
REVIEW ESSAYS

“GOD SPEAKS FROM WITHIN HISTORY” The Challenging Witness of Liberation Theology

Laura Nuzzi O’Shaughnessy
St. Lawrence University

A Grammar of Justice: The Legacy of Ignacio Ellacuría. Edited by J. Matthew Ashley; Kevin F. Burke, S.J.; and Rodolfo Cardenal, S.J. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2014. Pp. xvi + 283. \$25.00 paper. ISBN: 9781626980860.

Witnessing: Prophecy, Politics, and Wisdom. Edited by Maria Clara Bingemer and Peter Casarella. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2014. Pp. xiv + 176. \$35.00 paper. ISBN: 9781626980877.

The Prophet of Cuernavaca: Ivan Illich and the Crisis of the West. By Todd Hartch. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015. Pp. xii + 235. \$29.95 cloth. ISBN: 9780190204563.

The Poor in Liberation Theology: Pathway to God or Ideological Construct? By Tim Noble. Bristol, CT: Equinox Publishing, 2013. Pp. vii + 224. \$99.95 cloth. ISBN: 9781845539894.

The development of a theology of liberation in Latin America was a consequence of the profound renewal within the Catholic Church provided by Vatican II (1962–1965) and its application to Latin America. Vatican II dealt with the consequences of global modernization, and of particular importance were issues of poverty and injustice. In *Gaudium et spes* the church recognized that “a huge

“God speaks from within history” is quoted from Oscar Romero, homily, February 18, 1979, cited in Maria Clara Bingemer and Peter Casarella, *Witnessing: Prophecy, Politics, and Wisdom*, xi.

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proportion of the world's citizens is still tormented by hunger and poverty."¹ This dramatic shift in worldview legitimated the process of renewal of the Latin American Catholic Church, which led to its reorientation at two seminal meetings of the Latin American Bishops Conference (CELAM). The first was held in Medellín, Colombia, in 1968 and is referred to as CELAM II; the second took place in Puebla, Mexico, in 1979 and is referred to as CELAM III.

Informing these historic conferences were European and Latin American theologians, who were formulating what would soon become a new theology of liberation. These theologians were encouraged by the suggestion of Pope John XXIII to engage in reading the signs of the times.² For the Latin American bishops and Latin American theologians the dominant "sign" was the vast inequality between rich and poor. To work on behalf of the poor became theologically and historically expressed by liberation theologians as "God's preferential option for the poor."

There is general agreement that the extensive and varied foundational body of literature on liberation theology began with Gustavo Gutiérrez's classic work *A Theology of Liberation*, first published in Spanish in 1971. The depth and scope of its comprehensive, interdisciplinary analysis have made it a touchstone for ongoing scholarship and controversy. Of special note is Gutiérrez's analysis of the biblical meanings of poverty, the New Christendom, the spiritual and the material planes, and the importance of orthodoxy and orthopraxis.³ Worthy of mention are the numerous works by Ignacio Ellacuría, whose early writing on Christology saw Christ as the logos of history, notably *Freedom Made Flesh: The Mission of Christ and His Church*.⁴ Another prolific theologian, Jon Sobrino, whose writing spans more than three decades and includes chapters in the edited volumes reviewed here, built on one of Ellacuría's concepts in *The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross*.⁵ Johann Baptist Metz is frequently acknowledged for his initial conceptualization of a new political theology that considers the impact of the Enlightenment on the established political order, its significance for human freedom, and what this means for religious faith.⁶ Liberation theology has inspired other marginalized peoples to find their own voices and to become actors in their own history.⁷

The majority of the contemporary authors writing in the books under review are part of a second generation of liberation theologians. What characterizes their

1. Walter M. Abbott and Joseph Gallagher, eds., *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Guild Press, 1966), 202.

2. *Ibid.*, 203.

3. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, translated and edited by Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973, 1988).

4. Ignacio Ellacuría, *Freedom Made Flesh: The Mission of Christ and His Church*, translated by John Drury (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1976).

