjoyed ourselves together for many years. Now they were dead.”\footnote{Sobrino, Jon, ed. \textit{Companions of Jesus: The Jesuit Martyrs of El Salvador}. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1990, 6.} He would later question why he was alive and why he was worthy to live on, but that was also transformed into a sense of mission and purpose: to finish the book he and Ignacio Ellacuría were writing together, to finish Juan Ramón Moreno’s next issue of Revista Latinoamericano de Teología, and to return to the UCA and El Salvador.\footnote{Sobrino, Jon, ed. \textit{Companions of Jesus: The Jesuit Martyrs of El Salvador}. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1990, 7.} The reactions from around the world gave Sobrino great comfort, from Archbishop Rivera, to the Superior General who promised to come to the UCA for Christmas. With this tremendous support, Sobrino also gained the courage to return, not just for his Jesuit brothers, Elba and Celina, but also for the 70,000 other victims in El Salvador.\footnote{Ibid, 9.} In his short book \textit{Companions of Jesus: The Jesuit Martyrs of El Salvador}, Sobrino describes
the lives of each of his companions and ends the descriptive chapter by naming them as martyrs. The papal nuncio at their funeral mass called them martyrs, and Sobrino calls them Jesuanic martyrs, just as he calls Rutilio Grande, S.J., Archbishop Romero, the Churchwomen from the United States Jesuanic martyrs. In the next two chapters we will see how Sobrino’s theology shows a marked shift after these events. While he works on a number of important themes from Medellín and Puebla, he develops these themes with more fervor and gusto after the impact of the death of his community and their two collaborators after 1989. While we will not explore the psychological impact of the deaths of these significant people, its impact on his work and theology cannot be underestimated.

7. Conclusion

In sum, the reality of martyrdom in Latin America in general and in El Salvador in particular provide great material for reflection on the significance of martyrdom and what constitutes a martyr in the 21st century. This chapter has shown that there is a broader Latin American reality beyond the scope of El Salvador. From the tip of South America in Chile to the northern most part of Mexico, the past century illustrates how the political situation in various countries affected the church. There are many Latin American countries which now claim their share of martyrs from the past century. As mentioned in the first chapter, this may appear at the outset to be an oddity, since almost all countries in Latin America are predominantly Catholic and Christian. Nevertheless,

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we find numerous examples of men and women who died for their faith. The reality of El Salvador proves to be a glaring example of this problematic. These four exemplary cases – Rutilio Grande, Romero, the U.S. churchwomen and the UCA Jesuits and their companions – provide a study of the reality of martyrdom in El Salvador. While perhaps they do not comply in the strictest sense with the traditional definition of martyr in *odium fidei*, they do provide examples of men and women who died for their beliefs and their faith. These four examples were chosen because of their significance for Sobrino and in varying degrees most closely impact Sobrino and his theological writings. But Sobrino also will want to account for those people who die for their faith, lay cathechists, church workers and others, who never get mentioned as prominently. These anonymous martyrs impact the discussion of the war in El Salvador and provide fuel for the discussion of their theological significance both for Sobrino and the church. The reality of martyrdom in Latin America in general and in El Salvador in particular provide great material for reflection on the significance of martyrdom and what constitutes a martyr in the 21st century. In the next two chapters I will analyze Sobrino’s Christology and use martyrdom as a lens for doing so. I will argue that the reality of martyrdom does impact Sobrino’s Christology. In turn Sobrino’s Christology also affects how he views that reality. I will argue that some of his basic categories such as the cross, discipleship and the kingdom of God will be strengthened and further developed due to the impact of martyrdom. As these categories broaden and expand, Sobrino’s understanding of martyrdom must also evolve and change.
CHAPTER THREE:
LIBERATION THEOLOGY AND ITS CONTEXT

“Liberation theology arose out of active praxis rather than static contemplation.”

1. Introduction

Since liberation theology blossoms forth from the Latin American context, and that Sobrino’s Christology is contextual and rooted in the Central and Latin American context, then the events which we examined in the previous chapter must impact in some way on the person of Jon Sobrino, and his Christology. Johann Baptist Metz suggests in his work *Faith in History in Society* that it is nearly impossible for a theologian to do so in a vacuum, ignoring the world outside. While one could question the scope of the impact of the outside world on Sobrino’s Christology, certainly the war in El Salvador shapes it. But one could argue that the events of 1989, the massacre of the Jesuit community at the UCA and their two collaborators forever change Sobrino. In fact, that argument will be my starting point in this chapter. When examining Sobrino’s

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Christology and the reality of martyrdom, I will argue that the events of 1989 form a pivotal point for a sharpening of his Christology and a broadening of his view of martyrdom. I do not argue that the assassination of Romero, the deaths of the U.S. churchwomen or the murder of Rutilio Grande on the road to El Paisnal did not affect Sobrino. But they did not impact him with the same force as the massacre of his own community. While the civil war disrupted the lives of Sobrino and all Salvadorans, not all events shaped him with the same weight, nor with equal force. So if we presume 1989 and the massacre at the UCA as a pivotal point for Sobrino, we have a dividing date for Sobrino’s work concerning martyrdom.

This third chapter will examine the key aspects of Sobrino’s Christology before 1989. After a brief discussion of his methodological reasons for emphasizing the historical Jesus, these three points will be used as a framework from which to build and expand upon for Sobrino’s work after 1989. First, the term martyr, while used before 1989, will be expanded later to coin a new term, Jesuanic martyr. Second, the cross, ever present in Sobrino’s Christology will be expanded later and applied to Ellacuría’s ideas concerning the crucified peoples. Third, Sobrino makes the claim that discipleship and praxis are key to following Jesus and announcing the kingdom of God. This idea of discipleship will be deepened and the importance of praxis intensified in Sobrino’s later work. After a brief biographical section, this chapter will show the significance of these three ideas before 1989, and continue to trace the development of martyrdom in Sobrino’s Christology from a concept learned about in books to a lived reality. When Sobrino departed for El Salvador he probably never envisioned that people he knew,
admired and even lived with would become martyrs for the kingdom. But this lived reality not only shapes his Christology, it sharpens it.

2. An Intellectual Biography of Jon Sobrino

If one examines Sobrino’s early theological work, at first glance one is hard pressed to find a plethora of references to martyrdom. But as we saw in previous chapters, the revolutions which began in Mexico before 1950, and in South America beginning in the 1960's, did not hit full stride in Central America until the 1970's. Sobrino arrived in El Salvador for the first time in 1957 as a Jesuit novice, with the intention of being a missionary and spending the rest of his life there.\(^\text{357}\) In his dissertation, Ernesto Valiente observes,

> “Like many other missionaries prior to him, the young Sobrino arrived in Central America not so much with the intention of encountering and engaging a new world, but rather intent on expanding his own. In a recent reflection on these years the theologian recalls that at the time he understood his mission as one to ‘help the Salvadorans replace their popular ‘superstitious’ religiosity with a more sophisticated kind, and…help the Latin American branches of the church (the European church) to grow.’”\(^\text{358}\)

After the novitiate and juniorate Sobrino was sent to the U.S. for philosophy studies in St. Louis. Later he will admit that this stage of largely Thomistic formation in the heart of the Missouri Valley would not adequately prepare him for ministry in El Salvador.\(^\text{359}\) The problem for the Jesuits in El Salvador at the time was that they did not

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\(^\text{357}\)&emsp;Sobrino was actually born in Barcelona in 1938, the product of Basque parents who were living in the Catalan capital at the time.


\(^\text{359}\)&emsp;See chapter one, “Awakening from a Dogmatic Slumber” in Sobrino, Jon. *The Principle of*...
have an adequate place for philosophical and theological formation, so the Jesuit
scholastics were sent abroad for their training. Sobrino was sent to St. Louis with the
hope that he would have a solid philosophical formation, learn English, and also study
engineering so he might one day teach at the Jesuit University in San Salvador, the UCA.
Next, when Sobrino returned to San Salvador he taught as a Jesuit regent, math and
philosophy at the Jesuit high school. After regency, Sobrino began his theology
training which typically ends in ordination for priesthood. In this case, Sobrino was sent
to Frankfurt to study at the Hochschule Sankt Georgen. Sobrino excelled in his
studies, so after his ordination he stayed for a doctorate which he finished in 1974. His
initial course of studies in Frankfurt were largely dogmatic, but in his Ph.D. dissertation
he worked extensively with modern German theologians such as Pannenberg and
Moltmann. He does credit a few of the insights he learned as helpful for his future.
Some of these came from the theological innovations of Vatican II. Valiente writes,
“Sobrino’s theological understanding began to move away from a positivist study of
dogmatic formulas to one more contextualized by historical reality.” For Sobrino, as

Mercy : Taking the Crucified People from the Cross Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994, one of his most
autobiographical essays. See also Ernesto Valiente’s dissertation which sets a nice time frame for his
theological work especially when he traces Sobrino’s intellectual biography starting on page 97 and
continuing to 105.

360 Jesuit regency then, as now, usually consisted of two to three years of teaching in a Jesuit high
school, in this case, the Externado in San Salvador, which still stands today. Interview with Salvador

361 Valiente Dissertation, 89.

362 Valiente notes that his dissertation was titled Le Dieu Crucifié (on the crucified God) and offers
a critique of the Christologies of Jurgen Moltmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg, footnote 40, 90.

363 Valiente, 90.

364 Valiente, 90
well as other Latin American theologians, Vatican II allowed some theologians to focus more on the reality of Latin America, and less on more esoteric theological works which found little or no application in a world of poverty and suffering. Sobrino himself describes it as “new light.” The writings of Pannenberg and Moltmann helped him to move away from more dogmatic concepts and focus more directly on the historical reality of Jesus of Nazareth. In Sobrino’s own words, “I discovered that Christ is none other than Jesus and that he conceived a utopia on which all too few have focused: the idea of the kingdom of God.”

Sobrino credits Rahner for the most lasting impression during his days of theological training in Germany. In fact, Rahner’s ideas about the mystery of God have stuck with him through the civil war and perhaps even today. But when he worked on his thesis the idea of differentiating the dogmatic ideas concerning Christ from the more concrete discovery of the historical Jesus of Nazareth started to take shape. It was not that he disagreed with Teilhard de Chardin concerning the “omega point of evolution” or with Rahner with his Christ as “absolute savior.” Instead, he discovered that this Christ was nothing other than Jesus, which led to the discovery of a new utopia: the ideal

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366 Valiente Dissertation, 90.

367 Sobrino, “Introduction: Awakening from the Sleep of Inhumanity,” 2. The original version of this work was actually written in English in 1991 and later translated into Spanish. The Spanish title of the essay is “Introducción: Despertar del sueño de la cruel inhumanidad.”

368 Sobrino, Despertar del Sueño, 13 . . . “La teología de Rahner — por poner el ejemplo mas beneficioso para mi — me acompaña durante aquellos años, y sus páginas sobre el misterio de Dios siguen acompañándome hasta hoy.” This first edition translation which Sobrino wrote originally in Spanish was published in 1992.

369 Sobrino, Despertar del Sueño, 13.
of the Reign of God.  

Sobrino also reflects on the fact that the reality around him forced him to confront his dogmatic slumber. He mentions Ignacio Ellacuría and Monseñor Romero as examples of Salvadorans and martyrs who help him awaken. He writes, “In this situation, I had the chance to encounter others who had already woken from the sleep of inhumanity: Ignacio Ellacuría and, later Monsignor Romero, to name two great Salvadorans, Christians and martyrs, great brothers and friends.” These martyrs also led him to greater encounter with the poor and the marginalized in his adopted Salvadoran homeland. He describes this awakening as one which forever alters his life, and radically changes his questions about the world and how theology might respond.

Certainly this time period must have been confusing for Sobrino, since it became a kind of paradigm shift or in his words “the headscratcher that is human life.” This turning of the world upside down was also an enjoyable process for Sobrino. He describes the

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370 Sobrino, Despertar del Sueño, 13. “Y me encontré — creo que fue un descubrimiento decisivo — con que el Cristo no es otro que Jesús, y que éste tuvo una utopía en la que no había pensado antes: el ideal del reino de Dios.” Valiente will further add that the idea of “Holy Mystery” and the idea of God’s communication through Jesus as Absolute mediator, are Rahnerian ideas for which Sobrino is greatful. See especially Rahner’s Foundations of Christian Faith 126-133, 140.

371 Ibid, 15. “En esa situación, tuve la dicha de encontrarme con otros que ya habían despertado del sueño de la inhumanidad: Ignacio Ellacuría y, después Monseñor Romero, por citar a dos grandes salvadoreños, cristianos y mártires, grandes hermanos y amigos.”

372 Ibid. One example of the change was the conversion of his question from whether or not we are human to whether or not our faith is human. “La pregunta fundamental se convirtió en si somos o no humanos y, para los creyentes, en si nuestra fe es o no humana.”

373 Ibid. This process of headscratching or “rompecabezas”, literally head breaking, alternate translation puzzle solving, changes the order of the moveable parts of different problems. Different questions lead to different methodologies, and different problematics. In this way, one could see that a more cerebral Rahnerian construct is not as helpful for a problematic where the Salvadoran war takes thousands of lives, and impoverishes further an already impoverished majority.
process as a better way to live, to enjoy life with greater joy and with greater meaning.\textsuperscript{374} So when he wrote his essay on the principle of mercy, he writes with what he calls “new eyes” looking back on the previous 17 years of his life.\textsuperscript{375} These new eyes allowed him to see both the good and the bad: massacres, terrible poverty, injustice, but also hope, creativity and generosity. Both the darkness and the light lead to a discovery and revelation of the truth of reality, the truth of humanity, and the truth of God.\textsuperscript{376}

3. Sobrino’s First Christology: Martyrdom, Cross, Discipleship, Kingdom of God

In \textit{Christology at the Crossroads}, one does not find a plethora of references to martyrdom. In part, that is because in this first work, he is still influenced by European Theology and his theological formation, but also because he has not found a way to adapt this theology into the reality he finds in El Salvador. That is not to say that martyrdom is not important for Sobrino’s early Christology, it is just not as present as it will be in his later works and writings. Before I introduce the three main themes of cross, discipleship and the kingdom of God, I want to give a short background of the method of the book and why Sobrino wants to ground his Christology on the historical Jesus. From the introduction to the book, we know that it is a product of a Christology Course given at the Center for Theological reflection in San Salvador in the mid-1970’s.\textsuperscript{377}

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{374}Sobrino, Despertar del Sueño, 16. “sino que se puede vivir con hondo sentido y con gozo.”

\textsuperscript{375}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{376}Ibid. “Pero lo que quiero mencionar ahora es el redescubrimiento que es anterior a todo esto: la revelación de la verdad de la realidad y, a través de ella, de la verdad de los seres humanos y de la verdad de Dios.”

\textsuperscript{377}Jon Sobrino. \textit{Christology at the Crossroads: A Latin American Approach}. Translated by John Drury. New York: Orbis Books, 1978, xiii. That is why some of the chapters resemble class outlines and notes. Some of the chapters also appeared as articles in \textit{Christus} and the Salvadoran publications \textit{ECA} and
Sobrino wants to introduce the idea of praxis and the integral part it should play in Christian life. In addition, Sobrino claims that one cannot have a Christology without the historical person of Jesus of Nazareth. By grounding his Christology in the historical Jesus he wants to start from below. This does not mean that Jesus as Son of God is not important for Sobrino. The revelation of Jesus as Son of God is important. But in this early work, Sobrino wants to emphasize the historical Jesus since he sees other Christologies as overemphasizing the divine presence of Jesus. He writes, “The revelation of the Son in the history of Jesus shows us completely and definitively how human beings can correspond to the ultimate mystery of God in the midst of historical existence.”

