

SALVANET

A Publication of Christians for Peace in El Salvador, CRISPAZ

FMLN Wins New Share of Power in Elections

The following is an excerpt from an article written in the April 1997 "Central America/Mexico Report" of the Religious Task Force on Central America and Mexico.

The Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) won a significantly increased share of political power in El Salvador's March 16 elections, tying their main rightist opponent in the popular vote and making gains in National Assembly seats and in municipal governments.

Salvadoran voters went to the polls to elect 84 deputies to the assembly and 262 mayors and their corresponding municipal governments.

The FMLN won 27 assembly seats, up from 14 won in the 1994 elections, and 48 mayoral races, a stunning increase from the 13 held previous to the vote. The Front will control six other mayors' offices where it ran in coalition with other left-of-center parties.

But undoubtedly its most significant victory came in San Salvador where a coalition headed by the FMLN won the mayor's race by a considerable margin over the incumbent mayor, Mario Valiente, of the rightist Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA). The coalition included the left-of-center Democratic Convergence (one of whose founders, Rubén Zamora, also won a seat in the assembly) and the Unity Movement (MU).

The coalition's candidate was Hector Silva, a 49-year-old gynecologist and former member of the now-discredited Christian Democrat Party,

once the strongest political party in the country. A target of political persecution in the late 1970s, Silva fled El Salvador in 1980, then returned to the country in 1985 to help lead a political opposition inside the country, in collaboration with the FMLN. He was voted to the National Assembly after the war, representing a coalition of progressive parties.

Silva agreed to run for mayor of San Salvador in exchange for autonomy in running his campaign and freedom to select half of the members of the city council. The FMLN will choose three.

In El Salvador's electoral system, municipal governments are not voted proportionally, but rather in a "winner-take-all" system. A package of electoral reforms that would have shifted this system to proportional representation failed in the ARENA-led assembly.

The San Salvador mayor's office is considered to be the second most prominent electoral position after the presidency.

Besides winning the capital, the FMLN won the mayors' office in most of San Salvador's working class suburbs and surrounding cities incorporating about one-fifth of the country's population of 5.8 million. They also won several other departmental capitals, including the country's second largest city, Santa Ana.✚

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CRISPAZ, Christians for Peace in El Salvador, was founded in 1984. We are a faith-based organization dedicated to mutual accompaniment with the church of the poor and marginalized communities in El Salvador. In building bridges of solidarity between communities in El Salvador and those in our home countries, we strive together for peace, justice and human liberation.

CRISPAZ has three programs:

- † CRISPAZ Volunteer Program
- † El Salvador Encounter Delegation Program
- † Communication Information Network on El Salvador (CINES)

SALVANET, a project of CINES is published six times per year.

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ELECTIONS '97

How Does the Salvadoran Electoral Process Work?

In March Salvadoran Legislative Assembly Representatives and mayors were elected. Held every three years, these are two of the four elections that exist in the Salvadoran political spectrum. The president and representatives to the Central American Parliament are elected every five years.

In order to vote, one must register with the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE). Each registered voter receives an electoral identification card.

On election day, the electoral process begins very early in the morning. All voting is done by paper ballot and this requires a high level of coordination and the participation of many volunteers. Each municipality has several voting centers, based on the population of that municipality. Every voting center has numerous voting tables and each of these tables is able to respond to a list of 200 registered voters. The voting tables, or "JRVs", are comprised of representatives of the different political parties. On election day, these representatives arrive very early and wait for the TSE to deliver the ballots and voter list. The table, which is comprised of three to six members, elects a president and a secretary. The rest of the table participates in the coordination process. All members of the JRV table serve a watchdog function to reduce the risk of electoral fraud. Those sitting at

the JRV table cannot wear any party colors or logos. In addition to the JRV table members, each table is attended by a handful of members of the different political parties who spend the day watching over the process and keeping an eye on one another!

After the ballots have arrived and all of the tables have been organized, the voting center is ready to receive voters.

In order to vote, one must find a master list of registered voters, posted in a central location. This provides information regarding the voting center and JRV table that correspond to a particular voter. The master lists are posted on large sheets of paper, often found blowing in the wind, some of the sheets torn or missing altogether. Once the voter has found his or her name, s/he proceeds to the corresponding voting site.



Equipo Maiz

Upon arrival at the correct table, the voter presents the president with her or his identification card. The JRV table verifies that the voter's name is on the list and that the picture matches the person waiting to vote.

