Introduction

“It’s Them or Us!”

[The 1993 Commission on the Truth for El Salvador produced] a chilling Report which . . . reveals how violence and state terrorism were used mercilessly against civil society. . . . Two [cases], in particular, shook the conscience of the world: the assassination of Archbishop Romero, committed by a death squad under the command of the founder of the ARENA party [Roberto D’Aubuisson], and the assassination of the Jesuit fathers and their domestic employees, ordered by the military high command.

Pedro Nikken, President of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights

It’s Them or Us!

Words of Colonel Guillermo Benavides to Jesuit high school graduate, Lieutenant Ricardo Espinoza, ordering him to assassinate Fr. Ignacio Ellacuría, S.J., President of the University of Central America

A few minutes after 8:00 p.m. on November 11, 1989, rebel forces of the National Liberation Party (FMLN) launched the largest urban offensive of its eight-year civil war against El Salvador’s repressive right-wing government.


3. A CIA analysis of the offensive states, “The rebel’s principal focus was the capital, but they also initiated heavy fighting throughout much of the country, including the departments of Santa Ana, San Miguel, and Usulután.” U.S. Declassified Documents I, CIA, Directorate
military and its U.S. sponsors were stunned by the strength and scope of the attack. The noise of fierce gun battles erupted throughout the capital city of San Salvador, and military flares illuminated the night sky. Two thousand rebel troops occupied entire neighborhoods until aerial bombing of the civilian population by the Salvadoran Air Force forced them to retreat. From there the rebels entered the wealthy Escalón district, home of government and business elites, attacking the official and private residences of the president and the head of the Legislative Assembly and the barracks of three separate Infantry Brigades and the Infantry Police. Nearby, they provoked a standoff at the iconic Sheraton Hotel with U.S. Green Berets, who beat a hasty retreat unharmed into awaiting helicopters. Analyzing the rebels’ ability to hold portions of the capital for three weeks, the Los Angeles Times reported that “the intensity and duration of the offensive” had the “right-wing government reeling,” threatened to “make the country ungovernable,” and “undermined” the central claims of “a decade of U.S. counterinsurgency policy.” Embarrassed by early losses and worried about continued U.S. support for its nine-year civil war against the rebels, on November 12 the government declared a state of emergency and established combat zones throughout the capital under the command of Colonel René Emilio Ponce, chief of staff of the Salvadoran Armed Forces.

At 6:30 p.m. on November 15, the fifth day of the occupation, with no end in sight, the United Nations Commission on the Truth for El Salvador says that Colonel Ponce convened “a meeting of the General Staff with military heads and commanders to adopt new measures to deal with the offensive.” The meeting took place at military headquarters (the Estado Major), and one participant described the mood as FMLN guerrillas roamed the capital just blocks away as “the most tense and desperate gathering of the country’s top military commanders since the war . . . began a decade ago.” Colonel Ponce states that some twenty-four officers attended the meeting “to analyze the positions we had lost since November 11 [and to determine] . . . what we needed to do to regain them,” adding ominously, “We understood that we needed to take stronger measures.”

  4. The preceding details are from Byrne, El Salvador’s Civil War, 152-53.
Introduction: “It's Them or Us!”

This was evidently a euphemism for Ponce’s decision to start dropping 500 to 700-pound bombs on occupied civilian neighborhoods and to implement long-held plans to begin murdering civilian political opponents. What followed evokes more recent images of dictators ordering troops to fire on unarmed civilians in desperate attempts to hold onto power during the “Arab Spring,” which began in 2011. The United Nations states,

Colonel Ponce authorized the elimination of ringleaders, trade unionists and known leaders of the FMLN and a decision was taken to step up bombing of civilian neighborhoods by the Air Force and to use artillery and armored vehicles to dislodge the FMLN from the areas it controlled. The Minister of Defense, General Rafael Humberto Larios López, asked whether anyone objected. No hand was raised. It was agreed that President Cristiani would be consulted.

Emboldened by this carte blanche to attack civilians, Colonel Guillermo Benavides turned to General Rafael Bustillo, seated next to him, and said, according to a source who attended the meeting, “This is a chance to go after” civilian groups considered supporters of the FMLN, adding, “I have the UCA [University of Central America] in my sector.” General Bustillo replied, “Well then, you know what you have to do.”

General Larios López states that the session broke up around 10:00 p.m., and the United Nations says, “After the meeting, the officers stayed in the room talking in groups.” Colonel Ponce gathered with several top-ranking officers, including General Bustillo (chief of the Air Force), Colonel Francisco Elena Fuentes (commander of the First Infantry Brigade), Colonel Juan Orlando Zepeda (vice minister of defense), and Colonel Inocente Orlando Montano (vice minister of public security). The report then asserts, “Colonel Ponce called over Colonel Guillermo Alfredo Benavides [director of the Military Academy] and, in front of the four other officers, ordered him to eliminate Father Ellacuría and to leave no witnesses,” adding that he was “to use the unit from the U.S.-trained Atlacatl Battalion.”

Within the hour, around 11:00 p.m., Colonel Benavides summoned Lieutenant Ricardo Espinoza, a young graduate of the Jesuit high school in San Salvador, and ordered him to assassinate Fr. Ignacio Ellacuría, S.J., president

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10. This detail is from Doggett, Death Foretold, 56.
15. Ibid.
16. Martha Doggett states that this detail was provided by “the extrajudicial confessions of the suspects.” Doggett, Death Foretold, 65.
Introduction: “It’s Them or Us!”

of the Jesuit-run UCA, and to leave no witnesses. This implied the murder of Ellacuría’s housemates, including Fr. Segundo Montes, S.J., the young man’s former high school principal and teacher. Espinoza protested, saying, “this is a serious problem.”

But Benavides insisted and ordered Lieutenant Yussy Menddoza, who had been sent to fetch his former Military Academy classmate, that he must participate in the action “in order to overcome any reluctance on . . . [Espinoza’s] part.”

Knowing he might face Fr. Montes, Espinoza took a bar of black camouflage grease with which to disguise himself and a little over three hours later “gave the order to kill the priests.” Espinoza later testified that his eyes filled with tears as he hurriedly left the Jesuit university residence while his troops riddled the helpless victims with bullets.

General Larios reports that he called President Cristiani, who arrived at the military headquarters at 11:00 p.m. and stayed until about 2:00 a.m. The U.N. report confirms that President Cristiani was indeed present at the Military Academy and that he met with the high command during most of the operation on November 16. The report by the Lawyer’s Committee on Human Rights, an official plaintiff in the case, asserts that the assassinations took place around 2:30 a.m., at which point it suggests that President Cristiani may have left the grounds of the military headquarters. Thus, the Jesuit murders were ordered by the highest levels of the Salvadoran military, with possible approval by the president of the country, and were in the process of being carried out while he was closeted with the military leadership about a mile from the scene of the crime. At the time of this writing, the Spanish National Court has reserved the right to indict former President Cristiani for involvement in the killings.

The question remains, however, why implicate virtually the entire command structure of the Salvadoran military, and possibly the president, in order to kill one priest and a handful of associates? The easy answer is that Colonel Ponce and the others understood that their ability to avoid prosecution as the intellectual authors of the assassinations would depend upon implicating all of their

19. Ibid., 47. Also Doggett, Death Foretold, 65.
23. Doggett, Death Foretold, 282.
peers. Clearly, the decision to murder Ellacuría was by no means a last-minute decision taken in a state of near panic in the face of FMLN control of parts of the capital. Indeed, a variety of historical, ideological, and personal factors fueled the deep-seated animosity of El Salvador’s extreme right for Ignacio Ellacuría. But the most important irritant may have been the threat posed by the work of Ignacio Ellacuría and his UCA colleagues to continued U.S. support for the government of El Salvador and its suppression of Salvadoran civil society with its demands for economic, political, and social change.

Martha Doggett, in her exhaustive report on the UCA murders, explains that in light of such factors, “Some observers believe that these officers have in retrospect exaggerated the severity of the FMLN challenge as well as their despair at the time in an attempt to rationalize the Jesuit murders and extensive aerial bombardment.” Her report on behalf of the Central American Jesuits and the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, the official plaintiffs in the case before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, charges, “An examination of events during the year preceding the UCA murders suggests that the decision to move against the Jesuits may have been taken months earlier.” Confirming this view, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights cites a pattern of slanders and “attacks by government officials and members of the Armed Forces” against the Jesuits going back “three years before the extra-judicial executions.”

Thus, Doggett concludes, “While the guerrilla offensive provided a last-minute impetus and suitable cover, hard-liners within the Army had long before resolved finally to act on their 10-year wish to silence Fr. Ignacio Ellacuría.” Indeed, she says, “The decision to kill Father Ellacuría was consistent with a long-standing pattern of attacks against the Jesuits [and] . . . increasing attempts to link the Jesuits to FMLN violence and to portray the priests as apologists for guerrilla actions.”

In the pages that follow we shall trace the roots of this long-held antipathy and its role in the decision to carry out the assassinations in the epoch-changing religious and political events that rocked Latin America and the Catholic Church in the decades after World War II.

Those who died included Fr. Ignacio Ellacuría, S.J., university president and the country’s leading public intellectual; Fr. Martín-Baró, S.J., university vice president for academic affairs and director of the University Institute of Public Opinion (IUDOP), El Salvador’s only functioning public opinion poll; Fr. Segundo Montes, S.J., director of the Human Rights Institute of the UCA (IDHUCA) and superior of the Jesuit community; Fr. Amando López, S.J., professor of theology and philosophy, and ex-president of the UCA in Managua;

27. Doggett, Death Foretold, 55.
28. Ibid., 4.
Fr. Joaquín López y López, S.J., national director of Fe y Alegría, an education and direct service program for children in poverty; Fr. Juan Ramón Moreno, S.J., assistant director of the newly constructed Oscar Romero Pastoral Center, campus home of the Center for Theological Reflection and part of the Jesuit community; Elba Ramos, cook for one of the seminary communities; and her sixteen-year-old daughter, Celina.

Jürgen Moltmann’s famous book, The Crucified God, was found soaked in blood by the body of Fr. Juan Ramón Moreno and is preserved in the university’s museum of the martyrs, just feet from where they died. It is a visceral sign of the cost of this ultimately unsuccessful attempt to silence the voice of a university that, for almost two decades, scrupulously documented the need to take the “crucified people” of El Salvador down from their cross. The blood and ink mingled on its pages serves as a fitting symbol of the faith, hope, and love that animated them and their vision of a Christian university grounded in God’s preferential option for the poor.

* * *

Part I of this book, then, tells the story of the UCA martyrs, focusing on their awakening to God’s self-offer in the crucified people of El Salvador and to Medellín’s call to take them down from the cross. We will follow the journey that led to the crossroads above, exploring the martyrs’ vision of the Christian university and their efforts “to do in our university way what [Oscar Romero] did in his pastoral way”31 as archbishop of San Salvador. I will discuss a variety of factors and events, both sacred and profane, including the conversion of Archbishop Romero; relevant aspects of the social, economic, political, and indigenous history of El Salvador; the influence on the thinking and spirituality of the martyrs of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, Vatican II, and the Latin American bishops at Medellín; the post–World War II promise of development and the role of the United Nations in Latin America; U.S. Cold War counterinsurgency doctrine and foreign policy; and many other factors.

Part II treats the Latin American fundamental theology of Ignacio Ellacuría and the underlying Christian historical realism that informs it. Here I will critically explore the transformations produced by Ellacuría’s dialogue with Ignatian spirituality, Xavier Zubiri’s neuroscientifically informed model of intelligence and his philosophy of God, the face of Christ revealed by Archbishop Romero in El Salvador’s suffering people, and Rahner’s christocentric and trinitarian fundamental theology.

Part III analyzes Ellacuría’s fundamental theology and Sobrino’s Christology as a collaborative theological reflection on God’s gracious self-offer in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and its analogatum princeps in the crucified people of the planet. I will examine why they consider the poor and

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Oppressed to be the defining sign of the times and a privileged *locus theologicus* for the encounter with God.

Finally, I will conclude by exploring the God revealed to the UCA martyrs and their companions by the suffering people of El Salvador.

This is a story of blood and ink; of writers, books, teaching, service projects, and learning dedicated to uncovering the truth about El Salvador’s state-sponsored persecution of civil society funded by U.S. tax dollars. But most of all it is the tale of a university’s efforts to help take El Salvador’s “crucified people” down from the cross by supporting their efforts to construct a society in which all would have a chance to share a future where dignity, love, compassion, and sanity might prevail.
Part I

Awakening to God in the Historical Reality of the People of El Salvador

ARCHBISHOP ROMERO’S PROPHECY AND THE BIRTH OF A NEW KIND OF UNIVERSITY
Grasping the Historical Reality of El Salvador (1965-1969)

From Development to the Option for the Poor

When I came back in 1972 I heard what had been going on in the Central American Jesuit Province at the end of the sixties . . . there had been a conversion. But what does that mean, conversion? Well, I would say it meant discovering the reality that had always been in front of us. We had it in front of our eyes, and had not seen it . . . But all of a sudden you see things the way they are, or at least . . . a little more the way they are. And that changes everything. It is, at least, the beginning of a process of change.

Jon Sobrino, S.J.¹

The movement into a new horizon involves an about-face; it comes out of the old by repudiating characteristic features; it begins a new sequence that can keep revealing ever greater depth and breadth and wealth. Such an about-face and new beginning is what is meant by a conversion. . . . [But] conversion involves more than a change of horizon. It can mean that one begins to belong to a different social group, or, if one’s group remains the same, that one begins to belong to it in a new way.

Bernard Lonergan, S.J.²

This is the story of the Jesuit martyrs and their companions at the University of Central America (UCA). Fr. Jon Sobrino, S.J., is the most important living witness to the events that form the core of our story, a survivor of the assassinations and Ignacio Ellacuria’s closest friend. Looking back on forty years of teaching,

¹ Robert Lassalle-Klein interview with Jon Sobrino, July 5, 1994, 2, 5.
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writing, and ministry in El Salvador since Medellín, Sobrino believes that the Central American Jesuits and their colleagues at the UCA experienced a conversion to God’s preferential option for the poor brought about by their engagement with the historical reality of the people of El Salvador. The trailhead of the path that brought them face to face with this reality and the change of horizon it provoked surely begins with the renewal of the Catholic Church initiated by the worldwide meeting of Catholic bishops at Vatican II (1962-1965). Its signature document, Gaudium et spes (GS), the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, presented the leadership of churches on every continent with the challenge “of reading the signs of the times and of interpreting them in light of the Gospel” (GS 4). Just three years later the Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops at Medellín, Colombia, August 26-September 6, 1968, took up the Council’s call, declaring, “A deafening cry pours from the throats of millions of men and women asking their pastors for a liberation that reaches them from nowhere else.” The bishops’ response to this cri de coeur from 1968 to the present has been their watershed discernment that God is calling the Latin American church to live out what Catholic Social Teaching calls a “preferential option for the poor.”