Here one finds a small positive correlation with Rahner as Sobrino describes Jesus “not as the epiphanic revelation of the ultimate mystery. Rather, he is the revelation of the Son, of the proper way to approach and correspond to the Father.”

Sobrino hopes to use some basic tenets of liberation theology as a correction to a very cerebral or a Christological view of Jesus from above. Working against those who portray Jesus as divinely distant, Sobrino wants to inject the idea of the kingdom of God present here in this world, at this time. A concrete historical person, Jesus of Nazareth.

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\[378\] Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*, xv. Here Sobrino is thinking of the difference between the way Christians formulate their thinking and act upon them, and the contradiction which one may find between their actions and their contradictions with the “fundamental principles and values preached by Jesus of Nazareth.”

\[379\] Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*, xxiv.

comes into the world to announce that the kingdom of God is here, real and at hand. Jesus then “proclaims the coming utopia; he denounces injustice as the epitome of sin; he shows partiality towards the oppressed; he unmasks alienating religious mechanisms.”

Before liberation theology perhaps Christian theology drew more upon the Spirit to fulfill the role that Jesus came to fulfill. That is to say, theology relied upon the Spirit of Jesus, but as a vague and abstract concept which somehow worked its way in and through the Christian community. Instead, Sobrino advocates a Spirit of Jesus intimately involved in Christian praxis. Sobrino claims, “the mutual interaction between an active Christian praxis based on the Spirit of Jesus and firm hope in the utopia of God’s kingdom is the Christian expression of the hermeneutic circle required for any theological reflection. In this case it is the Christian version of the hermeneutic circle required for all christological reflection.”

Thus begins the project which became *Christology at the Crossroads*. Sobrino himself admits that this Christology will shift our focus to a new understanding of Jesus which is in fact praxis based. When Jesus proclaims the coming of the Kingdom of God, he also denounces injustice. The hope is to realize the kingdom “in real life” which in turn will lead us to a new kind of discipleship. To put the timing of *Christology at the Crossroads* in perspective, the English version came out one year after the death of Rutilio Grande, the first Salvadoran priest to be martyred. The Spanish version was already published, and some of the ideas date back to Sobrino’s theological work in

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381 Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*, xxv.
382 Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*, xxv.
383 Ibid.
Sobrino begins the first chapter with a strong starting point: the historical Jesus. For Sobrino this is the key since he wants to intimately tie the historical Jesus to Christian praxis. He believes that during the 1970's the church in El Salvador has entered a period of profound crisis. He sees the theological roots of this crisis as an ecclesiological one, and that arena “is where Christian action unfolds.”

In the past the church has started with dogma, such as the Council of Chalcedon which affirmed the two natures of Christ; human and divine. But this dogma is “not only chronologically but logically posterior to the reality as posited by the Gospels.” Sobrino does not object to the creedal statements nor the formulas advanced at the Council of Chalcedon. He does want to begin from a different starting point. He wants to use “a biblical focus on Christ” and to make the effort to discover “the distinctive character of Christ’s person – his divine Sonship.”

This approach will allow him to examine the divine titles used for Jesus in the Bible which are properly attributed to Christ: “prophet, Messiah, Son of Man, high priest . . .” etc. But these titles are going to be examined after first reflecting upon the major events from the life of Jesus “which are already theologized in the New Testament: resurrection, transfiguration, baptism . . . and so forth.” For a variety of reasons, Sobrino starts with the historical Jesus so that he can avoid the tendency towards abstractionism as well as “the attending danger of manipulating the Christ event.”

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384 Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*, 1. Italics author’s emphasis.


386 Ibid, 5.

387 Ibid. Sobrino also admits that there is more than one Christology present in the New Testament.

When the historical Jesus is utilized as the starting point or the hermeneutical principle in Sobrino’s words, we can be drawn into the totality of the life of Christ in both our knowledge and our real life praxis.

By choosing the historical Jesus as a starting point, Sobrino draws on a new Latin American tradition. He wants to focus on a theology which arises out of concrete experience and faith practice. He writes, “The historical Jesus would serve as a satisfactory midway point between two extremes: turning Christ into an abstraction on the one hand, or putting him to direct and immediate ideological uses on the other.” Sobrino wants to avoid both extremes. He mentions Gustavo Gutiérrez and Ignacio Ellacuría as two examples of theologians who avoid the extremes of these two poles. But Sobrino does more than just appeal to Latin American theologians to justify his starting point. He sees in the world around him a similarity to the world of the historical Jesus. He writes, “First of all there is clearly a noticeable resemblance between the situation here in Latin America and that in which Jesus lived.” Sobrino sees some of the same social sins still present such as poverty and exploitation. He sees Latin American Christology working out some of the same issues as the early Christian community. In this way certain traits of Jesus will take on an importance because they will be viewed from the concrete situation of Latin America.

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389 Sobrino, Christology at the Crossroads, 10.


391 Sobrino, Christology at the Crossroads, 12.
3.1. The Cross

As I mentioned at the start of the chapter, I wish to highlight three different areas in Sobrino’s *Christology at the Crossroads*, cross, discipleship and the proclamation of the kingdom of God. Of particular interest will be where martyrdom fits into this particular liberation Christology. The first theme I wish to outline is the cross. Before moving to Sobrino’s ideas regarding the cross, it might be helpful to remember the Ignatian meditation on the Cross from the Spiritual Exercises. The meditation on the cross falls in the third week of the Exercises. After meditating on the passion narratives, including the agony in the garden, and the sentencing by Pilate, the ejercitant is asked to meditate on Jesus being raised on the cross and the death of Jesus. This meditation is important enough for Ignatius to suggest two repetitions, or three prayer periods total plus an evening application of the senses. Ignatius in annotation 297 suggests that all four gospel accounts may be used, with special emphasis on the two thieves, recommending St. John to his mother, the thirst of Jesus, Jesus giving up his spirit, the division of his garments and the striking of the lance which pours forth water and blood. The ejercitant then spends an entire day contemplating the burial of Jesus, the grief and fatigue of Mary, and the loneliness of the disciples. I mention the Exercises here because the cross likely was an annual contemplation for Sobrino, and the power which the cross holds likely goes beyond just a cerebral one. In addition, he mentions these Ignatian influences in his appendix, in particular the Ignatian emphasis on the

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Kingdom of God, and the “praxis oriented nature of the Exercises.” In many ways, as we shall see, Sobrino’s contemplation on the cross enriches his Christology. His Ignatian imagination allows him to go beyond the stock theological view of the cross, seen especially when he broadens the cross of Jesus to include the poor and the oppressed. Sobrino sees the Ignatian meditations as being grounded in the historical Jesus and the second and third weeks as being essential to the understanding.

I mention the appendix of the book first because I believe it influences Sobrino’s outlook on the cross. In particular because the Salvadoran war could be considered a “third week” experience. Looking around, with nightly roundups and killings of death squads, children, parents and grandparents among the “disappeared” one could pick any of the myriad of scriptural passages during Jesus’ Passion, Resurrection and Death to meditate upon. Whether or not Sobrino actively prayed through these passages is a potential point of debate, but his images for a crucified people cannot be denied. One need look no further than his dissertation thesis or his reliance on Moltmann’s work to understand the appeal of the cross for Sobrino, especially Moltmann’s idea of the

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394 Sobrino, Christology at the Crossroads, 399. Sobrino also notes the importance of discipleship and following Jesus, which stem from the second week of the Exercises. For more on the Christ of the Exercises see his appendix pp. 396-424.

395 Christology at the Crossroads, 413. Sobrino outlines the schematic of the exercises as God-Christ-God. The first and the fourth weeks corresponding to God, and the second and third weeks corresponding to Jesus Christ. He ties in the cross, discipleship and the Kingdom of God especially to the second and third weeks in this appendix.

396 In both spiritual direction and retreats, one refers to the state of the ejercitant in terms of what week they are in or how they are currently experiencing God. In this case the third week refers to the passion and death of Jesus Christ. Many people during war times might then most closely identify with the part of Jesus’ life surrounding the passion and death of Jesus, i.e. the third week.
Crucified God. In Sobrino’s own words, “Moltmann moved from the God of the future to the crucified God, from anticipatory recollection of Christ’s resurrection to the perilous memory of the crucified Jesus, from hope in Christ’s future to the following of the historical Jesus.” Sobrino reads Moltmann as a “political theology of the cross” which in terms of theodicy, “must reconcile God with evil, sin, injustice, and death. Even for Christians ‘suffering continues to be a cry without possible response.’”

The key concept in Moltmann’s theology for Sobrino is “the cross of the risen one,” or the cross of the Risen Jesus. It is because of the cross that Moltmann defines God as the “crucified God” and he constructs, according to Sobrino, a Christology and a theology “on the basis of Jesus’ cross.”

In his sixth chapter, Sobrino ties the death of Jesus on the cross to the idea of liberation. He begins by asserting that Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus the Christ, Son of God died by crucifixion. He claims that from the very beginning the cross becomes a kind of “dividing line between Christian existence and every other type of religion.” But the stark cross seldom carries with it a great deal of theological reflection. Theology sidesteps the task of reflecting on the cross itself. Sobrino remarks that while often we

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397 Sobrino, Christology at the Crossroads, 21. Moltmann’s Christology is one of three Christologies which Sobrino presents in this book. An examination of the influence of Moltmann on Sobrino’s Christology while warranted, will be left for a future project, especially the influence of Moltmann’s The Crucified God.

398 Sobrino, Christology at the Crossroads, 29. One can see the implications for discipleship here as well. We need to follow the same Jesus of history who is crucified on the cross.

399 Sobrino, Christology at the Crossroads, 31.

400 Sobrino, Christology at the Crossroads, 32.

401 Ibid.

402 Sobrino, Christology at the Crossroads, 179.
reflect on being saved by the cross of Jesus, we end up “eliminating the element of scandal in the historical cross of Jesus.”

In Latin America the cross has often been a main focus in popular religiosity. In general the main focus of the Triduum is on Good Friday and not Easter Sunday. But even with that focus Sobrino wants an interpretation of the cross which is more activist in character. He writes, “While the resurrection remains the paradigm of liberation, the cross is no longer seen simply as a symbol of suffering or as the negative dialectical moment which immediately and directly gives rise to the positive moment of liberation.”

In other words, one must engage the cross in order to get to the liberating force of the resurrection.

This rules out a romantic notion of the cross, often found in the Easter centered focus of the resurrection in mainstream U.S. culture. Sobrino claims, “The utopia of Christian resurrection becomes real only in terms of the cross, and theological reflection on the death of Jesus must probe deeper on at least two levels.” Sobrino goes on to describe these two levels as the theological level in the strict sense and the suppositions and implications of this particular conception for Christian life. On the one hand, if reflection on the cross does not reach the theological level of asking questions about God and stays simply with the death of Jesus, said reflection ignores the issue at the deepest level. On the other hand, if we ignore the implications of the cross in our present context, we deny the cross in our every day Christian praxis. Sobrino identifies these as the two main obstacles: “I think there are two main obstacles to any attempt to grasp the cross of

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403 Sobrino, Christology at the Crossroads, 180.
404 Sobrino, Christology at the Crossroads, 180.
405 Sobrino, Christology at the Crossroads, 181.
Jesus in all its profundity. One is the danger of isolating the cross from the concrete history of Jesus; the other is isolating it from God.

Sobrino will further divide the problematic into three main sections in this chapter. The first part questions the overemphasis on the positive benefits of the cross for humankind, i.e. an overemphasis on the salvific and soteriological aspects of the cross. The second part hopes to recover “a pristine value of the cross” especially by considering the historical outcome and consequence of the lifelong journey of Jesus on the cross which bears witness and challenges the truth of “other religious and political gods.”

The third, or most radical stage for Sobrino is the consideration of “the presence (or absence) of God on the cross of Jesus.” Here we face Moltmann’s alternatives: either the cross of Jesus is the end of all Christian theology or it is the beginning of a truly Christian theology which combines critical reflection with a liberative praxis.

In the first part, Sobrino wants our focus to be a post-resurrection view, but one which takes seriously the death of Jesus on the cross. This does not mean he negates Jesus as the Son of God. Quite the contrary, Sobrino wants to rescue these divine titles, and we will see this developed even more in *Christ the Liberator* in the next chapter. Instead, Sobrino wants to question those who seemingly ignore the cross, ignore the historical Jesus and in doing so “overlook the import of the cross.”

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406 Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*, 181.


408 Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*, 182.

409 Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*, 184. While Sobrino does think that an overemphasis of the divine or honorific titles for Jesus can lead to a de-emphasis of his life here on earth, he does not want to abandon these titles.
much emphasis on the saving power of the cross leads us into a meditation of the mystery
of the cross and helps us to forget the scandal. Instead, if we maintain the scandal of the
cross it “challenges us to say what sort of God we believe in. Insofar as salvation is
concerned, it does not simply ask how people are saved passively; it also asks how God
saves people in a world where there is no salvation.”

Sobrino wants to make sure we
don’t abandon the crucified God in the history of the church and of theology. Sobrino
acknowledges wholeheartedly the difficulties. One must first accept that the Son of God
died in scandal, or in Sobrino’s words “in disaster.”

Second, God the Father remained
passive, difficult conceptually since usually we imagine God as omnipotent and all-
powerful. This emphasis on the scandal provides a counterpoint to a more Anselmian
theory of vicarious satisfaction or the classic medieval interpretation of the salvific
meaning of the death of Jesus. In Anselm’s model the infinite distance between the
Father and creation is healed by the Son, and “due reparation is made to the Father
through the cross of his Son, and thus the sins of humankind are forgiven.”

Sobrino
reads the ultimate flaw in this viewpoint as ahistorical. The cross is interpreted in terms
of God’s overall design and “never gets inside the historical reality of Jesus and his
cross.”

In the end, Sobrino welcomes a God who suffers alongside humanity. He
echoes Bonhoeffer’s phrase “Only a God who suffers can save us” and accepts
Moltmann’s idea that a God who suffers is also a God who loves, “An inability to suffer

410 Sobrino, Christology at the Crossroads, 190.
411 Sobrino, Christology at the Crossroads, 192.
412 Ibid.
413 Sobrino, Christology at the Crossroads, 193.
would contradict the basic Christian assertion that God is love.”414 Sobrino’s assertion is a fairly simple one. He claims that “the man, Jesus of Nazareth, who died a failure on the cross and abandoned by God, is really and truly the Son of God.”415 But in making this assertion we can’t skip the first part and simply assert that Jesus is Son of God. The scandal of the cross cannot be ignored. Sobrino concludes, “In the Christian view his locus is not only the resurrection but also the cross of Jesus.”416

Admittedly, this focus on the cross leads one to focus more on the humanity of Jesus and the incarnation. Instead of God’s plan or design focusing on Jesus surpassing his own humanity, Sobrino wants God’s plan to be understood in terms of “the real, authentic incarnation of God.”417 This does not mean that cross is simply the end of “a biographical career” of Jesus, but rather shows Jesus as a faithful witness to the coming of the Kingdom of God here on earth.418 For Sobrino, this announcement of the kingdom in the face of the Jewish establishment necessarily introduces conflict into the heart of the life of Jesus. Accepting the incarnation, his own flesh and blood, causes Jesus to either choose to confront the establishment or watch passively and idly. Sobrino shows that Jesus confronts the factors working against the reign of God, and that “Jesus’ polemics with the religious authorities were not just a didactic exercise; they flowed naturally from

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414 Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*, 197.
415 Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*, 200.
416 Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*, 201.
417 Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*, 202. According to Sobrino, this again works against a viewpoint more like Anselm which speaks of Jesus’ crucifixion solely as a work of redemption.
418 Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*, 204.
the inner dynamism of the incarnation.”  