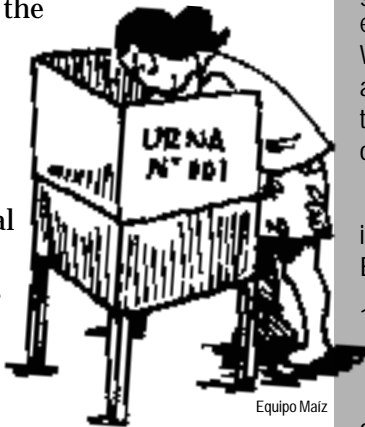
The voter is then given two ballots: one for the legislative

Political Party	Municipalities won Total=262	% of Population (in municipalities)	Legislative Assembly Total=84
ARENA <i>Nationalist Republican Alliance</i>	160	44.07%	28
FMLN <i>Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front</i>	48	26.74%	27
FMLN in coalition	6	18.56%	

assembly election and one for the mayoral election. Before handing over the ballots, the president must snip a corner, sign, and stamp each ballot.

The voter leaves his or her identification card with the JRV table and goes to a voting "urn" which is located a few feet away. In order to be more easily understood by a partially illiterate population, the

ballots are sheets of paper with the symbols of each political party. The voter marks an "X" on the symbol of the party for which s/he is voting. If more than one symbol is marked or if the ballot is mis-marked in any way, the ballot will be thrown out in the final count.



The voter deposits his/her votes into the corresponding ballot boxes and returns to the JRV table. The JRV table returns the electoral identification card and marks one of the voter's fingers with indelible ink. The voter signs the list acknowledging that s/he has voted.

The voting finishes when all of those who are waiting to vote at 5:00 in the afternoon have voted. Each table is responsible for the counting of their votes. They open the ballot boxes, count the votes together, and fill out a tally sheet which is signed by all table representatives. The president, accompanied by one or more of the other members of the table, delivers the tally sheets and ballot boxes to a central voting center and the country waits for the results!✚

During the March elections, many CRISPAZ volunteers and staff participated as International Electoral Observers through the National Council of Churches of El Salvador. The following are excerpts from a press release released by the National Council of Churches regarding the electoral event.

Communiqué from the National Council of Churches of El Salvador to the National and International Communities Regarding International Observation of the March 16, 1997 Electoral Event

We would like to express sincere thanks to the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) for giving us the opportunity to participate in the International Observation of the recent electoral event by accrediting more than 100 observers from a variety of different countries. We publicly recognize the titanic undertaking made by the TSE to guarantee transparency and the smooth operation of the electoral process, which proved to be a major advance in the Salvadoran Democratic Process. We congratulate the Salvadoran people for the level of maturity displayed during the March 16 elections.

We would like to point out some of the observed problems which should be taken into account by the TSE and by the political parties, especially regarding violations of the Electoral Code.

1. The purification and updating of the Electoral Registration Poll is urgently needed. It contains the names of deceased individuals. There were also cases of individuals with an electoral identification card who did not appear on the Registration Lists.
2. The Tribunal should maintain a stricter control over the electoral proceedings and should have inspectors present in all of the voting centers.
3. The role of the supervisors of the political parties should be changed. In many cases, these individuals abused their authority, heavily influenced the voting tables and the logistical support people, to the point such that one of our international observers was taken by the shoulders and lead to one of the tables.
4. In many voting sites, the voting began late (one to two hours after the established hour), which produced exasperation, confusion, impatience, and abstention.
5. Some of the voting centers were very small, which produced congestion and disorder.
6. There were many individuals that were unable to vote because their names were not found on the Registration Lists, even though they had electoral identification cards. Others had difficulties due to the lack of orientation inside the centers. Approximately 200 people reported having these problems.
7. Many cases were observed in which there was very little voter privacy and their right to a secret ballot was not respected.
8. Confrontations among representatives of the different political parties were observed at some of the voting tables, which included insults and in some cases physical interchange.
9. Public rest rooms were not available in the majority of the voting centers.
10. In some places, the JRVs were not complete and were lacking members and/or party observers.
11. In some places, the members of the JRV were incapable of carrying out their assigned responsibilities.
12. In some voting centers, the JRV was not organized in a democratic fashion.

San Salvador, March 20, 1997

Traditional Birth Experience Provides Volunteer With New Insight

Michelle Whalen is a CRISPAZ volunteer from Melbourne, Australia. She has been working in El Salvador for 4 years, working on education and women's projects. The following is the account of one of her numerous experiences in the community of Nueva Esperanza, Department of Usulután.

I was recently visiting my friend Angela, the community midwife. We were relaxing in her hammock when two women arrived in need of Angela's services for their sister. She invited me to come along and I jumped at the chance!

For many Salvadorans the attitude towards pain is that it is a part of life, so "put up with it and get on with the job!" This was certainly the attitude shared by Angela and by the young woman's mother. Naturally the mother-to-be was groaning softly with pain. Her mother would come to her periodically, and reproach her through gritted teeth to "be strong." At one stage, she brought a raw egg to the her daughter and poured it down her throat, "to give her strength," she told me. For me, that alone would have been torture! A couple of hours later the mother came to see her daughter, again telling her to be quiet and to be strong. "Well, give me another egg then!" cried the girl. Sure enough, another egg was dispatched down her throat. I think that the request for the second egg actually horrified me more than the act itself.