Discontent with the Unfulfilled Promises of Development

In what follows I will show that the embrace by the leadership of the church in Latin America of what they saw as God’s preferential option for the poor coincided with a growing conviction that the promises of the U.N. Decade of Development had failed to adequately address the suffering and poverty of its people. I will argue that these and other factors led the bishops to subordinate the concept of development to a preferential option for the poor as the proper horizon or framework for the work of the church in Latin America. The bishops did not abandon the term “development,” but tried to build on the use of “integral development” by Pope Paul VI in order to critique uses of the term “development” and developmentalist strategies that changed little and legitimated an oppressive status quo. Thus, Medellín asserts, “If development is the new name for peace, Latin American underdevelopment, with its own characteristics in the different countries, is an unjust situation which promotes tensions that conspire against peace.” This criticism is further concretized in Medellín’s use of


the word “liberation” to highlight and clarify its claim that fundamental social and structural “change will be essential in order to liberate the authentic process of Latin American development and integration.” Accordingly, the document insists that God’s call to live out a preferential option for the poor implies real, and sometimes drastic, economic, social, political, and cultural changes designed to promote and defend human dignity, the church’s ultimate criterion for all forms of development.

In this chapter I will tell the story of how the term development, which dominated the international discussion about material aid to those living in poverty and subject to marginalization, became subordinated in the Latin American church to the preferential option for the poor, and to the struggle for liberation and justice, which that commitment implies. I will also describe how these two concepts began to function as an effective historical framework or horizon that would lead the UCA Jesuits and their lay collaborators to become aware of, to take responsibility for, and finally to help transform and be transformed by the historical reality of the poor majorities of El Salvador.

In what follows, I will focus on the emergence of the development regime after World War II and its subordination to the option for the poor by the Latin American bishops and Latin American liberation theology because it is directly relevant to the response of the UCA martyrs to the “irruption of the poor” in the last third of the twentieth century. It is worth noting, however, that our approach will focus on only one aspect of the many forms of oppression to which Christian communities and churches around the globe (including Latin America) have responded during this period with critiques and prophetic calls for liberation from military rule, and serious social, cultural, and political change.

President Truman, the Cold War, and Development

The end of World War II in 1945 brought a dramatic shift in the balance of power from the European countries and their colonial empires to two new competing super-states, the United States and the Soviet Union. In this new context, “development” and military aid (punctuated by occasional military interven-

6. Examples include “Document on Justice” (3-4); “Document on Education” (2, 9); “Document on Youth” (15); “Document on Catechesis” (6); “Document on Lay Movements” (2, 4, 9, 13); “Document on the Poverty of the Church” (2, 7) in The Church in the Present-Day Transformation of Latin America.


8. While the following list is by no means comprehensive, one has only to think of the lasting contributions of Black theologies from Africa and the United States and Dalit theologies from India on the theme of race, the contributions of U.S. Latino/a theologies on the importance of culture, the contributions of Asian Christians on interreligious dialogue, the contributions of any number of groups calling for a global ethic, and the global contributions of women on the importance of gender, and of indigenous theologies on respect for the planet in fleshing out our understanding of how God has acted, stirring faith, hope, and love among followers of Jesus around the planet.
tion) would replace European colonialism as the principle tools for projecting and maintaining power abroad in the respective “spheres of influence” of the two emerging superpowers.

The stage for this post-war Cold War drama was set with the close of the Battle of Berlin, when the German General, Helmuth Weidling, surrendered to the Soviet army on May 2, 1945, while the armies north of Berlin surrendered to the Western Allies. It soon became clear that the Soviet leader, Joseph Stalin, who envisioned a communist Bloc allied with Russia that would provide a buffer zone in Eastern Europe against centuries of European imperialism, was not going to withdraw his armies from Berlin and Eastern Germany. Working to establish a post-war Soviet sphere of influence, Stalin soon provided Soviet support to the military wing of the Greek Communist Party in its civil war (1946-49) against the right-wing Greek government and the monarchy, and used Soviet troops to threaten Turkey in the strait linking the Black Sea with the Mediterranean Sea. The United States, however, had a radically different vision for a worldwide democratic and capitalist alliance rooted in a united Europe (the North American Treaty Organization or NATO), and supported by overwhelming U.S. military might. The latter was epitomized by U.S. possession of the atomic bomb, which it used three months later against civilian populations in Hiroshima (August 6, 1945) and Nagasaki (August 9, 1945) ostensibly in order to induce the August 15, 1945, “unconditional surrender” of Japan, the remaining Axis power.

A little over two years later, on March 12, 1947, President Harry S. Truman outlined before a joint session of Congress his plan to provide economic and military aid to Turkey and Greece in order to prevent their falling into the emerging Eastern Bloc. Truman requested $400 million in military and economic aid for Greece and Turkey, and “American civilian and military personnel” in order to assist those countries in defeating what he saw as the proxy forces of Soviet expansionism in post-war Europe. The underlying logic became known as the Truman Doctrine, and it would shape U.S. foreign policy for the next forty years. The Cold War was on!

Shortly thereafter, on June 5, 1947, Secretary of State George C. Marshall outlined at Harvard University what became known as the Marshall Plan, which many considered the economic corollary of the Truman Doctrine. The United States would create a program for post-war reconstruction and economic recovery funded by U.S. aid for European countries threatened with Soviet expansion. Barely a month later, George F. Kennan, head of policy planning at the State Department, framed U.S. post-war foreign policy in the larger context of “firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies.” In this way

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10. Ibid.
11. George F. Kennan (identified only as “X”), “The Sources of Soviet Conduct,” Foreign
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the Truman Doctrine, which was focused on U.S. military aid and Soviet containment, and the Marshall Plan, which was focused on post-war reconstruction and economic development, came to be seen as two sides of a single coin, providing the foundation of U.S. foreign policy at the beginning of the Cold War. The policy achieved apparent success over the next twenty years in Europe and Japan. But the often contradictory imperatives of war and economic development would undermine U.S. foreign policy and counter-insurgency efforts in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, sometimes contributing to the suffering of the poor majorities in those parts of the world.12

Gilbert Rist notes that two years later President Truman’s January 20, 1949, Inaugural Address formally “inaugurated the ’development age.’”13 The speech lists four policies that would dominate Truman’s second term and define U.S. foreign policy until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The first three points essentially summarized the existing policy of U.S. support for the New United Nations, European reconstruction through the Marshall Plan, and Soviet containment through NATO. But the fourth point, which Rist says was “taken on board as a public relations gimmick,” proposed “a bold new program . . . for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas.”14

From “Colonization” to “Underdevelopment”

Rist explains in The History of Development that Truman’s use of the adjective “underdeveloped” marked “the first time the term had been used in a text intended for such wide circulation as a synonym for ‘economically backward’ areas.”15 U.S. policy makers embraced the term as the embodiment of “a new way of conceiving international relations”16 that fit nicely with the goals of U.S. post-war foreign policy. North-South relations, which before World War II had been largely cast in terms of the troubled relationships between European colonizers and their restless clients in the South and the East, soon faced national liberation struggles. With Truman’s speech, however, the hierarchical subordination of colonized to colonizer was being reframed. “‘Underdeveloped’ and ‘developed’ were [recast as] members of a single family: the one might be lagging a little behind the other, but they could always hope to catch up—rather as a ’deputy manager’ can always dream of becoming a manager himself . . . so

13. Ibid., 69-79.
15. Ibid., 72.
16. Ibid.
long as he continues to play the same game and his conception of managing is not too different.\textsuperscript{17} Rist argues, however, that there was a darker side to the aforementioned shift.

From 1949 onwards, often without realizing it, more than two billion inhabitants of the planet found themselves changing their name, being “officially” regarded as they appeared in the eyes of others, called upon to deepen their Westernization by repudiating their own values. No longer African, Latin American or Asian . . . they were now simply “underdeveloped.” . . . Whereas the world of colonization had been seen mainly as a political space to encompass ever larger empires, the “development age” was the period when economic space spread everywhere, with the raising of GNP as the number one imperative.\textsuperscript{18}

Development soon became a major focus of United Nations activities and remained so throughout the Cold War to the present. This was true in part because of strong international support for the lofty goals stated above, and in part because Cold War politics led the permanent members of the U.N. Security Council to use their veto power to block the majority of U.N. initiatives “with respect to threats . . . , breaches of the peace, and acts of aggression.”\textsuperscript{19}

**Decolonization and Post-Colonial Critiques**

Outside Europe, the United States, and the Soviet Union, however, the post-war collapse of the overseas colonial empires of the Western powers constituted nothing short of a turning point in world history in the eyes of many. Between 1945 and 2000 approximately ninety countries gained independence from colonial rule, including India, Pakistan, China, Vietnam, Cuba, Malaysia, Nigeria, Congo, Angola, South Africa, and virtually the entire African continent, which saw the birth of over fifty nations between 1950 and 1980 alone. On December 14, 1960, the United Nations passed the *Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples*, with eighty-nine nations in favor, and abstentions by nine colonial powers (Australia, Belgium, Dominican Republic, France, Portugal, Spain, Union of South Africa, United Kingdom, and United States).

Julius K. Nyerere, president of Tanzania evocatively described the spirit of decolonization as “a worldwide movement . . . to put an end to the exploitation of man by man [so that] imperialism and racialism will become . . . a chapter in the history of man we shall hear about . . . in museums.”\textsuperscript{20} In this connection, Prasenjit Duara explains, “Decolonization represented not only the transfer-

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\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 74.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 79.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 81.
ence of legal sovereignty but a movement,” with an “emancipatory ideology” driven by the emerging “national historical consciousness” of liberation movements outside Europe, and articulated in literature written by the colonized.\textsuperscript{21} This literature analyzed imperialism and decolonization from the perspective of the former colonies, allowing, in the words of reviewer Richard Gunde, those “who live in the West, in the former colonial powers—to witness the process from the other side, so to speak,” and to understand that “despite the variety of colonialisms and decolonizations, the history of decolonization in the twentieth century presents a coherent, interconnected phenomenon.”\textsuperscript{22}

It should come as no surprise, then, that political, economic, and cultural commentators from Africa, Asia, and Latin America raised increasingly serious concerns in the ensuing years about the misuse of development aid as a tool for promoting Euro-American and Soviet geo-political interests (some would say imperialism), undermining political self-determination and development among its supposed beneficiaries. While these writings are too diverse and complex to summarize here, post-colonial writers from Africa and Asia, and Latin American “dependency” theorists emblemize these trends. In this section I will briefly mention the seminal contributions of Frantz Fanon and Edward Said to post-colonial thought, and later in the chapter I will address dependency theory in association with Latin America critiques of development. My purpose is to bring forward important voices from outside the circle of the United States and its close allies, critical of what they saw as culturally and economically exploitative aspects of development.

Frantz Fanon, a black Martinican psychiatrist who devoted himself to the Algerian revolution against the French, synthesized nationalist and anti-colonial reservations about post-war imperialism in \textit{Black Skins, White Masks} (1952) and \textit{The Wretched of the Earth} (1962). While continuing to insist on the importance of national struggles for liberation from European colonial rule, Fanon was a ferocious critic of the metamorphosis of anti-colonial African leaders after independence in the late 1950s into what he saw as a regressive neo-colonial force “that serves to immobilize the people.”\textsuperscript{23} Rejecting all forms of neocolonialism, Fanon also argued against the Marxists that race had ultimately trumped class in African colonialism, insisting, “When you examine . . . the colonial context, it is evident that . . . you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich.”\textsuperscript{24} Writing during the transition “between colonial-

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{24} Franz Fanon, “Concerning Violence” (1963), 40; cited in Larsen, “Imperialism, Colonialism, Postcolonialism,” 36.
\end{itemize}
ism and the establishment of the postcolonial (or, more accurately, neocolonial) national state,” Fanon argued that race had become just another Cold War ideology, uniting former colonizers with the new African elites in a common effort to protect ill-gotten privilege.

Shawn Copeland, a contemporary African American Catholic theologian interested in the psychological trauma inflicted by racism, observes, “Perhaps no thinker exceeds Fanon’s ability to signify racial alienation, to explicate its crushing objectification, to diagnose its ruthless hurt, and to evoke its shock and shame.” Speaking from within the racialized identity imposed on him as a child in a racist society, Fanon chillingly writes,

> My body was given back to me sprawled out, distorted, recolored, clad in mourning in that white winter day. The Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is mean, the Negro is ugly; look, a nigger, it’s cold, the nigger is shivering . . . shivering because he is cold, the little boy is trembling because he is afraid of the nigger . . . I sit down at the fire and I become aware of my uniform. I had not seen it. It is indeed ugly. I stop there, for who can tell me what beauty is.

Here and elsewhere Fanon gives eloquent voice to the dehumanizing consequences of internalized racism for its colonialized victims.

The defining work of post-colonial thought, however, is widely considered to be *Orientalism*, written by Edward Said in 1978. The book unites literary and cultural criticism with Cold War political analysis, demonstrating how cultural specialists on “the Orient” functioned as sometimes innocent collaborators with European colonialism, and later with U.S.–Soviet Cold War politics. The book begins with a famous quote from Karl Marx, “They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented,” which the author uses to critique both Soviet and Western cultural imperialism. Said shows how centuries of *Orientalists* from Europe and elsewhere constructed the “Orient” (or East) in opposition to the *Occident* (or West) as an object of study and fascination for consumption at home, thereby defining and controlling its meaning, and silencing Asian voices in whose name they claimed to speak. The Orient was said to be premodern, irrational, and traditional in opposition to the superior West, which was typically portrayed as modern, rational, and civilized. Interestingly enough, the post-colonial critiques of Marxism by Fanon and Said helped them to gain exposure among scholars in the United States.

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States and the Europe during the Cold War, allowing them to become part of the canon for those studying post-colonial and liberation movements in Western universities.

The Non-Aligned Nations Endorse Development

Despite the importance of decolonization and various theoretical critiques of development as a vehicle for Western imperialism, however, international relations in the 1950s continued to be dominated by Cold War politics. Indeed, national liberation movements throughout the “developing world” became political and ideological battlegrounds for influence among the major powers. For the United States, General MacArthur led American and U.N. member troops in a “police action” when Soviet-supported North Korean forces invaded South Korea on June 25, 1950 (Korean War 1950-53). In Russia, Joseph Stalin died on March 5, 1953, and was replaced by Nikita Khrushchev, under whom the Soviets invaded Hungary and Poland in 1956 in order to consolidate control over the “Eastern Bloc,” which included East Germany, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Rumania, Albania, and Yugoslavia. France was faced with the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962), and its efforts to hold on to Vietnam were defeated in 1954 at Dien Bien Phu under president Ho Chi Minh. In July 1955 the Geneva Accords divided independent Vietnam at the 17th parallel into the communist North, and the U.S.-supported Diem government in the South. U.S. troops began combat operations in Vietnam shortly thereafter, on November 1, 1955, and the Vietnam War lasted until the fall of Saigon and the South to communist North Vietnam on April 30, 1975. When Gamal Abdel Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal on July 26, 1956, the Franco-British-Israeli Suez military operation ensued, which succeeded militarily and reopened the canal to Israeli shipping, but ultimately failed to regain control of the precious waterway for the former colonial power, England, because of U.N. intervention.