By making God present, by making the claim that God’s grace is accessible to all people and goes beyond any legalistic ritualism, Jesus meets a tragic end on the cross. The triumph of the cross then, can be seen as a triumph of the announcement of the kingdom, and a realization that God’s grace can be accessed by all people regardless of social standing, culture, or economic prowess.

3.2. Discipleship

Jesus becomes word incarnate in a concrete social situation. This concrete situation entails suffering and in the end death on the cross. The summons to discipleship leads to this concrete end, a kind of spirituality of the cross. Sobrino claims that this discipleship leads us to a political theology, one which can’t be dissociated from the cross. Therefore “identification with the crucified must take place on the way to the cross.”

When we stray from that path, the spirituality of the cross becomes something else, a stoicism, a masochism, or something completely dissociated with an incarnational view of the cross. Sobrino sees the cross as “the end of the process. If we do not go through that process, then the cross to which we offer our acceptance may not be the Christian cross.”

Sobrino realizes that this process necessitates a conversion, and following the cross as a disciple of Jesus may lead to a bumpy road at the least, and possibly a conflictual path in countries with an atheistic government, or one which perpetuates suffering in choosing policies which are at odds with the reign of God.

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419 Sobrino, Christology at the Crossroads., 207.
420 Sobrino, Christology at the Crossroads, 216.
421 Sobrino, Christology at the Crossroads, 217.
At the end of the cross section in this chapter Sobrino has his most significant exposition of how martyrdom might potentially befall a person who faithfully follows Jesus and the cross. In fact this is the only significant treatment of the theme of martyrdom in this book, and the first time it is mentioned.\textsuperscript{422} Sobrino starts by acknowledging that “there have been many martyrs for religious and political reasons, both before and after Jesus’ time.”\textsuperscript{423} He acknowledges that while Jesus was also a prophet, there was nothing beautiful about his death, nor was he just another martyr. Instead the death of Jesus

“differed from that of other martyrs and prophets for they died with the intention that their death should serve as their last act in defense of their cause. Thus their death often stood in continuity with their life and their cause . . . By contrast Jesus dies in total discontinuity with his life and his cause. The death he experienced was not only the death of his person but also the death of his cause.”\textsuperscript{424}

Sobrino claims that the martyrdom of Jesus is distinctive due to three key elements: his message concerning the imminent approach of God, his cry on the cross, and his abandonment by the Father. For this last point, Sobrino relies almost solely on Moltmann and his ideas on the crucified Jesus abandoned by God the Father on the cross. He does add later that this same abandonment allows us to experience the history of injustice and oppression which allows us to “hear the cry of Jesus on the cross and the cry

\textsuperscript{422}In fact, the index of the book does not even have martyrdom as a sub-heading, where as martyrdom is listed in Sobrino’s two major Christological works published after 1989.

\textsuperscript{423}Sobrino, \textit{Christology at the Crossroads}, 218.

\textsuperscript{424}Sobrino, \textit{Christology at the Crossroads}, 218.
of countless victims in history.”\textsuperscript{425} But for the first two points, one can see Sobrino’s own Christology shining forth when he develops his own ideas, especially when he writes about Jesus announcing the reign of God and following Jesus in discipleship in a Latin American context.

Sobrino ends his chapters related to the cross by affirming that the resurrection of Jesus should always be viewed in connection with his cross. Only in this way can we be led towards a life of faith, hope and love. Christian faith is not independent of all of the groans and cries throughout history. Christian faith viewed in the light of the cross takes shape by attacking unbelief. Christian hope is not a pure optimism but one which is rooted “in a hope \textit{against} injustice, oppression and death.”\textsuperscript{426} The cross of Jesus does not defeat hope but rather gives hope to those who are crucified in our own day.\textsuperscript{427} The cross of Christ gives Christian love a different dimension, a love which goes to the extreme. For Sobrino this love is not idealistic, nor pragmatic but the ultimate word uttered on the cross: “There is no greater love that this – to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:13).\textsuperscript{428} Faith, hope and love consummate in the final end on the cross. For Sobrino these ideals are what make the cross and resurrection our central face components. The scandal of the cross gives us a reality which is open to the world, forcing us to change our way of thinking, and moves us to enter into our real history. The

\textsuperscript{425}Sobrino, \textit{Christology at the Crossroads}, 231.

\textsuperscript{426}Sobrino, \textit{Christology at the Crossroads}, 232. Italics author’s emphasis.

\textsuperscript{427}Sobrino does not speak here specifically of “the crucified peoples.” He will utilize this concept later on, especially in his books written after 1989.

\textsuperscript{428}Sobrino, \textit{Christology at the Crossroads}, 233.
cross is not alienating, instead it calls our life into question and “makes it possible for history to keep moving forward toward the kingdom of God in hope and love.”

Before moving on to the next section I would like to comment on the brevity of this section. This brevity does not reflect a lack of importance of discipleship in Sobrino’s Christology. Instead, it is often incorporated or tied with other elements of Sobrino’s Christology, especially the vast sections which he writes about the cross. This does not mean that discipleship is unimportant, but rather it is assumed throughout much of Sobrino’s writing, just not explicitly stated. The theme of discipleship will be reiterated in Sobrino’s later works and writings and expanded upon, as we shall see in the next chapter.

3.3. Kingdom of God

Central to Sobrino and related to his ideas concerning martyrdom is the idea that Jesus is always at the service of God’s kingdom. This means that Jesus himself is not the primary focus of his preaching, rather the central focus is the kingdom of God. Jesus did not simply talk about God, he spoke about the kingdom of God. Sobrino wants to make the point crystal clear “that in historical terms we can only come to know the historical Jesus in and through the notion of God’s kingdom. By the same token we can only come to understand what is meant by the kingdom of God in and through Jesus.”

There is nothing novel about Jesus’ utilization of the term “kingdom of God.”

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429 Sobrino, Christology at the Crossroads, 235.
430 Sobrino, Christology at the Crossroads, 41. Sobrino admits he is not the only theologian who emphasizes this fact, noting that Rahner himself taught this.
431 Sobrino, Christology at the Crossroads, 41.
The term litters the Hebrew Scriptures and for Sobrino suggests two basic notions: “(1) God reigns with acts of power, (2) in order to establish or modify the order of things.” But Jesus appeals to the apocalyptic thinking of his time period when begins to talk about the definitive reign of God which people are awaiting. Jesus affirms that God exists and the reign of God is at hand. Sobrino claims this also implies that with each of our orientation toward God, we also enjoy a fellowship with our brothers and sisters. This affirmation is not without greater implications. For Sobrino, “the mere verbal proclamation of God without action to achieve his reign is not enough and orthopraxis must take priority over orthodoxy.” In this way it is not simply enough to proclaim that God exists. For Jesus proclaiming God also necessitates the realization of the reign of God in practice.

Jesus acknowledges that God’s grace surrounds us. He simply tells people that “the kingdom of God is already at hand, already breaking through.” But Jesus does not simply preach, the in-breaking of the Kingdom also finds its expression in deeds. The actions of Jesus “are not simply accompaniment to his words, nor are they primarily designed to illustrate his own person. Their primary value is theo-logical: They are meant to demonstrate the kingdom of God.”

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432 Sobrino, Christology at the Crossroads, 43. Sobrino relies on other scholars here, notably he mentions Leonardo Boff and his ideas concerning utopia.

433 Sobrino, Christology at the Crossroads, 45. From here on in this chapter Sobrino uses the term kingdom of God and reign of God almost interchangeably. So will I.

434 Sobrino, Christology at the Crossroads, 45.

435 Sobrino, Christology at the Crossroads, 46.

436 Sobrino, Christology at the Crossroads, 46-47. One is also reminded of Sobrino’s Ignatian influence here, “Preach the Gospel, when necessary, use words.”
reign of God is at hand. For this reason preaching and practice cannot be separated; both lead to liberation for Sobrino. Sobrino sees the form in which Jesus preaches and acts take the form of liberation. He doesn’t just preach about God’s kingdom, but he also heals the sick, touches lepers, talks to a Samaritan woman, associates with the Roman centurion, a foreigner, etc. By eating meals with both friends and sinners he gives a “clear sign of the eschatological reality.” Sobrino also disputes a more traditional interpretation of miracles and the forgiveness of sins as solely manifesting the divinity of Jesus. This denies the importance of the reign of God announced by Jesus. Instead, “Both his miracles and his forgiveness of sins are primary signs of the arrival of the kingdom of God. They are signs of liberation, and only in that context can they help to shed light on the person of Jesus.” Jesus performing miracles and forgiving sins announce the coming kingdom. Sobrino will further argue that “Jesus’ whole activity, including his miracles and his pardoning of sins, must be viewed primarily in terms of the kingdom of God drawing near to liberate people.” This fact teaches us something important for our own understanding of our relationship with Jesus. We must embody a relational character and assume an attitude of service to the Kingdom of God. In this way our contact with Jesus will not be fully realize “through cultic acclamation or adoration but through following Jesus in the service of God’s kingdom.”

Sobrino believes our understanding of sin also helps orient us toward the kingdom

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437 Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*, 47.
439 Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*, 50.
440 Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*, 50.
of God. When Jesus preaches the good news in a sinful world he points us toward liberation. Jesus also viewed sins in strict theological terms. Sobrino writes, “Sin is not just something that must be pardoned. It must be taken away, eradicated.” For Jesus sin is the rejection of God’s kingdom here on earth, and if we do not allow grace to fully enter our lives, we not only reject God but in terms of our own utilization of power and social sin, we can oppress others. We can understand this sin in two different dimensions, the personal and the social. Sobrino states, “The personal dimension was a refusal to accept the future of the God who was approaching in grace. The social dimension was a refusal to anticipate that future reality in our here-and-now life . . . Sin is no longer seen as directed against God but rather against the kingdom of God.”

For this reason, the proclamation of the kingdom of God necessitates conversion. Sobrino writes, “The problem of conversion becomes the whole problem of how we are to participate in the kingdom of God, how we are to cooperate in its fulfillment.” Our conversion consists of the coming together of grace and works, the fusion of orthodoxy and orthopraxis. The call of the kingdom is a call to discipleship. For Sobrino, discipleship is “an exigency of the kingdom of God.” Just like the first twelve disciples, by following Jesus we put ourselves at the disposal of the kingdom. The following of Jesus manifests itself in concrete applications. Faith put into practice

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441 Sobrino, Christology at the Crossroads, 51.
442 Sobrino, Christology at the Crossroads, 53.
443 Sobrino, Christology at the Crossroads, 56.
444 Sobrino, Christology at the Crossroads, 58.
signifies “a concrete obligation to fight for love and justice among human beings.”

This fight is not chosen arbitrarily by Jesus. In the revelation of the kingdom, Jesus reveals a meaningful future for those living in oppression, hope for the hopeless. It also obliges one to take up one’s own cross and follow Jesus as a disciple. In sum, one cannot divorce the historical Jesus from the announcement of the reign of God. Following Jesus is more than a theory, it is a concrete praxis. Sobrino does not propose a Christology here which is only accessible through orthodoxy. Instead, our orthodoxy drives us to practice our faith, and by living it, become a disciple who follows Jesus and announces the reign of God here on earth. For some, this might come with the ultimate cost. For some, following Jesus to the cross might mean following Jesus to the extreme end of the earth or even martyrdom. In the next chapter we will see how Sobrino deepens this understanding of martyrdom after 1989, and builds upon the foundation of the cross, discipleship, and the kingdom of God.

4. Conclusion

In this chapter we have seen the development of three major ideas in Sobrino’s Christology; the praxis of faith through discipleship which helps the committed Christian to participate in the announcement of the reign of God, and the central focus on the cross. But in terms of a systematic development of how martyrdom fits into Sobrino’s Christology or even a working definition of the term martyr for Sobrino one might be left unsatisfied. He does use the term martyr when referring to Rutilio Grande and Oscar Romero but does not write extensively on the topic, other than a brief essay in the 1983

445Sobrino, Christology at the Crossroads, 59.
Concilium edition *Martyrdom Today* where he suggests, along with Rahner and Metz, that perhaps the current thinking on what it means to be a martyr could be revisited.\(^{446}\)

And as mentioned above, he does devote a brief section on the cross to what it means to be a martyr. He also writes briefly about martyrdom in a 1981 article later published in a collection of essays in English in 1987.\(^{447}\) Here he describes what he considers the greatest surrender of discipleship — martyrdom. Sobrino writes, “Surrender to Jesus in discipleship during life attains its greatest depth of surrender in death and in that death that is particularly Christian: martyrdom.”\(^{448}\) In this section of the article Sobrino describes a Christology of liberation. He sees martyrdom as testifying to the hope in Jesus. Martyrdom is a praxic form of discipleship and a response to the call to follow Christ.

So, other than the brief mention of martyrdom in *Christology at the Crossroads*, the Concilium article and the passing mention in this 1981 essay, martyrdom does not take up significant mention in Sobrino’s work up before 1989. But after 1989, as we shall see in the next chapter, Sobrino increasingly elaborates on the topic and develops new ideas. Examining the reality around him makes Sobrino rethink what it means to be a martyr and to coin a new term “Jesuanic martyr.” While up to this point, martyrdom only gets a passing mention, after 1989 he does begin to write on the topic with greater

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\(^{446}\)Since I discussed this work extensively in the first chapter I will not revisit the essay here. Suffice it to say that in this article Sobrino simply plants the seeds in this five to six page essay for his later work on martyrdom and a potential relationship to his Christology.


\(^{448}\)Sobrino, *Jesus in Latin America*, 28.
depth and conviction. If one were to ask the question: Is there a dialectical relationship between Sobrino’s Christology and martyrdom before 1989? The answer would be no. But after 1989 martyrdom increasingly weaves into his Christology, impacting it, and as we shall see, causing him to broaden the categories of discipleship, cross, the kingdom of God, and what it means to be a martyr today.
CHAPTER FOUR:
SOBRINO’S JESUANIC MARTYR AND HIS CHRISTOLOGY

It is a fact that there are crucified peoples, “flogged Christs,” and this gives a better understanding of Christ, the Suffering Servant of Yahweh, hidden among the poor. It is a fact that there are innumerable martyrs who have given their lives out of love and who are still present and active, and this helps us understand the martyr Jesus who was raised from the dead.449

In the past chapters we have studied the development of what it means to be a martyr in the traditional sense and why there is need for a new or expanded definition. Then as a part of the history of a larger reality in Latin America, we examined the particular case of El Salvador and how the political turmoil there produced four exemplary martyrs for Sobrino. In chapter three, Sobrino’s Christological work before 1989 shows the influence of these martyrs, but it was not codified or defined. This chapter will examine Sobrino’s work from 1989 to the present. There are some key Christological categories for Sobrino which we saw in his earlier work which will be further developed after 1989, especially discipleship and the cross. In addition, the meaning of the word martyr gains a greater theological weight for Sobrino and he coins a new term-- the Jesuanic martyr. In this chapter we will see if the relationship between Sobrino’s idea of the Jesuanic martyr and his Christology is in fact dialectical. I will ask

449 Sobrino, Jesus the Liberator, 8.
the question whether or not martyrdom might be a lens with which to view Sobrino’s Christology and whether Sobrino’s Christological views help broaden and respond to Rahner’s push for an expanded concept of martyrdom. This chapter will conclude with the following assertions. First, Sobrino’s Christology has evolved over time, especially since the events of the 1980's. Second, Sobrino expands the concept of martyrdom beyond the traditional definition, and by coining a new term, Jesuanic martyr, helps us move beyond the traditional categories, and towards a working definition which may be more helpful for our 21st century reality. Third, the reality of martyrdom influences Sobrino’s Christology, and the new term Jesuanic martyr proves to be a key lens for interpreting his Christology.

