

"I AM PREPARED FOR ANYTHING":
CHRISTIAN MARTYRDOM, CIVIL SOCIETY, AND MYTHS OF MODERNITY
IN COLD WAR EL SALVADOR AND POLAND
BY
JOANNA H. MARTINEZ

A Dissertation submitted to the
Graduate School-Newark
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Arts
Graduate Program in History
written under the direction of
Dr. Karen Caplan
and approved by

Newark, New Jersey

May 2012

ABSTRACT

Drawing on the examples of the violent deaths of El Salvador's Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero and Poland's Father Jerzy Popiełuszko during the heights of Cold War struggles in the respective countries this thesis presents Christian martyrdom as part of monumental social changes of which the Catholic Church had become an agent after World War II. The popular Catholic Church in peripheral countries such as El Salvador and Poland, I argue, became the facilitator of grassroots civic activism and resistance in which peasants and workers, no longer passive recipients of political identities and economic policies from above, became active agents in constructing of novel forms of resistance to state hegemonies, new civil societies, and political ideologies. As members of 'popular churches' these new social actors challenged 'myths of modernity' pervading the Cold War polarization proving that in peripheral countries ideological categories such as left/right, socialist/liberal, and communist/capitalist did not lend themselves to easy universal categorizations. The Catholic Church, moreover, through Liberation Theology and theory of Solidarity provided alternative 'third road' ideologies, which borrowed from socialism and liberalism, but also challenged them. Catholicism, as 'practical religion', most dramatically articulated during Cold War in martyrdom and its cults, became synonymous with resistance to oppression and an existential code for civil societies striving for social justice.

CONTENTS

1. Introduction.....	1
2. Historiography, Methodology, and Organization.....	14
3. Chapter One: Cult of Martyrs as Agency of People – Spiritual Politics of ‘Popular Church’	22
4. Chapter Two: Christian Civil Society versus Hegemony of State.....	43
5. Chapter Three: ‘Myths of Modernity’ on Peripheries of Empires and Church’s ‘Third Road’ Ideology.....	70
6. Conclusion.....	9

INTRODUCTION

In 1998 the Great West Door of the Westminster Abbey in London was adorned with fourteen colossal statues that were commemorated in public ceremony attended by the Queen. Westminster Abbey, the jewel of European Christianity, was constructed in the late 10th century; the niches in the Western Gate had been empty since its construction in the mid-18th century. The lower tier, just to the right and the left of the door, was filled with four allegorical human-like depictions of mercy, truth, justice, and peace; the upper tier, above the door, with ten sculptures of 20th century Christian martyrs thus commemorating the most violent century in recorded human history as well as one in which the Church incurred the greatest number of martyrdoms in its history. The statues represent different Christian denominations, areas of the world, and forms of regimes and persecutions: Grand Duchess Elizabeth of Russia killed by Bolsheviks in 1918, Anglican catechumen Manche Masemola of South Africa killed at sixteen by her own parents, Polish Catholic priest Maximilian Kolbe killed in a Nazi concentration camp in 1941 after offering his life for that of an inmate, Anglican evangelist Lucian Tapiede of Papua New Guinea killed in 1941 during the Japanese invasion, Lutheran theologian and pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer killed by the Nazis in 1945, Pakistani Presbyterian evangelist Esther John killed by an alleged Muslim fanatic in 1960, Baptist civil rights leader Martin Luther King assassinated in 1969, pastor and evangelist Wang Zhiming killed during the Chinese cultural revolution of 1972, Anglican Archbishop Janani Luwum of Uganda assassinated during the Idi Amin regime in 1972, and El Salvador's Roman Catholic Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero assassinated during

its civil war in 1980.¹ Archbishop Romero is the only figure accompanied by another human being: he is holding a small child sculpted with features easily recognizable as characteristic of the native American population.

The Cold War proved to be fertile ground for Christian martyrdom in the 20th century. While the world watched the precarious escalation of the conflict, the Roman Catholic Church in the 1960's endeavored to reorganize and reposition itself toward modernity. In 1962 Pope John XXIII surprised the world by announcing the convocation of the Second Vatican Council, a universal council of Catholic bishops. A century had passed since the First Vatican Council and the Church was determined to put itself on record regarding its role in the rapidly modernizing world. Between 1962 and 1965 Vatican II met for four sessions and busied itself with matters ecumenical and evangelical. Some of the major breakthroughs resulting from it were the fact that several bishops from continents other than Europe were invited to take part in it and its resolution to put an end to performing Catholic Mass in Latin and allowing for liturgy in native languages all over the world.

In light of the extreme polarization of world politics after World War II Vatican II also strove to establish guidelines for the Church's role in political action. Vatican II, cognizant of its role in setting precedents in the formation of theology of liberation, was careful to distinguish between the Church's explicitly evangelical role and taking responsibility for the appropriation of its doctrine for specific political ends. The

¹ "Martyrs of the Modern Era" *BBC News UK*, 9 July 1998 [journal on line]; available from http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/129587.stm; accessed 6 March 2012.

message was clear: while the Church located itself as the evangelical champion of what the world increasingly described as 'human rights' it was careful to establish its doctrine of non-involvement in particular cases of political struggles. Section 76 of the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* produced by Vatican II proclaimed: "The role and the competence of the Church being what it is, she must in no way be confused with the political community, nor bound to any political system."²

Vatican II spun off a series of national and international Church councils. In 1968, in Medellín Colombia, Latin American bishops met for a continental conference intended to translate and apply the language of Vatican II to their regional circumstances and its major accomplishment was the founding of the 'option for the poor' as the guiding principle by which the Church were to proceed with modern evangelization in Latin America. Soon after Catholic theologians and intellectuals, such as Jesuit priests in El Salvador and Peruvian Gustavo Gutierrez, begun formulating Liberation Theology in which the Church's 'option for the poor', theories of failure of developmentalism, and the Gospel combined. Oscar Romero had been a simple priest during Vatican II and became bishop only after Medellín Conference. In twelve years, though, he would die, the protector of the poor and oppressed, of assassin's bullets in El Salvador's bloody civil war.

Another priest, unrepresented among the Westminster Abbey statues and generally unknown and unrecognized even as a martyr, Father Jerzy Popiełuszko of

² "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World," quoted in Quentin L. Quade, ed. The Pope and Revolution: John Paul II Confronts Liberation Theology (Washington , D.C.: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1982), 4.

Poland was kidnaped, tortured, strangled, and drowned in 1984 by agents of the Ministry of Interior after years of intimidation, death threats and surveillance. “These are all very gross tactics, but there are larger matters at stake,” wrote Popiełuszko few days before his death, “and I am convinced that what I am doing is right. And that is why I am prepared for anything.”³ His death came on the heels of the retreat of Solidarność (Solidarity Union), which he championed, from a position of open rebellion against Communist rule in Poland and propelled a massive public opinion assault on the regime resulting in an eventual revival of Solidarność. Like Archbishop Romero in El Salvador, Popiełuszko, an unrelenting preacher, became a revolutionary martyr of conscience, willingly sacrificing his life not only in struggle against political and economic tyranny but also for the literal application of Vatican’s doctrine of liberation: unprotected by, and at times, indeed, alienated from, the institutional Church they lived and died on its periphery as priests to the masses. Their deaths materialized in the gulf between the ‘high’ Church’s elusive ideology and the practical challenges its flocks experienced on the local grounds in struggles with particular political and economic realities.

At the time the Catholic Church had a new leader: Polish-born Cardinal Karol Wojtyła, known to the world and consecrated as Pope, John Paul II in 1978. The election of John Paul II came as a shock to Communist regimes of Eastern Europe and Moscow. Only a few years earlier, in 1975, the Holy See entered into negotiations with Eastern European Communist regimes during the Helsinki Conference stressing recognition of

³ Father Jerzy Popiełuszko, “I Am Prepared for Anything,” quoted in Grażyna Sikorska, Jerzy Popiełuszko: A Martyr for the Truth (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William b. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), xv.

human rights and fundamental liberties, among which the right to the personal practice of religion was proclaimed paramount.⁴ Despite its rhetoric of political non-involvement during the Cold War the consecration of a Polish Pope, whose native land had become the locus of anti-Communist struggle, propelled the Church into dialogues with various segments of civil society in countries affected by the Cold War struggle. In Latin America, where the Medellín Conference laid the foundations for Liberation Theology, the Church encountered the other face of the struggle: against the economic and political colonialism of the United States perpetrated on such countries as El Salvador. Although he did not explicitly endorse FMLN (Farabundo Martí Front for National Liberation – the most radical representation of El Salvador’s ‘communist’ answer to the devastating effects of political and economic liberalism), Bishop Oscar Romero gave his life for the protection of the most vulnerable segments of the population from the harm and indignities inflicted by the spread of clientelist capitalism in El Salvador.

The overarching theme of this thesis, therefore, is the showcasing of the Catholic Church as a political entity during the Cold War. I will argue that on the peripheries of the two world empires, Russia and United States, the Church’s teachings indeed provided a distinctive kind of ideology upon which civil societies were built and through which political action became a preoccupation of the masses. The juxtapositioning of the Salvadoran and the Polish cases is meant to explore the ways in which different segments of civil society strove against the two prevailing ‘myths of modernity’:

⁴ Agostino Casaroli, Martyrdom of Patience: The Holy See and the Communist Countries (1963-89) (Toronto, Canada: Ave Maria Centre of Peace, 2007), xxvii.

communism and capitalism. I call them 'myths of modernity' intentionally to point out that neither revolutionary culture espoused either of the ideological options as the ultimate resolution. My contention is that the Church's ideology of liberation, whether appropriated by the Salvadoran FMLN or the Polish Solidarność, did not simply represent the struggle of insurgent societies toward the opposite political poles; in other words, FMLN did not simply fight for communism, nor did Solidarność for capitalism. I believe that even as the institutional Church abstained from direct political involvement in specific conflicts, the Church of the masses, represented, in extreme cases, by individual martyrs such as Bishop Oscar Romero and Father Jerzy Popiełuszko, provided societies living under conditions of political and economic colonialism a middle way.

Under the precocious, although still explicitly conservative, leadership of John Paul II the Church became a locus of a third ideological option: humanism. This of course does not mean that the position of the institutional Church vis-a-vis its responsibility to take firm positions against genocides, torture and other massive human rights violations improved much in comparison to the inexplicable silence with which the Church met concentration camps and atomic bombs during World War II. But the foot-soldiers of the Church working on the ground in regions where poverty, repression, and crimes against humanity became their daily experiences did not abstain from political action, on the contrary: they became champions of it and died for it. Ironically, those martyrs whose likenesses installed at Westminster Abbey were meant to celebrate their ultimate sacrifices for the Church, often died instead neglected by the very Church in whose name they became a certain kind of politicians and activists for the masses. The

deaths of Bishop Romero and Father Popiełuszko illustrated the insufficiency of the equivocal Vatican II doctrine of liberation to grapple with the practical realities of poverty and marginalization on the ground. My thesis will show that people in revolutionary societies, often completely unaware of the evangelical and modernizing restructuring of the 'high' Church, found new and creative ways to link spirituality and politics in response to particular abuses. Vatican II, a pre-emptive effort to align the Church to the realities of the communist-capitalist polarization, although it contributed to the initiation of the dialogue between Church and politics ultimately proved impotent in solving the enigmas of Latin American and Eastern European Cold War struggles. I will argue that the popular churches on the ground, steeped in local conflicts, stood at the vanguard of change, political action and leadership, while the institutional Church often found itself reacting and following.