In this dynamic and rapidly evolving post-colonial context, the governments of Burma, Ceylon, India, Indonesia, and Pakistan called a conference of twenty-nine new African and Asian nations, April 18-24, 1955, in Bandung, Indonesia. Its stated aims were to promote Afro-Asian economic and cultural cooperation, and to oppose colonialism and neocolonialism by the United States, the Soviet Union, and other imperial powers. The final communiqué outlined ten principles found in the U.N. Charter condemning colonialism as “a denial of the fundamental rights of man” and “a means of cultural suppression,” and promoting economic, technical, and cultural cooperation among the new states.29

The meeting also famously initiated the “non-aligned nations” movement, voicing the demands of the developing or “Third World” nations to the emerging post-war international order. Rist notes, however, that the final communiqué also offered powerful legitimation for the goal of economic development being promoted by the United States and the United Nations.30

30. Ibid., 86.
for the creation of institutions and key elements included in the economic and political agenda already agreed upon at the U.N. Monetary and Financial Conference attended by the forty-four Allied Nations at Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, July 1-22, 1944, laying out rules for the post-war monetary system. Thus, from one perspective, Bandung can be said to symbolize what might be called the “critical” embrace of Truman’s notion of development by the non-aligned nations of the Third World outside of Europe, the United States, the Soviet Union, and their allies.

The Catholic Church Critically Embraces Development

In every age, the church carries the responsibility of reading the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel . . . We must be aware of and understand the aspirations, the yearnings, and the often dramatic features of the world in which we live (Vatican II, *Gaudium et spes*, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (§4).

If there was any doubt that the concept of development would play a key role in international relations for the rest of the century, it was erased in December 1961 when the U.N. General Assembly launched its first Decade of Development. The document called on all member states “to mobilize support for measures required to accelerate progress toward self-sustaining economic growth and social advancement,” with a goal of at least 5 percent GNP growth in the developing countries. In response, the Catholic Church under the leadership of Pope John XXIII (1958-1963), his successor Paul VI (1963-1978), and Vatican II (1962-1965) embraced the notion of development, integrating it into the rich tradition of Catholic Social Teaching.

The term received its first extended treatment, outside a brief mention by Pius XII (1939-1958), in *Mater et magistra* (1961) by John XXIII under headings such as “Balancing Economic Development and Social Progress” (§§73-81), “Aid to Less Developed Areas” (§§150-152), “Requirements of Justice as Between Nations Differing in Economic Development” (§§157-184), “Population Increase and Economic Development” (§§185-199), etc. The term appears twenty-four times John’s *Pacem in terris* (1963), issued during the Council, with a section explicitly dedicated to the United Nations (§§142-145) and treatments associated with human rights and duties (§§11, 13, 19, 36), the status of women (§41), participation in public life (§§73, 74), truth (§86), the rights and duties of states (§§64, 86, 92), the treatment of minorities (§97), race relations

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(§100), the arms race (§109), underdevelopment (§§121-124), and salvation and justice (§162). The term also runs through a variety of documents issued by the Council, including Lumen gentium (the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, 1964), which emphasizes how gospel values complement the “genuine development of human persons” (§46); Gaudium et spes (the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, 1965), which offers norms on how to avoid the imposition of Western-style development on the Third World (§86); and thirty-eight occurrences in Gravissimum educationis (the Declaration on Christian Education, 1965).

By the late 1960s, however, the optimistic tone of these earlier documents had been replaced by a more critical attitude embodied in Paul VI’s addition of the qualifier “integral” (§14) to his treatment of development, the central theme of his 1967 encyclical, “On the Development of Peoples” (Populorum progressio). In a famous passage summarizing the meaning of this term the Pope wrote, “The fullness of authentic development . . . is for each and all the transition from less human conditions to those which are more human.” He says that humanizing development involves

the passage from misery towards the possession of necessities, victory over social scourges, the growth of knowledge, the acquisition of culture . . ., increased esteem for the dignity of others, the turning toward the spirit of poverty, cooperation for the common good, the will and desire for peace . . ., and the acknowledgement by human beings of supreme values, and of God as their source and their finality. Conditions that, finally and above all, are more human. . . . (§§20-21)

In passages such as these, therefore, the term “integral development” began to function in Catholic Social Teaching as a way to criticize “developmentalist” schemes benefitting the superpowers, but doing little to seriously advance the quality of life and the standard of living for peoples in the “underdeveloped” or “developing” world.

Such reservations were soon confirmed by events on the ground. As the United Nations itself later observed, “Throughout the . . . 1960s . . . the growth rate in the economically advanced market economies accelerated, [while] . . . the gap between the per capita incomes of the developing countries and those of the developed countries widened.” The net result was that by the end of the decade, “Two-thirds of the world’s population living in the less developed regions . . . still had less than one-sixth of the world’s income.”

The first U.N. Development Decade ended in 1970 with its major goal unattained, and little improvement from 1962 when “annual per capita income in those regions averaged $136, while that of the economically advanced market

33. John XXIII, Pacem in terris §§64, 121-25, 131.
34. Vatican II, Gaudium et spes §§35, 44, 53-56, 60, 64-72, 85-86.
35. United Nations, “Economic and Social Development—First UN Development Decade.”
economies in North America and Western Europe averaged $2,845 and $1,033.” Even during its most productive years, 1960-1967, “the increase in their per capita gross product was only about 2%.” Such results did little to discourage growing suspicion that Truman’s program of “development” was nothing more than a tool of Cold War Soviet containment, ultimately designed to advance the economic self-interests of the United States in emerging markets, and to reduce hostility and promote further economic and political dependency on the United States and other “First World” economic institutions and nations.

The Latin American Church Charts Its Own Path: A Deafening Cry

Inspired in part by liberation movements in Africa and Asia and post-colonial critiques of development as an instrument of continued imperialism, pressures continued to grow throughout Latin America during the 1950s and '60s for governmental and economic reforms of U.S.-supported military dictatorships controlled by local elites. Indeed, U.S. policy makers were shocked by the broad popular support in Latin America for the successful Cuban revolution of 1959. For this and other reasons, the United States turned from blatant military subversion and support for military dictatorships toward a new approach, President Kennedy’s Alliance for Progress, built on promises associated with international development. The Alliance adopted the earlier two-pronged strategy of the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan, hoping to counter Cuba’s revolutionary influence by coupling intensive military subversion with civilian economic development and political reform. However, while U.S. policy makers and their partners promoted gradual change through development, the word liberation gained currency in Latin America as a euphemism for the immediate end to military rule and rapid transition to large-scale political and economic reform, whether by voluntary elections or by coup.

Latin American Critics of Development

Most Latin American nations gained formal independence from Spain and Portugal during the nineteenth century, so twentieth century struggles to end military rule and oppression by local elites did not follow the pattern of independence movements in Africa and Asia. However, the spirit of decolonization nonetheless infused the thinking of movements mobilizing literally millions of people in Latin American civil society behind demands for elections and economic reform. Frequently chaotic, driven by nationalistic concerns, and sometimes backed by armed rebellions, these movements nonetheless eventually succeeded in bringing an end to military rule in Argentina in 1983, Bolivia in 1982, Brazil in 1985, Chile in 1990, El Salvador in 1984, Guatemala in 1986, Haiti in 1990 and 1994, Honduras in 1982, Nicaragua in 1979, Panama in 1989, Paraguay in 1993, Peru in 1980, and Uruguay in 1985. In this context, the emergence of a powerful critique of U.S.-sponsored development regimes known
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as “dependency theory” provided an important argument delegitimating Latin American military regimes by characterizing their economic policies as systematically distorted by neo-colonial U.S. interests imposed on its military clients. In what follows I will briefly describe these theories and their role in our story.

Latin American dependency theory had its origin in the U.N. Economic Commission for Latin America (CEPAL), founded in Chile in the 1950s and headed by Paul Prebisch, who became first secretary-general of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in 1964. Fernando Henrique Cardoso, a professor of political science and sociology at the University of São Paolo, who taught abroad following the right-wing-backed military coup of 1964 (and who later became two-term president of Brazil, 1995-2003), developed his own version of “dependency theory,” which proved to be very influential in Catholic circles pressing for change. In 1967 Cardoso published an influential text proposing corrections to the model for “development” guiding U.S. projects in Latin America through the Alliance for Progress based on the theory of dependency.

Commentators distinguish Cardoso’s relatively more “nuanced form of dependency analysis,” which informed the work of Fr. Gustavo Gutiérrez and the Latin American bishops, from the more Marxist analysis of Andre Gunder Frank, who argued that “Europe and the United States financed their own development by exploiting poor nations and draining off profits (surplus value),” thus keeping “Latin America . . . from developing, by drawing off the capital needed for development, and imposing their own technology and controls.” Cardoso accepted the influence of foreign investors, but also paid attention to the autonomy of economic and socio-political forces operating within Latin America itself. Later, as the Cold War drew to a close, Cardoso contributed important reflections on the role of civil society in the Latin American transition from military to civilian rule, which fit well with the role played by the church. Commentators on Cardoso’s many contributions to Latin American political and economic theory during his long career as a scholar, finance minister, and later president of Brazil note that he consistently advocated economic and political movement toward globalized social democracy over other, more

isolationist, anti-globalization approaches, though always in a form designed to protect and promote Latin American interests.\textsuperscript{40}

Cardoso eventually became very critical of dependency theorists, proponents of the very school of thought he had helped to create. He argued that they tended to take “refuge in affirmations of the principle of Revolution without managing to light up the way towards it . . . [insisting] there can only be a radical way out, even though the class or classes that might deal a final blow to the existing order are never really delineated.”\textsuperscript{41} Cardoso’s point was that dependency theorists (himself included) offered few solutions to the problem they posed, substituting an unsubstantiated belief that a “revolutionary explosion” was about to take place. Many Latin American church leaders who were influenced by Cardoso’s version of dependency theory in these early years, eventually abandoned it for this and other reasons, but his contributions were significant. Cardoso won the John W. Kluge Prize for Lifetime Achievement in the Humanities and Social Sciences in July 2012 (considered by some the Nobel Prize for the humanities), and was described by James H. Billington, the Librarian of Congress, as “the outstanding political scientist in late-twentieth-century Latin America.”\textsuperscript{42} His influential 1969 book is still well regarded for detecting new possibilities for growth among the “periphery” countries in the early glimmerings of globalization. As president of Brazil from 1995 to 2002 he is regarded as the primary architect of Brazil’s rise past Britain and Italy to become the sixth largest economy in the world.

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\textbf{The Latin American Bishops Change the Conversation at Medellín, Colombia, 1968: God’s Preferential Option for the Poor}
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Just as such critiques were gaining greater traction, the Latin American bishops (CELAM) met in Medellín, Colombia, August 26-September 6, 1968, the first episcopal conference to respond to the call of Vatican II (1962-1965) to read the signs of the times in light of the gospel. CELAM held its first general meeting in 1955, and reconvened thirteen years later for the express purpose of promoting the conversion and renewal (aggiornamento) of The Church in the Present-Day Transformation of Latin America in the Light of the Council. The bishops chose an anguished phrase to capture their reading of pastoral situation of the church in Latin America in 1968, stating, “A deafening cry pours from the throats of millions of men and women asking their pastors for a liberation that reaches them from nowhere else.”\textsuperscript{43} Linking this cry to the ongoing debate about


\textsuperscript{43}. Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops, “Document on Poverty in the Church” (2), \textit{The Church in the Present-Day Transformation of Latin America in the
development outlined above, the bishops asserted, “Latin America appears to live beneath the tragic sign of underdevelopment.” In response, the bishops sought to formulate “a global vision of humanity, and the integral vision of Latin America’s development” that “does not pretend to compete with the attempts for solution made by other national, Latin American, and world bodies,” but rather tries “to encourage these efforts, accelerate their results, deepen their content, and permeate all the process of change with the values of the gospel.”

It would take us too far afield to review the renewal of the Latin American church outlined in Medellín's sixteen documents. What is important is that here and elsewhere the bishops insisted on the priority of liberating development, and in their own words a decade later, sought to “affirm the need for conversion on the part of the whole Church to a preferential option for the poor, an option aimed at their integral liberation.” With this epoch-changing discernment the Latin American bishops at Medellín became the first episcopal conference, three years after the close of Vatican II, to officially respond to the call to read the signs of the times in light of the gospel. Their prayerful conclusion was that the growing aspirations of the continent’s poor majorities for liberation was a sign that God was calling the Latin American church to embrace a “preferential option for the poor” as an appropriate horizon for its renewal after Vatican II.

Years of controversy, debate, and clarification followed these statements at Medellín (1968) and Puebla (1979), but Pope John Paul II eventually incorporated the preferential option for the poor into the heart of Catholic Social Teaching during his long pontificate (1978-2005). In his 1991 encyclical Centesimus annus, the pope unambiguously affirms what he describes as “the continuity within the Church of the so-called ‘preferential option for the poor,’ . . . which I defined [in Sollicitudo rei socialis, §42] as a ‘special form of primacy in the exercise of Christian charity’” (John Paul II, Encyclical Letter Centesimus annus §11).

Further, in his encyclicals Sollicitudo rei socialis (1987) and Redemptoris missio (1990) Pope John Paul II explicitly ties the salvation brought by Jesus to action for liberation when he asserts, “Jesus came to bring integral liberation,” and “the liberation and salvation brought by the Kingdom of God come to human persons in [both] their physical and spiritual dimensions” (Redemptoris missio 14). Assessing the teaching of John Paul II, the Irish social ethicist Donal Dorr writes, “there is no ‘backtracking’ [in the writings of John Paul II] from the position of Paul VI or John XXIII. Indeed, on this issue he has taken much stronger stands against injustice and in defense of human rights [and] . . . on the
two key issues of liberation and the ‘option for the poor.’” While not all would agree with this assessment, there is no question that the preferential option for the poor has become official Catholic Social Teaching, and been continually affirmed by the Latin American church. Likewise, it was explicitly and energetically affirmed at the most recent meeting of the Conference of Latin American and Caribbean Bishops in Aparecida, Brazil, in May 2007, some forty years after Medellín. Indeed, Pope Benedict XVI insisted in his opening address at the Conference that “the preferential option for the poor is implicit in the Christological faith in the God who became poor for us, so as to enrich us with his poverty (cf. 2 Cor 8:9).”

But what sort of action and what sort of society does Medellín envision? Some find evidence of “two conflicting models of restructuring Latin American society . . . in the Medellín documents.” On the one hand, the bishops criticize “neocolonialism” in the Document on Peace (§§8-10) and explicitly concede that “revolutionary insurrection can be legitimate in the case of evident and prolonged ‘tyranny,’” while cautioning with Paul VI that “‘armed revolution’ generally ‘generates new injustices, introduces new imbalances, and causes new disasters’” (Document on Peace §19, citing Paul VI, Populorum progressio §31). On the other hand, the Document on Justice outlines what one author calls a quasi-corporatist approach to development that includes an appeal to “business leaders, to their organizations and to the political authorities” (Justice §10). It envisions a network of “intermediary structures” between the individual and the state (Justice §7) that play an essential role in mediating participation from all sectors of society in the process of development (Justice §§7-15). Thus, the development and mobilization of a vigorous and flourishing Latin American “civil society” emerges as the key to the bishops’ vision for the promotion of peace and justice on the continent.