5. Jon Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1994).

6. Johannes Baptist Metz, ed., *Faith and the World of Politics* (New York: Paulist Press, 1968).

7. James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1968), and *Risks of Faith: The Emergence of a Black Theology of Liberation, 1968–1998* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999); Kelly Brown Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999); Ivone Gebara, *Out of the Depths: Woman's Experience of Evil and Salvation*, translated by Ann Patrick Ware (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1999).

work is their attempt to recapture the biblical and theological foundations of the first generation of liberation theologians: foundations that were always present and essential but were often overtaken by their unconventional use of socio-economic analysis as part of theological analysis. The foundational years for liberation theology coincided with the steady drumbeat of the Cold War. The historical context made suspect the introduction of concepts such as "dialectical tension," "historical praxis," unjust social structures," "social sin," "class conflict," and "institutionalized violence" within theological scholarship. The theologians themselves were vulnerable to charges of being either false Christians or Marxists in disguise.⁸

The books written by this second generation of theologians in the post-Cold War years under a changing papacy have both reaffirmed and enlarged the theological scope of liberation theology. The two single-authored books under review have done the latter. From Todd Hartch's *The Prophet of Cuernavaca: Ivan Illich and the Crisis of the West* we learn of Illich's quest for a renewed Catholicism and the role that he and his documentation centers played in the development of liberation theology. Hartch's work makes our understanding of liberation theology's development and of Illich himself more inclusive. Tim Noble presents liberation theology's perceived shortcomings from a postmodern perspective in *The Poor in Liberation Theology: Pathway to God or Ideological Construct?*, which raises questions about the conceptual weaknesses of liberation theology and how they can be remedied. The two collections, edited by J. Matthew Ashley, Kevin F. Burke, S.J., and Rodolfo Cardenal, S.J.; and Maria Clara Bingemer and Peter Casarella, reaffirm the imperative, first articulated by Gutiérrez in 1971, that liberation theology has to change lives at the individual and societal levels. These books pay witness to men who shaped El Salvador's history in the twentieth century, Salvadoran archbishop Oscar Romero and the Jesuit martyrs, as they have been called. Although there is some overlap among the contributors, with Michael E. Lee, Jon Sobrino, and Andrew Prevot writing for both volumes, their entries are not merely recycled material, and indeed these books might usefully be read together.

We begin with Hartch, whose subject, Ivan Illich, is best known as the author of controversial books such as *Deschooling Society* and *Medical Nemesis*. As these titles suggest, Illich was a forceful and provocative critic of some of the major institutions of the West: schooling was detrimental to education, and the medical establishment was a major threat to health. Moreover, the dehumanization and imposed domination he saw in both education and medicine were metaphors for the fallen values and behavior of the church itself. In this extensively researched book Illich is portrayed as well-educated and charming yet arrogant, both critical of and committed to the church that shaped his life.

Illich was born in Vienna, his father Croatian and his mother a Jewish German convert to Catholicism. During World War II he joined the resistance movement. In 1944 he became a priest, for reasons that are not completely clear. Eventually

8. See, for example, Quentin L. Quade, ed., *The Pope and Revolution: John Paul II Confronts Liberation Theology* (Washington, DC: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1982); and Anselm Kyongsuk Min, *Dialectic of Salvation: Issues in Theology of Liberation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).

he earned a doctorate in history at the University of Salzburg and then went on to study at the Gregorian University in Rome. When it looked like he was headed for a distinguished career as a Vatican diplomat, he considered becoming a professor and worked on a second doctorate at Princeton University. Then a chance encounter made him decide to go into parish ministry in a Puerto Rican section of New York City. By 1956 he was the vice rector of a Catholic university in Ponce, Puerto Rico. From these early years, his brilliance, versatility, and quixotic nature were obvious. Within a few years, he had lost the support of some Puerto Rican bishops (4–6).

In 1961 Illich moved to Cuernavaca, Mexico, and for the next five years he directed the Center of Intercultural Formation (CIF), a missionary training center. An early chapter in this book traces the commitments of Popes Pius XII (1939–1958) and John XXIII (1958–1963) to fill the need for Catholic priests in Latin America. Because of Illich's experience training missionaries in Puerto Rico, his prior work in Puerto Rican churches in New York City, and his outstanding intellectual capabilities, he seemed a good candidate for this new training mission in Latin America. Despite opposition from influential American Catholic leaders, Illich was chosen for this position.

A major thesis of this book is that Illich intentionally sabotaged the success of the American Catholic missionary movement in Latin America during the 1960s. Hartch recounts the teaching methods in use at the CIF and how students were broken down by the rigor of the program: its intensity, Illich's harsh judgments of their capabilities, and his shock treatment approach. He began each new program by telling the students that he had opened the center to minimize the damage they would be doing in Latin America (38).

In 1967, one of Illich's more controversial essays, "The Seamy Side of Charity," was published. His harsh criticism of the Catholic missionary project in Latin America as merely a strategy to bring dominant North American economic and cultural values to Latin America, as well as his criticism of the Catholic Church, led to a trial at the Vatican in 1968. He was neither convicted nor punished, but he decided to leave the priesthood. Hartch maintains, however, that in terms of how Illich lived his life and of his beliefs, he remained a priest, and that Illich is "best understood as a Catholic priest of conscious orthodoxy grappling with the crisis of Western modernity" (11). Moreover, these formative years in the priesthood, which Hartch maintains are frequently overlooked by scholars, were foundational for the latter part of his public life, for which he is better known.