The theoretical framework, as well as a wealth of primary documentation, for this thesis comes from the writings of the secular and ecclesiastical intelligentsia of the period, often intimate actors in the liberation struggles in El Salvador and Poland. Some other sources include documents reflecting the institutional positions of the Church toward insurgency as well as the formation of the workers movement of Poland (*Solidarność*) and the guerilla movement in El Salvador (FMLN) and vice versa. But the main theoretical theme of this thesis is the relationship between Marxism and Christianity. By Marxism I mean not only its purely communist offshoot but also its capitalist opposite. Pope John Paul II opposed communism on the basis of its human rights abuses but remained skeptical about the capitalist model of free market and

secular society, even as he espoused democracy as a universal good; he understood Catholicism as an innate Polish identity as opposed to the imposed Russian model of Marxism. But in the context of the Latin American struggle, and in an opposition to the Western view which often took him for a stout conservative and anti-communist, Pope John Paul II was gradually, even is cautiously, becoming a champion of Liberation Theology. As a radical doctrine of liberation of the poor from dependence on explicitly capitalist modes of production and distribution of wealth, based on unrelenting Biblical instruction and political organization in Christian Base Communities, it often involved evangelical work not only on issues of economics but the relationships between poverty and political structures of oppression.

Among the secular intelligentsia in Poland the ideological system of Adam Michnik, *Solidarność* architect, activist, and certain kind of philosopher, best describes the confounded relationship between Polish civil society and the Church. Michnik bemoans the lack of progressive liberalism in Polish tradition, brought upon by the fact that Poland, existing in the 19th century as an abstract political entity held together by the Church, never experienced the proper transition from feudalism to capitalism and didn't therefore produce a proper indigenous bourgeois class.⁵ Because liberalism, which accounts for the consolidation of strong nation states in the West, according to Michnik, never developed in Poland the Polish national identity centered on the illiberal Church and the organization of the state, once firmly established after World War II, fell

⁵ Adam Michnik, *The Church and the Left* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 8.

to socialism which provided the only possible outlet for secular liberal views.⁶ I will argue that a similar model for socialism can be applied to the case of El Salvador and other Latin American countries. Here, therefore, we come upon a paradox which will remain at the center of the theoretical crux of my thesis: “the party that sought to transcend liberalism in Western Europe sought to introduce liberalism in Eastern Europe”⁷; in other words: socialism as an ideology, as opposed to its extreme institutional communist representation, should be understood, in the context of liberation struggles on the peripheries of the empires, as a liberal, democratic and progressive tradition.

I will argue, therefore, that the divergent political experiences of the West and regions of Eastern Europe and Latin America account for the fact that socialism, while it had been often portrayed, in the Western view, as explicitly opposite to the liberal democratic model, in Eastern Europe and Latin America, especially at the height of the Cold War, became the bulwark of liberalism and individualism. What of the illiberal Church, however? Michnik defends it from Communism but also warns against its political passivity and conservatism – its own historical propensity to slip into forms of cultural and social totalitarianism. As a champion of *Solidarność*, what ideology did Father Popiełuszko die for? An ironic and perplexing supposition about *Solidarność* is inescapable: the formation and insurrection of the most numerous workers’ union in all of human history (ten million strong – virtually the entire working population of Poland)

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

hearkened back to Marx's prediction of a massive socialist proletariat revolution; but the insurrection was relatively non-violent, it happened, moreover, in a country devoid of capitalist infrastructure and elite and was directed, paradoxically, against Communism and led by individual acts of heroism such as the martyrdom of Father Popiełuszko.

In Latin America, in the decades following Bishop Romero's death, his martyrdom took on the proportions of symbolic death for the masses, compatible to Jesus's biblical sacrifice. His death, while meant to silence the masses, immediately began to have the opposite effect. Romero understood the condition of poverty, so prevailing not only in his native El Salvador but all over Latin America, as an expression of the violation of human rights, a dehumanizing injustice brought upon by the quasi-oligarchic half-feudalistic half-capitalist regime of old colonial wealth and new American encroachment. A gifted preacher and unrelenting organizer, equating the theology of Christian salvation with the historical salvation of his people, Bishop Romero often abstained from explicitly political semantics and opted, instead, for the codification of agitation through the use of the Biblical language of charity, benevolence and unity. His sermons, as well as diaries and other writings, as later discussed in my thesis, were full of Biblical, rather than political, references to themes of struggle against oppression and for justice, and peace.

Political action as part of Christianity is supremely embodied, however, by the writings of Salvadoran Jesuits, participants in the struggle, three of whom also ended up

assassinated as suspected intellectual leaders of FMLN: Ignacio Ellacuría, Ignacio Martín-Baró, and Segundo Montes; the 1989 Central American University (UCA) massacre took the lives of three other Jesuits and two women activists. The UCA Jesuits expounded on theories of capitalism, democracy, and liberation, collectively subscribing to the university's primary object of pursuit: the grasp of the peculiar 'national reality' of Salvadoran life that required the recognition of a difference between 'religion as opium' and 'religion as liberating faith'.⁸ Jon Sobrino, another UCA theologian who survived the massacre only because he happened to be out of the country at the time, expanding on the Christian theme of idolatry, advanced a theory of 'idols of modernity': wealth, power, comfort, and profit for which collective and individual human rights had been sacrificed by the Salvadoran elites. His friends, the UCA Jesuits, had been killed, argued Sobrino, "because they touched the idols" of modernity.⁹

The perplexing relationship between Church, state, and civil society in the Latin American context, is best articulated by Blase Bonpane, a human rights activist engaged with various Latin American student groups and indigenous populations, peace missionary who served as priest in Guatemala, and philosopher often actively engaged in the dialogue between Christianity and Marxism. According to Bonpane the historic coexistence of the Church and various forms of imperial power and repressive regimes has resulted in the Church's appropriation of the characteristics of those regimes:

⁸ John Hassett and Hugh Lacey, eds., Towards Society that Serves Its People: The Intellectual Contribution of El Salvador's Murdered Jesuits (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1991), 6.

⁹ Ibid.

formalism, legalism, and triumphalism.¹⁰ Bonpane, too, expands on the Jesuit call for the recognition of the 'national reality', part of which is the fact that the Church, taking on the stance of non-action suiting precisely the very regimes that produce rampant poverty, reinforces a situation in which "service to the poor becomes an individual response to a subjective case and not a systematic response to an objective condition."¹¹ The Marxist diagnosis of humanity as besieged by class struggle and as having to strive toward classless society is mirrored, according to Bonpane, by the Church's abstraction of a theory called 'society free of classes'.¹² Bonpane, thus, accused the Church of its institutionalized mystification of violence as abstract evil and poverty as abstract misery to be fought against by means of abstract concepts such as peace and justice.

But Bishop Romero did not deal in abstractions. Even as the Latin American Church, convened at Puebla Conference in Mexico in 1979, formally condemning police states and capitalist abuses and meditating on the limits of Liberation Theology, reaffirming its commitment to the 'preferential option for the poor' while still insisting that there was no place for politics in the Church¹³, Bishop Romero had to bury six of his priests gunned down by paramilitary squads financed by Salvadoran oligarchy. When the Bishop, accused of being a 'communist', paid the ultimate price for his 'realist', rather than theoretical, approach to the question of poverty, the Vatican and the Polish

¹⁰ Blase Bonpane, Guerrillas of Peace: Liberation Theology and the Central American Revolution (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1991), 1.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid, 8.

¹³ Ibid, 9.

Pope, whose native land was by now embroiled in a systematic struggle between the Catholic-based Solidarność and the Polish communist regime, lingered conspicuously silent, and careful not to publically link Romero's death with concepts of political resistance.

HISTORIOGRAPHY, METHODOLOGY, AND ORGANIZATION

A brief survey of scholarship reveals that cross-continental synthesis of Cold War themes is hard to come by. There is also a rigid ideological polarization along the communist-capitalist axis disallowing fluidity and ambiguity to social identities and sociopolitical concepts, and demanding exclusive allegiance to one system over the other. The Catholic Church's doctrine, although besieged by the dilemma of reconciliation of its institutional apolitical passivity and populist political activism, is most often portrayed in a regionally specific and ideologically exclusive manner: decidedly anti-communist in Poland, and precariously pro-communist in El Salvador. Does it follow that the respective civil societies, which appropriated their popular Churches as grounds for organization and resistance, were ideologically pro-capitalist in Poland and anti-capitalist in El Salvador? My contention is that no such easy categorizations can be made, and, therefore, the aim of my thesis is to challenge such erroneous bifurcations besieging regional and ideologically inelastic representations of the Cold War paradigm. In place of local and supposedly exclusive Cold War representations, I offer a comparison and a synthesis, a result of which is a complex picture of the way apparently dissimilar societies produce strikingly similar forms of resistance and responses to oppression.

My thesis consists of three parts organized around themes of agency, hegemony, and ideology, and therefore remains throughout a mixture of socio-cultural, political, and intellectual analysis. My methodology is to approach this topic from the center to

the periphery: from the individual cases of martyrdom and their popular cults, through the formation of revolutionary civil societies in religious environments, to the ‘big picture’: issues of the Church’s engagement with Cold War ideologies. The complex relationship between individuality and social responsibility, present in liberal, Marxist, and Christian ideologies, is an underlying theme of this thesis. Paramount to this discourse is my contention that instances of individual political acts in societies where rights are not guaranteed by law, custom, or regime, are capable of endowing civic life and social bodies with non-institutionalized political agency – public opinion, and moral agency – will of the people.

The first chapter retells the stories of Bishop Romero’s and Father Popiełuszko’s martyrdoms and presents a synthesis of the respective popular churches’ engagement in Cold War *Realpolitik*. In this chapter I am particularly interested in exposing the martyrdom of popular priests as a manifestation of political agency of the masses frequenting the churches, most evidently illustrated by cults of martyrdom that often took on explicitly political forms. Jan Kubik in *The Power of Symbols Against the Symbols of Power: The Rise of Solidarity and the Fall of State Socialism in Poland* espouses the dialectical significance of martyrdom, considering it a part of collective symbolic speech¹⁴, although accomplished by the ultimate sacrifice of life of one individual priest, indeed a powerful statement of agency of the masses capable of producing, sustaining and cultivating their own unique political environment and leadership in unity with their

¹⁴ Jan Kubik, *The Power of Symbols Against the Symbols of Power: The Rise of Solidarity and the Fall of State Socialism in Poland* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 13.

particular ethical and spiritual culture. The popular cult of martyrdom outlines the parameters of what Anna L. Peterson in *Martyrdom and the Politics of Religion: Progressive Catholicism in El Salvador's Civil War* calls “practical religion” capable of projecting the agency of the people into a dialectical relationship with elite institutions of state and Church itself while providing an “ethical and existential code for the living.”¹⁵ This revolutionary agency, capable of mobilizing masses against structures of powers and ideologies is an expression of the fact, according to Jonathan Luxmoore and Jolanta Babiuch, authors of *The Vatican and the Red Flag: The Struggle for the Soul of Eastern Europe*, that “modern world functions not through governments but through people.”¹⁶ This view is also a recurring theme in Yvon Grenier’s *The Emergence of Insurgency in El Salvador: Ideology and Political Will*, which, while affirming “patrimonial-oligarchic dominion” and “secular social injustice” as the roots of Salvadoran civil war, stresses the political will or agency of the revolutionaries: “ in contemporary developing countries, insurgencies are initiated by insurgents, not by ‘countries’.”¹⁷

Through martyrology, poor, excluded or oppressed “social actors”, according to Phillip Berryman’s *The Religious Roots of Rebellion: Christians in Central American*

¹⁵ Anna L. Peterson, *Martyrdom and the Politics of Religion: Progressive Catholicism in El Salvador's Civil War* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1997), 18.