1. Jesus the Liberator

In order to determine how Sobrino’s Christology evolves over time it will be helpful to examine two of his key theological works Jesus the Liberator: A Historical Theological View and Christ the Liberator: A View from the Victims.\(^{450}\) In particular we will see how some of Sobrino’s earlier ideas are developed and expanded. Jesus the Liberator was released in 1993 two years after the original Spanish version in 1991. The book is dedicated to the memory of the six Jesuits and their housekeeper and her daughter killed at the UCA and their housekeeper.\(^{451}\) The introduction proves telling in that

\(^{450}\)These are the full titles of both books but from here forward I will reference the two books as Jesus the Liberator and Christ the Liberator taken from the English book titles from Orbis Books. The original Spanish titles are actually a bit more specific: Jesucristo Liberador. Lectura historica-teológica de Jesús de Nazaret published two years before the English version in 1991 and La Fe en Jesucristo: Ensayo desde las víctimas published in 1999.

\(^{451}\)He names each one individually Ignacio Ellacuría, Segundo Montes, Ignacio Martín Baró, Juan Ramón Moreno, Amando López, Joaquín López y López, Julia Elba Ramos and Celina Ramos.
Sobrino answers why he chooses to write another book on Christology. One might think that this book is intended as a sequel to *Christology at the Crossroads*, but in fact it is an updated Christology which builds upon the first and is intended as a two part series with *Christ the Liberator* which will be finished a decade later. At the outset Sobrino makes reference to the hope that “this book will present the Christ who is Jesus of Nazareth” and for that reason he called it “Jesus the Liberator.”

He admits that the choice for the book was not an easy one since in El Salvador and in Latin America they tend to speak of the crucified Jesus Christ. One could say that the title provides a corrective for those who focus too much on Jesus Christ crucified by emphasizing the more hopeful liberation from the cross through Jesus. Sobrino then outlines why he writes this book on Christology and admits to some of the personal challenges. Writing about a liberating Christ which emphasizes the historical Jesus does not diminish the difficulty of writing a Christology. He admits that Christology “is up against a mystery.”

We can never claim that we know everything about that mystery or know more about Christ especially with such a presence of what Sobrino calls an excess of “historical darkness.” Sobrino also gives his reasons of the need for another book on Christology, one contextual and one more permanent. Sobrino writes the book because he sees Jesus as still an important

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453 From personal experience in Latin America there is a much greater identification with Jesus Christ crucified, perhaps because of the many poor and suffering there. Whereas here in the U.S. we sometimes have more of an identification with the Risen Jesus. The title thus makes sense in El Salvador. Sobrino wants to remind folks of the liberating aspect of Jesus, not just the suffering and death of Jesus in this title.

454 *Jesus the Liberator*, 2.

455 Ibid.
reality, present to the masses in Latin America.\textsuperscript{456} He sees Jesus Christ “at the service of the \textit{mysterium liberationis} and against the \textit{mysterium iniquitatis}. In this Latin American context he sees a universal Christ but also advances the notion that both Christ and the continent are crucified. He writes, “The relatively pacific ‘who do you say that I am?’ becomes a pressing question in the mouth of the crucified Christ and the crucified people.”\textsuperscript{457} Christ can also be grasped as good news too, not just as Christ crucified.

The reasoning behind the book hints at the purpose for this type of Christology. For Sobrino “The \textit{purpose} of this Christology is to put forward the truth of Christ from the standpoint of liberation . . .”\textsuperscript{458} The book relates Jesus to three central dimensions of his life: “his service to the \textit{Kingdom of God}, his relationship to \textit{God-the-Father} and his death on the cross.”\textsuperscript{459} Sobrino admits that presenting the content of Christ from the perspective of liberation is a deliberate methodological choice. By doing so Sobrino does not reduce the totality of Christ but instead rediscovers “dimensions of him absent from other Christologies.”\textsuperscript{460} Sobrino is not only concerned with the theme of liberation but also strives to develop a Christology which is relevant and applicable to Latin America.

Sobrino ends his introduction by acknowledging the significance the reality of El Salvador and the martyrs play in his context for writing this book. Sobrino asserts

\begin{quote}
The gospel’s finest and most original phrases – often taken for granted in christologies – resound here with real power,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{456}\textit{Jesus the Liberator}, 4.
\textsuperscript{457}\textit{Jesus the Liberator}, 5.
\textsuperscript{458}\textit{Jesus the Liberator}, 6. Italics author’s emphasis.
\textsuperscript{459}\textit{Ibid}. Italics author’s emphasis.
\textsuperscript{460}\textit{Ibid}, 7.
as something real. It is a fact that there are crucified peoples, ‘flogged Christs,’ and this give a better understanding of Christ, the Suffering Servant of Yahweh, hidden among the poor.\textsuperscript{461}

He also makes the claim that the innumerable martyrs are still present and active, and that the UCA Jesuits, the U.S. churchwomen, and Romero help us better understand the martyr Jesus. These many witnesses and martyrs help us better understand the witness of Jesus and provide us hope. The challenge of the Salvadoran reality “does not render christology superfluous, but makes it all the more necessary to put all one’s intellect into elaborating a christology that will help the resurrection of the Salvadorean people.”\textsuperscript{462} Hopefully then the person of Jesus Christ is united with a concrete reality and experienced as more than a theological concept but as a living faith. In Sobrino’s words, “The crucified Jesus Christ, so omnipresent, is really good news, is truly a liberator Jesus Christ.”\textsuperscript{463} Sobrino’s intent for this book is also made clear when he writes, “In the final analysis, this book does no more than – from Jesus – raise the reality I have been experiencing into a theological concept, reflect on a christological faith I find as a living faith, and no more than present Christ, the great witness to God, from the sources in theology, of course, but also from the cloud of witnesses who shed light on the witness by definition.” By examining the reality around him, Sobrino shows us a new way to do theology. Seeing the downtrodden people around him, seeing the misery, the war, the poverty, the response is found in Jesus. The human Jesus, who suffered, was flogged,

\textsuperscript{461}Jesus the Liberator, 8.
\textsuperscript{462}Jesus the Liberator, 8.
\textsuperscript{463}Jesus the Liberator, 8.
understands a people suffering. It is the divine Christ who resurrects and moves from the realm of the dead back to life. Reality is raised from the depths to the lofty realm of the conceptual. The downtrodden are raised from their crosses to triumph in Christ resurrected. The crucified Christ really is good news as a trueliberator, Jesus Christ.

In his first chapter, Sobrino introduces what he considers to be a new image for Christ which invokes a new envisioning of faith in Christ. Obviously, faith in Christ existed long before the Christianization of Latin America. But Sobrino rightly points out that the syncretization of Christianity in Latin America is unique and “the image of Christ and the inflicting of suffering have been connected in Latin America form the beginning and continue to be so.” But Sobrino insists that this image of the suffering Christ, also present in Spain and other Mediterranean cultures, uniquely becomes a symbol of protest in the South when it becomes a symbol of liberation. Sobrino associates this image of Jesus as liberator first and foremost with the historical Jesus of Nazareth. Following this historical Jesus necessitates a new way of living one’s faith. This radical conversion can and does lead to the possibility of being murdered, especially those who act in accordance with this novel image of Jesus the liberator. Sobrino notes that this generalized martyrdom only cements the proof that this new image for Christ is very real. The martyrs show evidence of a changed reality for those who want to fight for justice.

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464 Divinely human, and humanly divine. That mixture of two essences, so difficult to locate both in its reality and its concept. This may warrant more discussion later.

465 Sobrino, Jesus the Liberator, 12.

466 Ibid.

467 Sobrino, Jesus the Liberator, 13.
By following Jesus more closely they put their own lives at risk.

2. Sobrino’s Method for *Jesus the Liberator*

   Sobrino’s ideas about the historical Jesus do not come from a vacuum. He bases them in part on the Latin American Bishops Congregation in Puebla.  

   Puebla was concerned about the real or imagined dangers that John Paul II expressed about the first Latin American Christologies. Sobrino writes, “It I undeniable that underlying the document there is a concern with orthodoxy and that there is no longer the assurance and boldness of Medellín’s reflections.” Nevertheless Sobrino feels that even though some of the documents at Puebla may have been watered down, key elements of Latin American Christology remain, particularly those which speak of Jesus of Nazareth or what Sobrino terms “the historical Jesus.” Sobrino points to the parts of Puebla which deal with the problem of the presence of Christ in history, and our access to that part of our tradition. Sobrino claims that Puebla “restates the original formulas: Christ is present in the church, principally in holy scripture, in the proclamation of the word, in those who gather in his name and in the person of their pastors. And it concludes, ‘With particular tenderness he chose to identify himself with those who are poorest, and weakest’

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468 This is also a different sense of the historical Jesus than some scripture scholars. Notably John Meier critiques Sobrino for not having gone deep enough with his exegesis and lacking some awareness of historical-critical problems in Scripture. See John P. Meier, “The Bible as a Source for Theology” in CTSA Annual Proceedings, Toronto, Canada, Volume 43, 1988, 1-14.

469 Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 20. John Paul II apparently expressed his concerns in his opening address to the bishops gathered at Puebla. Sobrino claims that this new found concern about orthodoxy is the reason some of the statements were less bold.

470 Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 20. Sobrino ties the historical Jesus to his proclamation of the kingdom.
For Sobrino, Puebla formulates the concept behind the evangelizing potential of the poor. He writes, “The poor are those to whom Jesus’ mission is primarily directed; this is a supremely important and novel idea.”

Inspired by Puebla, Sobrino chooses a different starting point for his Christology. Rather than starting with dogma, or previous Christological texts, Sobrino starts with what is happening today in history, “the new image of Christ, and the new faith in Christ, and this is not the usual procedure.”

Sobrino claims that the new images for Christ are “a sign of the times” and will attempt to establish that Christ is a liberator and in what way Christ truly liberates. He writes, “As regards method, we have to determine the current *locus* in which christology can and must be done, in accordance with this sign of the times, and we have to justify the decision to begin with the historical Jesus.”

If Sobrino believes that God is present in history than it should be possible to find God in today’s reality. In chapter two of *Jesus the Liberator* Sobrino continues to outline some of the key methodological challenges to finding the kingdom in Latin America today. Sobrino utilizes Ignacio Ellacuría’s idea of the poor as a locus in order to illustrate this revelatory source. Sobrino, like Ellacuría finds that the typical place to find God is...

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473 Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 22.

474 Sobrino claims that Puebla does the most in formulating “the sign of the times.” But some, like Richard McBrien, trace the origin of the formula to *Gaudium et Spes*. Perhaps Sobrino means to say that Puebla builds upon the phrase the sign of the times, and its implications are more real in the Latin American context.

475 Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 22.
Among the poor, he finds evidence of both the Kingdom of God and the anti-kingdom. He finds that in the reality of the Latin American situation one finds “the partiality of God and Christ, the reality of the anti-Kingdom against which the Kingdom must be preached, or revaluations of elements included in christology but not taken very seriously: the following of Jesus, the beatitudes, the presence of Christ in the poor.”

Sobrino draws again on *Gaudium et Spes*. Sobrino stresses, “We are told that Christ is present in history and where and how he is present. To concentrate on a supremely important example, the presence of Christ now in the oppressed majority is affirmed and proclaimed . . .” The term that Sobrino attributes to Ellacuría to describe the oppressed majority is “the crucified people.” Sobrino’s emphasis on the cross comes to the forefront, and he applies it to the most marginalized people in his society – the poor. Sobrino interprets God’s revelation in his own reality to be read through the signs of the times, and finds this revelation in the people of God, the poor, the crucified people he sees around him.

Latin American Christology thus, in Sobrino’s view provides us with important tools for analyzing our faith in Christ. For Sobrino, simply identifying with the image of Christ is not enough, one must act on one’s faith in order live it. He writes, “Not only believers’ ‘image’ of Christ, but their act of faith, their response to and correspondence in

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the reality of their lives with this image, helps christology to penetrate the reality of Christ and understand the texts about him.\textsuperscript{480} After understanding the texts about Christ and trying to apply the texts to daily life, the reason becomes clear why there must be a lived and active part of one’s faith. The disciple and the martyr are two examples Sobrino uses for this lived faith. He writes, “For example, discipleship in practice is an introduction to the Jesus we follow, real martyrdom is an introduction to Jesus the martyr.”\textsuperscript{481} Sobrino utilizes this example early in the book and opens up possibilities to further engage these concepts near the end of the book. But the setting which Sobrino hopes to establish is clear for his Christology in Latin America, and specifically with the poor.\textsuperscript{482} So do martyrs then necessarily come from the setting of the poor? In order to be a disciple of Christ does one have to walk in some way with the poor? Clearly for Sobrino discipleship involves some type of accompaniment with the poor, and the more direct the better. But for now, I will leave the martyrdom question open, though it is also clear that El Salvador produced a number of martyrs who walked with the poor, like Rutilio Grande and the U.S. churchwomen, or spoke out against injustices against the poor, like Archbishop Romero. Nonetheless for Latin American Christology the important starting place is the situation of the poor. By walking with the poor we come to know Christ better. As Sobrino claims, “knowing Christ is, in the last resort, following

\textsuperscript{480}Sobrino, \textit{Jesus the Liberator}, 27.

\textsuperscript{481}Sobrino, \textit{Jesus the Liberator}, 28. This is the second mention of martyrdom in the book after the introduction.

\textsuperscript{482}This will have an impact on Sobrino’s ecclesial setting, because it will be “the church of the poor.” Sobrino, \textit{Jesus the Liberator}, 28-31. And the global setting will be “the world of the poor” Sobrino, \textit{Jesus the Liberator}, 32-35.
Christ.”  For Sobrino Latin American Christology is distinct because of their ecclesial and social settings: “in the world of poverty the poor and Jesus of Nazareth converge and point to each other.”

3. Sobrino Starts with the Historical Jesus

Obviously any division of the person Jesus Christ is fraught with difficulties. When one chooses to start Christology from above, or from below, the fear might be that the human side of Jesus or the divine side of Christ will be overemphasized. Sobrino himself acknowledges that the whole of Jesus Christ best represents the reality of Jesus Christ. But one can only start with some dimension of the person of Jesus Christ when writing a Christology. Thus Sobrino chooses to begin with the historical Jesus in his Christology. He writes, “Let me say from the beginning that I have chosen as my starting point the reality of Jesus of Nazareth, his life, his mission and his fate, what is usually called the ‘historical Jesus.”