By the late 1960s Illich had cut his ties with the Catholic missionary movement and CIF but remained in Mexico. Eventually, he started CIDOC (Center for Intercultural Documentation) ostensibly as a center to learn Spanish, but students could also learn from Illich, who was becoming a famous social critic. In those years it was a place of great intellectual ferment and excitement. Students, scholars, and intellectuals from all over the world came to Cuernavaca to study with him.

While he never considered himself an advocate of liberation theology, he was clearly struggling with the capitalist development programs of the 1960s and 1970s and was searching for alternatives. Although he said that he chose Cuernavaca by

chance as a place to establish his language center, this was not entirely true. The fact that it was home to Bishop Sergio Méndez Arceo, a man whose influence had been instrumental in the formation of "the preferential option for the poor" at the CELAM conferences, was clearly on Illich's mind.

While CIF was still flourishing and publishing the *CIF Reports* it played a critical role in gathering together the work of Latin American theologians who were trying to formulate a particularly Latin American theology. Illich's center in Cuernavaca quickly became the gathering place for those exploring progressive Catholic ideas. Illich held research seminars and field trips to Latin American countries to observe daily living. Eventually this group of theologians and their specifically Latin American focus shaped much of the discussion at the historic 1968 CELAM conference. In the spring of 1963 there was a gathering in Cuernavaca for the Canadian Conference of Major Religious Superiors and representatives of the Conference of Major Religious Superiors of Women. Their objective was to discuss the implementation of Pope John XXIII's call to assistance to Latin America. At the same time, a group of Latin American bishops were meeting in a preliminary session to discuss a reorganization of CELAM itself: how to bring its work more in line with the objectives of Vatican II. At times, these two groups of religious men and women worked together with representatives of the bishops' conference and formed personal bonds of friendship (60–63). In March 1964, Illich invited a group of theologians that included Gustavo Gutiérrez, Segundo Galilea, and Juan Luis Segundo to a retreat in Petrópolis, a city near Rio de Janeiro. Their purpose was to shape the contours of a Latin American theology. Despite the presence of European theologians, Gutiérrez dominated the discussion at this meeting. He had not yet used the term "liberation theology," but he spoke of theology as a "critical reflection on praxis" (64).

Thus when CELAM II convened there was already a working consensus on many of the topics to be discussed (69). In addition, many of the conference sessions were led by men who would be at the forefront of formulating liberation theology: Gustavo Gutiérrez, José Comblin, and Eduardo Pironio. The preplanning, of which CIF was a critical part, had paid off and moved the church away from resigned acceptance of the rich toward becoming a church of the poor (70–71).

Did Illich believe in the Catholic Church or was he trying to weaken its role? Harch maintains that Illich affirmed "the mystical nature of missionary service, especially its connection to Christ's incarnation through suffering, self-denial and cultural generosity" (36). One could argue that theologians such as Ignacio Ellacuría would agree with the preceding statement. However, leaving aside characteristics of personality and writing styles, there are major differences between which "church" these theologians identified. Illich is the only theologian discussed in this review who was tried at the Vatican and had extensive experience as a doctoral student and as a parish priest in the United States. His "church" was as much informed by what he saw happening in the North American Catholic Church as by his criticism of the bureaucratized Roman Catholic Church. He so greatly feared making the Latin American Catholic Church a development wing of organizations like the Alliance for Progress that he stopped the distribution of food from places in Latin America where there was real hunger. For him, a

handout was at best temporary; what was needed were long-term solutions to the real problem of hunger (78). For liberation theologians, a long-term solution of structural change was essential, but so was feeding the hungry. One wonders whether, had the missionaries slated to be sent to Latin America come from Europe instead of the United States, Illich's story would have been different. What united Illich and the liberation theologians was their commitment to formulating a new, dynamic theology that revitalized the church and addressed the needs of Latin America.

In a quite different inquiry, *The Poor in Liberation Theology: Pathway to God or Ideological Construct?*, author Tim Noble asks how liberation theology can speak for and to the poor without making idols of the very people they are trying to help. The author's concern is how the theologian, with his/her own training and worldview, and the poor in their own socioeconomic context can meet in the liminal space they both inhabit. Can their differences be informed and even enriched by their distinct "otherness"? The author is a former Jesuit who spent four years (1991–1994) in Brazil as a student and as someone who worked in a church community.