Rather than interpreting these divergent views as representing contradictory models, however, I would suggest that the bishops are struggling to integrate long-standing themes in Catholic Social Teaching that stand in creative tension (i.e., rights based vs. corporatist approaches). The bishops offer principles for a flourishing civil society, envisioning a path toward real change that avoids the extremes of both laissez-faire capitalism and Marxism, which they seek to avoid (Justice §10), while at the same time lending support to processes of social change with liberating effects on the “downtrodden of every social class” (Justice §20). Thus, they write,

46. Dorr, Option for the Poor, 361.
49. Ibid., 72.
The system of liberal capitalism and the temptation of the Marxist system... both... militate against the dignity of the human person. One takes for granted the primacy of capital, its power and its discriminatory utilization in the function of profit-making. The other, although it ideologically supports a kind of humanism, is more concerned with collective humanity, and in practice becomes a totalitarian concentration of state power. Thus, we must denounce the fact that Latin America sees itself caught between these two options and remains dependent on one or another of the centers of power which control its economy. (Justice §10)

Drawing on the church-sect theory of Max Weber, the prelates explicitly opt for an inclusive understanding of the church and its membership, stating, “The Church is faced with the dilemma of either continuing to be a universal Church or, if it fails to attract and vitally incorporate such groups, of becoming a sect.” Rejecting the latter path, the bishops insist that “because she is a Church rather than a sect, she must offer her message of salvation to all men...” (“Pastoral Care for the Masses,” §3).

This leads the bishops to argue that salvation entails the “authentic liberation” of all peoples, communities, families, and persons from death-dealing oppression (whether Christian or not). They say this entails the creation of “new human beings who know how to be truly free and responsible” in the modern world (Justice 3), and are the artisans of their own destiny. This in turn requires that the church’s religious commitment to God’s preferential option for the poor be realized through responsible participation in secular struggles for liberation from economic, political, and cultural oppression. Thus, on the one hand, the church is obliged to take sides on the issue of the poor, and cannot stand apart from the world in this regard. On the other hand, however, the church must find ways to live out and to explain how its preferential option for the poor functions as a part of God’s plan of the salvation, not just for some, but for all.

Fr. Gustavo Gutiérrez, Latin American Liberation Theology, and the Irruption of the Poor

No figure is more closely identified with the emergence of a theology of liberation and its defining concept, the preferential option for the poor, than Fr. Gustavo Gutiérrez, O.P. Born June 8, 1928, and raised amid genuine poverty in a loving mestizo family (part Hispanic and Quechua Indian) in Lima, Peru, Gutiérrez was bedridden by osteomyelitis from age twelve to eighteen. After three years as a medical student at the University of San Marcos, he entered the local seminary and was ordained a priest in 1959 by the Archdiocese of Lima after studies (1951-1959) in philosophy and psychology at the Catholic University of Louvain (Belgium), and in theology at the University of Lyon in France and the Gregorian University in Rome. Gutiérrez returned to Peru in 1959 as advisor to the National Union of Catholic Students and a professor of
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teology at the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru. There he observed the growing unrest and dissatisfaction with the first U.N. Decade of Development (1961-1969), fueled in part by the emphasis on justice and the modern world at Vatican II (1962-1965), which he attended in its fourth and final session as theological assistant to Bishop Manuel Larraín of Chile.

As a close observer of the powerful transformations reshaping Latin American society and the church, Gutiérrez concluded they were being driven by what he would later call the “irruption of the poor” from the status of non-actors to agents of their own history. Reflecting on this “new presence” of the poor and oppressed as significant actors in liberation movements across Latin America and around the globe, Gutiérrez offered what many consider the first proposal for a “theology of liberation” at a gathering of priests and lay people in Chimbote, Peru, in July 1968, one month before Medellín. Three years later in 1971 he published *A Theology of Liberation*. In the revised Introduction to this book Gutiérrez identifies three “basic” or “primary” claims of Latin American liberation theology: (1) human history is being reshaped by the irruption of the poor as agents of their own liberation, and by the “option for the poor” of Christians living their faith through solidarity and support for those liberation struggles; (2) liberation theology is critical reflection on this Christian praxis of a “preferential option for the poor” in light of the word of God, which constitutes a “new stage” in the history of Christian theology; and (3) the irruption of the poor as actors for their own liberation, and the church’s option for the poor expressed in Christian solidarity with their struggles for liberation, constitute an authentic proclamation of the Kingdom of God to the modern world.

Building on what we have discussed, we can locate Fr. Gutiérrez as part of an influential and growing number of Catholic leaders in Latin America who had concluded by the end of the 1960s that President Truman’s “developmentalist approach has proven to be unsound and incapable of interpreting the economic, social and political evolution of the Latin American continent.” As noted earlier, Gutiérrez was careful to endorse the use of “integral development” by Paul VI in *Populorum progressio* as capturing how “the term ‘development’ has synthesized the aspirations of poor peoples during the last few decades,” while simultaneously critiquing “developmentalism,” which Gutiérrez understands as an “ideology of modernization” that has “sanctioned timid and in the long run deceitful efforts.”

Instead of focusing on development, however, Gutiérrez emphasizes what he

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52. Ibid., 51.


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sees as the more fundamental phenomenon of the “irruption” or “new presence” of the poor and oppressed as actors on the stage of history. He asserts, “The most important instance of this presence in our times, especially in underdeveloped and oppressed countries, is the struggle to construct a just and fraternal society, where persons can live with dignity and be the agents of their own destiny.” He concludes, “Therefore, it is my opinion that the term development does not well express these profound aspirations. Liberation, on the other hand, seems to express them better.”

But liberation from whom or what? Gutiérrez asserts, “The building of a just society . . . in Latin America . . . revolves around the oppression-liberation axis.” Thus, on the one hand, the demands from poor or otherwise marginalized groups for structural change “may seem difficult or disturbing to those who wish to achieve—or maintain—a low-cost conciliation” in order “to keep living off the poverty of the many.” On the other hand, however, he asserts “that the Latin American peoples will not emerge from their present status except by means of a profound transformation, a social revolution, which will radically and qualitatively change the conditions in which they now live.” This observation would be confirmed over the next twenty years by a series of painful, but largely successful, campaigns to bring an end to military rule in various countries in Latin America, and by less successful efforts to promote political and economic reforms.

Gutiérrez, however, eventually revised his early position that “dependence and liberation are correlative terms,” which he said implies “that there can be authentic development for Latin America only if there is liberation from the domination exercised by the great capitalist countries, especially by the most powerful, the United States of America.” He changed this position in 1988 when he stated, “It is clear . . . that the theory of dependence . . . is now an inadequate tool, because it does not take sufficient account of the internal dynamics of each country or of the vast dimensions of the world of the poor,” and because “the world economy has evolved.”

What has remained consistent, however, is his position that “the social praxis of contemporary humankind has begun to reach maturity. It is the behavior of a humankind ever more conscious of being an active subject of history, . . . determined to participate both in the transformation of social structures and in effective political action.” Thus, in the Theology of Liberation Gutiérrez goes on to cite Max Weber’s claim that “nothing lies outside the political sphere” for the modern person, arguing that this now includes the poor, once they have irrupted into the modern world as agents of their own history. And he insists

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55. Ibid., xiv.
56. Ibid., 31.
57. Ibid., 54.
58. Ibid., 49.
59. Ibid., 54.
60. Ibid., xxiv.
61. Ibid., 30.
62. Ibid., 30-31.
that this irruption constitutes an epoch-changing reality, for it is precisely as a responsible agent in the political sphere “that a person emerges as a free and responsible being, as a person in relationship with other persons, as someone who takes on a historical task.”

It should not surprise us, then, that Gutiérrez believes that the preferential option for the poor is the source and the driving insight of Latin American liberation theology, as well as its primary contribution to the universal church. He writes,

The vision of Christian life manifested in this statement [of the preferential option for the poor] and in the practice of this commitment is, in fact, the most substantial part of the contribution from the life and theological reflection of the Church in Latin America to the universal church. The option for the poor took its first steps in the years before Medellín, was affirmed in the period after that conference, and was invoked in subsequent episcopal conferences and in the recent teachings of Benedict XVI and [the bishops’ conference in 2007 at] Aparecida, which have given it an impact and a place it would not have had without them.

He argues, therefore, that action for liberation is a secondary or derivative contextual commitment that makes the disciple’s embrace of God’s preferential option for the poor historically effective. Thus, from the perspective of the theologian most often considered the founder of Latin American liberation theology, the emphasis on the religious and social significance of the “irruption of the poor” as actors on the stage of world history and the church’s “preferential option for the poor,” first stated at Medellín in 1968, are the principle contributions of Latin American liberation theology to the universal church.

Despite this insistence on the priority of the option for the poor, however, Gutiérrez is probably best known for having formulated the basic methodology of Latin American liberation theology, which has served as a paradigm for a global family of theological approaches inspired by the mandate from Gaudium et spes “of reading the signs of the times and of interpreting them in light of the Gospel” (Gaudium et spes §4). As Gutiérrez himself notes, “One of the first statements of my way of understanding the theological task was that liberation theology is ‘a critical reflection on Christian praxis in light of the word of God.’”

The key to this definition was that it shifted the focus of reflection from ambiguous “signs of the times” to the actual faith-based solidarity of Christian disciples with the liberating struggles of the poor. Gutiérrez says this better reflects the message of the Bible, which “shows us that the doing of God’s will is the main demand placed on believers,” and fulfills the prophetic tradition in

63. Ibid.
twentieth-century theology that originates with “Karl Barth . . . when he said that ‘the true hearer of the word is the one who puts it into practice.’” Gutiérrez argues that this generates a “hermeneutical circle” that moves between two poles: the living word of God and the present historical reality of its interpreters, which he says should involve solidarity with the irruption of the poor into history as actors on their own behalf.

Thus, Gutiérrez concludes, “The historical womb from which liberation theology has emerged is the life of the poor and . . . the Christian communities that have arisen within the bosom of the present-day Latin American church.” For its part, this “theology tries to read the word of God and be alert to the challenges that faith issues to the historical process in which that people is engaged.” For Gutiérrez, this approach amounts to an updating of the famous definition of theology by St. Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109) as “faith seeking understanding” (fides quaerens intellectum). In the hands of Gutiérrez, Anselm’s definition refers both to the faith of the poor and to that of the church, which makes the preferential option for the poor that theology seeks to articulate and understand.

The Conversion of the Central American Jesuits to the Preferential Option for the Poor

Reflecting some of the same sensitivities discussed above, in El Salvador Archbishop Luis Chávez y González brought a consistent concern with poverty to the diocese of San Salvador over which he presided from 1939 to 1977, when he was replaced by Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero. In the early 1950s Archbishop Chávez encouraged the peasant-based cooperative movement, sending priests to Canada to learn how to form cooperatives, and setting up the Pius XII Institute to impart these skills in the context of Catholic Social Teaching. As noted above, the Catholic Church of the early 1960s under the leadership of John XXIII (1958-1963), Paul VI (1963-1978), and Vatican II (1962-1965), embraced the concept of development being promoted by the United Nations and other secular organizations, integrating it into the rich tradition of Catholic Social Teaching. Archbishop Arturo Rivera Damas (archbishop 1983-1994) remembers that Archbishop Chávez was very “anxious to put into practice the social doctrines that came out of the Council and to have them diffused and practiced.”

66. Ibid.
67. Ibid., xxxiii.
68. Ibid.
69. Ibid., xxxiii-xxxiv.
71. Interview with then Bishop Arturo Rivera Damas by Tommie Sue Montgomery; cited
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Development, the Church in El Salvador, and the Founding of the UCA

On August 6, 1966, Archbishop Chávez issued a pastoral letter, “The Responsibility of the Laity in the Ordering of Temporal Life,” which attempted to relate some of the teachings of the Council to the need for economic and political development in El Salvador. Rivera Damas recalled that the letter aroused the animosity of both the government and the oligarchy for its perceived “criticism of capitalism” and its possibilities for encouraging the potential threats embodied in the nascent Christian Democratic Party and the organization of voluntary grassroots movements. Through these and other activities, during the 1960s the notion of development began to guide the application of the church’s social teaching to the historical realities of El Salvador. Not surprisingly, development also framed the documents and ecclesial perspectives that shaped the founding of the University of Central America (UCA).

On August 24, 1964, the six bishops of El Salvador officially petitioned the papal secretary of state for permission to open a Catholic university in their country. The letter presents the Catholic university as a much-needed alternative to the perspective of the National University of El Salvador, which they believed was characterized by a “position and focus that was friendly to Marxism.” Later that year the Jesuits of Central America put their own stamp on the proposed university, subordinating the bishops’ anti-communism to a commitment to development as a horizon more consonant with the church’s social teaching and adequate to the project of a Christian university. Indeed, the document makes Third World development a founding premise for the work of the university, suggesting, “All academic faculties should be set up with a...


72. Ibid.

73. This section draws on the following studies of the founding of the Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas (in order of publication): Román Mayorga Quirós, La Universidad para el cambio social (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1976); Ignacio Ellacuría, “Sobre la fundación de la Universidad José Simeón Cañas,” September 30, 1982, appendix to Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Directors of the University of Central America, October 11, 1982 (San Salvador: Archives of the University of Central America); Charles Beirne, Jesuit Education and Social Change in El Salvador (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), 47-87.

74. Letter from the bishops of El Salvador to Cardinal Amleto Cicognani, August 24, 1964 (San Salvador: Archives of the Society of Jesus of Central America). Copy in the UCA El Salvador file. Cited in Beirne, Jesuit Education and Social Change, 73. Note that the Jesuit curial staff of the Central American Province of the Society of Jesus has decided that sensitive correspondence in its archives dating from this period shall remain confidential until an undetermined future date. Fr. Beirne was a high-ranking official of the university shortly after the assassinations, and before the province’s decision to close these files, and therefore had a unique opportunity to study this correspondence. Where I must rely on his description of a document, it is cited in the form above.
sense of absolute priority on university graduates with a development mentality not only in the economic arena but also in the social realm. This priority is presented not only because of the evident danger from communism but also in the light of social justice.”

Thus, on September 15, 1965, Fr. Florentino Idoate, S.J., the UCA’s first president, would inaugurate the University of Central America José Simeón Cañas with a speech celebrating the university’s role in forming professionals who would contribute to El Salvador’s future “socio-economic development.” And five years later in a speech written by Ignacio Ellacuría and Román Mayorga celebrating the signing of the first loan from the Inter-American Development Bank, university treasurer Fr. José María Gondra, S.J., recalled, “When our university began its foundational labors in 1965, it believed its service should be focused around the concept of development.” As we have seen, however, by 1970 a decade of experience with the concept of development had brought the Latin American Conference of Bishops, together with many other important leadership and grassroots groups, to seriously question the adequacy of this horizon as a framework within which to interpret and respond to the historical realities of Latin America.

As a result, the decades of the 1970s and ‘80s would find the Jesuits of Central America and the UCA at the center of a deadly serious national struggle to define a new horizon for a national vision including the hopes and aspirations of the majority of El Salvadorans. The UCA and many others would insist with Archbishop Romero and the Latin American bishops that development should be subordinated to the preferential option for the poor and the struggle for liberation it implies, metaphors chosen to capture the social-political-economic transformations considered necessary to achieve truly “integral” development.