¹⁶ Jonathan Luxmoore and Jolanta Babiuch, *The Vatican and the Red Flag: The Struggle for the Soul of Eastern Europe* (London and New York: Geoffrey Chapman, 1999), xiii.

¹⁷ Yvon Grenier, *The Emergence of Insurgency in El Salvador: Ideology and Political Will* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1999), 2.

Revolutions, establish blueprints for their “grassroots level” political agency.¹⁸ One particular way in which this agency is expressed and supported by the Church, according to Hanna Diskin’s *The Seeds of Triumph: Church and State in Gomułka’s Poland*, is its ability to shape and reflect public opinion. Diskin’s discussion of the Church’s power is particularly informative to my topic, especially where discussing the readiness of the ‘militant’ popular church to publically draw lines between justice and injustice¹⁹, and when observing that “prosecution of church’s active power increased its passive power.”²⁰ This model of power distribution between state, church and people holds true, I will argue, not only structurally to martyrdom of priests but cross-regionally to Poland and El Salvador. The unique “alternative political mechanisms” existing in Poland, as discussed by Diskin, also existed in El Salvador, I will argue, and, in both places, in contrast to not only Western democracies but also Soviet plutocracies.

The second chapter recaps the basic processes of formation of civil societies in Poland and El Salvador, organized around demands for social justice and challenges to the legitimacy of the ruling regimes: for workers through Polish Solidarność Union and for the poor through Christian Base Communities in El Salvador. Here, I am mostly concerned with concepts of state hegemonic structures of power versus alternative and subversive political environments formed under the protection of the popular churches. According to Kubik, state hegemony and legitimacy in communist Poland was

¹⁸ Phillip Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion: Christians in Central American Revolutions* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1984), 2.

¹⁹ Hanna Diskin, *The Seeds of Triumph: Church and State in Gomułka’s Poland* (Budapest, Hungary and New York: Central European University Press, 2001), 206-207.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 219.

undermined specifically because of the Church's active role in building a "culture of social activism" against the control of means of production, communication, and coercion by single political elite.²¹ My contribution to this argument is that the historical role of the Church in Poland and in El Salvador is similar in several ways: because both countries experienced endemic political violence, holocausts of conquest and traumas of economic colonialism the Church had taken on the roles of producer and preserver of national identities and political cultures contrasting those of oppressive oligarchies and tyrannical regimes. Historically, therefore, in Poland and El Salvador subversive journalism and scholarship, student and clandestine organizing, as well as worker and peasant unionism – activities vitally important to formation of vibrant civil societies, belonged to what Diskin calls "mediatory capacity"²² of the Church.

In *The Church, Dictatorships, and Democracy in Latin America* Jeffrey Klaiber asserts that in Latin America the Church has taken a role of "civil corporation" whose explicitly moral legitimacy does not come from the state or politics but from religion and history, and works in contrast to legitimacy based on "traditional charismatic authority" or "modern democracy based on the concept of equality before the law".²³ By the time of the 1980s massive social movements both Poland and El Salvador experienced very little in a way of the beneficent modern democracy and a lot in the way of the destructive charismatic authority, hence the autonomic position of the Church. The struggle for what David Ost in *Solidarity and the Politics of Anti-Politics: Opposition and*

²¹ Kubik, 11.

²² Diskin, 226.

²³ Jeffrey Klaiber, S.J., *The Church, Dictatorships, and Democracy in Latin America* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1998), 4.

Reform in Poland since 1968 calls the “third road” political system “centered on neither state nor the market but on the public sphere of a strong, pluralist, and independent civil society”²⁴ would have been impossible without the entrenchment of the popular Catholic Church into the fabric of society. This is true of Poland as well as for El Salvador, despite their different structures of state hegemony present throughout history. In *Marxism and Christianity: The Quarrel and the Dialogue in Poland* Józef Tischner, although equating the successful carving out of political space for freedom with the Christian “spirit of resistance”, also contends that the formation of anti-communist civil society in Poland was a “success of a nation” rather than the Church or a result of failure of Marxist-socialist doctrine.²⁵ I will argue to the contrary, however, that the challenge to state power structures and image of legitimacy came precisely from the failure of Polish Communism as well as from the popular Church’s resolute support of civil society. Moreover, I’ll argue, the similar convulsion of circumstances – the spread of Liberation Theology and the failure of the clientelist quasi-capitalist, oligarchic patrimony of the state to meet the even most basic needs of the working poor -- accounted for the civil strife in El Salvador.

The third chapter deliberates on ‘myths of modernity’: socialist and neo-liberal ideologies energizing the communist- capitalist clash and the involvement of the institutional Catholic Church in the conflict. In this chapter the main argument of my thesis comes a full circle: neither revolutionary civil society strove to attain to the

²⁴ David Ost, *Solidarity and the Politics of Anti-Politics: Opposition and Reform in Poland since 1968* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 15.

²⁵ Józef Tischner, *Marxism and Christianity: The Quarrel and the Dialogue in Poland* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1981), 161.

extreme opposite of the political spectrum in which their struggles have been framed by the specious Cold War ideological bifurcation. The ideals of modernization, secularization and social justice, mantras of both communist and capitalist orders, which failed spectacularly in the peripheral countries, were successfully replaced in Poland and El Salvador by ideologies of sustainable progress based on Christian values. Both Liberation Theology and the ideology of *Solidarność* espoused progressive neo-Christianity versus the secularism of Marxism and neo-liberalism. How do you separate church and state in societies in which the Church provides the only viable arena for political participation and the only logical alternative to failed mechanisms of social justice? In his metaphysical interpretation of modernity and Christianity in Latin America – *Beyond Philosophy: Ethics, History, Marxism, and Liberation Theology*, Enrique Dussel states: “all economics is an ethics”²⁶ and again all “oppression is not abstract but material.”²⁷ The Church’s role in the extremities of the Cold War struggles, therefore, was to bring humanism back into economics and politics. The institutional Church’s insistence on non-involvement in political conflicts went hand in hand with what George Weigel in *The Final Revolution: The Resistance Church and the Collapse of Communism* calls the perceptions of failures of the modern “tyranny of the political”²⁸ The popular church’s involvement with the clandestine organizing and resistance, support for free intellectual discourse, and several instances of martyrdom, especially in El Salvador,

²⁶ Enrique Dussel, *Beyond Philosophy: Ethics, History, Marxism, and Liberation Theology* (Lanham, Boulder, New York and Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 15.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 14.

²⁸ George Weigel, *The Final Revolution: The Resistance Church and the Collapse of Communism* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 12.

inspired a certain “revolution of the human spirit” and constructed a novel paradigm for “politics to end all politics.”²⁹

Why the focus on religion in Cold War history? Because it provides profoundly meaningful, yet so often neglected, category of analysis for understanding the complex ways in which specific societies in peripheral countries organized their political identities and activities, frequently irrespectively of or explicitly in contrast to the procedural platitudes, dogmatic ideological truisms and ceremonial reproaches characterizing official conflicts between centers of power such as the Soviet Union and the United States. My emphasis on the Catholic Church as a political entity, intended as a unique contribution to the Cold War retrospective, is aimed at illustrating the way in which the conceptual inflexibility of the Cold War *Realpolitik* catapulted the Church, especially in its populist forms and because of its ability to successfully formulate a ‘third option’, into a position of leadership for popular uprisings. Although arising under diverse historical, socio-cultural, economic and political circumstances, civil societies in Poland and in El Salvador during Cold War strove for similar objectives: social justice, sustainable economy, fair distribution of resources, and certain ethics of everyday life in which human dignity and welfare, rather than economic accumulation or profit, would have become a paramount purpose in government, ethics which were absent from both the communist and capitalist commercial models and socialist and neo-liberal politics.

²⁹ Ibid, 13.

CHAPTER ONE

Cult of Martyrs as Agency of People – Spiritual Politics of ‘Popular Church’

If they ever take our radio, suspend our newspaper, silence us, put to death all of us priests, bishop included, and you are left alone – a people without priests – then each of you will have to be God’s microphone. Each of you will have to be a messenger, a prophet. The church will always exist as long as even one baptized person is left alive. (Oscar Arnulfo Romero)³⁰

The position of the Church will always be the same as the position of the people. The Church means not only the clergy but also the people – those million-strong masses who form the Church; and when the people suffer, when the people are persecuted then the Church shares in their suffering. The mission of the Church is to be with the people every day, to participate in their joys, their sorrows, and their sufferings. (Father Jerzy Popiełuszko)³¹

In Poland and El Salvador martyrdom of priests became an impetus for spiritual politics to which the respective ruling regimes had no appropriate answer. Because the murders were perpetrated on people who were so conspicuously non-violent and yet so tirelessly activist in defense of justice for the oppressed, the regimes orchestrating the murders found themselves politically defeated by their own methods. Romero and Popiełuszko preached spiritual politics to the masses from moral and ethical heights to which the Salvadoran oligarchy and Polish politburo had no claim. Their deaths only intensified that effect: the orphaned masses, united in cults of their martyrs and radicalized by the indiscriminate and unapologetic violence, became the repositories of the political will of their fallen heroes. At the same time, Romero and Popiełuszko also stood at the vanguard of resisting the Catholic Church’s doctrine of political non-involvement. What the Church understood as politics the priests understood as their occupational duties. In El Salvador, Romero’s assassination was preceded by the

³⁰ Quoted in Sobrino, Witnesses to the Kingdom, 35.

³¹ Quoted in Sikorska, Jerzy Popiełuszko, 1.

murders of Jesuit priests, catechists, activists, nuns, and community organizers on which the Bishop commented thus:

I am glad, brothers and sisters, that they have murdered priests in this country, because it would be very sad if in a country where they are murdering the people so horrifically, there were no priests among the victims. It is a sign that the church has become truly incarnate in the problems of the people.³²

In Poland, in an attempt to silence and disband *Solidarność* and forestall the possibility of Soviet military invasion, on December 13th, 1981 the Communist authorities declared martial law, curfews, and strict censure of press and other media, as well as arrested and detained in internment camps thousands of union organizers and members.

Popiełuszko, undaunted by the admonition of the Polish Primate Józef Glemp to stay out of the conflict, made it his explicit occupation to attend court trials of the workers, visit them in jail, and support their families, explaining:

The work of the priest is in a way an extension of work of Christ. A priest is taken from the people and ordained for the people in order to serve them. So the duty of the priest is to be always with the people in both good and bad times. The duty of a priest is to be with the people when they need him the most, when they are wronged, degraded, and maltreated.³³

In similar, fashion Bishop Romero helped to organize and supported a grass-roots human rights organization COMADRES: El Comité de Madres y Familiares de Presos, Desaparecidos y Asesinados Políticos de El Salvador “Monseñor Oscar Arnulfo Romero” (Committee of Mothers and Families of the Disappeared, Murdered, and Politically Imprisoned of El Salvador).³⁴

The Archbishop of San Salvador Oscar Arnulfo Romero was assassinated while celebrating mass in a hospital chapel on March 24, 1980. His death came after several

³² Quoted in Jon Sobrino, *Witnesses to the Kingdom*, 96.