Noble acknowledges a sense of respect for the writing of many liberation theologians, but his major reason for writing this book was his deep frustration with the way their work had been appropriated by those he calls "pastoral agents." These agents were advocates for the poor but they became disillusioned with the complex realities of their work. Their idealization of the poor and their facile Marxist critique were unsettling to Noble as he came to believe that the poor were being denied their own autonomy (1–3). This is the only time that Noble refers to these pastoral agents and it is not entirely clear to whom he refers. The reader is not sure if "pastoral agent" is a synonym for a misguided theologian or for a missionary and is thus characterized as these were by Ivan Illich in the preceding book. In contemporary usage the term "pastoral agent" is used more broadly than the term "missionary" to mean those, whether foreign-born or indigenous, who can be priests or lay workers who serve in different capacities of education, health care, and community development.

Noble discusses the Roman Catholic understanding of a sacrament as iconic: as sacraments the poor provide a way of encountering God. If the poor are a sacrament of God, as liberation theology claims, the question is: How can the poor be a sacrament, or icon of the God of the Kingdom which is already among us and still to come?

What follows is an extensive examination of the concept of the poor and how it is used in liberation theology. Not surprisingly, Noble concludes that there is no precise definition or understanding of the concept. Sometimes it is merely "the poor"; other times they are referred to as "the people." The latter concept was already in use at Vatican II and in the second and third Latin American Bishops' Conferences in Medellin (1968) and Puebla (1979). Its meaning is also ambiguous. The question raised herein is how one can build a liberation theology on behalf of "the poor" when its defining conceptual characteristics are illusory.

Noble's discussion of capitalism and its "utopic" promises then shifts to the utopian promises in liberation theology, which he distrusts. However, Noble does

acknowledge the deepening search for liberation in Latin America. He agrees with theologian João Batista Libanio in his observation that "liberation . . . is the great utopia" (53).

For many liberation theologians, utopia is related to Christian eschatological hope in the coming of the kingdom of God. However, for these theologians, if an earthly utopia could be achieved it would be incomplete because it would only point to the kingdom of God, it cannot achieve it. If it did so, there would be no reason for the kingdom and this would be idolatrous. For Noble, the possibility of a better (utopian) world is provisional because we do not know what God's plan is for the world. Moreover, he argues that the danger for liberation theologians (and his reference here is to Ellacuría's work, which will be discussed shortly) is not that utopia claims more than it can deliver but that its vision is presented as complete.

As the edited volumes reviewed below suggest, for theologians like Ellacuría the lack of definitional clarity of "the poor" is not an obstacle to wanting to see a "civilization of poverty" in the historical Salvadoran context in which he lived. It is certainly true that no human mind can fully know what God wants, but part of the answer to the tension within Ellacuría's construct of the kingdom that is "now, yet coming" flows from how one understands and commits oneself to the totality of God and the meaning of the life of Jesus. Noble's work is not that different from that of the liberation theologians he has written about, but his is a cautionary tale.

To correct this potential shortcoming in liberation theology Noble addresses its problems by introducing the work of Emmanuel Levinas and Jean-Luc Marion. Levinas developed the concept of "alterity" or "otherness": the recognition of a radical difference between one's conscious self and an "other." The value of recognizing the other is that it prevents the "I" from seeing only the self. For Noble, this recognition of the distinction between the self and the other can help in the theological understanding of the poor and in the prevention of the poor becoming an idol. Developing a radical sense of the otherness of the poor would mean that they are not seen as a faceless totality of collectivized idols. The importance of seeing the poor as other is that it helps the "I," in this case the theologian, to see the poor as people in their own rights and not as reflections of the theologian himself. It prevents the "I" from determining the interpretation of the other (75).

As conveyed by Noble, Jean-Luc Marion attempts to find a language that will allow us to speak of God, who cannot be named and cannot be seen. If God is seen (*visible*), God will be perceived and understood through categories of being that humans use and that make God less than God. Marion sees Christ as the icon that leads to God and the poor as icons of Christ. As icons we look at them as they reveal God's meaning. Only if the poor are allowed to be truly and uniquely the individuals that they are can they remain iconic. If the "I" presumes to know what their problem is and how to solve it, the poor become just numbers, a collective idol. It is the iconic poor who must lead; they must command, not the theologian (95–100).

The theologian who in Noble's estimation most allows for this possibility is Clodovis Boff, whose article "Epistemology and Method in the Theology of

Liberation" presents a threefold methodology of "see-judge-act" that became popular after the CELAM conferences. As presented by Noble, Boff's works affirm the iconicity of the poor as there are no predetermined objectives for the poor in his theology.