The Early Years of the UCA: 1965-1969

Fr. Charles Beirne, S.J., describes 1965 to 1969 as “the founding years” of the UCA. The aforementioned “development mentality” favored by the UCA team

76. Though the UCA uses the term “rector” to refer to its legal and titular head, I will translate this with the more familiar term “president” throughout this chapter.
79. My description of the Universidad Centroamericana during these years again draws on the following studies: Román Mayorga Quirós, La Universidad para el cambio social, esp. 21-37; Ellacuría, “Sobre la fundación de la Universidad José Simeón Cañas”; Beirne, Jesuit Education and Social Change, esp. pp. 71-87.
in El Salvador would characterize their work until Medellín, a 1968 meeting of the Jesuit provincials of Latin America in Rio, Brazil, and the emerging theology of liberation shook the Central American Jesuits to their roots at the province retreat in December 1969. In the meantime, however, the structural foundations for a truly modern, if conventional, Catholic university were being laid.

Drawing on research from the Jesuit archives, Fr. Beirne has traced the development and implementation of the idea for a Jesuit Central American university from the original proposal by Jesuit General Fr. John B. Janssens to Central American provincial Fr. Miguel Elizondo on April 21, 1958 through 1994. Fr. Beirne highlights two key structural decisions taken while the university was “still on the drawing boards.” First was the implementation of the recommendation by Fr. Janssens, based on the advice of his education consultant, Fr. Paolo Dezza, S.J., to establish one university with campuses in Managua (Nicaragua), Guatemala City, and San Salvador (this was added later) so that “cooperation and help from various nations would be made easier, and cultural and economic bonds encouraged.” Fr. Beirne notes, “Although the Roman Jesuit curia would raise the issue from time to time, and consider each of the universities as ‘branches,’ the one UCA never came into existence. Separate institutions developed in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala.”

Second, and more significant, is the unanticipated singular importance of the Private School Law passed by the Salvadoran legislature on March 24, 1965. This law essentially pre-empted seven years of sometimes difficult negotiations among Jesuit, diocesan, and Vatican officials by mandating “a legally separate entity, a special kind of not-for-profit corporation (corporación de utilidad pública),” in which “neither the church nor the Society of Jesus would be its owner,” but rather “its Board of Directors, who were to administer it according to its ‘public’ or ‘societal’ purposes.”

Fr. Beirne says the new arrangement “essentially changed . . . [the UCA] from the type of university envisioned at the meetings with the hierarchy . . . when a ‘Catholic’ university was being planned,” to a structure that “would protect the university from intervention by the Salvadoran and Vatican hierarchy.” Fr. Luis Achauerandio could not have imagined how the new university’s legal autonomy would protect its implementation of the Central American Jesuits’ option for the poor from being crippled by those very forces during the 1970s.

83. Ibid., 74-75.
84. Ibid., 76.
85. Ibid., 76-77.
86. Ibid.
and 1980s. But it seems clear that he intended to create a truly modern Catholic university; one with sufficient religious and secular autonomy to fully engage the new Latin America emerging during the 1960s. As Fr. Beirne notes, after Medellín and the Central American Jesuits’ option for the poor, everything would look different.

Luis Achaerandio and his team built independence and autonomy into the model: a special kind of “public,” not an official Catholic university. In 1965 the Salvadoran bishops and the oligarchy wanted a Catholic haven within which their charges could be protected from noxious influences outside. If the UCA had been an official Catholic university from the beginning, it is not hard to imagine how the bishops might have intervened, even dramatically and as early as 1970, when the university began to define itself as an agent for social change, and as a creative and critical conscience for the nation.

Thus, exactly one month after the initial August 15, 1965, meeting of the all-Jesuit Board of Directors, Fr. Idoate would officially inaugurate the university’s efforts in “the preparation of citizens well equipped to lead the intense development which is coming.” The issues that would arise in the remaining years of the decade are appropriately described by Fr. Ibisate (who joined the Board with Fr. Ignacio Ellacuría at the beginning of the second academic year) as focused on the process of the UCA’s “being born,” and by Fr. Beirne as “growing pains,” terms that connote a period of establishing foundations in continuity with the founders’ development-oriented original vision.

During the university’s first few months, deans of engineering and economics were appointed, and negotiations were completed with the Salesians to establish the campus temporarily on their Don Rua property. Jon Sobrino, then a Jesuit seminarian (who would describe his apostolic vision in 1966 as “helping the people to . . . become a little bit more like Spaniards, Europeans, or North Americans”), was assigned to teach engineering. And Fr. Idoate took

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88. Ibid., 233.
89. The first Board included Florentino Idoate (president), Segundo Azcue (vice president), Joaquín López y López (secretary), José Ignacio Scheifler (pro-secretary), and Jesús de Esnaola (member). See Beirne, Jesuit Education and Social Change, 77.
92. Ibid.
94. Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Directors of the University of Central America.
a 50 percent pay cut to cover still unfunded scholarships. Shortly thereafter President Julio Rivera came to the rescue with thirty scholarships worth $52 a month.\textsuperscript{95}

The San Salvador UCA opened its doors in 1966 with 309 students (136 in engineering and 173 in economics) and ended the year with 14 professors having taught 367 pupils.\textsuperscript{96} Later that year the School of Business Administration was approved.\textsuperscript{97} Fr. Beirne endorses the belief of Román Mayorga, university president from 1975 to 1979, that “the school got off the ground . . . because of three factors: the international prestige of the Jesuits as educators, negative impressions of the National University’s quality and atmosphere, and the initial academic programs of engineering and business [which were] in great demand during this era of developmentalistic optimism.”\textsuperscript{98}

In 1967 the UCA grew to 541 students taught by 26 teachers (mostly part time). And on May 12 the Board obtained a $240,000 loan to purchase land for a campus. But shortages of Jesuit personnel and fund-raising problems led its president, Fr. Idoate, to tell his provincial that if the Jesuits were going to continue to staff the seminary, “I do not see the university as viable.” Though twenty donors had promised to help purchase a campus site, Fr. Idoate reports that “the project is moving desperately slowly, and some have put on the brakes because of nervousness at the publication of certain church social documents.”\textsuperscript{99}

One can see why the paradigm shift from development to the option for the poor, which was about to take place at Medellín, would take several years to arrive at the UCA.

In the meantime, the UCA had more immediate and mundane concerns. On July 28, 1967, the university was evicted from the Salesian property. The Salesian superior, Fr. José C. Di Pietro, wrote with equal parts of disgust and irony to the Jesuit provincial:

I have nothing to say about the music, dancing and happiness of the students at their parties, but what surprises me is that on these occasions they are given total freedom in our house to get drunk with barrels of beer at their disposal . . . After my complaints . . . they suspended the

José Simeón Cañas, November 15, 1965 (San Salvador: Archives of the University of Central America).

95. Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Directors of the University of Central America José Simeón Cañas, November 25, 1966 (San Salvador: Archives of the University of Central America).


97. Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Directors of the University of Central America José Simeón Cañas, September 28, 1966 (San Salvador: Archives of the University of Central America).

98. Mayorga Quirós, La Universidad para el cambio social, 27, 28; and Beirne, Jesuit Education and Social Change, 79.

distribution of beer for a time, but the students continued with their supply of rum, and threw the empty bottles from the second floor to the street. . . . I am sure that such orgies are not the usual custom in your high schools and universities.  

Fortunately, the UCA was able to move with its now 719 students and 42 instructors to a temporary home at the Jesuit high school where they stayed until finally moving to a permanent campus in February 1969. Yet, despite these setbacks, by 1968 the UCA would begin sending faculty for Fulbright-sponsored graduate studies in the United States, and establish a third faculty or division (in addition to business/economics and engineering) in the area of philosophy, letters, and human sciences. The year 1969 ended with 57 UCA faculty having educated 1,039 students, and the appointment of Fr. Luis Achaerandio, S.J., the recently retired provincial superior of the Central American Jesuits, as university president. Like the rest of the Latin American Church, the UCA was about to be rocked by the impact of Medellín.

The 1968 Jesuit Meeting in Rio, Brazil

The documentary history of liberation theology compiled by Alfred T. Hennelly, S.J., bears eloquent testimony to the fact that the preferential option for the poor, and the struggle for liberation and justice it implies, only gradually came to supplant development as an overarching horizon for many Latin American church leaders, including the Jesuits. Hennelly traces this outcome to the church’s disenchanted with the failure of the First Decade of Development to address what Medellín would eventually call the “institutionalized violence” of “international monopolies and [the] international imperialism of money” directed against the poor (citing Pius XI in Quadragesimo anno and Paul VI in Populorum progressio). He also cites the effect of events like the March 31, 1964, military coup in Brazil, and the subsequent adoption of Brazil’s “totalitarian ideology” of the National Security State by other Latin American regimes. But Hennelly suggests that the crucial break occurred when the Latin American church began to attend to its own experience that “unlike the United States and Europe, Latin America constituted an enormous ocean of poverty.”

101. Fr. Beirne notes that through 1994 the UCA would have sponsored fifty-two faculty members for Fulbright scholarships for U.S. graduate studies. Of these twenty-nine were no longer teaching at the UCA, twelve were still on the staff, two had died, and nine were still in studies. See Beirne, Jesuit Education and Social Change, 82.
103. Second Conference of Latin American Bishops, in Hennelly, ed., Liberation Theology, 41.
104. Ibid., 2.
experience became an important "source" for the church’s pastoral and theological reflection, a move that was further stimulated by Vatican II’s call for ecclesial renewal and inculturation.

While it would take until 1971 for Gustavo Gutiérrez to elaborate his “theology of liberation,” what was clearly understood by the bishops at Medellín in 1968 was that the church was giving apostolic “preference to the poorest and most needy,” and “pre-eminence” to “our duty of solidarity with the poor.” Indeed, the bishops went out of their way to point out that “this solidarity means that we make ours their problems and their struggles,” through “criticism of injustice and oppression” and participation in “the struggle against the intolerable situation that a poor person often has to tolerate.” Thus, as I have already noted, the church’s discernment that God was calling it to a preferential option for the poor would lead some to see the church as an important participant in civil movements for social change and liberation from military rule and other forms of oppression.

It is important to distinguish the meaning and history of the church’s disenchantment with developmentalism and its subordination of integral development to the option for the poor as the horizon for its apostolic activity during the 1960s, from the history of the formal consideration of these concepts by theologians and church leaders. For while the latter history must address the work of Gustavo Gutiérrez, who dedicated himself to this task, the former more encompassing paradigm shift involved a broad cross-section of individual believers, pastoral agents, and church leaders throughout the Latin America. This larger history would include the church’s adaptation of Paulo Freire’s development of methods of literacy training designed to “conscientize” Latin America’s poor, Brazilian experiments with basic Christian communities, and the meeting of the Jesuit provincials of Latin America with their General, Fr. Pedro Arrupe, S.J., in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, May 6-14, 1968. The dramatic results of this meeting (yet another important meeting in the months before Medellín) would play a crucial role in the history of the Central American Jesuits and the University of Central America by inspiring the province retreat of December 1969.

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105. Ibid.
108. In order to avoid confusion, I will not use the terms “vice-province,” “vice-provincial,” etc., substituting “province,” “provincial,” etc., throughout this work. The only exception is that printed works will retain their original titles in the footnotes. Miguel Elizondo, “El sentido teológico y espiritual de una reunión comunitaria de la viceprovincia” [The Theological and Spiritual Meaning of a Community Meeting of the Vice-Province], in “Reunión Ejercicios.” The prefix “vice” is inherently confusing since it is also used in English to mean assistant. At the time referred to in the text the Society of Jesus in Central America was still formally a vice-province of the Spanish Province of Castile. Fr. Juan Hernández-Pico explains that after having been elevated from the status of a “mission” on February 7, 1937, it would remain a vice-province until August 5, 1976, when Jesuit general Pedro Arrupe officially elevated its status and appointed Fr. César Jerez the first provincial of the new province. See Juan
The final document represents an official statement of the vision of the highest levels of governance of the Society of Jesus in Latin America for the post-Vatican II renewal of its membership. In their analysis of “the social problem of Latin America” the Jesuit leaders “propose to give this problem absolute priority in our apostolic strategy; indeed we intend to orient our whole apostolate around it.” Leaving no doubt that their option for the poor has a political dimension they state, “We hope to participate, as best we can, in the common quest of all peoples . . . for a freer, more just, and more peaceful society.” Emphasizing that this implies a commitment to critically reexamine their various works in light of the struggle for liberation from military rule and other forms of oppression in Latin American they assert, “In all our activities, our goal should be the liberation of humankind from every sort of servitude that oppresses it.” And “aware of the profound transformation this presupposes,” including a “break with some of our attitudes in the past,” the provincials assert with some prescience that though these changes “will almost certainly arouse reactions,” still “we promise to work for bold reforms that will radically transform existing structures (Populum progressio §32) . . . as the only way to promote social peace.” The document (written two-and-one-half months before Gutiérrez’s speech in Chimbote, Peru) is an unusually clear exemplar of the significance and depth of the shift in the Latin American church before Medellín in 1968 from development to the option for the poor and the efforts to promote liberation it implies.

The Jesuit provincials are quintessentially Ignatian in their preoccupation with exploring the practical apostolic implications of this paradigm shift for Jesuit works in Latin America. First, they propose to “prepare priests and lay persons for their apostolate in the world of today.” Second, the document proposes all Latin American provincials “allocate a part of our apostolic resources to the growing mass of those who are most neglected.” Examples given include “Centers of Research and Social Action,” “rural parishes,” and “pastoral work among grassroots communities” of the poor. Third, the provincials ask that all Jesuit “schools and universities accept their role as active agents of national integration and social justice in Latin America.” Fourth, “adults in every walk of life” are to be supported as “active promoters of social change.” Fifth, the Jesuit leadership asks that “communications media” be given “decisive importance in inculcating human values . . . that will help to create the new order we seek.” Sixth, the superiors propose that “our participation in the creation of

110. Ibid., 78, 79.
111. Ibid., 79.
112. Ibid., 80.
113. Ibid., 80, 81.
114. Ibid., 81.
115. Ibid., 82.
a new social order presuppose[s] a deep, inner conversion within each one of us.” And seventh, the Jesuit provincials state, “We also realize that . . . [this] presupposes changes in our decision-making process as provincials. . . . But we are pledged to carry it through as quickly as possible.”

Within one year the Jesuits of Central America would begin a planning process to reevaluate all of their existing works in light of the decrees of Vatican II, Medellín, the Rio letter, and the commitment of the Central American Jesuits themselves to solidarity with the poor. It was this process as much as any other that served to translate the paradigm shift from developmentalism to the option for the poor stated by their leaders at Rio and Medellín into a reality for the Jesuits in El Salvador.