³³ Quoted in Sikorska, *Jerzy Popiełuszko*, 33.

³⁴ Jean Boler, “the Mother’s Committee of El Salvador: national Human Rights Activists,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 7, No. 4 (Nov. 1985): 543.

fiery sermons delivered in face of growing repression and violence. On February 17, 1980, for example, the Bishop, expressing his opposition to the military aid the United States provided to the Salvadoran authorities, thus commented on the institutionalization of violence in El Salvador:

Neither the Government Junta nor the Christian Democrats govern this country. Political power is in the hands of the armed forces which are unscrupulous in their use of power. They only know how to repress the people and defend the interests of the Salvadorian oligarchy.³⁵

Death threats became common. Two weeks before the assassination, while the Bishop celebrated a mass for Mario Zamora Rivas, a leader of the Christian Democratic Party, who was assassinated because he criticized the Christian Democrats for joining centrist and leftist parties in Government Junta in December of 1979³⁶, a bomb, aimed at killing Romero, was planted by the altar but failed to go off.³⁷ Few months before the bombing attempt the audacious Archbishop refused protection when it was offered to him by the government:

I wouldn't accept the protection, because I wanted to run the same risks that the people are running; it would be a pastoral anti-testimony if I were very secure, while my people are so insecure. I took advantage to ask him [the President] for protection for the people in certain areas where military blocks, military operations...sow so much terror.³⁸

The day before his death the Bishop pleaded with Salvadoran soldiers for the lives of innocent people and admonished them to stop the brother-on-brother violence: " I beseech you, I beg you, I order you, in the name of God, to stop the repression!"³⁹ The death squad responsible for Romero's death, according to the UN Truth and

³⁵ Quoted in United Nations Security Council, Annex, From Madness to Hope: the 12-year war in El Salvador: Report of the Commission on the Truth for El Salvador, S/25500, 5-8 (New York: United States Institute of Peace Library, 1993), 121.

³⁶ Ibid, 132.

³⁷ Ibid, 121.

³⁸ Quoted in Peterson, 62.

³⁹ United Nations Security Council, Annex, From Madness to Hope, 121.

Reconciliation Commission, was ordered to carry out the assassination by former military Major Roberto D'Aubuisson, known for notorious and indiscriminate violence – foreshadowing the reality of life in El Salvador for a decade to come:

Between 1980 and 1991, human rights violations were committed in a systematic and organized manner by groups acting as death squads. The members of such groups usually wore civilian clothing, were heavily armed, operated clandestinely and hid their affiliation and identity. They abducted members of the civilian population and of rebel groups. They tortured their hostages, were responsible for their disappearance and usually execute them.⁴⁰

Bishop Romero, however, was executed in plain view, in front of the congregation, by a single bullet fired from the back of the chapel. On March 30, 1980, San Salvador came out to the streets to bid farewell to their fallen Bishop. Some 50,000 people, mostly poor women and children, attended the funeral, protected only by a “contingent of Boy Scouts as security guards”⁴¹. Bombs went off and gun shots fired into the congregation while “Mexico’s Cardinal Ernesto Corripio Ahumado, the representative of Pope John Paul II at the funeral, was delivering his tribute to slain archbishop.”⁴² Forty people were killed and untold dozens injured.

In the end of the same year, on December 2, 1980, four American churchwomen involved in pastoral and civic activities in El Salvador – Ita Ford, Maura Clarke, Dorothy Kazel, and Jean Donovan, involved in pastoral and civic activities in El Salvador – were detained by the National Guard of El Salvador. They “were taken to an isolated spot and subsequently executed by being shot at close range.”⁴³ In November of 1989, six Spanish-born Jesuit activist priests were slain at UCA (Central American University José

⁴⁰ Ibid, 124.

⁴¹ Christopher Dickey, “40 Killed in San Salvador: Bombs, Bullets Disrupt Archbishop’s Funeral,” Washington Post, 31 Mar 1980, A1.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ United Nations Security Council, Annex, From Madness to Hope, 56.

Simeón Cañas): university rector and professor of philosophy Father Ignacio Ellacuria, vice-rector and director of psychology department Father Ignacio Martín-Baro, professor of theology Father Amando López, director of Fe y Alegría (Faith and Joy) international religious education program Joaquín López y López, director of the Institute of Human Rights at the university Father Segundo Montes, and theology professor and assistant director of the Monsignor Romero center at the university Father Juan Ramón Moreno.⁴⁴ The American churchwomen and Jesuit intellectuals, although clearly belonging to elite strata of society, represented the ‘popular church’ and radical Christianity. Because of the fact that the Church was the single most important institution of colonial power and postcolonial politics among the poor and common folk for five centuries, “the only intellectuals who are close to the popular masses”, the priests and catechists, became natural leaders for the people.⁴⁵

In Poland, in similar fashion, the Church, established there in 966 A.D., was the major repository of common identity. On October 19, 1984, Father Jerzy Popiełuszko was expected at a “mass for the working people” in Bydgoszcz, some sixty kilometers from Warsaw, in which he headed the parish of St. Stanisław Kostka, a revered Polish saint. On his way to Bydgoszcz, the activist priest who by that time had received several death threats and had been incarcerated and interrogated because of his ties to *Solidarność*, was stopped repeatedly by traffic police; after being observed in Bydgoszcz he disappeared somewhere on his way back to Warsaw.⁴⁶ The next day news of his

⁴⁴ “The Six Salvadoran Priests Slain by Uniformed Gunmen,” New York Times, 17 Nov 1989, A13.

⁴⁵ Grenier, 130.

⁴⁶ Sikorska, 84.

disappearance spread and people began congregating in the Kostka church praying for his safe return. But he never did return safely; his tortured and mutilated body was discovered in the Wisła river ten days later.⁴⁷ Unlike the deaths of Salvadoran priests and catechists, which were investigated for years and brought to conclusions only after the end of the civil war, largely through the efforts of various, often international, human rights groups, the death of Father Jerzy Popiełuszko was investigated immediately. There was a fear, on the part of the Polish government as well as the Catholic Church, that his murder would become an occasion for massive social unrest. Solidarność was, by that time, pushed into underground clandestine organization and although institutionally weakened and officially non-existent, it was deeply entrenched into society. In fact, the investigation and trial of the Popiełuszko abductors and killers became a landmark case, an unprecedented attempt at justice by the communist regime, spurred by fear of open rebellion by tens of thousands of Solidarność activists and sympathizers praying at churches, mounting monuments of flowers and candles at altars, and endlessly congregating in non-violent but massive vigils in memory of the slain priest of the people.

The institutional Church in Poland had its hands full in trying to appease the crowds and in 'cooperating' with the government. There were no signs of police at the priest's funeral; the government had no choice but to trust that the 'popular church' was going to restrain itself. The primate of the Polish Catholic Church Cardinal Glemp, desperately trying to control tears when gazing at the coffin of one of his priests

⁴⁷ Sikorska, 98.

murdered by agents of communist authorities, spoke to the congregation in a conciliatory tone:

Let the strangely latent instinct for self-preservation be awakened and let Poles of different social groups meet not crying over the coffin of the martyred priest, but at the table of dialogue to strive toward peace. The church has wanted this for a long time and the church repeats this desire today.⁴⁸

But the leadership of Solidarność too, attempting to seize the moment for its own political goal of resurrection, chose the peaceful path. Lech Wałęsa, the charismatic worker-leader of the movement, speaking directly to Father Popiełuszko also addressed the crowd during the funeral mass for the slain priest:

We bid you farewell, servant of God, pledging that we shall never bow to oppression. [...] We shall act in solidarity with service to the fatherland and we shall respond with truth to lies and with good to evil. We bid farewell to you solemnly and with dignity and hope for a just social peace in our country. Rest in peace. Solidarity is alive, for you have given your life for it.⁴⁹

Since the 1980 massive strikes at Poland's leading shipyards and factories organized by Solidarność, and the subsequent proclamation of martial law in December 1981, Poland's government operated in the fashion of a military junta headed by General Wojciech Jaruzelski and his enormous security apparatus. But the general chose to fight Solidarity with institutional rather than military means, and quickly denounced the murder of father Popiełuszko as political provocation by communist hardliners opposed to his policies of reconciliation."⁵⁰ That the country never spiraled into a civil war was also the result of fear of direct Soviet intervention. The Polish people were very much aware of their precarious situation vis-à-vis the government and the Soviet power, especially since Soviet intervention was bound to provoke American reaction; this was

⁴⁸ Michael T. Kaufman, "200,000 at Rites for Polish Priest; Cardinal Lauds Him as Martyr," New York Times 4 November 1984, 16.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 2.

⁵⁰ Luxmoore and Babiuch, 260.

the time of immense proliferation of nuclear arsenals on both sides of the Iron Curtain and the threat of nuclear war seemed real.

The provocation of the Popiełuszko murder backfired just as catastrophically as the assassination Archbishop Romero in El Salvador; instead of silencing opposition the regimes produced a certain spirit of martyrdom among popular masses. The presence of the Polish Pope too endowed the Church with an air of martyr-like crusading. The Pope, whom the world immediately embraced as the first truly modern patriarch of the Catholic Church, was immensely popular on all continents. An avid soccer player, a poet, and devotee to Mother Mary, and a man of a warm and engaging personality, he was equally popular among women, men, youth and children. He spoke several languages fluently and always made a point of addressing congregations in the language of the country in which he visited. He'd kneel and kiss the earth when getting off the airplane whether in Africa or America. He traveled tirelessly, attempting to refashion the Catholic Church into a modern ecumenical church capable of embracing not only different denominations of the Christian faith but also other faiths. In May of 1981, just as the conflict between the Polish government and Solidarność was intensifying and the "Church representatives were informed that Soviet troop movements had increased to and from the German Democratic Republic"⁵¹, Pope John Paul II almost became a martyr for his Church too – he was shot through the abdomen by Turkish assassin Mehmet Ali Agca while surrounded by a crowd of thousands of pilgrims in St. Peter's square. The assassination attempt, especially because of the conflict in Poland, was

⁵¹ Ibid, 233.

immediately thought to be the work of the Kremlin. But when Agca started to point fingers to his collaborators, the Italian secret services, as well as American CIA, were implicated as plotting to provoke a massive uprising in Poland.⁵² The investigation never brought satisfactory answers but this provocation failed too and when the Pope recovered, his travels, pilgrimages, and visits with heads of states as well as various national churches took on an expressively martyr-like character.

Concern for the common people became, therefore, in the midst of Cold War struggles in Poland and El Salvador, the main preoccupation of the popular church. In both countries there was no expressed need for evangelization and conversion: that had been accomplished through centuries of the Church's presence among the poor and the marginalized. Archbishop Romero and Father Popiełuszko did not seek to become martyrs, but they resolved to live out their particular ideologies of liberation of their peoples to their logical conclusions; their duty was to remain with their flocks no matter what the consequences. Through such activist priests the Church, therefore, resisted the ideological bifurcation of Cold War politics, and concentrated, instead, on pastoral work. Before the onset of the Cold war, the Polish popular church went through a sort of training in pastoral work in circumstances of the extreme violence of World War II. What connects the Polish and the Salvadoran experience of Christian martyrdom is precisely this: although perhaps removed in time and differentiated by specific conditions, both populations, and therefore both popular churches, experienced ferocious and indiscriminate violence.

⁵² Ibid, 234.