Noble's is an intellectual book whose major contribution should not be taken lightly: liberation theology must be aware of the dangers of idolatry and the problems inherent in reifying the poor. However, there is a sense of detachment in this book. It is curious that given Noble's fieldwork in Brazil there is no mention of even a single impoverished Latin American and no attempt to look at the cultural consequences of poverty for women (except to say he will not address this topic), for indigenous peoples, or for other marginalized groups. The reader does not get a sense of a personal connection with Latin America's context or with its poor. What this study lacks is *compromiso*.

By contrast, the two edited volumes under review are firmly grounded in a specific temporal and geographical context, namely El Salvador in the 1980s. For most of its history El Salvador was ruled by its economic elites, who by the early twentieth century were called the "Fourteen Families." In 1932 a rebellion against these elites, led by Farabundo Martí, was quickly put down, and over thirty thousand people were killed in retaliation. This event solidified the permanent alliance between the economic elites and the military, a relationship that continued until 1979, when a group of moderate army officers overthrew an especially repressive elected military general, Carlos Humberto Romero. The moderates were quickly defeated by the more powerful right wing of the military and its infamous death squads. A coalition of five guerrilla groups, the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), was formed and the nation was plunged into a civil war that lasted twelve years and killed over seventy-five thousand people, most of them killed by their country's own military.⁹ The Salvadoran Catholic Church did not escape this struggle. The 1980 assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero was a tipping point that plunged the country deeply into the nascent civil war. The murder of six Jesuit priests in November 1989 at the hands of El Salvador's military was another watershed moment, which led to international pressure to end the war. In 1991 the Security Council of the United Nations established the United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador (ONUSAL), and the final peace agreement, the Chapultepec Accords, was signed in Mexico City on January 16, 1992.¹⁰ Contributors to the pair of edited volumes necessarily reference these events as they examine, among other things, the theological approaches held by and relationships among the Catholic clergy serving in El Salvador during the war.

Witnessing: Prophecy, Politics, and Wisdom is the result of a conference at DePaul University that celebrated the lives of the six martyred Jesuits and their house-

9. Tommie Sue Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador: From Civil Strife to Civil Peace* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1982).

10. For an extensive analysis of the accords and the establishment of the historic Commission on the Truth see also "El informe de la comisión de la verdad: Análisis, reflexiones y comentarios," *Estudios Centroamericanos*, abril–mayo 1993; and the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, *Improvising History: A Critical Evaluation of the UN Observer Mission in El Salvador* (New York: Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, 1995).

keeper and her daughter on the twenty-third anniversary of their deaths. This edited collection was written to honor, deepen, and continue the witness of these individuals as they lived the life of Christian discipleship despite the risks. The heart of this volume is captured by the prayer of Jon Sobrino, fellow Jesuit colleague of the slain martyrs, the "living martyr" as he is now called: "May they rest in peace; may they never allow us to rest in peace" (x).

For the contributing authors, prophecy, politics, and wisdom are not separate forms of witnessing. They open up new avenues for theological reflection, for pedagogy, and for spirituality within global Catholicism. The book examines Latino/a Catholicism as well as black theology in the United States, postcolonial theology in Manila, and the church of the poor in Brazil, as well as liberation theology and the connection between mysticism, witnessing, and liberation. This is a thought-provoking book that shows the continuity and the evolution of witnessing in the writings of Karl Rahner, Karl Barth, Johann Baptist Metz, Gustavo Gutiérrez, and Jon Sobrino, among others.

The book opens with an article by coeditor Maria Carla Bingemer in which she argues that testimony is crucial to the history of Christianity. Before there were written texts there were living witnesses whom she calls "true living texts" (1–2). Witnesses were and are radical and disturbing. Bingemer maintains that they are comparable to what history and literature have called heroes, who serve a cause greater than self with nobility and conviction. The hero demonstrates quality of character by the courage with which the hero confronts the existential decisions he or she must make. Thus there is a close connection between bearing witness in a world that rejects the struggle for justice or peace and the role of the mystics, who like the heroes of old, were also willing to die for the truth in which they believed. Mysticism has two different definitions within the Judeo-Christian tradition. First, it is a contemplative, prayerful, meditative experience of God. Second, the constant test of the authenticity of mystical prayer has been whether it increases love of God and neighbor.