One reason Sobrino offers starting with the historical Jesus is that “God’s descent into history cannot be understood in its pure abstract formality, simply by accepting the great miracle and gift of this descent, but only when we examine what it really consists of. This reality is Jesus of Nazareth.” Sobrino argues that the divine miracle is Jesus of Nazareth, and that the nature of this miracle can be found here below, so Christology must start from this perspective. Secondly, faith statements are not always helpful because they can end up being limit statements.

483 Sobrino, Jesus the Liberator, 35.
484 Sobrino, Jesus the Liberator, 35.
485 Sobrino, Jesus the Liberator, 36.
486 Sobrino, Jesus the Liberator, 37.
Sobrino does not want Jesus Christ to end up being a limit statement. Instead he argues that “To be able to confess meaningfully that Jesus is Christ, it is necessary to know Jesus, to know and analyze data about him which . . . enable a person to take the leap of faith and say, ‘Jesus is Christ.’”

Besides, since the first followers of Jesus were faced with the historical realities, his ministry, life, death on the cross and resurrection, the person of Jesus becomes the logical starting point. He writes, “This process began with Jesus of Nazareth. The logical process of christology is, therefore, chronological. Jesus can be understood as the way to Christ.”

Without going through the step by step process Sobrino uses, suffice it to say that he proves his point by using Rahner and classic Christological paradigms. In the end, Sobrino wants his method to be based on the idea that Christology is first and foremost inspired by the Gospels. He writes, “I have said that the method of Latin American christology is inspired by that of the Gospels, and I have also said that it has nothing original to offer when the Gospels are analyzed as ‘sources of knowledge’ about Jesus.”

Sobrino believes that Latin American Christology stands out from all the others and that the gospel message still needs to be told today. While suffering may be a part of that reality, there is still good news to be told as well. The gospels teach an important message for Latin America. In order to explain this further Sobrino will utilize two key lenses we have already seen in

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487 Sobrino, Jesus the Liberator, 38. Italics author’s emphasis.

488 Sobrino, Jesus the Liberator, 38.

489 Sobrino, Jesus the Liberator, 62.

490 The use of the divine titles for Jesus Christ are not explored in depth here, simply outlined. Sobrino more elaborately works through these titles in his next major Christological work Christ the Liberator.
4. Mission and Kingdom of God

First and foremost it is important to understand that Sobrino emphasizes that Jesus did not become incarnate to start a campaign of self-promotion. Instead, Jesus focuses primarily on two things; the Kingdom of God and the Father. These two are intertwined, but to underline their continuity with the last chapter I will concentrate on Jesus’ mission as the proclamation of the Kingdom of God. Sobrino gleans from the Synoptic Gospels that Jesus’ mission is defined as announcing the kingdom of God.\(^{491}\) Sobrino writes, “The Synoptics make clear this initial presentation of Jesus from the standpoint of the kingdom with the clear intention of putting forward a programmatic summary of his mission.”\(^{492}\) So Jesus’ announcement of the kingdom of God is greater than himself.

After examining some of the expectations of the Kingdom from the Old Testament and John the Baptist, Sobrino turns his attention to Jesus’ concept of the Kingdom of God. He writes that “Jesus came following a tradition of hope for oppressed history, that the first impression he made was above all in continuity with a hope-filled tradition.”\(^{493}\) Sobrino wants to emphasize this hopefulness because he believes that Jesus shared in the hope of the coming of the Kingdom. He writes, “we should first attach great importance to the fact that Jesus shared in the expectation of the Kingdom, that he thought it possible,

\(^{491}\) Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 68. Sobrino cites specifically Mk 1:14-15, Mt 4:17, Lk 4:18, Mt 11:2-5, and Lk 18-22.

\(^{492}\) Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 68.

\(^{493}\) Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 74. Italics author’s emphasis.
that he thought it something good and liberative." In this way Jesus was hopeful that humanity could overcome its oppressed history.

The coming of the Kingdom will be a grace from God and not one which can be forced by human action. But the expectation of the kingdom should change Christian praxis. Sobrino asserts, “The coming of the kingdom demands a conversion, metanoia, which – to put it simply for the moment – is a task for the listener: the hope the poor must come to feel, the radical change of conduct required by the oppressors, the demands on all to live a life worthy of the Kingdom.” Sobrino will go on to say that the gratuity of God and our action are not opposed, and that while we cannot force the Kingdom to come, we can prepare for its coming by changing our own actions. Sobrino also wants to reclaim that in the end the Kingdom of God is good news. He writes, “The conclusion has to be that in the gospels, Jesus is good news, but, with logical priority, the good news is what Jesus brings: the Kingdom of God.” For all of us who hear the Word of God we should rejoice in the knowledge of the coming reign of God on earth.

Sobrino shows another aspect of the Kingdom of God which is the importance of the kingdom for the poor. For the poor the kingdom is especially good news. While the Kingdom of God is for everyone Jesus addresses the poor specifically and uniquely. This message is echoed in church documents today. Sobrino writes, “And this is impressively borne out by Puebla: by the mere fact of being poor, whatever the moral or personal situation in which they find themselves, God defends them and loves them, and they are

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Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 75.

Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 76.

Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 78.
the first ones to whom Jesus mission is directed." For the church and its mission today the announcement of the Kingdom is still fundamental. For this reason, Sobrino sees the option for the poor not only as linked with Scripture in the Synoptics, but also as a partiality toward the poor today. It is these poor who Sobrino thinks “Jesus tells to have hope, that God is not like their oppressors have made them think, that the end of their misfortunes is coming, that the kingdom of God is coming and is for them.” Those who work in hopeful expectation for the coming of the kingdom should bring this message of hope which is concerned with the life and dignity of the poor.

Sobrino shows that the Kingdom of God is integrally connected with the poor. The essence of the Kingdom includes the life of the poor, and more than just defending their basic need to survive. There are two different audiences Sobrino addresses through this analysis. He wants to account for the historical roots of Jesus and see how Jesus addressed the poor in his day. But in addition he applies the strong images of Jesus to the problematic of the poor in our world today. Sobrino utilizes a famous Romero quote to illustrate both levels. As Romero said, the greatest gift of God’s creation must be defended: life. Sobrino gives several reasons why Jesus wants to defend the poor. First, the law of Israel is the will of God, and the Torah defends life. Second, Jesus condemns traditions that run counter to God, for example forbidding corn to be plucked

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497 Sobrino, Jesus the Liberator, 80. Sobrino cites #1142 of Puebla.
498 Sobrino, Jesus the Liberator, 82.
499 Sobrino, Jesus the Liberator, 84. “This is what Archbishop Romero said, ‘We have to defend the little thing that is God’s greatest gift: life.’”
from the Sabbath in Mark’s Gospel. Finally, Jesus gives central importance to the meal and more specifically, the key staple of the day, bread. Jesus eats with sinners and the multiplication of the loaves and fishes indicate the poor must be fed. Sobrino writes, “The passages cited above about life, meals and bread are not literally related to the Gospels to those dealing with the Kingdom of God and the poor, but they are objectively related . . . The Kingdom of God must, then, include as its least what is the greatest for the poor: life.”

Sobrino insists that the central message of the Kingdom of God is directed toward the poor. He writes, “The parables reproduce Jesus’ basic message about the Kingdom in a different literary form . . . But their central message is the same as that proclaimed by Jesus’ practice: the Kingdom of God is coming for the poor and the outcast; it is partial, and therefore causes scandal.” Sobrino claims that the parables continue to make the same central message. What changes is the audience. The parables don’t change in content or context, but they are not received by the various audiences critical of Jesus: the Pharisees, scribes, Roman authorities, etc. But he still tells them they can repent, that God is merciful, but if pushed God will still advocate for the poor. Sobrino writes,

To this audience, Jesus repeats his central message: the Kingdom of God is for the poor, the weak and despised – though here he does it speaking of ‘God’ rather than ‘the Kingdom of God.’ (Jesus) tells his adversaries that God takes sides, is rich in mercy, tender and loving to the poor

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503 Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 100.
and little ones. The basic message is that this is what God is like and so the poor and the sinners can await this God with joy and without fear. So the coming of the Kingdom is truly good news.\textsuperscript{504}

For Sobrino, Jesus shows a partiality or a preference for the poor. Jesus is trying to convince others not just that God is good, but God has special compassion for the “little ones,” the Anawim, the poor. Whether or not Jesus succeeds in getting his message across to those in power, does not change the central message. In this section Sobrino relies heavily on the Synoptic gospels, especially Luke and Matthew. He highlights the extremely harsh warnings, because he boldly emphasizes Jesus’ conclusion: “faced with the imminent return coming of the Kingdom they must put their talents to work; otherwise when the Lord comes he will put them from him and send them to share the fate of the hypocrites (Mt. 25:51). The \textit{Pharisees} are reproached for their actions and warned that they will incur God’s wrath . . . .”\textsuperscript{505}

The gospel message of Jesus is full of contrasts. The good news brings with it a surprising crisis. While it is critical that everyone hear the good news, Sobrino emphasizes that the people of Israel can no longer simply rely on their status as the chosen ones. But the basic requirements are clear. Sobrino elaborates, “And in two classic parables, Jesus proclaims the basic requirement in the face of the coming Kingdom: You must be merciful to the needy (the Good Samaritan, Lk. 10:29-37) and do things for them (Mt. 25:36-46) This is the first and last requirement of the Kingdom and

\textsuperscript{504}\textit{Sobrino}, \textit{Jesus the Liberator}, 100. I substituted Jesus for “he” for clarity. The original Spanish is more clear as to who the subject is, not to criticize the translation too much.

\textsuperscript{505}\textit{Sobrino}, \textit{Jesus the Liberator}, 101. Italics author’s emphasis.
everything depends on it, including final salvation.”⁵⁰⁶ But these parables can also produce joy and hope since the Kingdom is coming. Those who hear the saving message of Jesus can put their trust in that message and rejoice in that good news. Sobrino makes special mention of the parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl of great price in Matthew’s Gospel.⁵⁰⁷ He remarks, “God’s happiness, shown in the parables of welcoming the little ones, is matched by the happiness of those who find the Kingdom.”⁵⁰⁷

Finding the Kingdom leads to an expression of great joy and is a cause for celebration. Sobrino writes, “The coming of the Kingdom is good news, and is therefore incompatible with sadness. More, the Kingdom of God has to be celebrated with joy, since it would be a strange sort of good news if it did not.”⁵⁰⁸ While this Kingdom is celebrated against the backdrop of the anti-Kingdom, Jesus welcomes all of those people who most often are kept apart. For this reason Jesus invites the publicans, eats with sinners, and protects the prostitute. Even those not usually invited to the table can take part in the divine banquet. For Sobrino, “Jesus’ meals are not only beneficent celebrative signs, but also liberative ones: those who for centuries have been prevented from eating together can now eat together. This is why Jesus eats with the poor and the despised.”⁵⁰⁹

We find the tragic moment in those who reject the Kingdom, Jesus’ enemies and all those scandalized by the fact that He eats with sinners. Their blindness to the Kingdom of God

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⁵⁰⁶ Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 102.
⁵⁰⁷ Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 102.
⁵⁰⁸ Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 102.
⁵⁰⁹ Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 103.
causes their exclusion from it. He writes, “If God’s joy and the joy of little ones cannot move their hearts of stone, they will never have hearts of flesh and will have understood nothing of the Kingdom of God.”

Sobrino’s main point is that Jesus does communicate the joy and happiness which the proclamation of the Kingdom causes to shine brightly forth both in his lifetime and today. The Kingdom can even cause us to celebrate now. Sobrino claims, “Celebration of the Kingdom of God is the great sign that something of it has already arrived. Let me end this chapter by saying that this is still true in Latin America.”

He goes on to note that even though it might seem counter-intuitive to many of us, the poor celebrate. Just because they may suffer more injustice than most, does not mean that they are necessarily sad. Instead, “They have the capacity to celebrate what beneficent and liberative signs there are. And they celebrate it in community, like Jesus, around a table. This shared table is still the great sign of the Kingdom of God.”

He ends the section on the Kingdom with a quote from one of his exemplary martyrs Rutilio Grande, S.J. in his famous homily in Apopa just a few weeks before he died. Rutilio preached about a common table for everyone, where each person had his or her own tablecloth and place setting. He named the table one of love, and ended the homily by proclaiming, “It is the love of shared fellowship that breaks and overthrows all types of barrier and prejudice and will overcome hate itself.”

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510 Sobrino, Jesus the Liberator, 104.
511 Sobrino, Jesus the Liberator, 104.
512 Sobrino, Jesus the Liberator, 104. The homily can be found in its entirety in the Revista ECA 348/347 (1977) p. 859.
5. The Cross

In the third part of *Jesus the Liberator*, Sobrino returns to his initial theme of the cross of Jesus. He starts with a clear focus on the death of Jesus: “There is no doubt that Jesus died a violent death.” Sobrino then explores the reasons for this violent death, drawing mostly on the historical scholarship concerning why Jesus was killed, and giving a theological analysis for why Jesus died. Sobrino still draws on Moltmann for some of his work, particularly the Crucified God, but in a different way from his previous work in *Christology at the Crossroads*. In this section of *Jesus the Liberator* he moves Moltmann to the Excursus following the chapter rather than citing him extensively. This suggests that Sobrino has strengthened his own theological voice and is less reliant on European sources. But Sobrino does not simply dwell on the historical cross of Jesus. He moves us from the time of Jesus to speak also about the crosses and the crucified peoples of today. He writes,

> The crucified peoples of the Third World are today the great theological setting, the *locus* in which to understand the cross of Jesus. I say this because . . . a series of important questions appear which do not receive an unequivocal answer from exegesis: the meaning Jesus gave to his own death, the historicity of Jesus’ trials, Jesus’ last words on the cross, and so on . . . The point I do want to make is that the cross that dominates the Third World greatly illuminates the coherence with which the passion and death of Jesus — as a whole – are described.

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514 See especially the first part of Chapter Seven for evidence of this. While Sobrino references M. Kähler and Moltmann, he does not cite them extensively. Ellacuria and Schillebeeckx are simply footnoted.

515 Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 196.
Many people in Latin America identify with the cross of Jesus. It helps them to carry their own cross. Sobrino wants to make the locus of the crucified peoples his Christological starting point.

Sobrino makes the argument that Jesus’ teaching and preaching represented a radical threat to the established religious leaders of his time. Sobrino believes that the religious powers of the time, rather than deal with a radical message, simply snuffed it out. Jesus got in the way, and in the words of Romero, “Those that get in the way get killed.”

But Jesus was persecuted by the authorities before his death on the cross. His active ministry, his healings, and his teaching caused a strong reaction by the establishment. The end result of the persecution is clear when Jesus enters the city of Jerusalem. Sobrino argues that in Jerusalem, “it is clear that plots against him are multiplying, and that the leaders – now a more diverse group, including especially the chief priests – want to get rid of him.” In Jerusalem, Jesus’ life is at risk. Sobrino claims that John’s Gospel provides the greatest detail of this persecution.

From the beginning of his first visit to Jerusalem, Jesus’ life is in danger. Sobrino emphasizes the importance of Jesus’ persecution to show that the death of Jesus is not accidental, “but the culmination of a necessary historical process.” Sobrino stresses the persecution of Jesus to account for the persecution and death of modern day martyrs. He writes, “It is important to stress in our time in order to grasp the element of

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516 Sobrino, Jesus the Liberator, 196.
517 Sobrino quotes primarily the synoptic Gospels for evidence.
518 Sobrino, Jesus the Liberator, 197.
519 Sobrino, Jesus the Liberator, 199.
culmination present in the murder of today’s martyrs, and not to reduce them to a very cruel historical accident, but to understand them as something that could be seen coming, because history in itself is cruel.”