The dog was in and out of the room, hiding under the bed so that we wouldn't see her. Light was provided by candle and by my flashlight. On top of it all, the mosquitoes were busy. My job was to time

the contractions and to hold the flashlight for the examinations and for the birth.

About an hour before the baby was born, Angela had to return to her house to get another pair of sterile gloves. I was instructed to hold down the fort. The future grandmother came in and asked how things were going. "The same," I replied, as confidently as possible. I don't think she trusted me because she checked for herself. She nodded in agreement. She went away and didn't come back again until the final pushes.

I had imagined a more caring setting: the traditional midwife, the woman's mother and sisters gathered around in a female ritual. However, the reality was that she was left totally alone until the actual birth, (the only outside interest being the timing of the contractions, the state of her vagina, and of course how much noise she was making). Even at the moment of the birth they were aggressively telling her to push harder to surface the baby's head and shoulders. When she groaned, they scolded her, telling her that all the strength was in her throat and that was not where it counted! When the baby was finally born, out came a rush of blood and baby and a little girl was born. One minute you could see the head of the child inside and the next, it was born! It was a fascinating experience, both the biological wonder of being present at the birth, and the cultural difference in regards to the attitude toward pain and suffering and childbirth itself. There certainly was not much romance involved at that end of the process!✚

Fertility and High Population Growth Rate

Fertility rate is the number of children that a woman bears during her fertile years, the years between which she menstruates, approximately 14 to 44 years of age.

The 1985 statistic shows that the Salvadoran woman had an average of 4.5 children, with a higher average in the countryside, at 5.8 children. In 1993, the statistic decreased: at the national level, the average was 3.9 children, maintaining a higher average in the countryside at 5 children per woman. This shows that the

poorest families are also those with the most children, further intensifying their poverty.

Only 53 percent of women in El Salvador use contraception, the majority of whom live in the city. In addition, there are a large number of adolescent mothers: more than half of whom are under 17 years of age. These statistics have not varied in the last 20 years. The average age of first sexual relations is 13 years of age and 74 per cent of all adolescents with an active sexual life are unaware of methods of family planning.

Fertility Rate by Area (women 14-44 years old) 1985-1993

	1985	1988	1993
National	4.5	4.6	3.9
Metropolitan	3.3	3.0	2.7
Other Urban	3.7	3.7	3.5
Rural	5.8	5.9	5.0

source: *El Salvador en Cifras y Trazos*, Dr. Francisco Lazo & Carlos Ruiz Moiza, Asociación Equipo Maíz, 1996

The Other Side of the Mirror, The Other Side of Peace.

by Matthew Eisen
San Salvador, 1 March 1997

The bead of sweat rolls along her scalp,
tickling each hair as it races to her forehead,
where it meets a brow of wrinkles.
Passing over them as on a journey through mountains,
passing . . . just one bead of many that came before it,
passing, . . . filling itself with the history
these mountains of work encompass.

And just as the bead of sweat reaches its site of departure
from this bowed head in the midst of work,
just as it swells,
not belonging solely to her body,
but also to the earth,
it is then,
as it releases to fall in slow motion,
past the old compañera grinding the corn,
then,
at that exact moment,
there falls from the clouds above,
the first drop of rain to begin a new season.

They fall simultaneously,
in slow motion,
until they both reach the earth.

She hears them crash, and she freezes.
She listens, as the sound of crashing beads of sweat
turns to the sound of a heavy rhythmic rain.
She listens, yearning for a rain that will cleanse her body,
to transform her...
still frozen, she just listens as the crashing patterns become more rapid.

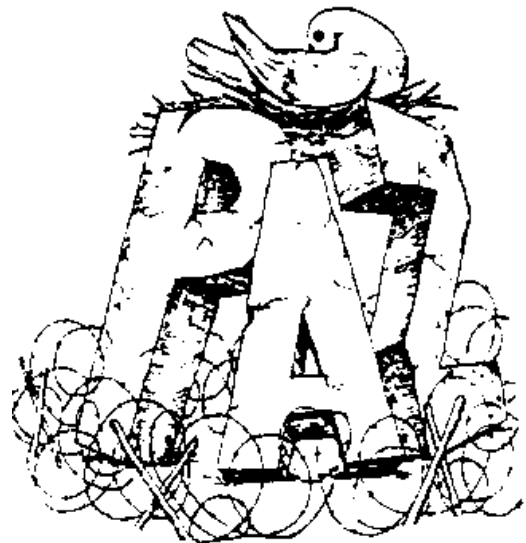
Then, as the sound becomes less sporadic
and more constant,
she lays down the grindstone and leaves the corn,
simply and deliberately, with no expressions displayed,
yet a torrent of emotion within.
Like a dignitary before a speech,
she walks with a noble stride,
towards the door,
outside, where the rain falls upon her.

And as if we were a drop of rain, in slow motion,
originating from the clouds above,
we see her,
standing there on the dirt road,
as she looks up, mouth widening,
in laughter and sorrow,
arms stretching out overhead,
the rain and sweat now mixing with tears,
as it rolls down her cheek.