The Cold War was, by no means, the first occasion for the Polish popular church's involvement in resistance and experience of violence. In World War II, Catholic clergy, scattered among occupied cities and rural guerilla bands, provided both moral and material support to resistant Poles. Polish priests also personally experienced the horror of Holocaust. Most of the Nazi concentration camps were built on Polish territory, additionally, Poland, especially its central and eastern parts, was a theater for the Soviet and Nazi military occupations. In Auschwitz concentration camp Father Maksymilian Kolbe, one of the figures memorialized by the Westminster Abbey tribute to Christian martyrdom, gave his life in place of a man unknown to him. In socialist Poland, his martyrdom took on a specifically political significance, even though his act of self-sacrifice expressed an explicitly apolitical attitude; as an unmarried priest he simply gave his life for a man of whom he only supposed could have been a husband and a father. The post-war socialist propaganda made much use of the symbolic value of work for the common good but Father Kolbe's sacrifice transcended both the socialist communitarian view on value of work and the individualist liberal system of beliefs of work for the improvement of one's economic and social position. In words of Józef Tischner, the official chaplain of Solidarność, "Father Kolbe's deed shows us not the value of work, but the values which work should serve. It unveils a sphere of values which work should serve. In this way, it also demonstrates the true order of human hopes."⁵³

⁵³ Tischner, 73.

In the decade after World War II in Poland, the communist authorities began the offensive to rid Polish schools and cultural institutions from the influence of the Catholic Church. Polish Primate at the time, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, firmly and vocally opposed the secularization of public life. The Polish politburo arrested the Cardinal and kept him detained in an internment camp for three years. An avid proponent of the philosophy of mutual understanding between the Polish Catholic Church and communist regime, which was signed into an official agreement in 1950, the Cardinal, even in internment, prepared himself for the work ahead:

Many a time a government circles have accused me of wanting to become a martyr. The desire was far from my mind, although I did not exclude the possibility. From the very beginning of my work, I had taken the stand that the Church in Poland had already shed too much blood in German concentration camps to afford to squander the lives of its surviving priests. Martyrdom is undoubtedly an honorable thing, but God leads its Church not only along an extraordinary way, that of martyrdom, but also along an ordinary one, that of apostolic work. Indeed, I was of the opinion that the modern world needed another kind of martyrdom – the martyrdom of work, not of blood.⁵⁴

Cardinal Wyszyński eventually died in June of 1981, just a few months after the assassination attempt on the Pope, and after over three long decades of capable and decisive stewardship of the Polish Catholic Church through the labyrinth of Cold War politics. He is forever known, among Poles, as the ‘Primate of Millennium’. Father Kolbe’s death and Cardinal Wyszyński’s position on martyrdom demonstrate that, either in its most extreme form of actual sacrifice of one’s life or in the form of pastoral work, the concept of martyrdom was deeply ingrained in the Polish psyche even before the onset of the Cold War and represented a kind of tool in the arsenal of spiritual priests-activists as well as in the collective psyche of the faithful.

⁵⁴ Stefan Wyszyński, *A Freedom Within: The Prison Notes of Stefan Cardinal Wyszyński* trans. Barbara Krzywicki-Herbert and Reverend Walter J. Ziemba (San Diego, New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1983), 17.

In El Salvador the radicalization of the symbols of martyrdom followed a different path but arrived at the same conclusions. There too, there was little need for evangelization, but an overwhelming need for pastoral work. To Archbishop Romero pastoral work, above all, meant, education ‘to be more rather than to have more’. Although witnessing rampant poverty all around him, Romero did not see salvation for the poor in simply providing for their economic needs. He envisioned building a society based on Christian values of work rather than work for its own sake as an ethic of life aimed at accumulation of wealth:

The church must propose an education that makes people agents of their own development, protagonists of history, not a passive compliant mass, but human beings able to display their intelligence, their creativity, their desire for the common service of the nation. Education must recognize that the development of the individual and of peoples is the advancement of each and all from less-human to more human conditions.⁵⁵

This is Liberation Theology, as ‘practical religion’, in a nutshell. Preceding the Medellín and the Puebla Conferences of Latin American Bishops but working within the framework of the Second Vatican Council, Gustavo Gutierrez, a Peruvian priest, published, in 1973, what proved to be an exceedingly influential book *The Theology of Liberation*. For Gutierrez, just like for Kolbe, Romero, and Popiełuszko, the central preoccupation of the Church is a specific man as, first and foremost, a human being with common human problems of attaining sustenance, safety, and freedom rather than some abstract subject of Church’s ecclesiastical projects. The challenge for the Church, argued Gutierrez,

does not come primarily from the man who does not believe, but from the *man who is not a man*, who is not recognized as such by the existing social order: he is in the ranks of the poor, the exploited; he is the man who is systematically and legally despoiled of his being as a man, who

⁵⁵ Oscar Romero, *The Violence of Love: The Pastoral Wisdom of Archbishop Oscar Romero* trans. James R. Brockman, S.J. (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1988), 36.

scarcely knows that he *is* a man. His challenge is not aimed first at our religious world, but at our *economic, social, political, and cultural world*; therefore it is an appeal for the revolutionary transformation of the very bases of a dehumanizing society.⁵⁶

The often repeated charge against Liberation Theology as a utopian fantasy, and therefore inherently Marxist, does not take into account its inherent pragmatism – its “utopian imagination relentlessly searches out what is possible in even apparently hopeless situations.”⁵⁷

Therefore, Liberation Theology does not seem utopian because its goals are unreasonable or unattainable, but because the institutionalization of poverty and marginalization make them appear so. With the ideology of liberalism it shares its commitment to individual responsibility for self-improvement, while with socialism its obligation to common good, but unlike either of the two, it makes a central issue of human dignity. Precisely the same can be said about Pope Paul II’s philosophy of solidarity, on which the Polish Solidarność was ultimately based. The pragmatism of both of those systems of belief although formulated in seemingly very different societies and under dissimilar circumstances, lays in its undaunted confrontation with uncomfortable realities of socio-political and economic systems for which accumulation of wealth and profit trample on human dignity and endeavor to accomplish the former with only theoretical regard for the latter. As such, theologies of liberation and solidarity

⁵⁶ Gustavo Gutierrez, “Liberation, Theology, and Proclamation,” in Quentin L. Quade, ed., The Pope and Revolution: John Paul II Confronts Liberation Theology (Washington, D.C.: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1982), 29.

⁵⁷ James b. Nickoloff, “Church of the Poor: The Ecclesiology of Gustavo Gutierrez,” Theological Studies 54, no. 3 (Sept. 1993), 516.

point to the ways in which communism and capitalism degenerate into systems of amassing power and capital by a chosen few.

The utility of martyrdom as a symbolic political power of the masses rested, therefore, in its insistence on values of human dignity as the highest good and in its unique ability to guide and generate public opinion. In systems in which the political power, and therefore the authority to produce and control resources and channels of communication, was usurped by monopolies and powerful but exclusive interest groups, it provided alternative forms of political representation for the common folk. While assassinations of priests and catechists diminished the Church's 'active power' they enhanced its 'passive symbolic power' exponentially:

Martyrs dramatize the feasibility of defying an oppressor. The martyr demonstrates that defiance is thinkable and doable through the challenge of the superordinate, oppressive power. He or she breaks the tacit acceptance of established authority and its right to determine public policy by decree.⁵⁸

The martyrdom of Father Popiełuszko, as well as Archbishop Romero, the Jesuit priests and churchwomen, gave people power in the form of choosing how they would react. On October 30, 1984, when the news came to St. Stanisław Kostka church in Warsaw that the mutilated body of Father Popiełuszko was found in the river, the congregation, which, by that time, had held a prayerful vigil in the church for ten days, was no doubt moved to anger; Father Lewek, one of the thirty priests keeping vigil along with the people, asked the faithful to remember Jesus's non-violent grief after the death of Lazarus. In the words of father Lewek this is how the congregation behaved in reply:

⁵⁸ Eugene Weiner and Anita Weiner, The Martyr's Conviction (Atlanta, Georgia: The Scholar's Press, 1990), 56.

Something very moving happened. The crying crowd managed to show that they forgive. Three times they repeated after the priest, “And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive....” It was a Christian answer to the un-Christian deed of the murderers.⁵⁹

While the repressive regimes operated and enforced their authority through the ‘culture of fear’, the Churches became spaces of freedom in which society and individual human beings, even when faced with assassinations and persecutions, were presented with choices and, thus, endowed with dignity.

Just as there always existed what Peterson called a “dialectical relationship between sacred and secular history”⁶⁰ – in the case of Christianity the sacred history is founded on the biblical story of social activism and not only spiritual but political martyrdom of the original and ultimate martyr: Jesus, there was, in the case of Poland and El Salvador a dialectical relationship between sacred ethics and civic behavior. Although, as Peterson pointed out, social scientists aren’t always able to understand self-sacrificing behaviors it appears that “contextualized understanding of repression”⁶¹, as provided by Christian social stories of martyrdom, provided a necessary symbolic ground for reconciliation to the possibility of violence and death if need be for the common good. In martyrdom’s symbolic field the psychologies of individualism and communitarianism were reconfigured to preserve, at all costs, the human dignity of individuals and civic groups:

Through his or her death, the martyr makes believable those abstract principles that lie at the root of human connectedness, such as kingship, religious belief, national or ethnic solidarity, or the more universal principle of ‘humanity.’ We are forced to take note of the martyr’s conviction because it appeared true, valid, and convincing enough to warrant self-sacrifice.⁶²

⁵⁹ Quoted in Weigel, 150.

⁶⁰ Peterson, 81.

⁶¹ Peterson, 131.

⁶² Weiner and Weiner, 52.

'Contextualization of repressions' for Poland and El Salvador meant the establishment of symbolic dialectical relationships between cases of Christian martyrdom and collectively owned national histories of experiences of tyranny.

By assassinating priests and catechists the autocratic governments created vacuums for the resurfacing of memories of bygone suffering. The Cold war struggles in Poland and El Salvador became grounds for the reemerging of collective memories of past experiences of oppression and violence. In El Salvador it was the memory of 'La Matanza' – a paramount event in El Salvador's social and political history: the 1932 massacre of Farabundo Martí's insurgents along with unwarranted and unprecedented murder of some two percent of the national population of El Salvador (some 30,000 people, mostly indigenous peasants).⁶³ Farabundo Martí, after whom the FMLN had been named, was a communist leader of the Regional Federation of Salvadoran Workers in the 1920s and fought alongside a Nicaraguan guerilla leader Augusto César Sandino (hence the Nicaraguan Sandinistas of 1980s).⁶⁴ In late 1931 Martí organized a communist-led revolt against the oligarchic government's lack of response to catastrophic land shortages and general economic misery brought about by the single crop economy; in El Salvador, this was devoted to coffee and was both enormously profitable to landowning families and abusive to peasants.⁶⁵ The massacre created the original 'culture of fear' in El Salvador: indigenous populations, for fear of repression, largely abandoned their native dress, Nahua language, and customs and endeavored to

⁶³ Peterson, 27.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 26.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 26.

adopt the culture of *ladinos* – thus contemporary El Salvador lacks distinctly indigenous populations recognizable by cultures.⁶⁶ Salvadoran peasantry was, therefore, a repository of a never healed historical wound which, in the context of the Cold War civil struggle, resurfaced.