Just as Jesus was persecuted, tortured and killed by death on a cross, so too does Sobrino see today’s martyrs as having been persecuted and killed.

In the case of Jesus, the causes cited in the Gospels for the persecution vary, some are historical, but others theological especially in the Gospel of John. But Sobrino will claim, “The persecution arises because Jesus attacks the oppressors (historical dimension), who in addition justify oppression in the name of God (transcendent dimension). By attacking them, he (Jesus) defends the victims.”

Yet Jesus consciously continues his course of actions to raise the plight of those on the margins to the consciousness of the mainstream. The increasing persecution does not slow Jesus’ ministry, if anything his fervor increases. Sobrino hopes to show that Jesus continued to fight for the poor despite the consequences. He concludes, “This makes it clear that Jesus must have been aware of the possibility of a tragic outcome. This point is important to make us aware of Jesus’ freedom and, ultimately, of his love.”

Sobrino wants to show that the cross manifests the love of Jesus. The cross symbolizes the fact that “Jesus deliberately stays in the conflict while aware of its consequences.”

Sobrino sees the martyrs in a similar light. They

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520 Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 199.
522 Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 200.
523 Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 200.
don’t shirk their responsibility nor run from persecution. Those that follow Jesus may end up dying like Jesus.

Sobrino is fully aware of the conflict this may bring. Following Jesus as a disciple is fraught with conflict. But then again, so was Jesus’ life. Jesus held to his convictions to his bitter end on the cross. Here, Sobrino joins the cross with discipleship, without explicitly using the term. We follow Jesus, for the love of Jesus’ and Jesus’ love for us, which may lead us to conflict or even death.

Jesus did not die like some fanatical madman. He suffered persecution, willingly out of love, and in faithfulness to God. Sobrino writes, “Jesus, then, suffered persecution, knew why he was suffering it and where it might lead him. This persecution, consciously accepted, is the measure of his faithfulness to God.” Sobrino adopts the thinking of the early Christian church in viewing Jesus as the first Christian martyr. If we understand the death of Jesus to be the first Christian martyr’s death, perhaps it would be worth examining how Jesus viewed his own death. Similar to other prophetic figures, the historical Jesus may have tried to find meaning in his own death. The Eucharistic narratives in the Gospel may be one sign we have for Jesus’ hope that his memory would live on. While Jesus was able to foresee his end, he also instituted something which would cause his memory to live on. Sobrino wants to show how Jesus links his own life and death to one another. Jesus dies for us, on our behalf. Sobrino writes, “It is an

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524 Sobrino, Jesus the Liberator, 201.

525 We saw this especially in the first chapter as we saw the story of Polycarp. Jesus rather than St. Stephen was viewed as the first Christian martyr.
understanding of Jesus life as service, and in the end sacrificial service.”

Jesus’ own sacrifice can thus be seen as an act of service, one which leads to the salvation of the human race. But here again Sobrino wants to emphasize that the first disciples are also invited to share in the sacrifice, especially in the cup of Jesus. Many may want the cup of Jesus to pass by. Jesus himself asked for the cup to pass by in the agony of the garden. But the invitation to share in the cup is an invitation to share in the death of Jesus. Sobrino claims that Jesus sees his entire life as one of sacrifice and service. He writes, “His death therefore is not absurd and useless, either for him or for others. Jesus directly offers to all people the meaning of a life of service, and this is what he proposes to his disciples.”

Multiple times Sobrino draws on the prophet Micah as an example. Jesus does justice, loves tenderly, and demands that we do the same “walking with God in history.” Jesus’ model serves as an effective example for all people to walk with God in our own history. But this faithful service to the end is one which the martyrs especially take to heart. Sobrino at one point even argues that this ultimate sacrifice can lead to our full humanity when he writes, “To be faithful to the end is what it means to be human.” We may not all be called to be martyrs, but we all will die some day, and hopefully after a faith- filled life following Jesus in discipleship.

Sobrino sees the death of Jesus as a consequence of his mission. The Gospels

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526 Sobrino, Jesus the Liberator, 203.
527 Sobrino, Jesus the Liberator, 203.
528 Sobrino, Jesus the Liberator, 203. Sobrino quotes from Micah with frequency, often this same quote, four times in this section alone.
529 Ibid, 204.
make it clear why he was killed. Sobrino writes, “He was killed – like so many people before and after him – because of his kind of life, because of what he said and what he did. In this sense there is nothing mysterious in Jesus’ death, because it is a frequent occurrence.” Sobrino finds nothing mysterious in the sense that many people die for political reasons, Jesus among them. The tragedy for Sobrino lies in that so many human beings also suffer and die, but unlike the Son of God they go unmourned, unremembered. Many martyrs for justice die uncelebrated, unremembered, unlike the proto-martyr Jesus who we remember in the Eucharist every time we say the anamnesis. But Jesus dies because he gets in the way of the establishment, according to Sobrino. He writes, “It is getting in the way that comes from the simple fact of a particular incarnation, but not . . . in the world, but in the world that is anti-Kingdom which acts against the kingdom. Jesus became incarnate in this world, and not in another, he acted against this world of necessity . . . and this world reacted against Jesus also of necessity.” Sobrino argues that Jesus death was not a coincidence since, he was condemned to death by the leaders of his world. But what is different in the case of Jesus is his resurrection on behalf of the victims of this world through which he defends them. In the resurrection Jesus is recognized as the Son of God.

6. Victims and Violence

The reality of the victims is vitally important, especially in Latin America. It is from this reality that martyrs are produced so this section addresses the violent situations

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530 Sobrino, Jesus the Liberator, 210. The Johannine language of kingdom and anti-kingdom are common for Sobrino.
which produces both victims and martyrs. As we saw in the second chapter there is a long history of violence in Latin America, and especially in El Salvador, Sobrino’s lived reality. Sobrino notes that it is for this reason that Medellín speaks out against such institutionalized violence, especially against forces of tyranny. Archbishop Romero spoke out against this type of institutionalized violence, and dies for his speech. He spoke out especially on institutionalized violence which perpetuates injustice, and wanted only those wars which satisfied traditional Catholic teaching regarding just war. The martyr Ignacio Ellacuría also analyzed this type of institutionalized violence and criticized it from different perspectives. First, structures which create violence must be examined against the common good. Second, “unjust violence” often perpetuates stereotypes and “generates the violence of repression.” Finally, Ellacuría makes the argument for revolutionary response against repression, if the repression works against the common good. Speaking in these terms were some of the reasons that politicians and military officials killed Ellacuría, and make him an exemplary martyr for Sobrino, as one who died like Jesus, speaking out against the political regime and even religious authorities of his day.

Sobrino does not claim that violence is a solution proposed by Jesus. But Sobrino does believe that kinds of violence need to be differentiated. Clearly Jesus suffered violence. And many in the Salvadoran civil war did too. Sobrino wants to explore a possible response to repressive violence. Structural violence and repressive violence

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531 Sobrino, Jesus the Liberator, 212. Sobrino cites especially the sections on “Peace” from Medellín, #’s 16 and 19.

532 Ibid, 213. Sobrino does not cite the explicit document here, but seems to be paraphrasing here from one of Ellacuria’s articles, “Violence and non-Violence.”
injustice “must be unmasked.” In the end, all violence needs redemption. And this redemption comes primarily from one place, the person of Jesus Christ. The evil present in some societies needs to be redeemed. But some redemption also may come from the blood of the martyrs. Romero and Ellacuría remind us that the work and struggle for justice are not only important, but perhaps their deaths also brought and end to the violence. Their vocation was not one of armed insurrection. But they still spoke out against the horrific violence they saw or heard about on a daily basis.

7. Scandal of the Cross

For Sobrino the cross provides the key reason for explaining why Jesus died. First, one must acknowledge that it is not just any human person who dies on the cross but the Son of God. But Jesus was also killed just like many of the prophets of God. He spoke out, or spoke differently from the powers that be, and was killed for it. Sobrino writes, “We may understand the historical reasons for the cross – Jesus’ cross and those of so many others – but as to the ‘why?’ of the cross, judgment is suspended. If there is an explanation, it is hidden in God.”

The death of Jesus forces us to answer the question of theodicy. Not only why God allows evil in the world but also how is it that God can allow his only Son to die on the cross? Sobrino asserts that the New Testament does not try to give us convincing reasons. The acts of the passion we play out each year during Holy week do not necessarily reconcile the reasons behind why evil exists in the world. The cross

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533 Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 216.

534 Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 221.
expresses both hope and absurdity and goes beyond explanation. Sobrino criticizes those who would want to utilize only the Anselmian approach to explain the necessity of the cross. It may be one thing to appeal to God,

And it would be even more dangerous – as shown by all arguments based on Anselm – to claim to know that and how, in God, Jesus’ cross becomes something logical and even necessary. If this were the case, Jesus cross would not reveal anything about God, it would not give any help at all in understanding God. God, understood in advance is what would make it possible to explain the cross, but then the cross would tell us nothing about God.\textsuperscript{535}

Moving beyond the scandal of the cross to the salvation of the cross is the mystery worth solving.

There was a reason Jesus died a scandalous death on the cross. Formally speaking, we find goodness in the cross. God saved us from sin. God brings salvation through the cross.\textsuperscript{536} Sobrino stresses two soteriological ideas: “The first is that the good that God brings through the cross is salvation, but salvation came to be understood in the specific sense of salvation from sin.”\textsuperscript{537} The crucified Jesus brings salvation from sin. But the type of sin is not specified by Jesus, whether personal or social, freedom from tyranny, or other type of sin, no strong distinctions are brought into question, rather those questions arise today. Second, God certainly saves through the person of Jesus.\textsuperscript{538} Sobrino writes, “But what specifically in the cross and what makes it a mediation of

\textsuperscript{535}Sobrino, \textit{Jesus the Liberator}, 221.

\textsuperscript{536}Sobrino, \textit{Jesus the Liberator}, 222. Sobrino cites numerous biblical citations here to prove this idea of a primitive kerygma, Acts 5:31, John 11:50, Cor 5:14 ff, for example.

\textsuperscript{537}Sobrino, \textit{Jesus the Liberator}, 222.

\textsuperscript{538}This question was not doubted by the early Christians.
salvation, and in particular, forgiveness of sins, required explanation. Here, then we are moving on two levels: on the level of faith, the deeper level, where we affirm that there is salvation on the cross, and on the level of analysis, the more theological level, where we have to show how there can be salvation in the cross.”\(^{539}\) Especially on this second level, Sobrino argues that we should not dull the edge of the scandal of the cross.

If we forget the scandal of the cross and simply remember the good of our own salvation, we are left with a purely triumphalistic view. Sobrino forces us to remember both sides of the problematic, the triumph but also the scandal.\(^{540}\) He insists that “the pain of the cross does not in itself produce salvation.”\(^{541}\) Suffering by itself does not bring about redemption. But in his analysis, the cross demonstrates what was historically a necessary component of God’s love. In many ways the whole of Jesus life lead to the cross so that “real incarnation in a world of sin, is what leads to the cross, and the cross is the product of a real incarnation.”\(^{542}\) In this dichotomy incarnation to the cross, cross moving us to incarnation, Sobrino encapsulates the whole of Jesus life. The incarnation of Jesus moves to the death of Jesus. But the fact that Jesus becomes flesh gives us the soteriological significance behind the cross.

The dichotomy which Sobrino reveals also affects how we might look at the martyrs. They too lead us toward the mystery of the cross. The martyrs remind us of the

\(^{539}\) Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 222.

\(^{540}\) Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 223. Sobrino will go on to examine the different New Testament models, sacrifice, new covenant, and suffering servant in Isaiah, and the Pauline view.

\(^{541}\) Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 228.

\(^{542}\) Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 229.
salvific dimension of the cross in a tangible way. Martyrs remind us of our own finitude here on earth, but also point us toward the salvific nature of the cross. The cross can be understood through the example of one martyr especially, Archbishop Romero. Sobrino relates, “As often occurs in Latin America, in the presence of the martyrs, when human beings understand that there has been love, they understand it as good news, as something deeply humanizing. ‘It is good for human beings that Archbishop Romero spent time on earth.’” 543 This also gives us a modern day example, someone who tried to pattern his life after Jesus in our day. In the person of Romero, “Jesus leaves us the legacy of being servants like him.” 544 While we may not seek martyrdom ourselves, we can be inspired by the depth of their sacrifice, and ultimate identification with the saving love of the cross of Jesus.

8. Martyrdom and the Crucified People

In *Jesus the Liberator* Sobrino links the cross to the “Crucified People.” 545 With this methodological move Sobrino wants us to connect the scandalous death of Jesus on the cross, with the suffering and death of many people in Latin America. Other Latin American authors have written about the suffering of many of the poor on the margins, but here the link becomes more tangible. When one contemplates the scandal of the cross for Jesus, one might interpolate and better understand the suffering of so many. Sobrino

543Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 230. The quote inside the quote is from Ellacuría.

544Ibid.

545Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 233. As mentioned previously the idea of “the crucified people” is borrowed in part from Ignacio Ellacuria. What is novel here is the methodological move to link the cross to the crucified peoples which Sobrino adopts from Ellacuria. See Ignacio Ellacuria’s article in *Mysterium Liberationis*, “The Crucified People” p. 580-603.
is careful here not to encourage suffering for the sake of suffering, rather to examine the reality of suffering in the world around us. He describes this personal reflection: “What moves me to go deeply into the scandal of the cross is not that I am proposing a cult of suffering or masochism, or that I want to diminish the resurrection – some critics say I insist too much on what Paul says about the crucified Jesus and not enough on what he says about the risen Christ.”

But in part Sobrino is more concerned that we don’t forget those who suffer like Christ did, and especially that we do not forget the martyrs. Sobrino boldly states, “‘Woe to human beings and believers if they forget the crucifixion!’ If we do not forget those who are being crucified today, it will be more difficult to forget the crucified Jesus.” When we remember the reality of the crucified peoples we cannot help but be reminded of Jesus’ own suffering for us on the cross. The UCA martyrs are also on Sobrino’s mind as he draws in his own personal experience. He writes,

“Allow me to say this with a very personal experience. On 16 November 1989, when the Jesuits of the Central American University were murdered outside their house, the body of Juan Ramón Moreno was dragged inside the residence into one of the rooms, mine. In the movement one book from the bookcase in the room fell on to the floor and became soaked in Juan Ramón’s blood. The book was The Crucified God. It is a symbol, of course, but it expresses the themes of this chapter, God’s real participation in the passion of the world.”

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546 Sobrino, Jesus the Liberator, 235. One needs to remember as well that Sobrino will explore more with the Risen Christ in his next book Christ the Liberator.

547 Ibid. Sobrino mentions especially Don Pedro Casaldáliga’s phrase, “Woe to those who forget their martyrs!”

548 Ibid.

549 Sobrino, Jesus the Liberator, 235. While Sobrino does acknowledge this is only a symbol, it is
This is one of the few places in the book where Sobrino reflects on his own experience. He knew the UCA martyrs personally, and adding to the previous martyrs, Rutilio Grande, Romero, the U.S. churchwomen and others only deepened his experience. Like Jesus these martyrs did not die a pleasant death.