We gain speed, she becomes clearer, larger, alive...
we are near her now,
and just before we reach her,
we learn from her,
in the depths of her thoughts,
she wonders...

"What would it be like,
if instead of drops of rain,
you were bullets,
like in the days of old,
to take me from this misery,
this 'time of peace'".

*Matthew Eisen is a CRISPAZ volunteer from Cincinnati, Ohio.
He is working with the Generation XXI Youth Movement.*



The Unreachable Yet Necessary Utopia that Helps Us Believe and Progress

by Father Jose Carlos Fernandez-Cid

The "Signs of the Times" are those great events and attitudes that characterize an age. One such sign is Utopia, that is to say, human hope.

For the Greeks, hope was evil. In Hellenic mythology, Pandora received a box in which all evils were enclosed. Her curiosity caused her to open the box thereby releasing all evils into the world. The last evil to leave the box was hope.

In the Judeo-Christian world, hope is good. "Our father in faith," Abraham, hoped against hope. St. Thomas of Aquinas defined hope as strength in the face of the improbable. Hope is strengthened by difficulty. It is its nature. Regarding Utopia (which in Greek means "place that does not exist"), Thomas Moore—writer, humanist, lawyer, magistrate, professor, council to King Henry VIII of England (who ordered his death)—was the inventor of this word. In the island of Utopia there is peace, justice, equality, common possessions, honor, work for all, special care for the sick and for the weak.

In the real world supporters of such a Utopia do exist. They are the minority, but their power shapes history: conscientious objectors who believe in a world without militaries and without wars; ecologists who defend the oceans, the rivers, the forests, and

the atmosphere; doctors without borders; clowns without borders. These are human beings who believe in Utopia.

When Gandhi said: "*It is impossible to reach the stars, but it is logical to move towards them and not in the opposite direction*"; or when Tagore wrote: "*I know that my dreams, my melodies without singing, are not completely lost*," they express belief in Utopia. And when Martin Luther King said: "*I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, sons of former slaves and sons of former slave-owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood*," he was making the same statement of faith in Utopia. The Reign of God, announced by Jesus who died on the cross, is UTOPIA.

I read a beautiful poem by Debruyne:
A day will arrive in which children will learn words that they will find difficult to learn. The children of India will ask: What was hunger? The children of Alabama will ask: What was racism? The children of Hiroshima will ask: What was the Atomic Bomb? And all the children of the world will ask: What was war? And you will be the one to answer them: they are the names of things fallen into disuse, just like slave galleys or slavery. They are words that no longer mean anything. For this reason they were removed from the dictionary. ✚

Join a CRISPAZ delegation!
El Salvador Encounters

Grassroots Social Justice
August 29–September 7, 1997

Human Rights Past and Present
October 24–November 2, 1997
October 26 marks the 10th anniversary of the death of Herbert Anaya of the Human Rights Commission of El Salvador.

Spirituality and Martyrdom
November 28–December 7, 1997
December 2 marks the 17th anniversary of the death of the North American church women.

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The articles on these two pages are translated from "Sentir Con La Iglesia." For a one year subscription to this monthly Spanish-language publication, send US\$30 to:
**Sentir Con La Iglesia, Apartado Postal 42,
San Salvador, El Salvador, Centro América**

With the signing of the 1992 Peace Accords, the Ombuds office for human rights was established as a governmental watchdog agency. Dr. Marina de Avilés heads this office. She has met with many CRISPAZ delegations and her words have made a strong impact on the country and on North Americans.

Interview with Human Rights Ombudswoman, Dr. Marina de Avilés

Doctor, what made you decide to work in the legal field?

I think that one of my father's virtues was his love of justice, something that he was able to share this with us, his children, through every action of his life. I believe that this was one of the reasons that I chose the vocation of justice. I think that justice is the sustenance of all human activity.

Do you think good laws are the answer to a country's difficulties?

Laws definitely play a substantial part in a country's progress. But it is not enough to have good laws, but also good people to carry out these laws.

Is your job as the "Advocate of the People" difficult? If so, why?

It is difficult. In the first place, my position in this country is very new. There is a lack of knowledge regarding the role of the "Advocate of the People." This person is considered to be the public censor of those who break the laws and abuse their public offices at the detriment of civil society. The public authority that crosses the line is never going to accept questioning, and thereby becomes one of the main detractors of the work of the Ombuds office. It is necessary to educate these individuals in the noble philosophy of respect for human rights.

Doctor, from the governmental side, you and your work are viewed as favoring the left. Do you consider yourself a woman of the left?

I have never participated in a political institution nor do I belong to any party. I do recognize that I am a progressive woman, a woman who loves justice and who is committed to peace and to the truth. I don't know if these would be attributes exclusively of the left. I think that there is no reason to give space to the idea that the Ombuds office has an inclination towards the left, nor that said institution has its own color or ideological mark. Our public declarations attempt to be consistent with the truth.