**The Call for Renewal: Ellacuría and the Voice of Jesuit Formation**

Jesuit students immersed in a course of studies far removed geographically and thematically from the realities of Central America were among the first members of the Central American province to embrace the “profound conversion” called for by the bishops of Latin America, and the Latin American provincials at Rio. Fr. Juan Hernández-Pico notes in his *Recent History of the Central American Province (1976-1986)* that thirty-nine of the Province’s seventy-two Jesuits doing studies gathered in Madrid, June 26-29, 1968, with Fr. Segundo Azcue, provincial of Central America, in order to discuss “the crisis hitting religious life.” The students complained of the “inertia” and lack of “new proposals and planning” from the Central American Jesuits in response to the challenges of secularization, the suffering of “the Third World,” and the 1968 Rio letter signed by Fr. Azcue calling Latin American Jesuits to an option for the poor. Fr. Hernández-Pico reports that Ignacio Ellacuría, who was at the meeting, proposed that Fr. Azcue convene “a representative meeting of the Province in order to create a shared consciousness and sense of co-responsibility for the necessary changes” mandated by Medellín and Rio. The author adds that the elderly provincial “demonstrated an admirable openness of heart to the new challenges,” and “decided to convoke the [requested] meeting of the Province during December 1969.” A decade later Fr. Azcue would serve as confessor for Archbishop Romero.

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116. Ibid.
117. Ibid., 82.
Hernández-Pico says Azcue “entrusted the preparation to Frs. Llasera and Ellacuría.” Fr. Javier Llasera, assistant to the provincial, was named general secretary for the meeting, and the young Ellacuría recruited his former novice master to the team, Fr. Miguel Elizondo, now retreat master and director of the final stage of Jesuit formation in Medellín, Colombia. The group also invited two other Spaniards to give presentations, Fr. Florentino Idoate, S.J., the UCA’s first rector, and Fr. Ricardo Falla, S.J., a young anthropologist ordained in 1964 and in training for assignment to one of the new Centers for Research and Social Action (CIAS). Elizondo and Ellacuría, still only thirty-eight years old and ordained in 1961 just before Vatican II, would play a critical role in turning Azcue’s request into an epoch-defining moment for the Central American Jesuits.

The leaders of the retreat were all Spaniards, which is not surprising in light of the still official subordination in 1969 of the Central American Province to Spain. It is important to understand this relationship and its impact on Ellacuría and Elizondo as leaders of this crucial retreat. The Spanish Jesuits first arrived in Guatemala in 1579,123 seven years after coming to Mexico on September 28, 1572,124 and three decades after the first New World Jesuits arrived in Brazil on March 29, 1549. However, the worldwide suppression of the Society of Jesus by Pope Clement XIV on August 16, 1773,125 and the expulsion of all Jesuits from El Salvador in 1872,126 meant that no Jesuits returned to El Salvador until the arrival in 1914 of a group of Jesuits fleeing religious persecution from the Mexican revolution. A little over twenty years later, on February 7, 1937, the Jesuit “mission” in Central America was elevated to the status of a vice-province under the care and supervision of the Spanish Province of Castille.

As part of this mission in 1949 six young Jesuits were sent to San Salvador from Spain under the direction of novice master Miguel Elizondo in order to help found a Jesuit novitiate for Central America. One can imagine tears running down the face of Ignacio Ellacuría’s worried parents, his father an oculist.


124. The dates for Mexico, Brazil, and the worldwide suppression of the Jesuits are provided by William V. Bangert, S.J., A History of the Society of Jesus (St. Louis, MO: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1972), 95, 37.

125. The Jesuit order was restored worldwide on August 7, 1814. See Bangert, History, 428.

from outside of town, as they bid goodbye with other heartsick parents to their sons leaving Bilbao, Spain, by train on their way to El Salvador. Like the others, “Ellacu” had entered the Jesuit novitiate in Loyola, the home of St. Ignatius, only a year before. But there he was, a firmly solicited (yet willing) eighteen-year-old “volunteer” about to begin what he would later call his “American” life.\textsuperscript{127}

The true “Central-Americanization” of the province only became a reality with the wave of native-born sons who entered the Jesuit novitiate during the 1970s and ’80s, making it possible to end the legal dependency on the Province of Castille on August 5, 1976.\textsuperscript{128} But Ellacuría and the other Spaniards who came as teenagers felt that, unlike Spaniards who came later in formation as priests, they had adopted the reality of Central America as their own.\textsuperscript{129}

Looking back on the challenge of forming mainly Spanish novices to serve in the Americas, Elizondo recalls being guided by Ignatius’s motto, \textit{Ad majorem Dei gloriam} (for the greater glory of God), and says, “I felt totally free of my past, of my antecedents as a Jesuit and as a novice master, although I was a ‘novice’ in that myself.”\textsuperscript{130} Not surprisingly, Elizondo sought to instill freedom in his novices as well. He encouraged them to interiorize the spirituality of their yearly retreat encounter with the \textit{Spiritual Exercises} of St. Ignatius by studying the founding history and documents of the Society of Jesus, and by learning to use their own judgment in adapting to their new reality. This seemed better than depending on Spanish convention regarding “the many things they were supposed to do in order to be a good Jesuit—the many rules to obey, virtues to practice, devotions to keep and so on in order to reach what one can consider essential in the vocation of the Society.”\textsuperscript{131} Elizondo admits that he sometimes struggled to live with the “somewhat adolescent” exuberant energy of his young charges, such as Segundo Montes (one of the martyrs), who arrived from Valladolid, Spain, in 1951. But as Fr. César Jerez, S.J. (the native-born provincial who would lead the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{128} Hernández-Pico, \textit{Historia reciente}, 17. This date is provided in the “Recent History of the Central American Province” by Fr. Hernández-Pico, which mentions “central-americanization” as a central challenge (\textit{Historia reciente}, 3). It was also the subject of a difficult meeting of the province’s men in formation with their superiors in 1994. The younger men, who are overwhelmingly from Central America, complained of the overemphasis on Spanish culture and customs and the lack of attention to inculturation by Spanish-born Jesuits. Interview of Central American Jesuits in formation by Robert Lassalle-Klein, San Salvador, July 1994.
\item \textsuperscript{129} Based on a comment by a Jesuit who came as a teenager from Spain to Central America. Interview with Salvador Carranza by Teresa Whitfield (Santa Tecla, El Salvador, January 25, 1991). Cited in Whitfield, \textit{Paying the Price}, 21 n. 20.
\item \textsuperscript{130} Interview with Fr. Miguel Elizondo, S.J., by Teresa Whitfield (Guadalajara, Mexico, December 31, 1990). Cited in Whitfield, \textit{Paying the Price}, 21.
\item \textsuperscript{131} Ibid., 22.
\end{itemize}
province through its first persecutions and the martyrdoms of Rutilio Grande, S.J., and Archbishop Romero) would later recall, Elizondo “taught us not to be afraid.”

It was this generation, especially Ellacuría and his old novice master, Elizondo, who would set the stage during these days for a thorough renewal of Jesuit formation in light of the historical realities of Central America. The two helped create an epoch-changing moment of conversion by confronting the faith of the province gathered for the Christmas 1969 retreat with the historical reality of the suffering people of Central America. Jon Sobrino believes that the question that faced the Society of Jesus during these years after Medellín (1968) and the call of Vatican II (1962-1965) to read the signs of the times in light of the gospel was, “So, how do you react in the midst of [Central America’s] reality?” In trying to explain what prepared Ellacuría for his leading role in helping the UCA and the Central American Jesuit province to answer this question, Sobrino recalls,

Ellacuría used to say he was impressed by four people during his life: his novice master, Fr. Elizondo, at the human, spiritual level; Espinosa Pólit, his humanities professor in Ecuador; Karl Rahner as a theologian at Innsbruck; and Xavier Zubiri in Spain, the subject of his doctoral dissertation in philosophy. What I think Ellacuría appreciated from Zubiri was the critical realism. Zubiri taught him to ask, “What is the university in the midst of reality? And what is the reality of the University?”

The enthusiasm for reality inspired by these men, and the aforementioned freedom grounded in the tradition of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius nurtured by Elizondo, helped prepare Ellacuría not only to embrace the younger Jesuits’ criticism in Madrid of their far-flung formation, but to be converted himself by the historical reality of Central America they so missed. Sobrino adds that for the rest of his life (1967-1989) “Ellacuría was pioneering that; taking risks, not being afraid—we were, of course—but not being stopped by problems, persecution, bumps.” This process was about to take a massive leap forward with the Christmas 1969 province retreat.

134. Jon Sobrino believes that “Ellacuría was strongly affected by the realism of the Exercises of St. Ignatius.” He suggests that the deep-seated realism of the Exercises is embodied in the centrality they give to the following: (a) the examination of the present historical moment; (b) the notion of imitation [of Christ]; (c) the doctrine of the incarnation; and (d) the meditation on the two standards. Note from Jon Sobrino to Robert Lassalle-Klein, July 24, 1995.
Looking back, Fr. Hernández-Pico, secretary for the gathering, recalls,

The predictions were realized that there would be “large disputes” in this “Spiritual Exercises–conference.” The Province experienced a powerful and conflictive cleansing, whose effects, redoubled during the year 1970, would be present during all of the years Fr. Miguel F. Estrada was provincial. The meeting itself was seen by some as the time when the foundations were able to be established to sketch a new navigational map for the Central American Jesuits. Others saw it as an assembly vitiated by the emotionality of new positions, and more like a meeting of fundamentalist fanatics than a time of calm discernment. [However, w] ith quite a few directives put there to try to avoid a serious rupture in the union of hearts among the Jesuits of the Province, Fr. Arrupe substantially approved the practical conclusions of the meeting.\footnote{Hernández-Pico, História reciente, 9.}

The perspective provided by the distance of almost a quarter of a century gives us a broader appreciation of the seminal importance of this gathering. It is now clear that a shift in horizons, comparable to that experienced by the bishops at Medellín, occurred during the days of December 24-31, 1969, for the majority of Jesuits gathered at the diocesan Seminary in San Salvador. The importance of later decisions and events inspired by the meeting would tend to overshadow the open-ended and properly affective character of this attempt by a group of Central American Jesuits to update their own grasp of Ignatian spirituality. They began by returning to the spirituality of their founder embodied in the \textit{Spiritual Exercises} of St. Ignatius to prepare themselves to respond to the epoch-making challenges of Medellín and Rio. Fortunately we are able to ground the living memory of the event in documents that provide an in-process record of the meeting itself.\footnote{“Reunión-Ejercicios de la viceprovincia Jesuitica de Centroamérica, Diciembre 1969,” in \textit{Reflexión teologico-espiritual de la Compañía de Jésus en Centroamérica, II} (San Salvador: Archives of the Society of Jesus, Central American Province, Survey S.J. de Centroamérica).}

\textbf{Conversion of Heart and the Option for the Poor of the Central American Jesuits: The December 1969 Retreat}

Ellacuría and Elizondo used a truly “radical” approach for the retreat in returning to the long-neglected tradition of group discernment described in \textit{Deliberatio primorum patrum},\footnote{Constitutiones societatis Jesu I, 1-7; in \textit{Monumenta Historica Societatis Jesu}, \textit{Monumenta Ignatiana}, Series III. See Jules J. Toner, S.J., “The Deliberation That Started the Jesuits: A Commentary on the \textit{Deliberatio primorum patrum}, Newly Translated with a Historical Introduction,” \textit{Studies in the Spirituality of the Jesuits} 6, no. 4 (June 1974).} the official account of the 1539\footnote{Ignatius and his early companions deliberated for several months during 1539 on...} discern-
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ment by Ignatius of Loyola and his companions to found the Society of Jesus. Yet the meeting’s central theme of “renewal” (renovación), like Vatican II’s aggiornamento (bringing up to date) of church traditions, made this admittedly bold recovery of Jesuit foundations seem truly traditional in the hands of the province’s former novice master and the soon-to-be director of Jesuit formation (Ellacuría). “Following the parameters of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius,” the two sought to renew the whole province by constituting it as single subject united “in communal reflection and prayer.” The object of prayer and reflection was to be “the image of the Jesuit and the Society [of Jesus] . . . in the circumstances of Central America today.”

Principles and Foundations

Ellacuría’s first talk summarized the “goal and meaning” of the gathering in three points: (1) to create a moment of communal reflection for the Central American Jesuits about the present historical situation of Central America guided by their shared tradition of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius; (2) to offer the Jesuits an opportunity to come to prayerful agreement about the fundamental principles for the renewal of their members and apostolic works; and (3) to prepare the hearts (affections) of those gathered by seeking an attitude of openness and “indifference” through the Spiritual Exercises as the principle and foundation for the personal and structural renewal of the province. The approach was effective, though, as we shall see in the next section, not without its risks.

The first morning was filled out by the Fr. Azcue’s provincial welcome, a communal rendition of “Veni Creator,” and Elizondo’s introductory reflection on “The Theological and Spiritual Meaning of a Community Meeting of the Province.” This talk emphasized the christological depth of Ignatius’s principle that “we should make ourselves indifferent to all created things, insofar as we are allowed free choice and are not under any prohibition.” Elizondo

whether to formally constitute themselves as a religious order. This decision was confirmed during eionmunion of a Mass celebrated for the group by Pierre Favre on April 15, 1539.

140. Ignacio Ellacuría, “Finalidad y sentido de la reunión” (Goal and Meaning of the Meeting), 1, in “Reunión-Ejercicios,” 37.
143. “Presentación,” 1. Juan Hernández-Pico links the reflection on this theme and the postulate developed at the Province Congregation of 1970 to the historical development of Decree Two (“The Jesuits Today”) of the 32nd General Congregation of the Society of Jesus, December 2, 1974–March 7, 1975 (see Hernández-Pico, Historia reciente), 9, 10.
145. See note 108, above.
146. The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola, trans. Elisabeth Meier Tetlow (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1987), 11. The complete text reads: “Human persons are created to praise, reverence, and serve God the Lord and by this means to attain salvation. The other things on the face of the earth are created for us, to help us in attaining
asserts, “If we have to renew ourselves, we won’t begin by renewing ‘things,’ nor will we begin by renewing ourselves, as persons; rather we will begin by renewing our . . . [experience] of the God who has communicated himself to us” in the *Spiritual Exercises.* Many were no doubt surprised by the depth of humility and feeling with which this elder Jesuit invited his brothers to put aside their doubts and fears and to embrace a spirit of communal conversion in meeting the challenge of Medellín.

I have a lot of people here who have been my novices, to whom I have given the *Exercises,* and have tried to explain what the Society is. I was superior of this province, which meant I had to look after the majority of those who are here. [And] you may have an image which could become an obstacle to the correct interpretation of what, in reality, the *Exercises* are, identifying this spirituality with what you received from me. I always think that the third class of humility [see note] for me is to have been master of novices twenty years before the present epoch, because it was impossible that one could have prepared people for such a different era from the one in which we lived and those things which used to condition our life. Thus it is that I am beginning to be converted myself and to acknowledge the sins . . . which I may have had in a thing so essential as the transmission of that which the Society of Jesus should be. I have tried to change *[convertirme]* and to be open-mindedly indifferent, without worrying about anything but what the truth is, whatever it may be, even though it might be very different from what I have lived. I have tried to adjust a bit to the rhythm of the times and the voice of the call of God which manifests itself there.148

the purpose for which we are created. Therefore, we are to make use of them insofar as they help us to attain our purpose, and we should rid ourselves of them insofar as they hinder us from attaining it. Thus we should make ourselves indifferent to all created things, insofar as we are allowed free choice and are not under any prohibition. Consequently, as far as we are concerned, we should not prefer health to sickness, riches to poverty, honor to dishonor, a long life to a short life. The same holds for all other things. Our one desire and choice should be what will best help us attain the purpose for which we are created.”