The title of this chapter comes from Metz's reinterpretation of the Greek origins of the word "mysticism," which comes from the verb *myō* meaning to "close, shut up or shut the mouth or eyes."¹¹ However, the second definition allows Metz to say that mysticism with open eyes "consists not so much in having extraordinary visions but in having a *new vision of all reality*, discovering God as the vision's ultimate truth, as its living foundation, active and ever new" (10; emphasis in original). For Bingemer, "mysticism is the cradle of testimony" (6). We do not find mystics behind cloistered walls but in places that are ugly and dangerous.

Of special note in this collection is Andrew Prevot's comparative study of Spanish-born Jesuit Ignacio Ellacuría, one of the six Jesuits murdered in 1989, and black liberation theologian James H. Cone. Prevot's task in this chapter is to unite these theologians' two forms of spiritual testimony. In their writing and in their living, Ellacuría and Cone associated prayer with individual or communal practices of devotion but also with risk-taking acts on behalf of the victims of history.

11. As quoted in Johann Baptist Metz, *El clamor de la tierra: El problema dramático de la teodicea* (Estella: Verbo Divino, 1996), 26.

Prayer is essential to a testimonial Christian spirituality (Bingemer and Casarella, 46–47).

Ellacuría's spiritual tradition was formed by his understanding of the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignacio de Loyola, whereas the sources of Cone's testimony were the pre-Civil War spirituals of the slaves and the theology of the black church. Ellacuría's Ignatian starting point is the importance of *kenosis*,¹² which "leads the Christian who may initially be outside a situation of unjust suffering to risk entering more deeply into that situation in imitation of Christ, in accordance with the promptings of the Spirit and in solidarity with the present-day crucified peoples" (Bingemer and Casarella, 49). For Cone, in the midst of black lives of unjust suffering there is the call for hope and consolation that reflects the active presence of Christ and the Holy Spirit in their midst, which is found in the spirituals and in the history of their struggles.

The end result of this inward and active spirituality is the outward way that followers of Christ can be a part of God's ongoing work of salvation in history. Ellacuría acknowledges that the world needs a plan for structural change, but what it needs even more is "personal adhesion to the person of Christ." Prayer is essential to the development of the theological self that each individual strives to become.¹³ For Cone, the love of God calls for the creation of a loving community, but he sees the sin of the world embodied in an idolization of the white god and the wealth accumulated by white society (Bingemer and Casarella, 54–55). For him, blackness is a crucial part of God's creation and should be acknowledged as such. To argue that God is black is not a statement about the literal color of God's skin but is to legitimate God's presence in the prayers and struggles of black people. For both these men, Christian testimony calls for two commitments: a call to conversion directed primarily toward those who enjoy wealth and privilege that they needed to relinquish, and a call to steadfast hope, addressed to those who are living on the margins of society. Prevot contrasts the authenticity of the work of these men with more ontological or postmodern approaches to be found in some philosophical understandings of being and existence (Bingemer and Casarella, 50), including the works considered earlier in this review.

The other edited volume reviewed here, *A Grammar of Justice: The Legacy of Ignacio Ellacuría*, is a tribute to the life and work of Ellacuría and therefore also deeply contextualized in El Salvador's civil war. It begins with the moving and prophetic letter written by Ellacuría to Monseñor Romero upon the death of Father Rutilio Grande and two of his companions, killed by Salvadoran death squads on March 12, 1977, as Grande was traveling to conduct a religious service. As already noted, three years later, on March 24, 1980, Monseñor Romero would be killed while celebrating mass, and within nine years Ignacio Ellacuría and the five other Jesuit priests also would be killed together with two women who had

12. *Kenosis* refers to the self-emptying of one's will and becoming entirely receptive to God's divine will.

13. *Theological* is an Ignatian term signifying life transformed by grace and animated by the virtues of faith, hope, and charity.

taken refuge in the Jesuit residence of the Central American University (UCA). At the time of his death, Ellacuría was the rector of the UCA in El Salvador and a respected and forceful voice for a negotiated settlement to El Salvador's civil war.

In the introductory chapter, Kevin Burke, S.J., one of the volume's three coeditors, sets forth a conceptual framework that affirms the ongoing importance to the living of the contributions of those martyrs whose lives made a profound and continuing impact on the world. Their lives' work, their commitment to the poor, their biblical witness, and their suffering and death made them famous as martyrs, but their deaths also represent the deaths of thousands of unnamed martyrs who died in the same fight for justice. They are remembered not with sentimentality but with "enacted memory." We are not only remembering the past but we are remembering the future for which the martyrs lived and died. This edited collection is an act of remembrance and is a product of the 2013 colloquium on Ellacuría's writings, which meets regularly to continue the dialogue on his grammar of justice.¹⁴

In a subsequent chapter, Jon Sobrino reflects upon the close relationship that developed over time between Romero and Ellacuría. Prior to the murder of his friend Father Rutilio Grande, Romero was distrustful of the 1968 Medellín documents and of Ellacuría's early writings (Ashley, Burke, and Cardenal, 58). Romero's response to this tragic death was to hold only one nationwide religious service on the Sunday following Grande's death and to concelebrate the mass with almost all the priests of the archdiocese, despite the opposition of the papal nuncio and some of the bishops (3–4). Romero began to see more clearly an alternate vision for the Salvadoran church, which moved him theologically closer to Ellacuría and further from that of the Salvadoran church hierarchy.