What are the strategic obstacles for human rights in El Salvador?

As I indicated earlier, one of the biggest obstacles is the complete lack of knowledge regarding the philosophy of the Ombuds office and the role of the "Advocate of the People." But I should also point out that El Salvador lacks an infrastructure that would allow for more efficient national development. However, the educational process towards a culture of peace with respect for human rights is smoothing out the difficulties in this field of work.

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If at this moment you had to give a test to El Salvador regarding "human rights," what grade would the country receive?

Well, I want to say that, based on the work of the Ombuds office, there has been a great effort to inform civil society about their rights and obligations . . . I believe it would receive a five.

Exactly? . . . Just barely? . . .

Yes, but I think that we should take into account that there are sectors of power that try to confuse us. They allege that human rights are the rights of delinquents. These sectors have a mechanism in place to disseminate this belief. Those of us who respect human rights should try to get past these obstacles and help everyone to understand their rights, the ways to make them work, and at what point to take action to defend these rights.

Has there been an improvement in the situation of human rights following the signing of the Peace Accords in El Salvador?

I believe that there has been a slight improvement, but there is still a long road ahead.

If a party were to propose to you the candidacy of president, could you see yourself as the second "Doña Violeta" of Central America?

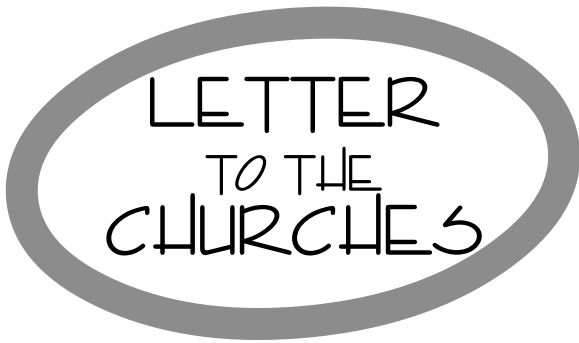
Well, I would like to say that among my expectations and goals, both short and long term, this is not something that I have in mind. Additionally, no one has made a proposal of this nature to me. But I do think that it would be a historic event in our country. I think that the issue is not about being female. In my opinion, the essential issue is that the woman who would assume the presidency be honest, a person of integrity, someone fully identified with the aspirations of the people, and someone able to develop a program of consensus.

Do conditions exist in El Salvador such that a woman could hold the executive office?

I think that women here have demonstrated that they have the necessary courage and temperance to be able to assume this position . . .

Of course, as far as the women are concerned, I do not doubt it, but taking into account the Salvadoran reality . . .

Yes, it would be difficult, but not because women do not have the capability, rather because men have not yet been able to understand that we are living in a world of equality in which there should exist conditions of equal opportunity for all.♣



from El Salvador

We are persecuted but never abandoned;
struck down, but never left to die.

(2 Corinthians 4:7-8)

□ INFORMATION SERVICE OF THE PASTORAL CENTER, CENTRAL AMERICAN UNIVERSITY, SAN SALVADOR □
EDITED ENGLISH TRANSLATION

Letter to the Churches is a bimonthly publication of the Archbishop Oscar Romero Pastoral Center, Central American University (UCA), San Salvador. These are letters of flesh and spirit, written from one Salvadoran community to another and from the Salvadoran Church to the Universal Church. The following are excerpts from this publication.

Rutilio, Romero, Alfonso Navarro and Many Others. A Church of the Poor.

In March, El Salvador celebrated the 17th anniversary of Monsignor Romero's martyrdom on March 24 and the 20th anniversary of Rutilio Grande's martyrdom on March 12. The life and death of these two individuals have had a tremendous impact on the Salvadoran church and people. The following article is a reflection on their lives and martyrdom. —Ed.

After having remembered Rutilio, we now remember Monsignor Romero. And we remember Alfonso Navarro, Ocatvio Ortiz and many other priests, religious, and lay workers. From our current ecclesiastical reality, we remember three things that will enliven and animate us.

A Generation of Bold Women and Men

Monsignor Romero and the martyrs gave impulse to a tradition of bold Christians who were to meet the severity of reality with an independent temperament. Today, the danger for the Church consists in not assuming the responsibility of this reality and its severity.

The gospels narrate the beginning of Jesus' mission in the following way: "When John the Baptist was put in jail, Jesus went to Galilee and there he began to announce the Reign of God." John the Baptist was a bold prophet that denounced the immoral life of Herod. For that he was imprisoned, and later assassinated. Jesus of Nazareth, known by Herod as a member of John's group, began his mission precisely in this difficult moment, a compassionate evangelizer, but also a bold prophet. The same

thing happens in El Salvador. Mario Bernal is ousted from the country and Rutilio pronounces the homily of Apopa. Rutilio is assassinated and Monsignor Romero begins. Monsignor is assassinated after his "in the name of God, stop the repression" and Ignacio Ellacuría comes forth . . .