148. Ibid., 3. In his *Spiritual Exercises* St. Ignatius elevates the “third degree of humility” above the others in the following words: “By grace, I find myself so moved to follow Jesus Christ in the most intimate union possible, that his experiences are reflected in my own.” This is reflected in “a love and a desire for poverty in order to be with the poor Christ; a love and desire for insults in order to be closer to Christ in his own rejection by people; a love and a desire to be considered worthless and a fool for Christ, rather than to be esteemed as wise and prudent according to the standards of the world. See David L. Fleming, S.J., A Contemporary Reading of the Spiritual Exercises (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1976; 2nd ed. rev. 1980, 1987), 40, 41; §167.
Elizondo then forcefully asserts that what is at stake is nothing short of a “dialogical encounter of the whole province . . . with the Christ of today, with his church of today, and with the Christ located here, in this province.”

Looking back, we can see that this historical encounter with the Christ of Medellín, Rio, and the region’s suffering people had the effect of actualizing the radical freedom inspired by the Spiritual Exercises, which Elizondo had tried to instill in his recently immigrated charges in 1949. While he could not have known his efforts would bear fruit in the birth of a prophetic vision for the church in Latin America, Elizondo later recalled: “I [had] wanted to prepare in them the openness that is necessary for what the future will bring, without ever knowing what the future may be.”

The “First Week” of the Spiritual Exercises: The Province Examines Its Conscience

The first day ended with a presentation summarizing the results of the June 1968 student meeting in Madrid, a review of the various Jesuit works in the nations of the province (Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Costa Rica), a Christmas-eve dinner, and a large concelebrated mass. Christmas morning was dedicated to a beginning of the small group process. After lunch Elizondo gave the first of two talks on the first week of the Exercises, emphasizing how unjust and hurtful patterns of behavior among the Jesuits of Central America might inhibit a free response to God’s call to a preferential option for the poor discerned by the bishops at Medellín.

In “The First Week as Indispensable Beginning for Conversion,” Elizondo argues that it was Ignatius’s tangible experience “that the Reign of God has already come,” which made the saint aware of sin and brought about the two stages of his conversion. The initial conversion was provoked by an experience of the reality of the Kingdom in the lives of the saints, which Ignatius read while recuperating at Loyola from a serious injury sustained in a military campaign. The second, more profound, conversion was provoked by a deeply mystical experience years later while writing the Spiritual Exercises in Manresa of God’s “salvific design” through the work of the Trinity in the world. As a son of Ignatius, Elizondo similarly argues that if “we speak of a conversion at the level of the province,” then “we all have to face, or confront ourselves with the Reign of God.” But he adds a crucial point. He says, “There can be sin without guilt—that is, situations which are sinful . . . [simply] because they impede” the

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152. Ibid., 1.
153. Ibid., 2.
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Reign of God. On the other, however, he says we must take responsibility for “our faults,” which include “my judgments or ideas, my positions or situations, which may be the cause of these sins.” Elizondo then calls each Jesuit, and the province as a whole, to do a traditional Ignatian examination of conscience regarding how their individual and social sins may have become obstacles to “our encounter with Christ . . . which is our apostolic vocation.”

Having dealt with the preliminaries, Latin America’s Jesuit retreat master then invited his colleagues to accept what he sees as the fundamental grace of the Ignatian charism:

The Ignatian vocational experience consists in a Trinitarian experience, of the Trinity present and operative in this world, in all things . . . realizing its plan for the salvation of the whole world. In this experience Ignatius sees that all things are born from God and return to God through the presence and operation of God’s self. And not only by means of the presence and operation of God, but through the insertion of humanity in history. Into this history of salvation comes the human “par excellence,” Christ, and with him all persons chosen to actively cooperate in the operation of the Trinity, to realize the salvific plan of God.

When St. Ignatius feels that this is the call, that the one calling him . . . is . . . the God of salvation, he emerges from his solitude and . . . engages the world. [Thus,] . . . the definitive God of Ignatius is going to be the God of this world, . . . the world is the location for the encounter with God. . . . [Consequently,] action becomes a totally different category. . . . Love will not be principally affective or contemplative, but a love which is realized in works, which translates into service, which is realized in this cooperation with God. And, in this way, action will be for St. Ignatius the response to this Trinitarian God, and the sign of the active presence of the Trinity in Ignatius and the life of his Society [my emphasis].

The talk ends by relating this profoundly Ignatian understanding of human action to a recent interview with the Jesuit superior general, Fr. Pedro Arrupe, pointedly subtitled “The Society of Jesus has decided to dedicate itself to the world of the poor and recognizes the necessity for structural change.” The retreatants spent Christmas afternoon in small group reflection on Elizondo’s points, followed by a eucharistic celebration, and a free evening to visit local friends and family.

154. Ibid.
155. Ibid.
156. Ibid., 3, 4.
157. Ibid., 7, 8.
Tensions and Challenges

Ellacuría began the following morning with a fraternal correction intended to preserve the unity of minds and hearts, which the Jesuit general, Fr. Pedro Arrupe, considered essential to the success of the retreat.

Yesterday, unfortunately in my opinion, the young people said little about their sins, as if it was not intended here to look at what is sinful in the lives of all of us. However, it is necessary to confront not only our works, but our lives. It is easy to criticize our works. But it is not so easy to examine our lives, and the young people have lives as well. . . .

I want to say from this moment, to avoid misunderstandings, that this schema is not designed to attack anybody. . . . So then, I would ask that neither the older people nor those who are in authority think that this . . . has been prepared as a weapon to attack them. Nor, equally, should the younger people think that it is a weapon with which they can attack and which frees them from all [self]reflection.158

He then offered a challenging meditation on “Our Collective Situation as Seen from the Perspective of the First Week.”159

Here Ellacuría argues (perhaps surprisingly for 1969) that any Christian anthropology “without essential and constant reference to sin” is “deformed.”160 With Elizondo, he distinguishes “personal” from “collective” sin, noting that in the Christian tradition “human self-destruction is due to . . . personal sin.”161 He asserts that, while the traditional understanding of “original sin goes beyond personal liberty,” it nonetheless includes the notion that “in one way or another we are all responsible” for the evils of this world.162 Thus, he concludes, “the collective evil of social injustice, which is in the teachings of Vatican II, Medellín, and Rio, the great sin of our time, the ‘mystery of evil’ of our day, is itself . . . caused by sin, the sin of not attending to the other as a human being, . . . as a person.”163

Juan Hernández-Pico recalls the remarkable impact of Ellacuría’s words.

All were powerfully struck by the consideration of sin as “collective sin,” a biblical interpretation of the crystallization of evil in history. Attention was called to the fact that Vatican II, Medellín, and the Rio Letter were pointing to, for our present history, social injustice as the great collective sin. The compliance with this great sin in our lifestyles

158. Ibid., 1.
160. Ibid., 3.
161. Ibid., 7.
162. Ibid., 5.
163. Ibid., 7.
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(individualism, adoption of bourgeois values, worldliness) and in the way of structuring our works (preference given to the upper classes, economic commitments to the rich, collaboration with oppressive forces) pointed out our co-responsibility for this collective sin.\(^\text{164}\)

Ellacuría’s challenging reflection echoed throughout the morning dedicated to time for personal reflection, an hour for small group discussion, and a general assembly for reports and discussion. The official record of the meeting\(^\text{165}\) documents the electric effect of the presentations, and the strong mood for change building in the province. While noting the “terror” felt by many in the face of the unknown, one group called for “hope” and “faith in the continuing presence of the Spirit in . . . our epoch.”\(^\text{166}\)

After lunch, small groups discussed the results of a questionnaire that had been distributed asking all to assess the current state of the province. The survey revealed a general feeling of satisfaction with the renewal of religious life,\(^\text{167}\) with the notable exception of the vow of poverty.\(^\text{168}\) However, strong majorities felt the province favored the rich and neglected the poor in its apostolic works.\(^\text{169}\) And there was virtual unanimity in the opinion that “the great renewal documents of the church” were still little known and lacked implementation in the province.\(^\text{170}\)

The general assembly that followed became a profound and surprisingly detailed communal reflection on the individual and collective shortcomings of the Central American Jesuits when examined in the spirit of Medellín and Rio. Group seven, which included the next provincial, Fr. Miguel Estrada, and a current member of the provincial staff, Brother Francisco Azurza,\(^\text{171}\) suggested:

Upon analyzing the causes of the shortcomings in the changes, we believe that sufficient practical respect for the aforementioned documents does not exist. There has been a lack of decision and courage in the superiors, including both the consultors [the Executive Board of the province], and the subjects as well, . . . and a lack of planning at the provincial level. There is no concrete plan of action and the principal cause of this is the magnitude of the change to be realized.\(^\text{172}\)

\(^{164}\) Hernández-Pico, Historia reciente, 8.

\(^{165}\) “Nuestra situación colectiva desde la perspectiva de la primera semana” (Dia. 26.3, 4), 1-4, in “Reunión-Ejercicios,” 72-75.

\(^{166}\) Ibid., 2.

\(^{167}\) “Primera encuesta o examen practica. Resultados,” 1-5, in “Reunión-Ejercicios,” 156-60.

\(^{168}\) Ibid., 2, questions 6.1, 6.2, 6.3.

\(^{169}\) Ibid., 3-4, subsection on “Sobre el sendido de nuestras obras colectivas.”

\(^{170}\) Ibid., 4, subsection on “Sobre la renovación de nuestras obras de acuerdo a las directivas de la Iglesia y la compañía.”

\(^{171}\) For a list of the members of each discussion group, see “Reunión provincial: Grupos de trabajo,” in “Reunión-Ejercicios,” 12.

\(^{172}\) “Resumen de la discusión por grupos y la asamblea general” (Dia 26. 5.1, 2), 3, in “Reunión-Ejercicios,” 154.
The group proposed the creation of a structure for province planning that would carry out a process of discernment regarding the works of the province guided by the conclusions of the retreat. This process would play a powerful role in helping to transform the Central American province in a few short years, but as Ellacuría prophetically warned, “You have to die to sin [to follow this path], and death is not without pain.”

The “Second Week” of the Spiritual Exercises: The Reign of God Preached by Jesus

The following day, December 27, Miguel Elizondo gave two talks exploring a key theme from the second week of the Exercises: “The Ignatian Vision for the Following of Christ.” The first presentation claims that Ignatius, Jerome Nadal, and their companions understood the Jesuit and Christian vocation as an active collaboration with the Trinity in bringing about the Reign of God. Indeed,

This call from Christ to the whole world and to each one in particular is, not only to enter into the Reign, but rather to collaborate with it. And so the importance of apostolic action will take on a sharp relief in Saint Ignatius. In this concept of the Trinitarian experience, the world is not going to be saved only through prayer or only through penance, but rather, in this Ignatian view, through apostolic action which is, at the same time, prayer [my emphasis].

After time for personal reflection and small group sharing, the retreatants gathered for a general assembly.

The discussion had clearly gained considerable momentum by this point. There were apparently contradictory calls for serious change, strong criticisms of the current province leadership, complaints of an overemphasis on social themes, an appeal for the importance of priesthood, a discussion on how to sort out the various images of Christ present in the province, and an urgent plea for practical models to integrate religious life with work for social change in the service of the poor. Perhaps the question of a recently ordained Jesuit from the Jesuit high school in Panama captured the moment best: “It seems that a certain fear still exists that this meeting is being guided toward the social. But is it certain people who are guiding us, or is it the contemporary situation itself? If it is the latter, we have to go in this direction and come up with real solutions.”

176. Ibid., 3.
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After lunch Elizondo’s second talk, on “Prayer in the Society of Jesus,” again highlighted Ignatius’s Trinitarian experience of God as creating, acting in, and sanctifying history in order to explain Nadal’s famous description of Ignatius as a “contemplative in action.” Elizondo suggests this is why action became the locus classicus for the Ignatian encounter with God. And he says this is the reason that Ignatius, even though he prays two hours a day, puts no legislation in his Constitutions requiring a specific duration for daily prayer. Elizondo’s argument is that,

The spirituality of Saint Ignatius is a spirituality of action in this double sense: in that all prayer should translate into apostolic service, and that action and apostolic service are in themselves prayer, which is characteristically Ignatian. Speaking in clearer terms, they are union with God.

His point is that, while “Medellín . . . is urging [Latin American Christians] to find a theology for the person of action . . . the Ignatian experience gave it to us four hundred years ago.”

Elizondo’s talk was then followed by a general assembly in which Luis Achaerandio, president of the UCA, charged that “some young people are trying to justify not explicitly praying.” While this intervention would be read by some as representing the growing split between the “gradualists” and the “liberationists,” it is only fair to Fr. Achaerandio to point out that the intervention was about the role of prayer in the renewal of religious life. And here it is crucial to recall that the monumental shift of the Central American province toward the option for the poor at the 1969 retreat emerged from an honest discernment about the proper path for religious renewal. It was not a strategic

179. Jesuit historian Joséph de Guibert, S.J., notes: “Jeronimo Nadal, one of the men who knew Ignatius most intimately, thinks that his special grace was ‘to see and contemplate in all things, actions, and conversations the presence of God and the love of spiritual things, to remain a contemplative even in the midst of action’ (simul in actione contemplativus).” See The Jesuits: Their Spiritual Doctrine and Practice, trans. William J. Young, S.J., ed. George E. Ganss, S.J. (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, [1953], 1964, 1972), 45.
180. On this point, see St. Ignatius of Loyola, The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus, trans. George E. Ganss, S.J. (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1970), §§582-84, 259-61. Footnote 2 (p. 260) maintains, “With respect to the length, Ignatius assigned for the scholastics still in formation one hour of prayer daily, which could be divided into different periods (342). But he steadily refused to prescribe one universal rule obliging all the formed members to one specified duration of daily prayer (582-83).”
182. Ibid., 90.
183. “Preguntas a los padres Elizondo y Ellacuría” (Dia 27, 5), 1, in “Reunión-Ejercicios,” 96-98.
referendum on politics, the Alliance for Progress, or liberation theology. No doubt, however, many struggled to hold such strategic concerns at bay as the province gathered to celebrate Mass at the day’s end.