In December of 1981, an infantry battalion of the Salvadoran army descended on the village of El Mozote and after separating men, women, and children systematically killed all inhabitants of the village – some one thousand people.⁶⁷ Several similar massacres took place in El Salvador throughout the 1980s and mirrored in context and character other Central American Cold War patterns of violence and conflicts; the impoverished peasantry was considered communist by affiliation to guerilla movements and therefore was indiscriminately eliminated. For the Salvadoran peasantry, therefore, not much has changed between 1920s and 1980s – between La Matanza and El Mozote, aside from one paramount development: while the Catholic Church remained complicit in oligarchic tyranny throughout the 19th century and first half of the 20th, after the second Vatican Council and especially in its popular form, it slowly turned its face toward ‘the poor’. By the time of the Salvadoran civil war the Church produced an impressive Catholic intelligentsia, such as the Jesuits murdered at UCA in 1989, and an army of priests and catechists working, and dying, among and for the poor. In 1977 *The Washington Post* thus reported on “Latin America’s Outspoken Church”:

⁶⁶ Ibid, 27.

⁶⁷ United Nations Security Council, Annex, [From Madness to Hope](#), 109.

A few priests can be murdered and some bishops sent into exile. But how can the entire organization be stamped out? And how can the *campesinos* be stopped from turning to the Church when they see it suddenly concerned with economic development rather than merely dispensing the sacraments? Latin American governments can create martyrs, but history shows that the Church only grows stronger when its members are willing to die for it. The irony of Latin America is that, as its generals and dictators attack the Church in the name of national security and in defense against communism, they are imitating and even surpassing the brutality of Eastern European and Asian regimes that truly are Communist.⁶⁸

In the Polish collective psyche the 1940 massacre at Katyń bared similar symbolic function to Salvadoran La Matanza. The communist regime attempted, after World War II, to silence the memory of Stalinist atrocities, especially through erasing the ‘true history’ of the unfolding of the war on Polish territory from school textbooks, press, and other media. But there were too many people who remembered what happened: on September 17, 1939 Stalin’s Red Army entered Poland from the east; this was not yet an ‘offensive for liberation’ but an aggression similar to Nazi occupation. Thus the young Polish Republic, brought back to existence as an independent state only at the conclusion of World War I in 1918, along with its Common Army, was hard pressed to defend its territory from Stalin’s and Hitler’s war machines. In the spring of 1940, in an effort to weaken the Polish resolve to become an actor in the war theatre, Stalin ordered the arrest and execution of top Polish military leadership. Thus, at Katyń’s forests near Smoleńsk, some fifteen thousands of military officers and members of Polish intelligentsia were executed and buried in massive unmarked graves. Neither the Soviet authorities nor the Polish communist regime ever admitted to the truth. The Katyń massacre was officially silenced until the 1990s and functioned as a taboo as long as the Communist Soviet Union existed. The word was that several priests serving as

⁶⁸ Colman McCarthy, “Latin America’s Outspoken Church,” [The Washington Post](#), 21 July 1977, A19.

chaplains in the Polish Common Army also perished at Katyń. In 1970s when the Polish civil society awoke to protests against the communist regime one of its major grievances was the silencing of the truth about Katyń. In 1979, on the 40th anniversary of the Nazi and Soviet occupations of Poland several churches in the biggest cities in Poland held masses commemorating the massacre of the ‘flower of the Polish nation’ as workers and students demanded a hoisting of a symbolic cross at Powązki cemetery in Warsaw to properly acknowledge the Stalinist crime against Polish military and intellectual leadership.⁶⁹

The silencing of the Katyń massacre completely undermined and delegitimized the authority of the Soviet regime and its puppet communist government in Poland. The Kremlin and the communist PZPR – Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza (United Worker’s Party of Poland) held no moral authority over the Polish collective psyche. In the shipyards of Gdynia and Gdańsk, where Wałęsa and other Polish workers organized massive strikes under *Solidarność* in August of 1980, memories of Katyń and other repressions reverberated through the language of the non-violent rebellion. In Gdańsk’s “Lenin” shipyard a wooden cross was placed in the hall by the workers, ironically right next to a marble bust of Lenin placed there by the communist authorities, in commemoration of four shipyard workers shot dead by the authorities in December of 1970.⁷⁰ Gate Two of the shipyard, where the killings happened, became the spot from which the *Solidarność* leadership communicated with authorities and the nation. Here, Wałęsa, proudly displaying a lapel pin with the image of the Polish Black Madonna of

⁶⁹ Kubik, 222.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 196.

Częstochowa – the most important Polish shrine comparable in its meaning and popularity perhaps only to the Mexican shrine of Guadalupe – spoke of worker's demands and prayed for the murdered and persecuted. When the authorities denied the worker's demand for the hoisting of an official monument dedicated to commemorating the deaths of the four workers killed in the 1970 strikes, one of the members of Solidarność replied:

We are haggling over dead heroes like blind baggers under the lamp post. You're talking about planning problems... people have been waiting for a monument to fifteen thousand Polish soldiers murdered by the Soviet government in Katyń forty years... I beg your pardon forty years ago... How much longer?⁷¹

Thus the collective memories of Katyń and worker's demands for social justice converged. For Polish people the silencing of Katyń and other atrocities testified to the real character of the communist regime and no amount of carefully crafted propaganda could erase the obvious truth that communists were liars. In the same fashion the Salvadoran La Matanza and the atrocities of the 1980s civil war converged in the collective Salvadoran psyche as evidence of the inherently inhumane and traitorous character of the oligarchic-military complex that ruled El Salvador for much of the twentieth century. The social revolution in Poland, much like in El Salvador, became therefore much more than a movement for political representation and economic and social justice – it became a 'revolution of spirit' in which Christian values, morality and ethics became tangible political principles. Before I turn to the examination of the ways in which the popular Catholic Church, alongside popular cults of Christian and civic martyrdom, helped to organize civil societies in Poland (comprised mostly of workers,

⁷¹ Quoted in Kubik, 185-186.

students, and Catholic intelligentsia) and in El Salvador (peasants, students, and Catholic intelligentsia) it is fitting to close this chapter with the most famous quote from Archbishop Romero, transcribed from a conversation he held with Guatemalan newsman José Calderón Salazar two weeks before he died:

I have often been threatened with death. I must tell you as a Christian, I do not believe in death without resurrection. *If I am killed, I shall arise in the Salvadoran people.* I say so without boasting, with the greatest humility. [...] Martyrdom is a grace of God that I do not believe I deserve. But if God accepts the sacrifice of my life, let my blood be a seed of freedom and the sign that hope will soon be a reality. [...] You may say, if they succeed in killing me, that I pardon and bless those who do it. Would, indeed, that they might be convinced that they waste their time. A bishop will die, but God's church, which is the people, will never parish.⁷²

Martyrdom's power in challenging oppressive regimes in Poland and El Salvador rested in its symbolically transformative influence on civil societies, harking back to the symbol of Christ's resurrection: the death of one individual equaled a new life for a community.

⁷² Quoted in James R. Brockman, S.J., Romero: A Life (Maryknoll: New York, 1989), 248.

CHAPTER TWO

Christian Civil Society versus Hegemony of State

I am optimistic from the point of view of Christian hope. This is the hope I try to communicate to the people, because I am certain there is a God who is close to our problems and He will not let us down. But in addition to this, from a human point of view, I believe there are peaceful solutions. I believe in the ability of our people if only they are given the opportunity to participate. Here is where the difficulty lies. As long as there is repression, and any discordant voice, any left voice against the government – whether a political party or a popular group – is repressed, there will be a problem. Elections alone are not the answer. (Oscar Arnulfo Romero)⁷³

On August 30, 1980, a Sunday, cardinal Wyszyński sent a message through a priest asking me to go to the Warsaw steel mill, where a strike was in progress in solidarity with the striking shipyard workers. I said Mass. I lived through the disorders with the steel workers. I heard the confessions of people, who tired beyond endurance, knelt on the pavement. Those people understood that their strength lay in God, in the unity with the Church. And so I felt the need to remain with them. (Father Jerzy Popiełuszko)⁷⁴

Many scholars have pointed out that the struggle between civil societies and the structures of state hegemonies often take place in symbolic fields. In Cold War peripheral countries, such as Poland and El Salvador, the struggle between violence, as a symbol of state power, and broadly defined Christian ‘martyrdom’, as a powerful civic symbol, expressed a struggle for legitimacy and authority. Kubik’s model of constructing of the “counterhegemonic discourse” with five distinct “symbolic tools”⁷⁵ in Poland’s civil society can be applied to El Salvador’s counterhegemonic discourse as well. First is the redefinition of the “nation’s identity independently of the official idiom”⁷⁶: socialist/Communist in Poland, and proto-capitalist/oligarchic in El Salvador. Second is the reinvigoration of the nation’s “oppositional ethos”⁷⁷: pertaining to the partitions of Poland in the 19th century and colonialism by foreign powers in El Salvador. Third is the

⁷³ Oscar Romero, interview by Patrick Lacefield in Marvin E. Gattleman, Patrick Lacefield, Louis Manashe, and David Mermelstein, eds., El Salvador: Central America in the New Cold War (New York: Grove Press, 1986), 133.

⁷⁴ Quoted in Sikorska, xiii.

⁷⁵ Kubik, 267.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

constructing of bridges between the “Christian worldview and ethics and oppositional politics”⁷⁸: through spontaneous Christianization of the worker’s movement in Poland and through more structured evangelization of civic life in Salvadoran CEBs. Fourth is the challenge to ‘official history’: exposing the soviet complicity in Katyń massacre in Poland and revealing the complicity of state violence in Salvadoran La Matanza. Fifth is the “return of political principles” deemed obsolete by the exiting regime⁷⁹: demand for participatory democracy and social justice in both countries, in El Salvador’s case also the demand for investigation of human rights abuses. The civic activism, persecutions and martyrdoms of activist priests, such as Archbishop Romero and Father Popiełuszko, provided civil societies with such ‘symbolic tools’ in abundance.

In Latin America, Liberation Theology used Christian Gospel as such a ‘symbolic tool’ not only to highlight the failure of capitalist developmentalism, but also the failure of liberalism, applied to such underdeveloped nations, to establish pluralist and self-determined civil societies. To build a new kind of civil society, the architect of Liberation Theology Gustavo Gutierrez argued, “more is required than the rejection of some individual injustice or other”, but rather “a certain degree of political maturity” which would “permit a true political understanding of the Gospel” and “prevent it from being reduced to an aid program, however sophisticated, or to a simple task of ‘human promotion’.”⁸⁰ This chapter will show how Polish Solidarność and Salvadoran CEBs endeavored to build politically mature new civil societies. The leadership of Pope John

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 268.

⁸⁰ Gutierrez, 32.

Paul II was unquestionably crucial to the establishment of the doctrine of social responsibility and solidarity on which these new Christian civil societies were to be based. Addressing a crowd of impoverished city dwellers in Salvador, Brazil in June of 1980 the Pope advanced his theory of the superiority of peaceful reform versus violent revolution:

All of you who have taken the name of builders of society, have a certain power in your hands because of your positions, your situations, or your activities. Use that power in the service of social justice. Reject that kind of reasoning which is inspired by the collective egoism of a group or of a class or is based on the motivation of one-sided material profit. Reject violence as the means of resolving the problems of society, since violence is contrary to life, it destroys man. Apply your power, be it political, economic, or cultural, to the service of solidarity embracing the whole of man, in the first place men and women who are most in need, whose rights are most frequently violated.⁸¹

But this non-violent political maturity was unquestionably a challenge in El Salvador and in Latin America in general. Certainly, the example of the Cuban Revolution and the ethos of Castro's Guevarist leadership reverberated across the region and resulted in the endemic spread of the 'communist solution' among Latin American oppositional movements. Many Catholic priests, too, found themselves unable to resist the direct involvement in guerilla movements.