Monsignor speaks of a generation of bold men and courageous women, like Silvia, Ticha, Ita, Maura . . . The important part is to remember that this boldness does not come from temperament: Monsignor Romero and Rutilio were very fragile. I. Ellacuría, on the other hand had a strong character. Maura was the feminine expression of tenderness . . .

They were equal to the task of responding to a tough and brutal reality. For this reason, Rutilio talked of "Cains" and Monsignor Romero roared against those that "converted Aguilares into a jail and a place of torture." They were also bold in their vision of utopia; they demanded nothing less than the possibility of life. "A table for all," dreamed Rutilio. "Over these ruins will shine the glory of God," dreamed Monsignor. "We have to revert history," dreamed Ellacuría. They were also bold in enduring a process that inscribed their own death. "Don't go to El Paisnal," they said to Tilo. "Don't go to celebrate mass in the Hospitalito (Divina Providencia) for Sara," they said to Monsignor. "Don't return to El Salvador," they said to Ellacuría. Foolishness? We should say, it is a love of these bold men for their brothers and sisters, the poor.

A Generation that Believed in the Fruitfulness of the Gospel

Monsignor Romero and the martyrs believed in the fruitfulness of the gospel in order to transform people and the country. They offered to God and to Christ the best that they had. The gospel converges with the best Salvadoran hopes, but also offers “something new” that is profoundly humanizing. Today, many in the Church want to offer the gospel as doctrine and moral code, no longer as good news.

Horizontalists, Marxists, liberationists, Medellinists, atheists . . .! they said. How many lies they told not to accept the obvious. “Long table cloths, common table for all, stools for all. And Christ in the middle!” “Who tells me, brothers and sisters, that we will go to meet God.” “We watch for the coming of Liberator God.” These are the words of Rutilio, Romero and Ellacuría.

These men were bold believers. Their faith converged with the yearnings of the poor and the victimized. God is “their” God, not the God of the powerful and opulent. “Some want a God of the clouds. They prefer a mute Christ without a mouth, made of their own caprice and according to their own selfish interests,” said Rutilio. “The glory of God is that the poor live,” said Monsignor. And his faith offered a gospel to profoundly humanize the poor—and everyone: “That the people and the organized, be imbued with the spirit of the Beatitudes, that they might be poor with spirit,” said Ellacuría.

To believe in the gospel is not to accept it as a mere collection of orthodox doctrines and to comply with a collection of obligatory mandates. For this we have the texts of the masters, the catechisms, and the writings of theologians on their level. To believe in the gospel is to believe in gifts and grace, in what comes from above, from the Celestial Father, and in that which comes from below, from Jesus of Nazareth. It is to believe in the fruitfulness of the word of God, of the word and the life of Jesus. To believe in the profound, human goodness of God and of Jesus is contagious and will change us inside.

An example taken from Rutilio: “I congratulate you brothers and sisters! You have taught us a great lesson. You tell us that rather than fighting with brother Peter about whether or not the Virgin did or did not have many sons, or whether or not you can or cannot eat a strangled hen, you offered your help when they displaced him. In your poverty you have helped him to raise a roof and to move his belongings.” This is the fruitfulness of the gospel. It is not the gospel as “doctrine” or as law, but the gospel as

good news, as grace, as an invitation to be brothers and sisters.

A Generation that Constructed a Church of the Poor

Monsignor Romero and the martyrs posed the fundamental challenge to the Church: To be a people of God, an ecclesiastical body, continuing the mission of Jesus, leaven for the country. All of this from the poor, for the poor, and with the poor in the center. Today, part of the Church of the poor wants to shape itself, be it with the intention of doing good, around the powerful and with the powerful.

The martyrs were very clear about this, without worrying about whether or not the option was “preferential.” The poor are, inherently, the privileged of God and they should shape the entire Church: the doctrine, hope, mission, celebration.

This took life in the ecclesiastical base communities, with problems certainly, but also with great gains. These Christians grew because they had the Bible in their hands and they began to make use of the first and most important human religious right: communication with God, without any interference from the outside in this most profound human relationship. They grew because they committed themselves to the “great love.” And they grew because they were, above all, community, communion, Eucharist, shared table.

Today, there is no longer talk of the Church of the poor. Very efficiently, some members of the hierarchy establish their most important relationships with the powers of this world. They create movements of poor people, but they do not involve Christians that are living the conflictive, current reality and they do not endanger peace—even with their shades of irrelevance, sadness, and even boredom. They tolerate the evangelical sects because, in the end, anything is better than the old base communities.