Sobrino envisions Jesus death as one of a “trusting martyr.” As Son of God, he envisioned that his death would be meaningful, but at the point of death he had to be confident of that trust. But Jesus goes beyond the normal category of martyr. Sobrino writes, “Jesus on the cross is not presented as one more martyr, in the sense that the martyrs (or many of them) interpreted their own deaths in continuity with their lives and as their last service to their cause. They will disappear but their cause will go on, and their death will help the cause go on.” For Sobrino Jesus’ death goes beyond a mere cause, because on the cross, in spite of the apparent abandonment of Jesus by God the Father, Jesus completes his salvific mission.

Sobrino continually links the death of Jesus with the death of so many crucified people, those people who suffer because of poverty or injustice. The death of Jesus on the cross makes us remember “the crucified people.” Sobrino wants to add this term as a part of a necessary theological language. They help us to identify the body of Christ in our midst. Sobrino wants us to see that the crucified people, the poor, the marginalized, are the actual presence of the crucified Christ in history. He writes that “in this crucified people Christ acquires a body in history and that the crucified people embody Christ in eerily poignant. The book is in fact conserved in the museum of the Centro Monseñor Romero at the UCA.

Sobrino, Jesus the Liberator, 238.
history as crucified.”\textsuperscript{551} But Sobrino does not stop there. He wants to take the concept one step further and call the crucified people “a martyred people.”\textsuperscript{552} As mentioned previously, Latin America is a place where recently more Christians have died a violent death than on any other continent. Sobrino argues that many who are killed died as Jesus did, but are not called martyrs because they “do not fulfill the canonical and dogmatic conditions for martyrdom.”\textsuperscript{553} The current dogmatic requirements according to Sobrino are similar to what I outlined in the first chapter: “martyrdom is caused by \textit{odium fidei} and death should not be a response to previous violence on the martyr’s part.”\textsuperscript{554} In short, a martyr dies as a witness for the Christian faith.

Sobrino re-examines Jesus’ death as a martyr in order to shed light on the Latin American context. He asserts, “The Latin American martyrs have forced us to rethink the traditional notion of martyrdom. In our opinion they have done something even more important: they have obliged theology to rethink its methodological approach to Christian martyrdom.”\textsuperscript{555} He argues that Christian martyrs in Latin America are in fact martyrs for the Kingdom of God. In this way “a martyr is defined as not only or principally someone who dies \textit{for Christ}, but someone who dies \textit{for Jesus’ cause}. Martyrdom, in this definition, is not only death in fidelity to a demand of Christ’s . . . but the faithful reproduction of Jesus’ death. The essence of martyrdom is affinity with the death of

\textsuperscript{551}Sobrino, \textit{Jesus the Liberator}, 255.
\textsuperscript{552}Sobrino, \textit{Jesus the Liberator}, 265.
\textsuperscript{553}Sobrino, \textit{Jesus the Liberator}, 265.
\textsuperscript{554}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{555}Sobrino, \textit{Jesus the Liberator}, 266.
In this way the martyrs of Latin America cause us to rethink our definition, since many died for the same reasons Jesus did, in the attempt to bring about the Kingdom of God here on earth. Sobrino brings a new element into his definition, since a martyr can also be one who dies as a witness for justice. They identify with Jesus on the cross in an ultimate way, “as the ultimate witness to God’s love, particularly for victims and against their oppressors.” Sobrino stops short of calling those who died anonymously martyrs for the faith. But whether they are called martyrs or not, it is clear that they often die an unjust death. While perhaps they do not show us the active struggle of the Kingdom, they are the ones who best illustrate the vast suffering poor of the world. But what they do hold in common is an intense identification with the cross and a similarity to the martyrdom of Jesus.

Sobrino identifies many martyrs who structurally reproduce the martyrdom of Jesus, starting with Archbishop Romero, and citing examples of priests, nuns, catechists, students, peasants, etc. He argues that they are like Jesus because they prophetically gave their lives for the Kingdom. But clearly the key martyr for Sobrino is Romero. He stands out as one of the “martyred people” who gave his life for the cause of justice. In Jesus the Liberator Sobrino the notion of martyrdom can be seen as a key lens for interpreting Sobrino’s Christology. He clearly sees Jesus death on the cross showing Jesus as the first martyr. Reflection on the cross helps us to identify with “the crucified people.” This identification identifies a new type of martyr which goes beyond the

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556 Sobrino, Jesus the Liberator, 267. Italics author’s emphasis.

557 Sobrino, Jesus the Liberator, 269.
traditional definition, a martyr for the cause of justice.

9. The Jesuanic Martyr

Writing for the ten year anniversary of the UCA martyrs, Sobrino returns to the theme of martyrdom when he reflects on the deaths of his Jesuit companions. In reflecting on the event, he coins a new term, “the jesuanic martyr.” In the article, he harkens back to Rutilio Grande and Romero, Martin Luther King, and the proto-martyr Jesus of Nazareth, and advance the claim that the Salvadoran reality warrants a new breed of martyr with a new name, “the Jesuanic martyr.” He links the term to Ellacuría’s phrase, “the crucified people.” The Jesuanic martyr can often be found in the same context which produces this crucified people and Sobrino affirms the nature of El Salvador as “a martyred people.” He claims that the Jesuanic martyrs are authentic and with liberty and love denounce structural injustice and are not limited to El Salvador but are scattered throughout the third world.

These martyrs are characteristic of many Christians in Latin America who prophetically speak out against injustice on behalf of the poor. They are called Jesuanic martyrs because “their life, love and praxis are structurally like that of Jesus.”

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559 Sobrino, Los Mártires Jesuánicos, 45.

560 Sobrino, Los Mártires Jesuánicos, 46. This article has not yet been translated into English. The phrase reads literally, “un pueblo martirial.”

561 Sobrino, Los Mártires Jesuánicos, 46. He mentions Bishop Juan Gerardi Conedera as the most recent example.

562 Sobrino, Los Mártires Jesuánicos, 47. “Aquí los llamamos mártires con toda naturalidad porque su vida, su amor y su praxis fueron estructuralmente como las de Jesús.”

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Jesuanic martyr dies like Jesus and for the same cause as Jesus. This causes us to change our traditional thinking on martyrdom. He cites as a primary example Archbishop Oscar Romero. His life and death give us pause to account for not only an exceptional human being, but an excellent Christian example, causing some to already proclaim him a saint because he spoke the truth and defended the poor from their oppressors. \footnote{Sobrino, Los Mártires Jesuánicos, 47. Sobrino mentions especially Pedro Casaldáliga’s poem “San Romero de América.”} Romero’s life is similar to that of Jesus Christ in life and death and he “reproduces the death of Jesus.” \footnote{Sobrino, Los Mártires Jesuánicos, 47. “Reproduce la muerte de Jesús.”} Sobrino claims that there are two fundamental elements which all Jesuanic martyrs have in common: they act in “love and defense of their brothers, the poor, and they live out their lives, like Jesus, until death.” \footnote{Sobrino, Los Mártires Jesuánicos, 48. “El amor y la defensa a los hermanos, los pobres, y al llevarlo a cabo, como Jesús, hasta la muerte.”} All of these Jesuanic martyrs, Romero, Martin Luther King, the UCA martyrs, respond to the anti-Kingdom by actively fighting for the Kingdom like Jesus did. The fight for the crucified people and their deaths express their love. Sobrino argues that both the crucified people and the Jesuanic martyr must be seen together. He writes, “the crucified people is, definitely, what gives meaning to the Jesuanic martyr. They have been actively and freely incorporated with the death of the crucified people, and they have done it to save them, and have been saved by them.” \footnote{Sobrino, Los Mártires Jesuánicos, 50. “Pues bien, el pueblo crucificado es, en definitiva, lo que da sentido a los mártires jesuánicos. Estos se han incorporado activa y libremente a la muerte del pueblo crucificado, lo han hecho para salvarlo, y han sido salvados por él.”} The main difference between the martyrs of the UCA or other more famous martyrs is that unlike the crucified people their deaths are honored and
remembered. But Sobrino suggests that their deaths remind us of the plight of the crucified peoples as well.

One of the main problems with the term Jesuanic martyr is that it falls outside the normal bounds of theological definition and category. Frankly put, the church and theology simply don’t know what to do with this new category of martyr. For this reason Sobrino wants to expand the concept of martyrdom to account for this new reality. The Jesuanic martyrs themselves call for this expansion with the way they give their lives in love. By the poignancy of their deaths, the UCA martyrs call for us to see the cross and the crucified people. Sobrino argues that they most profoundly identify with the mystery of God in the cross. They also call us to our own conversion perhaps even calling us to our own death, “to give our lives to take the crucified people down from the cross.” Sobrino wants us to remember these Jesuanic martyrs so as to remember all of the crucified people throughout the world. If we remember them, we remember what they gave, but also remember the love of God which calls us to be more fully human.

10. Christ the Liberator

The Jesuanic martyr reminds Christians about the struggle for justice in this world. But in giving their lives to take the crucified people down from the cross, they also point us toward the resurrection. In Christ the Liberator Sobrino writes about the resurrection from the perspective of the victims of history. This book serves as a sequel to the previous book Jesus the Liberator and he works to include the impact of the

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567 Sobrino, Los Mártires Jesuánicos, 51.
568 Ibid. I add crucified people for meaning. “Hasta dar nuestras vidas, por bajarlos de la cruz.”
resurrection, something which was purposefully not included in the previous book. He wants to acknowledge the tremendous poverty in the world, and to address that perspective in his Christology. Sobrino writes, “The view of the victims helps us to read christological texts and to know Jesus better. Furthermore, this Jesus Christ, known in this way, helps us to understand the victims better and, above all, to work to defend them.”

This book serves as a sequel to the previous book *Jesus the Liberator* and he works to include the impact of the resurrection, something which was purposefully not included in the previous book. Sobrino sees the resurrection of Jesus as an eschatological event and one that irrupts into history. He wants to show that the resurrection will bring hope to the hopeless, especially the poor and the marginalized throughout the world. For Sobrino the risen Christ claims victory over death on the cross. Martyrdom makes only a brief appearance in the first two of three sections in the book. I will reference these brief mentions of martyrdom and then shift to how Sobrino applies martyrdom in the third and final section of the book.

Before illustrating the martyrdom references I would like to briefly outline the relevant aspects of the first two sections of the book as they relate to martyrdom. In the third chapter Sobrino outlines the hermeneutical principles necessary for understanding the resurrection from the perspective of the victims. Sobrino hopes to show that the resurrection “expresses the totality of being human.” He views the resurrection as God’s eschatological triumph over injustice. The resurrection of Jesus gives hope for all

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570 Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator*, 35.
those crucified in history. Sobrino wants the resurrection to inspire not just hope, but Christian praxis. For Sobrino, “Praxis, together with hope, is what establishes unity and meaning in history.”\textsuperscript{571} The hope in the resurrection should impel Christians to desire to take the crucified people down from the cross. Sobrino writes, “We can say that hope and action are needed to grasp Jesus’ resurrection, and not just any love and action but those that apply to the task of taking the crucified down from the cross.”\textsuperscript{572}

The second part of the book describes the divine titles of Jesus so as to better understand the meaning of the resurrection. Sobrino tackles these titles so as to re-read them from a Latin American perspective. He argues that the divine titles of Jesus are still relevant for a Christological discussion of the resurrection today. Sobrino gleans these titles primarily from the New Testament, and wants to focus primarily on the liberating function of the Risen Christ. In Latin America the cosmic Christ defends the poor and from this context of oppression is named as “the liberator.”\textsuperscript{573}

Sobrino’s first mention of martyrdom occurs in chapter twelve in his discussion of the divine titles Son of God, Son of Man and Servant of Yahweh. In the last section Sobrino mentions the problem of theodicy, and especially when so many in Latin America suffer from inhuman poverty. Faced with injustice Sobrino claims that one way to face the situation is through praxis, in contrast to those who chose to face the injustice with mere prayer or an inwardly directed faith. Just as the Son of God completed his mission here on earth, some people identify with the Son more fully and completely.

\textsuperscript{571} Sobrino, \textit{Christ the Liberator}, 47.

\textsuperscript{572} Sobrino, \textit{Christ the Liberator}, 49.

\textsuperscript{573} Sobrino, \textit{Christ the Liberator}, 121.
Here Sobrino reiterates his ideas about martyrdom in *Jesus the Liberator*, but this time in light of Jesus as the Son of God. He writes, “In our world there are those who carry out a mission and are destroyed by it, ending up like the suffering servant, weak and powerless; there are many martyrs who today express this total identification with the servant.”

This theme of the suffering servant is continued from his previous work in *Jesus the Liberator*. In this book the martyrs help us to recall this suffering servant, and cause us to remember those who are poor and die as victims. Sobrino accounts for both groups, the martyrs and the victims. The suffering servant, Christ, is present to both of these groups.

Sobrino also mentions martyrdom when he describes “the good news” in the last chapter of the divine title section, “Jesus as *Eu-Aggelion*.“ Sobrino argues that the impact of Jesus’ mercy can still be felt today. The martyrs help witness to the good news of Jesus and these keepers of the good news continue to inspire us to follow Jesus ourselves. Sobrino gives the example of Archbishop Romero as one of these followers of Jesus who witnesses to the good news through his actions. The good news converges in the person of Romero in three distinct ways. First, he brings the good news through his service to the Kingdom, his preaching, hope and utopia which he radiated. Second, Sobrino describes “his paschal fate, the ultimate solidarity and love his death expressed, and his hope of rising again in the Salvadoran people, whose liberation will come to be a

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574 Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator*, 189.

575 Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator*, 209ff. This section describes the good news of Jesus, orthopraxis, and especially Jesus’ service to the Kingdom of God.

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Third, Romero evidenced solidarity with the poor by remaining close to the victims and prophetically speaking out against their oppressors. In short, Romero was good news to the poor and all those on the margins.

Sobrino views the death of Jesus and that of modern martyrs as good news. He mentions a long litany of martyrs: Martin Luther King who speaks for the oppressed, Alfred Delp and Dietrich Bonhoeffer for speaking out against the Nazis, Ellacuría who returns to El Salvador despite the danger, and Ita, Maura, Jean and Dorothy in their faithful accompaniment of the poor. For Sobrino martyrdom is the epitome of good news. He writes, “martyrdom, the ultimate witness to the absoluteness of love, truth, and justice and to the manner of living love in freedom, without hatred, with hope, contains much that is good news.”

The good news brought by the martyrs almost always appears in times of persecution. Sobrino asserts once again the primacy of Jesus as the proto-martyr, and faithful witness. But the world today remains cruel. In spite of that cruelty, Sobrino wants to recall that “martyrs tell us that truth and love, firmness and faithfulness, and love to the end are possible. And that is good news.”