While bishops, such as Oscar Romero, became radicalized by the violence perpetrated on clergy across the region but remained dedicated to pastoral work only, many priests opted for joining guerilla units and adhering to both Christianity and Socialism: following the example of "guerilla-priest" Father Camilo Torres killed in 1968 in Colombia, others joined in armed insurrections.⁸² Across Latin America guerilla-priests

⁸¹ John Paul II, "Peaceful Reform vs. Violent Revolution," quoted in Quade, 135.

⁸² Alan Riding, "The New Pope Comes to Confer with a Latin Church Militant," New York Times, 21 January 1979, E3.

participated in various 'leftist' social movements. In 1979 *New York Times* reported on this growing trend of direct political involvement on the part of Latin American clergy:

In Honduras, a largely agricultural nation, they helped form the National Peasant Union to fight for land reform. In Argentina, calling themselves Third World Priests they were active on factory floors organizing trade unions and, at times, collaborating closely with the Montonero movement that later took up arms against the military regime there. In Chile, they sponsored the Christians for Socialism movement that supported the government of the late President Salvador Allende Gossens. In Guatemala, they were busy urging Indians to abstain from voting in elections rigged by the government.⁸³

In El Salvador Father Barrera Motto was killed in December of 1978 when fighting in an FLMN unit; Father Gaspar Garcia Laviana was killed while fighting alongside Nicaraguan Sandinistas in December of the same year.⁸⁴

The relationship between the FMLN and the Catholic Church was in many ways symbiotic. Just like the Nicaraguan Sandinistas who came to power in 1979, FMLN remained tolerant and supportive of the Church and the Church, spread across various civic organizations, supported the FMLN. The marriage of guerilla and Christian groups was not a union of mutual agreement on all political and social issues but a union of necessity and ideological compatibility. In 1980 the Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR) led by Christian Democrats suffered a devastating setback when its president Enrique Alvarez, alongside four other leaders, "were kidnapped from the Jesuit high school in San Salvador and found murdered a few days later."⁸⁵ In November of 1980 the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) was born out of the unification of five different oppositional armies FPL (Popular Forces of Liberation), ERP (Revolutionary Army of the People), FAL (Armed Forces of Liberation), PRTC (Party of Revolutionary

⁸³ Alan Riding, "Latin Church in Siege," *New York Times*, 6 May 1979, 236.

⁸⁴ Alan Riding, "The New Pope", E3.

⁸⁵ Peterson, 32.

Central American Workers), and RN (National Resistance), some of which were supported by the Salvadoran Communist Party.⁸⁶ By the time of the unification of the oppositional forces, Archbishop Romero was assassinated and death squads were killing several hundred people a month. Soon after FDR and FMLN joined forces to form FMLN-FDR.⁸⁷ Clearly, FDR needed military protection to avoid, as much as possible, kidnappings and assassinations of its leaders. FMLN needed logistic support and channels of communication with the outside world. FDR provided that support by establishing, in many cases because of its ties to Christian Democrats through churches and other religious organizations, several offices outside of El Salvador: in United States, western Europe, and Latin America, while also establishing links with NGOs (nongovernmental organizations) and gaining recognition from Mexican and French governments as legitimate.⁸⁸ Although the United States refused to recognize FDR as a legitimate political front, and FMLN as an legitimate military front, and continued its propaganda against both insisting they were Soviet backed 'terrorist' organizations, the FMLN-FDR alliance managed, in spite of more than a decade of endemic violence in El Salvador, to build an effective network of civic groups, indeed, an international civil society.

But FMLN-FDR was not the nucleus of civil society in El Salvador. Central to the formation of the new society was the emergence of popular movements of peasants and the establishment of CEBs – Christian Base Communities in rural areas of El

⁸⁶ Ibid, 34.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 35.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 35.

Salvador. The Catholic Church, led by Jesuit academics and activist priests, was instrumental in the awakening of socio-political consciousness among peasantry: “Slowly the peasants began to abandon their fatalism,” reported an unidentified Jesuit in 1977 when the issue of land reform became the central preoccupation of budding civic life in El Salvador, “slowly they began to understand that their hunger, their disease, their infant mortality, their unemployment, their unpaid wages, were not the will of God but the result of the greed of a few Salvadorans and of their own passivism.”⁸⁹ In July of 1977, a paramilitary group called the White Warrior Union, supported by Salvadoran oligarchy, begun systematic repression of Jesuit priests in countryside: “fifteen were expelled, five denied re-entry, two slain, and eight tortured” while the group promised to kill another fifty Jesuits if they did not abandon their work in villages and leave El Salvador all together.⁹⁰ In the 1970s two major peasant groups, led by Catholic activists, came into existence: FECCAS (the Christian Peasants’ Federation) and UTC (Union of Farmworkers). The most striking characteristic of these groups was the fact that their activists “developed leadership and organizational skills, as well as their ideas about social justice and the value of collective action, in base Christian communities, *cursillos*, *encuentros*, and other Catholic educational and pastoral programs.”⁹¹

The ‘culture of social activism’ among El Salvador’s peasants, therefore, grew out of the convergence of increased Catholic activism in the countryside and the deepening

⁸⁹ Alan Riding, “Salvadoran Jesuits Say Land Reform Is the Main Issue,” New York Times, 23 July 1977, 5.

⁹⁰ “Salvadoran Rightist Group Threatens to Kill Jesuits Unless They Leave Nation,” New York Times, 18 July 1977, L5.

⁹¹ Peterson, 31.

agricultural crisis. While the oligarchy held a majority of irrigable land, the military government of Humberto Romero (not related to Oscar Romero) offered peasant loans for renting of small family plots⁹², loans the peasants could never afford to repay in the long run. Meanwhile peasant organizing remained prohibited by law and unrecognized by the government. This led to increased radicalization of the rural areas of El Salvador and to the formation of the People's Revolutionary Block comprised of peasant and student organizations supported by Jesuit intelligentsia and rural Catholic clergy.⁹³ At the same time rightist paramilitary groups organized themselves into an umbrella organization ORDEN (National Democratic Organization) which, by the late 1970s, boasted of some 65,000 members⁹⁴ roaming the Salvadoran countryside in pursuit of leftist activists. Archbishop Romero took an active role in the discourse on land reform. In 1978 he was still hopeful and stressed the importance of the point of view of the Catholic intellectuals in the debate:

If the repressive aspect is avoided and the land reform goes as far as the nationalization of the financial system, perhaps – this would be the ideal – a coming together of the left's program and the government's program could be thought of. We now that involved in the program of the left are not only the known organized groups, but intellectually very capable people, and this must be taken into account. The measure of this coming together is the end of the repression. While the repression continues, no force of the people will trust working with the government.⁹⁵

But the repression never ended and when Ronald Reagan came to power in the United States and with him the symbolic and the military aid for repression of all things 'communist', the leftist oppositional forces found themselves not in the middle of

⁹² Karen DeYoung, "Church Demands Change in El Salvador: Prelate, Citing Pope's Backing, Turns from Oligarchy to Favor Land Redistribution," The Washington Post, 5 August 1978, A12.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Quoted in Brockman, 237.

national discourse on land reform but embroiled in a civil war with the Salvadoran paramilitary security apparatus.

When the mechanisms of ‘democratic and charismatic authorities’ failed, the ‘moral authority’ of the Church remained the only catalyst for the formation of El Salvador’s civil society. CEBs – grassroots Christian Base Communities – were organized in El Salvador, as elsewhere in Latin America, in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s and 1980s by educated priests, university students, and human rights activists. Together with Liberation Theology’s evangelical ‘option for the poor’, the ideologies of CEBs organizers were “dominant discourses in social sciences”: dependency theory and Marxism-Leninism.⁹⁶ The activities of CEBs organizers centered on the Gospel of liberation and salvation but they also extended into practical dimensions of every-day rural life: literacy programs, healthcare and childcare, legal services, agricultural cooperatives, and political organizing. Grassroots organizing cemented Liberation Theology to the realities of the economic challenges of the communities in which it was preached. The activist clergy of CEBs were, in fact, agents of social change and political mobilization and their undertakings clearly challenged the prevailing paradigm of Christian activism as limited to organizing of communities of earthly poverty and utopian longing for heavenly salvation. Yvon Grenier writes about the “romantic position” from which the activist Catholic Church has often been portrayed as culturally important but politically impotent as underestimating “the nature of the mobilization commanded by the Popular Church. For all the participatory and populist style of the

⁹⁶ Grenier, 139.

CEBs and other Catholic popular organizations, one invariably finds a clear sense of leadership, in addition to a manifest division of labor between the mobilized masses on the one hand and the urban-born , ideologically harmonious, activist leaders on the other.”⁹⁷

In the case of Salvadoran CEB’s that urban ideological leadership was provided by the Central American University José Simeón Cañas (UCA). The UCA Jesuits were considered the most distinguished intellectuals in El Salvador not only on issues of theology but also sociology, economics, psychology, and political sciences. Ironically, UCA was founded and staffed with Spanish-born Jesuits in 1965 by conservative elites as an anti-communist university.⁹⁸ But with the onset of Vatican II reforms and Medellín’s establishment of the parameters of Liberation Theology progressive Catholics gradually took over the university and its reformist agenda was officially proclaimed by 1970.⁹⁹ Segundo Montes, one of the six UCA Jesuits eventually murdered in 1989, thus described the program of a modern Catholic university:

The University, and especially the Catholic university, must be the laboratory where new models of society , more just and more Christian, are created. Its stand for the poor is formalized in denunciation of structural sin and in the elaboration of new models, forming men, professional or not, who will be able to transform this society so that it will benefit all, and especially the poorest.¹⁰⁰

The emphasis in UCA’s ideology was certainly placed not on archaic religious practice but on a practice of religiously inspired but fully conscious, active, and mature socio-political life accomplished through non-violent but decisive political will. Because of its

⁹⁷ Grenier, 142.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 144.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 145.

¹⁰⁰ Quoted in Grenier, 143.

elitist character but especially because of its insistence on both the ‘option for the poor’ as an expression of integral participatory democracy and on non-violence as an expression of truly civilized political behavior of modern men UCA was, at times, equally at odds with the Salvadoran oligarchy and FMLN. Throughout the Salvadoran civil war, however, UCA remained the central intellectual nerve center of the new civil society.

In Poland, the processes of building of new civil society involved the workers (proletariat in the communist sense) and, similarly to El Salvador, the university vanguard and Catholic intellectuals. The surfacing of Solidarność in 1980 was a result of long years of grassroots organizing of workers’ unions, especially among urban poor proletariat employed in factories, mines, shipyards, and steel mills and it was aimed not only at achieving specific reforms or satisfying worker’s demands but at changing the political culture of the population. In this sense, Solidarność’s cells resembled Salvadoran CEBs: there was an effort to reawaken collective political consciousness and individual civic responsibility. Of the specific “social need” lying at the foundation of Solidarność, Kubik writes:

Solidarity did not arise solely from a need to restore (liberal-democratic or any other) political culture but also from a need to revive Polish culture as a whole: not only from the need to find permanent system of checks on the regime’s performance or even to reassess its authority and legitimacy, but also from a need to reconsider afresh *collective identity* and the *ethical foundations* of the society. There is only one language suitable for such considerations: the language of symbols and myths.¹⁰¹

The Polish Communist state machinery attempted from the very beginning of its operation after World War II, to manipulate public opinion and, therefore, build its legitimacy inventing fictions about Polish past and utopian narratives about Polish

¹⁰¹ Kubik, 256.

future. It invented a certain propaganda of success to which the position of an average Polish citizen was always distrust and repugnance. Because Polish people historically aspired to visions of Western republicanism and capitalist development, the communist propaganda never fooled anyone: the plain truth was that Poland was quickly slipping behind the Western developed world and the Soviet buildup of a military arsenal sucked all resources and capital out of this country which was still desperately trying to rebuild after the Nazi and Soviet occupations and the material devastation of World War II.