A Church of martyrs has to be a Church of the poor. We need it. There are many strikes against it, but we are not beginning at zero. The tradition persists in small and large things: the Diocese of Chalatenango publicly pronounced before all of the problems of the country and the Church; Monsignor Rosa, Monsignor Cabrera, Monsignor Mojica give their word. Communities and groups continue meeting around life and around the Bible. It may seem like little, but there are many examples. This is the martirial tradition. And, being not only an ecclesiastical tradition, but a Salvadoran one as well, God willing, this will pervade and orient the hope that has risen in many after the elections.✙

Two Mexican Jesuits Unjustly Arrested

On March 8, two Jesuits were arrested in Chiapas and accused of homicide. This immediately caused statements against the action from many, including Don Samuel Ruiz. At the same time, the spokesperson for the Mexican federal government affirmed that the investigations would be taken to their ultimate consequences, to which he added these incredible words: "because in Mexico, no one is untouchable." On March 13, the judge granted restricted freedom to the two Jesuits and to the two campesinos that were detained with them. The Jesuits, after five days of imprisonment, said that they will sue the Department of Justice of the state of Chiapas for damages and defamation. Observers believe that the detainment of the Jesuits has caused further delay to the peace process in Chiapas, which has been disrupted since September, 1996. The following is a press release written by the Mexican Jesuits and a letter from the UCA of San Salvador to Mexican President Zedillo.

Pronouncement of the Society of Jesus of Mexico

The government of the state of Chiapas illegally detained yesterday, March 8, two priests of the Society of Jesus—Gonzalo Rosas Morales and Gerónimo Alberto Hernández López—as well as Francisco González Gutiérrez and Ramón Parceró Martínez, all of whom the State claims were associated with a supposed ambush in which two State Public Security agents died.

The Society of Jesus in Mexico completely rejects the version offered by the Government of the State of Chiapas, including the implication that the detained were involved in these illicit acts. The Government of the State of Chiapas falsified reality and has thereby presented a serious challenge to the rule of law, peace, and human rights.

Fathers Rosas and Hernández have distinguished themselves via their trajectory of pastoral accompaniment and solidarity with the indigenous populations of northern Chiapas for many years. They have also participated in the processes of organization and development carried out by indigenous communities, and the search for greater justice, well-being and fraternity among these populations. We categorically affirm that they had no intervention in the acts of which they are deceitfully being accused . . .

Mario López Barrio, S.J., Provincial

Denunciation of the Irregularities of the Arrest

The director of the Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez Human Rights Center mentions, among others, the following irregularities.

From the moment of their detainment, "they were subjected to torture and physical and psychological mistreatment. They received physical blows from weapons that the judicial police and public security were carrying . . . They were maintained incommunicado for 20 hours . . . they were denied the right to an attorney . . . They were not notified of the motive for their arbitrary detainment and they are unaware of their legal situation . . . There exist contradictions among the versions offered by the authorities . . ."

Moving from this concrete case to the general thesis, we affirm that "these acts confirm the daily practice of incommunication, humiliating treatment and degradation, physical and psychological torture, the fabrication of guilt and evidence, actions all of which have been committed by the authorities who must obey the law and who constitute an ominous obstacle to the delivery of justice and the reestablishment of the rule of law in our country."

Letter from the UCA to the President of Mexico, Ernesto Zedillo

March 13, 1997

Mr. Ernesto Zedillo
President of Mexico
Mexico, D.F.

Mr. President:

We write to you to present our most energetic protest against the arbitrary and illegal detainment of Jesuits Gonzalo Rosas Morales and Gerónimo Alberto González López, and the citizens Francisco González Gutiérrez and Ramón Parceró Martínez, who have been mistakenly implicated, without due clarification, in various criminal acts.

According to the information we received, which was given in good faith, Articles 215, Fraction VII, 225 Fraction X and 364 of the Penal Code of the Federal District were violated in this process. We believe the reliable testimony of the Provincial Father of the Jesuits in Mexico that the detained parties were subjected to degrading and humiliating treatment,

which violated not only their constitutional rights, but their human rights as well.

Our University and the Jesuits that have worked here in the past were also victims of a series of outrages that culminated in the assassination of six Jesuits and two of their co-workers. Based on our own experience, we are concerned that these detentions mark the beginning of a persecution similar to the one that culminated in the assassination of our compañeros in El Salvador. It is certain that recent years have seen a period of lies and slander against the Mexican Jesuits, supported by the authorities of the State of Chiapas and other related officials. This is the same type of slander that preceded the assassination of the Jesuits in El Salvador.

We sincerely want for Mexico neither the brutality nor the shame that results from crimes such as those that were committed here during the primitive state we experienced and which appears today to be the trend in the State of Chiapas.

Above all we would like to make, through you, a plea to the prudence of the authorities of your country to stop this delirium of persecution against all those that try to peacefully unify Christian faith with social justice. At the same time we ask for the immediate release of these four people illegally and arbitrarily detained.