11. Reality of Martyrdom

The reality of martyrdom makes the strongest impact on the third part of *Christ the Liberator*. In this section Sobrino concentrates on Jesus Christ as mediator and the import of the Kingdom of God. He especially advances the view of the victims, not just

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576 Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator*, 216.
577 Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator*, 217.
578 Ibid.
to further the cause of liberation theology, but because belief in Christ and working for the Kingdom, makes us take into account the majority of the population of the world. Sobrino shows that Christology and works must be tied together as the Christian community follows Christ as disciples in the post-Easter community. For this reason works assume great importance as evidence of faith. Sobrino remarks that “virtually all the apostles died as martyrs.” Whether or not this is legend, Sobrino wants to insist on the eschatological significance of witness value of the twelve apostles as twelve martyrs. He also remarks that “Some of the great christologues, such as Ignatius of Antioch and Justin, died as martyrs and related, as we shall see, the reality of martyrdom to christology.” While none of them had the same notion of the Jesuanic martyr, they did want to show how the reality they lived in produced martyrs who witnessed to their faith. The martyrs show us the need for witnessing to our faith so that faith not be relegated purely to the theoretical realm. The martyrs move us from complacent orthodoxy to orthopraxis.

As Christianity moved to become a part of the mainstream Greco-Roman world, the martyrs still remained part of the Christian imagination. The Kingdom of God was still integrally tied to the gospel mission of service to the poor as well. But Sobrino argues that in some ways, the Christian imagination never lost a sense of the importance of standing against an oppressive regime or government. The first Christians understood the importance of what it meant to be “the church of the martyr.”

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579 Sobrino, Christ the Liberator, 229.
580 Ibid.
581 Sobrino, Christ the Liberator, 249.
rose to a position of power, this tradition of martyrdom still remained.

These martyrs shape Sobrino’s understanding of how the victims of history view God. Sobrino claims that the victims still believe and hope in a powerful and saving God. But they also remain open to the notion of a God who suffers with them. The poor also have the ability to recognize those faith committed people who choose to stand with them. Sobrino claims that in the experience of El Salvador many “have moved close to the victims — from Archbishop Romero and Ignacio Ellacuría to many other priests, religious sisters and professional people. Sociologically these people express otherness with regard to the poor, and it is just in this otherness that the victims see the possibility of salvation.”\(^5\)\(^{82}\) These exemplars of affinity with the poor choose to share the sufferings of the people even to the extent of experiencing martyrdom. Again, Sobrino uses Romero as an example of someone who witnesses to the church incarnate. He writes, “Romero saw something so saving in the cross, not just as the way to resurrection but as already the expression of incarnation and incarnation following on to the end; that is, he saw the cross as affinity — the greatest possible affinity— with victims.”\(^5\)^{83}\) Romero identified with the victims in an ultimate way, and for this reason the Salvadoran people believe he lives on with them, and continue to remember his witness at the anniversary of his death year after year.

Sobrino also makes the claim that the martyrs help us to fight against the tendency of the church to gravitate toward docetism and gnosticism. They ground us in reality,

\(^5\)\(^{82}\)Sobrino, Christ the Liberator, 272. Italics author’s emphasis.

\(^5\)\(^{83}\)Sobrino, Christ the Liberator, 273. Italics author’s emphasis.
and help us to remember those who struggle daily for basic survival. Modern Christians remember Jesus as proto-martyr who as divine being also shared fully in our humanity through his death. Sobrino cites the example of Ignatius of Antioch who when faced with his own imminent martyrdom reflected that “by rejecting martyrdom one rejects salvation.”\footnote{Sobrino, \textit{Christ the Liberator}, 279.} For this reason Sobrino writes, “There is, therefore, a relationship between martyrdom and salvation, and the theoretical basis for this is communion in the (martyrial) flesh of both Jesus and the martyrs.”\footnote{Ibid.} The martyrs show the Christian faithful the importance of witness, and the necessity for belief in something greater—salvation in Christ. The martyrs show the Docetists the importance of affirming both natures of Christ, human and divine, by following the life of Christ to the same ultimate end. One way to counter this Docetist impulse is to keep focusing on real life. It helps us to ground the church in a reality which accounts for those on the margins, rather than simply letting our ecclesial focus drift towards the sublime. Sobrino recalls that Romero did not build a church without limitations, but he did build a real church. Sobrino claims that Romero built a real church “because it was the place for expressing grace, faith, commitment, and the hopes and values of the people of El Salvador.” This same church stood with the poor and the victims evidenced by the priests, women religious, and committed church members who gave their lives in witness and in solidarity with the poor.

When Sobrino examines where we find God in history, martyrdom again sheds

\footnote{Sobrino, \textit{Christ the Liberator}, 279.}
\footnote{Ibid.}
light on the cross as sacrifice or self-giving. The cross becomes a symbolic part of
history and emphasizes how Jesus came into conflict with the oppressors. Sobrino
claims, “The cross came about, therefore, for defending the weak, and this makes it an
expression of love. We can then say that the cross brings salvation, that the cross is eu-
aggelion, good news. Love saves, and in the end love, in its various expressions, is the
only thing that saves.”

Jesus’ love culminates in the cross, a radical expression of self-
giving throughout his life. Some want to qualify this love, just as some debate how to
qualify Romero’s love in his canonization process. Sobrino reminds us that there are
debates about what title to give Romero if he is to be canonized. Sobrino writes, “If he is
to be beatified as a martyr (and not as bishop and martyr), what counts essentially from
the canonical point of view is his death itself, which could mean that his past life and the
historical reasons that led to his death – with the exceptions of the hatred of the faith and
now, perhaps the hatred of justice – will not be essential, or at best be secondary.”

But in many ways this would distort the real person in history. To omit the justice issues, the
fact that he defended the poor against his oppressors and died in the end for it, would
distort the reasons for his martyrdom in history. Sobrino argues that the martyrs remind
us of the Jesus of history as well. The resurrection of Jesus is that much more powerful
after he lived in the Galilee, healed the sick, broke bread with his disciples and then died
a scandalous death on the cross. For this reason, Sobrino claims that the resurrection as a
part of history is greater than a resurrection which is purely conceptual. The risen Christ

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586 Sobrino, Christ the Liberator, 305.
587 Sobrino, Christ the Liberator, 306.
did in fact walk among us. The resurrection “is doing justice to a victim; it is the hope that the butcher will not triumph over the victims and that we may be able to share in this hope.”\(^{588}\) The cross and the resurrection joined together as one unity reveal the God of love.

Sobrino closes the book with an excursus on journey and memory. With this conclusion, he shows the centrality of the Kingdom of God and the important status of the poor in the Kingdom. The Kingdom of God calls us to faithfulness, to walk humbly and follow the call of Jesus Christ. The Christian message should give hope to the victims. Martyrs give us an example of those who follow Jesus to the ultimate end. They are the witnesses and give the poor and the victims reason for hope. Sobrino names these witnesses when he recalls “Archbishop Romero, Ignacio Ellacuría and his companions, Celina Ramos, and most recently Juan Gerardi – a whole constellation of witnesses, martyrs who not only bear witness to Christ but who remake the life and fate of Jesus.”\(^{589}\) These martyrs bring hope and can be the mediation of grace for the crucified peoples, the victims of this world. These victims also stubbornly show us how to hope against hope. The victims help us to remember what is important, but also what it means to journey clinging to hope. The martyrs encourage us to live our faith more authentically with the witness of their lives. Sobrino closes poignantly, “But the greatest encouragement comes from those who inspire with their actual lives, those who today resemble Jesus by living and dying as he did. This is God’s journey to this world of victims and martyrs, and is

\(^{588}\)Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator*, 306.

\(^{589}\)Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator*, 340.
the way to the Father and the way to human beings, above all to the poor and the victims of this world.”

12. Summary

In this chapter I have shown an evolution in Sobrino’s Christology and thinking regarding martyrdom. In *Jesus the Liberator* Sobrino shows the centrality of the cross and the Kingdom of God in Jesus’ life and ministry. He links the cross to the idea of the crucified people and hopes to inspire those who seek justice to bring the crucified people down from the cross. Sobrino advocates an expansion for what we consider martyrdom, speaking about a new category of martyrdom for those who want to closely follow Jesus and strive for justice, defending the poor from their oppressors. After *Jesus the Liberator*, in a 1999 article, Sobrino coins a new term, “the Jesuanic martyr” as he reflects on the Salvadoran martyrs, and especially Romero and his UCA brothers. This term encapsulates what it means to be a martyr for Sobrino, one who reproduces the death of Jesus, and gives his or her life for the defense of the crucified people. In *Christ the Liberator*, we see how martyrs provide a hopeful sign of the resurrection. They give their lives as Jesus did as a sign of saving grace in history. In *Christ the Liberator*, we see the evolution of Sobrino’s Christology into, – one which remains based in the context and reality of El Salvador, – but now combines the life, death and resurrection of Jesus into one congruent whole. The martyrs help to bring this about. Their witness reminds us of the body of Christ incarnate, who gave his life for us, and gives hope to the victims of history, that they might one day have their burdens lifted in the experience of the

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resurrection.

14. Summary Conclusions

I would like to end this chapter with a few brief conclusions. First, I will evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of Sobrino’s expansion of the term martyr. Second, I will briefly trace the development of Sobrino’s Christology, as it is spurred on in part by the reality of martyrdom. Third, I will point towards the future direction that Sobrino’s rethinking of martyrdom might take the theologians of tomorrow.

It is clear that the reality of martyrdom affected the development of Sobrino’s Christology. As we saw in Chapter Three, there are very few reference to martyrdom in *Christology at the Crossroads*, and martyrdom does not influence the overall work to the degree that we see in *Jesus the Liberator* or *Christ the Liberator*. In some ways this makes sense from a purely historical view. Sobrino’s first book draws more on Sobrino’s European formation and there are more references to Moltmann and Pannenberg than martyrdom. From the start of the book, the dedication to the UCA martyrs in *Jesus the Liberator* marks a change from Sobrino’s previous work. Martyrdom affects the work in both the number of citations and the qualitative sense. In Sobrino’s own words “martyrdom is a reality, not a concept.”

It breaks into the Christology of Sobrino, because the reality of martyrdom, breaks into El Salvador just as it has done in many Latin American countries. In *Christ the Liberator*, this reality of martyrdom is assumed, and he adds a more concrete term, the Jesuanic martyr, to the mix. I don’t think it’s

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591 Sobrino mentioned this reality to me personally in a conversation at Loyola Chicago in June of 2009. Literally he said, “Martyrdom is not a concept, it is a reality.” He then recommended I come to El Salvador to see this reality, in the crucified peoples of today.
stretching too far to think of Jesus the proto-martyr as the foundation for Christ as resurrected being. Even after enumerating the many divine titles of Jesus in Christ the Liberator, we are left with this Christ whose main role is to take the crucified peoples down from their crosses.

One of the main strengths of Sobrino’s expansion of the concept of martyrdom to admitting the reality of martyrdom is that we are forced to confront a Latin America which is not beautiful. Here in the United States we don’t have this same experience. The Salvadoran reality forces this new framing of martyrdom. The traditional definition of martyrdom, literally to die “in odium fidei” simply does not work here. Christians are murdered by other Christians, so technically they do not die for their faith. But Sobrino wants to insist that they do die for their faith. Their faith is what causes them to speak out against oppression – Romero, to continue to confront the repression -- Ellacuría and Montes, to preach against unfair labor practices in the countryside at Apopa – Rutilio Grande, or walk with the people as missionaries in a far away land -- Ita Ford, Jean Donovan, etc. So Sobrino has a valid point. There are those who model their lives on Jesus, Jesus as proto-martyr, Jesus as prophet, and Jesus as a seeker of justice. These exemplary martyrs for Sobrino choose to pattern their lives on Jesus, to take up the scandal of the cross in this new reality and are killed for it. Sobrino makes an important contribution by answering Rahner’s 1983 call to re-think this question. And who better to reflect theologically on the question, than someone who had to live through the massacre of his entire community, and then returned to El Salvador to re-think the same Christological questions from this context. By coining a new term in the Jesuanic martyr,
we have a new paradigm for a modern reality. Martyrs who die for justice.

A critical voice might complain that this might dilute the term. Sobrino in some of his more polemical writings seems to want to expand the concept to the more anonymous cases. When he writes about the “red martyrs” in *Jesus the Liberator*, when he talks about the anonymous lay catechists killed or the massacre at El Mozote, does he extend the term too far? I think Sobrino does purposefully push the definition of martyr to its limits, but I don’t think if he were seriously pressed he would stake too much on this claim. I think it’s a way for Sobrino to include those more anonymous martyrs who died for justice. The concern is that we stretch the category of martyrdom too far. If we try to include the more anonymous cases of martyrs, do we diminish the real meaning of what it means to be a martyr? I share this concern. Neither the term Jesuanic martyr or even having a specific case where we allow for a martyr for justice is problematic. But trying to polemically include the red martyrs or the Marxist student does not help his overall argument. It weakens the force of his argument by alienating those who hold to a more traditional view of martyrdom and would be willing to account for a “justice martyr” like Romero. But overall, I think the coinage of the term Jesuanic martyr adds a new category of martyr, especially in the Latin American context.

Second, I think the reality of martyrdom helps us to trace the overall development in Sobrino’s Christology. Certainly some of the key categories remain the same throughout, such as discipleship and the cross. But the same categories expand and broaden in Sobrino’s later works. Taking the theme of discipleship, we saw in *Christology at the Crossroads* that this was key. To be a disciple one must follow Jesus,
as apostle, or as modern day practitioner. But the cost of discipleship is heightened in Jesus the Liberator. Jesus the proto-martyr shows us the difficulty of walking with him in faith. In both the first book and the second discipleship is poignantly linked to the cross. But even Sobrino’s thinking about the cross is deepened as he adds the term the crucified peoples in Jesus the Liberator, and then in Christ the Liberator makes the bold claim that with the help of the resurrected Christ we need to take the crucified peoples down from the cross, and to give them hope in the resurrection. The victims of history understand the mystery of the cross, but they need help to see the hope in the resurrection. This key link between the cross and the crucified peoples is certainly not distilled in Sobrino’s early work like it is in his later work. The Jesuanic martyrs alert us to the fact that the crucified peoples not only exist but cry out for justice. They remind us of the ongoing task to not only witness to Christ crucified, but also to instill the hope of the Risen Jesus to those who most desperately need to hope.

Finally, I think it is clear that Sobrino’s contribution to the renewed interest in martyrdom is clear. We might disagree with how far Sobrino wants to extend the concept, but clearly his work gives us an important new definition and way to speak about the martyrdom today. I think the challenge for the future is to explore the variations of this term and to test it. Was one of the Protestant non-combatants in the massacre at El Mozote a martyr if they did not intend or seek martyrdom? Is the young Marxist university student who does not believe in God but fights for social justice in his country and is killed for it a martyr for justice or a Jesuanic martyr? And more broadly, can we extend this concept to different denominations or faiths, Protestant, Catholic,
Orthodox, Muslim or Jew, we all have examples of martyrs from the time of the Maccabbees, to religious wars, to our modern sacrificing martyrs of today. Certainly Sobrino’s outlining of the problematic could be helpful to this discussion, and while we might disagree on the conclusions, no one can doubt the importance for future work. We are still counting the number of Latin American martyrs today, and we can look to the current conflicts around the world to find more examples in the future. While in the global north perhaps we do not have the same experience as in the global south, it does not lessen the impact of the fact that we still have a Church which produces martyrs, perhaps of different type and kind, but throughout Latin America, Africa, the Middle and Far East of today. One challenge for me and other theologians in the future might be too see how this reality of martyrdom impacts so many people today, and how martyrdom might be a key Christological lens for the future. Sobrino, by examining this new reality of martyrdom not only strengthens his own Christology, but lays down a gauntlet for those who want to find a more expansive definition for the martyrs of today.