Michael E. Lee, writing in *Witnessing: Prophecy, Politics, and Wisdom*, understands Romero's transformation as a response to social sin. At this point in his life (three weeks after his installation as archbishop) he was faced with a religious conversion that Lee calls a New Testament *metanoia* (146). It is not that he did not sympathize with the poor before the death of Grande, but in applying the Rules for Discernment in the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignacio de Loyola he saw the change in himself as a movement "from the good to the better" (152).¹⁵ Thus both books present a moving testimony to the theological and theological impact that Romero had upon Ellacuría, who never considered Romero as a colleague but as an exemplar of a servant of God.

Ellacuría's writing was prolific and many of his ideas are examined in *The Grammar of Justice*. His treatise "Utopia and Propheticism from Latin America: A Concrete Essay in Historical Soteriology," written just months before his death, is reprinted in its entirety in this book. In the essay he calls for the formation

14. The title comes from a nineteenth-century work by John Henry Newman, *An Essay on a Grammar of Assent to God*, in which he wrote about the ongoing tensions between faith and reason (Ashley, Burke, and Cardenal, xv).

15. As quoted in Martin Maier, *Monseñor Romero, maestro de espiritualidad* (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 2005), 104.

of a new human being and a new “civilization of poverty,” a concept that Sobrino later amended to be a “civilization of shared austerity” (Ashley, Burke, and Cardenal, 227).

For Ellacuría, utopia approaches the reign of God at the personal and societal levels. It is born of revelation, tradition, the prophets, and the suffering servant narratives in second Isaiah of the Hebrew Scriptures, and in the New Testament, the Sermon on the Mount, and the Last Supper discourse, as well as some conciliar and papal documents. This utopia depends on the historical context in which propheticism takes place, because propheticism is understood to be the contrast between the coming of the reign of God within a specific historical situation. This utopic vision is possible for Ellacuría because “indeed God’s transcendence has become history ever since the beginning of creation” (Ashley, Burke, and Cardenal, 12). There is a dialectical tension between the historical context and the reign of God, as there is between acts of prophecy and utopia. The kingdom is “now but coming,” which leads from a given historical situation to the ultimate reign of God. The historical situation leads to the reign of God, it does not achieve it.

Of particular note are the chapters in *The Grammar of Justice* by Rodolfo Cardenal, S.J., who writes about Ellacuría’s ecclesiology, which began in his experiences of the base Christian communities (CEBs).¹⁶ He considered them a new way of being the church. From this foundation he formulated what is probably his most controversial concept: the “crucified people,” which is both a metaphor and a soteriological construct. It represents those to whom God’s reign is promised but also those who are embodied to be saviors of the world, the new creation, and a new church that works on behalf of the poor. The difficult question of how the crucified people can save others when they are not yet saved themselves is one that Cardenal explores by examining the paradox of the life of Jesus, whose death was a consequence of his life. The meaning of his life did not end with his death, which has to be reproduced and followed with hope and resurrection. Jesus’s death, like that of the poor, had historical and not natural causes: his death brought salvation into the one history of humanity (Ashley, Burke, and Cardenal, 157–159).

The latter sections of this book discuss the role that the university should play in the betterment of society. These chapters are a testimony to the role of the UCA before and during the peace negotiations of the late 1980s and the unwavering vision that Ellacuría advocated and concretized between the church and the university in El Salvador. Gandolfo argues that the UCA became a model for those universities that take as their responsibility the creation of a just world (Ashley, Burke, and Cardenal, 161). The ultimate goal for the university is to become an institution that works toward the common good, which means that its mission extends beyond the classroom.