Sincerely,
Francisco Javier Ibisate, S.J., Rector
Rodolfo Cardenal, S.J., Vice-Rector
José María Tojeira, S.J., Adviser

Thoughts on Rutilio

- † Rutilio: A great testimony of devotion for the Christians of El Salvador and the world. Long Live Rutilio!
-Nora Díaz
- † For being faithful to the Spirit of the gospel of Jesus of Nazareth, for showing us the way in such confusing times, and that your death and resurrection will enrich us with hope, thank you Rutilio.
-Anonymous
- † The greatest help for the people of El Salvador has been the martirial blood of saints such as Father Rutilio. Infinite thanks for having spoken when you had to speak, for having acted when you had to act. God willing this will serve as an example for today's Church, as we need it. Christ is incarnate in El Salvador!
-Mario E. Caceres
- † Your pastoral testimony animates us to commit to the cause of the kingdom, to announce the Good News in the manner of Christ "heart and mind" that "didn't come to be served but to serve."
-Mario E. Romero C.
- † For a man that was always life, hope and light for his community, a community of men and women that remember him today and always as a true soldier of Christ, who fought against the injustice that attacked his people. "Rutilio was and will be a symbol of the struggle to achieve the day of social justice in El Salvador." Thank you Rutilio!
-Ulises Villatoro
- † F. Rutilio, your spirit lives on in the people, for you, like John the Baptist, prepared the way that many did not want to follow. Your way was the way of Jesus Christ and of the poor of El Salvador. YOUR LIFE, YOUR EXAMPLE, and YOUR MARTYRDOM animate us to follow the way to the freedom of El Salvador, your people.
-Mauricio Castro
- † Rutilio Grande, one of the first Jesuit martyrs of El Salvador, your people, El Salvador, are with you always remembering everything that you did for us. Together the Salvadoran people and your memory will move forward.
-Alex C.
- † Rutilio Grande represents the best of humanity. He lives in each one of us that live the gospel. People of El Salvador, We move forward! We will be Victorious!
-Marvin Guthot

Yearly subscriptions to Carta A Las Iglesias, a bi-monthly publication in Spanish, can be obtained for \$30 by writing to: Centro de Distribucion UCA, Apartado Postal (01) 575, San Salvador, El Salvador, Centro America. Make checks payable to: Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas

CRISPAZ Supports the Closing of the School of the Americas

The "Vigil and Lobbying Campaign to Close the U.S. Army School of the Americas" was held in Washington, DC from April 19 to 29, 1997. Companion vigils were held each of these mornings in front of the U.S. Embassy in San Salvador. CRISPAZ co-sponsored the vigil on Thursday, April 24. The following article is written by CRISPAZ board chair, Carol Davis regarding her experiences on the Capitol steps.

It was a sunny, clear Saturday morning when the Vigil and Lobbying Campaign held its opening ceremony on the East Steps of the capitol. There was an air of excitement as we listened to readings from newspapers from all over the country: *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The San Antonio Express-News*, *The Atlanta Constitution*, *The Ledger-Inquirer* (Columbus, GA), all of them calling for the School of the Americas at Fort Benning, Georgia to close its doors forever. This was the fourth year that the vigil has taken place on the capitol steps and the air was full of optimism that *this* would be the year to finally close the School of the Americas.

Much of this optimism stems from the September, 1996, Department of Defense release of "Torture Training Manuals" that were used at the School of the Americas (SOA). The manuals advocate execution, false imprisonment, blackmail, physical abuse, and other forms of torture. They confirm that the SOA has instructed Latin American soldiers to intimidate and murder their own people, especially religious workers, labor organizers, and others working for the rights of the poor. With the release of this information, it has become obvious that the SOA has not been fostering good relations with Latin America as it has claimed. Those of us who have traveled to El Salvador have heard for years from the Salvadoran

people what the Department of Defense has now been forced to admit. With this information, how could our Representatives and Senators vote to keep the SOA open?

Despite the optimism, there is still work to be done. It is up to each of us to contact our Representative and insist that he or she sign-on to HR 611 to close the School of the Americas. There are many states where no Representatives have signed-on, so there is a lot to do before summer.

Senator Richard Durbin (IL) will sponsor a bill similar to HR 611 in the Senate, but he is looking for two or three other Senators to join him in introducing the bill. Will you ask your Senator to join him? All Representatives and Senators recently received a copy of the Maryknoll World Productions video *School of Assassins*, and *School of Assassins*, a book by Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer. Now that these members of Congress have this information, it is up to each of us to give them the extra incentive to become informed about this issue and to vote to close down the SOA.

Father Roy Bourgeois, founder of "SOA Watch," testified in Federal Court on April 29, 1996, that "people will continue to . . . say: 'No, not in our name will we allow you to keep this School going.' I have no doubt at all that one day, and I pray that it's soon, this School, the School of the Americas which has caused so much suffering and death to our sisters and brothers abroad and has been a theft from the poor here at home, will close. We will not stop speaking out until it does. We will speak from prison, Your Honor. We will speak from our cells. The truth cannot be silenced, it can't be chained." ✚

The School of Assassins video can be obtained by calling 800-227-8523. The book School of Assassins is available through Orbis Press.

CRISPAZ

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