**Following the Christ of the San Salvador Retreat: Discernment and Decision**

Achaerandio’s admonition on the importance of prayer is important to keep in mind as we turn to the two talks by Ignacio Ellacuría built around what many regard as the key moment in the *Spiritual Exercises*, “making a choice [election] of a state or way of life.”\(^\text{185}\) Significantly, the retreat’s final document places these talks under the critical heading, “The election, and the reform of our works.”\(^\text{186}\) The first presentation, on “The Problem of the Translation of the Spirit of the *Exercises* to the Province,”\(^\text{187}\) offers the Christ of the San Salvador retreat as the norm for that reform. Ellacuría argues,

> The province should be the efficacious sign of [the] Christ experienced in the *Exercises*. Because if it is [part of the] church, it should be a sign, and it should be an efficacious sign; an efficacious sign of Christ. And which Christ? Of the Christ experienced in the *Exercises*, in the historical situation in which we are living. Saint Ignatius made his Society the historical objectification of the charism of the *Exercises*. That is to say: . . . he thought, . . . that the Society is the great outcome of the *Exercises*, the great objectification of the *Exercises*, the great body animated by the spirit of the *Exercises*.\(^\text{188}\)

Ellacuría’s challenge was to apply this experiential-Christological norm to the present historical reality of the province. Recognizing that each work of the province inevitably reflects the worldly dynamics of its historical situation, he warns, “If the high school or the university or the work in which I am engaged competes against, due to its own dynamics, what each one of us personally thinks or has experienced is the dynamic of the *Exercises*, then there is a problem to be solved.”\(^\text{189}\)

The rest of the day was given to two more rounds of personal reflection, small group discussion, and a general assembly. The record bears eloquent testimony to the almost irresistible momentum building to confront a question posed from the floor by Miguel Elizondo himself: “the Society will have to see concretely

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185. This translation is from Fleming, *Contemporary Reading of the Spiritual Exercises*, 103.
188. Ibid., 6.
189. Ibid., 11.
if these high schools and universities are a sign, in the higher and transcendent sense of Christ, for serving and loving others.”

It was in this atmosphere that Ellacuría delivered his most powerful, and potentially explosive, talk on the penultimate day of the retreat—an all-out effort to confront the faith of his fellow Jesuits with the scandalous historical reality of Central America as part of the Third World. In a daring and very Ignatian move, he turned what many already knew to be a dangerous confrontation with this seemingly hopeless reality into the ultimate apostolic challenge, recommending “The Third World as the Optimal Place for the Christian to Live the Exercises.”

It is interesting to note that he portrays the talk as a “small attempt” to go beyond the work of his teacher, Karl Rahner, by focusing on the “worldly reality [of Central America], and conceiving of it in theological terms.”

Noting that the overwhelming majority of the world’s population lives in the Third World, Ellacuría argues that if “Christ is in the poor,” then “it is not us who have to save the poor, but rather it is the poor who are going to save us.” He then offers a prophetic reflection on what would prove to be his own fate.

A minimal solidarity with the Third World elicits a turn to the road to redemption and the march to the resurrection. . . . Imagine the day on which a professor at the university turns his whole orientation toward prophetic denunciations of the allies of the . . . [First and Second] Worlds in this Third World. . . . The day in which a university professor dedicates himself categorically and thematically to prophetically denouncing that reality, be assured on that day one of two things [will happen]: either those outside, or those inside, will end up removing him, . . . and they will start taking away his posts. And [likewise] be assured that if the Society puts itself wholly on this valiant road of protest, the Society will not have to renounce [its posts], they will be taken away.

Ellacuría then proceeds with his stunning argument that the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius is leading the Jesuits of Central America to serve, and therefore to share, the fate of the crucified Christ of the poor. Laying out a rationale for Jesus’ death on the cross, he asserts on the one hand, “It is not true . . . that Christ loved the cross, and that he went looking for pain, poverty, and the rest. Christ was only seeking to fulfill his mission. On the other hand, however, he did know that his mission would carry him in the end to the cross; and conse-

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190. “Resumen de las discusiones de grupo e intervenciones en la Asamblea General” (Dia 28: 3,4), 8, in “Reunión-Ejercicios,” 120.
191. Ignacio Ellacuría, “El tercer mundo como lugar optimo de la vivencia Cristiana de los Ejercicios” (The Third World as the Optimal Place for the Christian to Live the Exercises) (Dia 29:1), 1-12, in “Reunión-Ejercicios,” 127-38.
192. Ibid., 2.
193. Ibid., 4.
194. Ibid., 6.
quently what he did was say, ‘I will fulfill my mission even though I know I am going to die.’”\textsuperscript{195} Ellacuría then argues that a similar dynamic is at work in the Jesuit vocation to apostolic action, which requires them to confront the inherently anti-evangelical dynamics of the Third World. And he suggests it places the Society of Jesus in the Third World on the same road that Christ walked:

> We are in the same situation [as he was]. . . . [And] what is it they will say to us priests or Jesuits when we dedicate ourselves to this task? First of all [they will say] . . . “these priests are communists or Marxists, we can’t help them anymore. Let’s find other priests, because there is always a need for priests that support us in our situation, since these Jesuits are not helping us.” . . . [But] we must stay with the mission of the Old Testament prophets, not because we are seeking that, . . . but rather because of our understanding of the secular mission that we have to fulfill, and everything else will be given to us besides: the pain we spoke of yesterday and the beatitude which this pain gives.\textsuperscript{196}

Ellacuría’s words would prove eerily prophetic. In the early hours of November 16, 1989, following the Jesuit assassinations, a military sound truck from the First Infantry Brigade circulated in the neighborhood of the bishop’s headquarters announcing triumphantly, “Ellacuría and Martín-Baró have fallen. We are going to continue killing communists!”\textsuperscript{197}

Following this talk and time for personal and small group reflection, the general assembly strongly endorsed “the creation of a Central Planning Commission which will work until Holy Week looking for a practical manner in which to realize these ideals.”\textsuperscript{198} The strongly supported proposal would be implemented. But the voice of Fr. Noel García from the Managua UCA ended the session with a poignant challenge to his fellow Jesuits, adding a sobering reminder that the outside world was rapidly changing even as their prayerful deliberations drew to a close.

> I have been working for nine years in social questions, having been trained for that. [And] I see that we are confronted with a social revolution in Latin America. For that reason I believe that, rather than discussing whether the high schools or the universities should abolish themselves as such, we should see if they are fulfilling their end of forming agents of change, so that this social revolution which has to have an ideology—Marxist or Christian—becomes Christian. This is our great responsibility.\textsuperscript{199}

\textsuperscript{195} Ibid., 8, 9.
\textsuperscript{196} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{198} “Resume de la discusión por grupos y la Asamblea General” (Dia 29: 3.4), 2, in “Reunión-Ejercicios,” 140.
\textsuperscript{199} Ibid., 3.
The final document would recall Ellacuría’s talk, and the discussions that followed, as a critical turning point toward the decision “[t]o put ourselves efficaciously at the service of this Third World with the power of the gospel and the resources of our human preparation.”200

The Third and Fourth “Weeks” of the Spiritual Exercises: Coming to Conclusion

After lunch the survey team reported that an overwhelming proportion of the gathered Jesuits had written that they were now “ready to leave everything” in order to “undertake an honest search for what we should do.”201 Thus, December 29, 1969, ended with the formation of working groups to prepare a discussion for the following day “regarding the accommodation of our works to the spirit . . . of these days.”202 Afterward they gathered for the Eucharist, celebrating the “apostolic mission”203 of the Jesuits in Central America.

On the final morning, thirty-seven-year-old Ricardo Falla predicted that “death and resurrection” would inevitably accompany the Society’s option for the poor in Central America. But he identified this with “The Sacrificial and Resurrectonal Meaning of Religious Life,”204 and reminded his brothers that, after Ignatius’s insight at the River Cardoner into the role of the Trinity in the world, the saint reported beginning “to see everything with another set of eyes, and to discern and test the good and the bad spirits.”205 The sixty-three-year-old ex-president of the El Salvador UCA, Florentino Idoate, then responded to Falla’s challenge by summoning the province “to see God in all the concrete urgency of today for us in the ‘Third World,’ and to begin a process of apostolic discernment in the ecclesial spirit “concretized by the documents [of] the Council, Medellín, [and] Rio . . .”206 Fr. Idoate’s fusion of the horizons of Jesuit renewal with Medellin’s call to the option for the poor in his interpretation of “The Contemplation to Attain [Divine] Love in a Secularized World”207 shows how far things had progressed since his 1965 speech inaugurating of the UCA in the name of “development.”208

201. “Resultados de la segunda encuesta o cuestionario” (29:5), 4, in “Reunión-Ejercicios,” 168 (results: 84 respondents, 5 = very strongly agree; 5=56, 4=16, 3=6, 2=1, 1=4; abstain=1; 86 percent responded 5 or 4, “very strongly agree” or “strongly agree”).
203. Ibid.
205. Ibid., 2.
207. Ibid., 1.
208. Florentino Idoate, S.J., “Discurso del rector de la Universidad Centroamericana
Throughout the afternoon and evening the Jesuits worked to produce the outlines of an apostolic plan to concretize their own conversion, first in a general assembly, then in small task forces, and finally in a plenary session called for 8 p.m. They gathered after evening Mass for a final session in order to approve “The Final Document of the San Salvador Meeting,” which recommended three “presuppositions” for a yet-to-be-written apostolic plan: (1) the province’s communal commitment to the “redemption and liberation” of Central America as part of the Third World; (2) a strengthening of the spirit of community, mutual respect, and simplicity of lifestyle in the province; and (3) a deepening of the spirit of the willingness to put oneself and the works of the province at the service of the poor, as expressed in the retreat. A three-month “Work Plan” was then approved with the express purpose of moving the process forward.

Only a Beginning

Fr. Hernández-Pico suggests that, officially, it was first here at the 1969 retreat that “the Jesuits committed themselves . . . to attend to the cries that were coming from the unjustly impoverished and oppressed majorities of Central America, putting aside disordered affections for established works and lifestyles in order to promote . . . efficacious action on behalf of the poor.” With this monumental shift in horizons the process of renewal accelerated quickly, including the rapid naming of a new master of novices (Fr. Juan Ramón Moreno) and the creation of a new work, that of the Delegate for Formation, for which Fr. Azcue nominated Fr. Ignacio Ellacuría. Both nominees would be assassinated nineteen years later at the UCA. Within three months the province leadership embraced many of the recommendations from the retreat, including the idea that Jesuit formation be geographically and spiritually relocated within the historical reality of Central America.

The new provincial, Fr. Miguel F. Estrada, then called a second meeting of delegates selected to represent the various “works and nations” of the province in September 1970, at the Santa Tecla Jesuit center in San Salvador dedicated specifically to the question of “apostolic programming.” Not surprisingly, the first months of Fr. Estrada’s tenure were largely focused on preparations for this critical gathering, including the completion of a “sociological survey.”
of the Central American region (twelve volumes), which was presented at the meeting with “provisional conclusions.” Fr. Hernández-Pico reports that after much debate and discussion it was decided at this second meeting that “our apostolates should . . . foment attitudes of commitment to the social liberation our peoples, giving the latter the theological depth of being viewed as an integral part of the redemptive liberation of Jesus Christ.” And he concludes that the most important achievement of the gathering was the development of the outlines of the new apostolic plan called for at the December retreat.

In this same meeting the Central American Jesuits determined an order of apostolic priorities. Their presupposition was the affirmation of the Rio Letter that “the social problem of Latin America” should have “absolute priority in our apostolic strategy” and, thus, . . . should translate into the allocation of “a part of our apostolic efforts toward the innumerable and believing mass of those who have been abandoned.” The meeting named a series of apostolic activities (not concrete works) as priorities. (1) The formation of young Jesuits; (2) socio-philosophical-theological reflection on the Central American reality; (3) attention to, and, in some cases, formation of diocesan priests and . . . male and female religious; [and] (4) community organizing. They also mentioned two others without distinguishing an order: exercising a liberating influence in the area of education, and the promotion of communication media.

Clearly, the preferential option for the poor and the struggle for liberation it implies had officially replaced developmentalism as a defining aspect of the horizon of the Jesuits of Central America.

The debate by no means ended there, however. An opposition group from the UCA and the diocesan seminary, which had emerged during the retreat, charged that the dramatic Christmas and Holy Week movement of the province toward the option for the poor had been a kind of religious coup d’état. Fr. Beirne says, “They pictured Ellacuría as controlling the younger group that did his bidding.” The new provincial, Fr. Estrada, was compelled to write to Fr.

216. Ibid.
217. Ibid.
218. Ibid., 10, 11.
219. Ibid., 10-14.
220. Beirne, Jesuit Education and Social Change, 86. Fr. Beirne notes that the group included Fr. Achaerandio, and Antonio Perez (both from the UCA); Fr. José Ignacio Scheifler (a member of the first UCA Board replaced by Ellacuría) and Santiago Anitua (both from the San Salvador Seminary); and Fr. Jesus Rodriguez Jalon (from an unidentified university; he and Anitua did not attend the retreat). Note that the information in parentheses was not provided by Fr. Beirne, but was extrapolated by the author from the retreat document (“Lista de asistentes,” 1-4, in “Reunión-Ejercicios,” 8-11; and “Distribución de los padres y hermanos de la provincia según su trabajo de acuerdo con el ultimo catalogo,” 1-2, in “Reunión-Ejercicios,” 14-15).
Arrupe in Rome in order to refute these charges, to explain the depth of the changes taking place, and to report on the work of the survey team. Responding immediately, Fr. Arrupe “praised the work of the sociological survey team and told Estrada not to be surprised by opposition.” Thus encouraged, the thirty-six-year-old provincial pressed forward.

Four months later, after reviewing the results of the important September meeting at Santa Tecla, Fr. Arrupe would write, “The conclusions, presuppositions, and results are worthy of approval and are within the spirit of the Vatican Council, the 31st General Congregation and the documents of Medellín.” He would describe statements in the sociological and theological sections of the documents that reflected the shift to the horizon of liberation as “correct,” noting “they conform to recent developments of the social apostolate since Medellín . . . and are consistent with the orientation of the Society of Jesus in Latin America.” But he would caution Fr. Estrada to heed the importance of apostolic unity, and to respect the difficult changes in mentality that such a shift of horizons would require.

Thus, Fr. Arrupe’s approval cemented the commitment of the 1970 Jesuit leadership in Central America to the process of conversion called for by Latin America’s bishops at Medellín, and the Jesuit provincials at Rio. As I have suggested, what had occurred could be described as a shift of apostolic horizons. Like many others, the Jesuits realized that the horizon of development, and its “historicization” in programs such as the Alliance for Progress, had proved inadequate to deal with the painful historical realities of Latin America. Indeed, even as Jesuit superiors working in the provincial offices near the UCA struggled with recalcitrant priests at the UCA and the archdiocese, events were acceler-

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224. Ibid.

225. Ibid., 86-87.

ating across town. Salvador Cayetano Carpio was recruiting students from the National University for an “armed revolutionary struggle” under the new banner of the FPL (the Popular Forces of Liberation), the first of the FMLN’s eventual five political-military organizations. And in March 1970 the country’s land barons, their supporters, and the Salvadoran military party rudely slammed the door in the face of a growing chorus of proposals for agrarian reform.

Fr. Arrupe’s support for the results of the Santa Tecla meeting and the new direction of the province completed the first stage of the conversion of the Central American Jesuits from developmentalism to a historical commitment to Medellín’s preferential option for the poor and the struggle for justice and liberation it implies. It was a big step forward. But as the gathered members of the province had realistically concluded in December, “It is only a beginning.”

The first fervor of this epoch-changing conversion was about to meet the historical realities of the UCA and El Salvador.

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