To this end, the UCA played an important role by including in its mandate the inclusion and active participation of groups from civil society. By May 1989 the UCA reorganized its documentation center, and its weekly publication *Proceso*

16. For an example of the participatory dialogue that took place between a priest and a small community of believers see Ernesto Cardenal, *The Gospel in Solentiname*, vols. 1, 2, 3 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1977, 1978, 1979).

became the most important and trusted source of current events in the country. In 1984 the university created the Chair for the National Reality. In 1983 another of the martyrs, Segundo Montes, S.J., created the Human Rights Institute, which focused on the plight of El Salvador's refugees. In 1986, a third fellow martyr, Ignacio Martín-Baró, S.J., started the Institute for Public Opinion, which provided credible data on the country's poor. In the early 1980s the UCA also began a program of social outreach through its journals, its radio station, the community service program of its students, and its vision of roundtable discussions with groups in society such as labor unions and religious and military figures. The UCA began to press for dialogue and a process of mediation of the civil war, and by the late 1980s the tide of public opinion was turning in its favor. By 1988, Archbishop Rivera y Damas, successor to Archbishop Romero, sponsored a national debate at the UCA on the future of the country. As Robert Lassalle-Klein points out in a subsequent chapter, the murder of these men did not silence the forces for change but enabled them and helped to bring about a negotiated peace (Ashley, Burke, and Cardenal, 180–183).

Considered in light of more recent events, the four books reviewed here clearly have arrived in a portentous moment for liberation theology and for the Roman Catholic Church and its commitment to the poor. During the Cold War years of liberation theology's formation and implementation in Latin America, the Vatican treated it with hostility, which now seems to be changing under the leadership of Pope Francis. The first pope from Latin America and the first Jesuit speaks frequently of "creating a church for the poor" and has engaged in dialogue with theologians such as Gustavo Gutiérrez, who formerly were not welcomed to the Vatican.

For some, Pope Francis's attempts to strengthen the Catholic Church are a strategy to counter the growth of evangelical churches in Latin America, thus making his words more of a political statement than a theological one. For others, the Pope's intention is to continue the work done by the Latin American bishops at Medellín and Puebla and shift the focus of Catholicism from its European dominance to the region where the majority of Catholics now reside. Still others focus on his unwavering commitment to the poor.¹⁷ However, there is little doubt that by the force of his personality and his reading of the "signs of the times," the actions of Pope Francis have been different from those of his recent predecessors. While he does not describe himself as a liberation theologian, his consistent statements that the church must become the church of the poor demonstrate his affinity with this core principle of liberation theology.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the recent beatification of Monseñor Romero, whose path to sainthood had been stalled in the Vatican since 1997. In January 2015 the Theological Commission of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints reached the crucial decision, by unanimous vote, that Romero had been killed "out of hatred for the faith." Some weeks later, the Commission of Cardinals and Bishops of the Congregation also gave its positive verdict, thus enabling the

17. "Pope's Focus on Poor Revives Theology Long Scorned as Marxist," *New York Times International*, May 24, 2015.

Pope to declare Romero a martyr.¹⁸ In the Catholic tradition when a pope decrees that a candidate died a martyr, a miracle is not required to proceed to beatification and canonization. In the largest public gathering in El Salvador's history, the late archbishop was beatified on May 23, 2015, in San Salvador.¹⁹

What has received less media attention than this validation of Romero's life and work has been a modest breakthrough in the unresolved case of the November 1989 Jesuit murders. Of the six priests killed, five of them were Spanish nationals. In September 2015 the US Justice Department extradited to Spain former Salvadoran vice defense minister Inocente Orlando Montano Morales, who had been implicated in these murders. He had entered the United States illegally and lived near Boston for ten years. El Salvador's amnesty law prevents the extradition of some of the other military officers implicated in these murders, but Montano Morales lost this protection by reason of his residency in the United States.²⁰

The books under review demonstrate the compelling, contemporary need for a theology that liberates the poor, whose lives are arguably worse now than they were in the 1960s. They also attest to the vexing and complicated *problemática* of "poverty." For the liberation theologian poverty is a hermeneutical concept, for the philosopher it is heuristic, for the economist it is empirical and statistically measurable, for the pastor it is exegetical, for the pastoral agents it is the context in which they work. For the poor, poverty is pervasive and dehumanizing. This is the challenge for liberation theology and its practitioners (who play many of the roles listed above) as they continue to live according to the biblical witness to which God has called them.

18. "Pope Approves Martyrdom Decree for Slain Salvadoran Archbishop," *Guardian*, February 3, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/3February/2015>.

19. Jocelyn A. Sideco, "Romero, Saint of the Americas," *National Catholic Reporter*, June 5–18, 2015.

20. Linda Cooper, "Salvadoran Military Man Linked to 1989 Jesuit Massacre Faces Extradition to Spain," *National Catholic Reporter*, April 21, 2015.