Most of the population viewed the home-grown Communist leadership of Poland as uncultured illiterate sellouts to the Soviet machinery of public demagoguery. By the late 1970s the Polish Communist regime, led by the charismatic Edward Gierek, had to invent all kinds of public myths of success, through such celebrations as the May Day parades, to keep the fictions of perfect socialism intact. Stanisław Barańczak, renowned Polish critic, poet, and essayist, thus described the way in which the Communist regime attempted to shape mass culture in 1970s:

The authorities were clearly aware that today they could not shape the views of the society through repetition of direct orders and slogans, which cause nausea in an average recipient, but only indirectly: through smuggling directives, pressures, ideological schemes, and value system wrapped as attractive products of mass culture, such as rhythmic songs, a colorful spectacle, or a sensational story.¹⁰²

Solidarność was built, therefore, similarly to Salvadoran civil society, through constructing, with the explicit help from the popular Church, of an alternative social narrative about the past, the future, and the meaning of a productive and beneficial model of citizenship. It operated as counter- hegemonic culture bent on exposing ‘the

¹⁰² Quoted in Kubik, 72.

truth' about national history and the extent of the economic and cultural damage inflicted on the nation by communist plutocracy.

The processes of the emergence of the Catholic Church as a counter-hegemonic 'civil corporation' in Poland, as well as in other Eastern and Central European countries imprisoned behind the Iron Curtain, began immediately after World War II. When Soviet 'imperialism' swallowed up the territories of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, Albania, Yugoslavia, and Eastern Germany after the Yalta conference, Stalin's repression of the Catholic Church followed. Eastern and Central European Catholic hierarchies, and their respective populations, were immediately radicalized by the Stalinist open war on religion, resistance to which was "symbolically incarnated in five 'martyr cardinals': the Hungarian Józef Mindszenty, the Pole Stefan Wyszyński, The Croatian Alojzije Stepinac, the Czech Josef Beran, and the Ukrainian Józef Slipyj."¹⁰³ All of the 'martyr cardinals' suffered through house arrests, imprisonments, public show trials, and all, save Wyszyński and Mindszenty, died in exile.¹⁰⁴ The official stance of the Vatican during the early post-war persecution of the Church was becoming more and more anti-communist with each new arrest and persecution of clergy. In 1957, Pope Pius XII issued a statement that foreshadowed the direction in which the Church would eventually move at the Second Vatican Council. Interestingly, it also foreshadowed the emergence of the theology of liberation that would later take root in Latin America:

We, as a head of the Church, have avoided, just as in earlier cases, calling Christianity to a *crusade*. We can, however, demand complete understanding for the fact, where religion is a living heritage from their forefathers, people view as a crusade the struggle that was unjustly forced upon by the enemy.... We are convinced that even today, the only way we can and will

¹⁰³ Weigel, 65.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

save the peace against a foe who is determined to impose upon all peoples in one way or another a particular and unbearable way of life, is by the strong and unanimous union of all who love truth and goodness.¹⁰⁵

The stance of crusading resistance of the Church was tempered, however, by the shock of the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 (unfolding during the congregation of the Second Vatican Council), and the realization that “nuclear weapons meant that the world was, in a sense, condemned to peace.”¹⁰⁶ In Poland, along with the fear of nuclear war, the fear of direct Soviet invasion, based on the events of the failed Czechoslovakia’s Prague Spring of 1968 during which Soviet tanks crushed through Prague and shattered a massive civil urban insurrection, were instrumental in directing the processes of building of resistant civil society into non-violent channels.

The Polish civil society of resistance, along with the popular church entrenched in it, became most dynamically engaged in three specific activities, reminiscent of the Salvadorian case: clandestine unionizing, social education in ‘true history’, and communication between different sectors of insurgency. Through the efforts of Catholic intellectuals and crusading priests, in similar fashion to El Salvador’s Jesuit leadership, the Church became concerned with stamping out a certain kind of apathetic malaise induced by the communist repression of civic life and economic stagnation. This was a project of rebuilding the morale of a nation and was based entirely on what Kubik calls a “public counterhegemonic discourse” which foreshadowed the development, just as the CEBs project of social justice in El Salvador, “post-totalitarian culture” in a system in

¹⁰⁵ Quoted in Weigel, 67.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 69.

which “post-totalitarian politics” did not yet exist.¹⁰⁷ Hence, in attempting to construct alternative networks of democratic participation the Polish neo-Christian civil society, just like the Salvadoran Christian civic movement embodied in CEBs, was way ahead of its time and of its government’s capacity to provide such alternatives.

Immediately after World War II, first on the Church’s agenda in Poland was education. In 1961 the Communist Government attempted to mount an offensive against the Church by placing restrictions on religious education of children, which, historically, had been the bulwark of the Church’s social work. By a secret decree of August 19, 1961 the government ordered the limitation of catechist instruction to two hours a week, the content of religious education to become subject to state supervision, and catechists to become state employees supervised by the state.¹⁰⁸ The Church responded by moving catechism classes from schools to churches, their halls, and parish buildings, and thus obtaining a greater independence and control over the children’s religious education, and more opportunities to interact with their parents. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s the churches became educational centers in which children and their parents received education completely bereft of the ‘propaganda of successes’ and often contradictory to what the state-sponsored school books contained, especially in national history. By the time of the emergence of Solidarność, the Church organized countless clandestine “flying universities” for young adults in which the ‘unauthorized’

¹⁰⁷ Kubik, 268.

¹⁰⁸ Arthur J. Olsen, “Poland’s Reds Plan to Control Religious Teaching of Children,” New York Times, 9 September 1961, 1.

version of Polish history was regularly thought by Catholic activists.¹⁰⁹ The tradition of clandestine universities had a long history in Poland spanning the entire 19th century until World War I – because of the disappearance of Poland from the map of Europe for over a hundred years following the late 18th century partitions of Poland by Russia, Prussia, and Austria clandestine education accomplished with the help of the always robust Polish Catholic Church was a natural and logical response to the ensuing communist repression. During World War II the same schema of underground education was carried out under the Nazi occupation.

The repression of religious and civic education went hand in hand with repression of freedom of press, other means of communication, as well as travel. There were books and authors blacklisted, documents censored for implications of Stalinist crimes, and mail from the Western world was opened and screened for subversive messages. Perhaps the most blatant form of repression was the refusal of the government to grant passports to travel abroad. Only Communist party members were able to obtain temporary passports. There were, also, several attempts at censoring of radio and press. In 1979, for example, a popular Catholic weekly journal *Tygodnik Powszechny* (Universal Weekly) was censored when the governments refused to permit the publication of a Christmas message of John Paul II to his home diocese of Kraków (Cracow).¹¹⁰ Radio and television broadcasting were also heavily controlled by the state and mostly in the service of the ‘propaganda of socialist success’. For independent news

¹⁰⁹ Michael Getler, “Intellectuals, Church Challenge Polish Censorship,” [The Washington Post](#), 8 July 1978, A6.

¹¹⁰ David A. Andelman, “A Popular Catholic Weekly in Poland Mirrors Church-State Conflict,” [New York Times](#), 5 January 1979, A4.

most Poles had to turn to Radio Wolna Europa (Radio Free Europe) broadcast from London late at night on frequencies beyond the reach of the communist censorship. During the August 1980 general strike in Gdańsk's shipyards one of the main demands of the worker reflected the growing frustration of Polish population with all kinds of censorship and repression against the Church. Part of the "Gdańsk Agreement" which eventually ended the strike and catapulted Solidarność into a civic leadership position read as follows:

The access to mass media by religious organizations in the course of their religious activities will be worked out through an agreement between the state institutions and the religious associations on matters of content and of organization. The government will ensure the transmission by radio of the Sunday mass through a specific agreement with the Church hierarchy.

The radio and television as well as the press and publishing houses must offer expression to different points of view. They must be under the control of society. [...]

Only a society which has a firm grasp on reality can take the initiative in reforming the economy. The government will significantly increase the areas of socio-economic information to which society, trade unions and other social and economic organizations have access.¹¹¹

The most important cumulative result of all the censoring and repressive tactics of the communist regime was that a very well organized underground network of communication and clandestine organization sprang up naturally among the working Poles long before the emergence of Solidarność. The Catholic Church was the facilitator of this grassroots movement in Poland in the same way the establishment of CEBs and activism of clergy in El Salvador eventually resulted in the spread of political consciousness among peasant populations. Compare Bishop Romero's entry in his diary about the bombing of the clandestine radio station YSAX in February of 1980:

It does not matter to us what group wants to claim for itself the attack on our radio station. What matters is that, in the last analysis, those responsible are members of the oligarchy, which

¹¹¹ Oliver MacDonald, The Polish August: Documents from the Beginnings of the Polish Worker's Rebellion, Gdańsk, August, 1980 (Seattle, Washington: Left bank Books, 1981), 104-105.

at this moment is desperately and blindly trying to repress the people. The dynamiting of YSAX is only a symbol. It shows that the oligarchy, seeing the danger of losing the complete domination that they have over investment and over agricultural exports, as well as their near monopoly of land are defending their selfish interests, not with arguments, not with popular support, but with the only thing they have. They use their money to buy weapons and pay mercenaries who are massacring the people and strangling every lawful cry for justice and freedom.¹¹²

With the intellectual help and moral leadership of the Church, therefore, Salvadoran peasants and Polish workers seized on the understanding of the dynamics of their respective oppressions and the way the repressive governments operated. The hegemony of the Salvadoran oligarchy and Polish plutocracy were undermined by the very tactics that were aimed at the silencing of the opposition movements. The hegemonic states lost all their credibility and claims to legitimacy because of use of physical and psychological violence.

In Poland, the strike was the ultimate means by which the working population expressed its dissatisfaction with the Communist regime. In response the security apparatus often used violence as intimidation. By the time of the formation of *Solidarność*, the organized strike was a very familiar pattern of the Polish proletariat's public behavior, as seen in the 1956 uprising of locomotive workers in Poznań, the 1970 riots in the port twin cities of Gdynia and Gdańsk and the port of Szczecin, and the 1976 strikes of the "Ursus" tractor factory workers near Warszawa (Warsaw).¹¹³ The 1970 strikes were precipitated by food-price increase and stagnant wages and eventually forced out of power party leader Władysław Gomułka, who was replaced by Edward Gierek, a self-pronounced progressive socialist. But by the 1976 strikes the prices of

¹¹² Romero, 232.

¹¹³ David Binder, "Polish Strikes Are Part of Pattern Going Back to 1956," *New York Times*, 19 August 1980, 8.

food went up another fifty percent signaling that the economy was on a verge of collapse.¹¹⁴ By 1979 there were severe shortages of food, coal, gasoline, building materials, and farm supplies. This time even the Polish independent farmers joined in the protests by forming Peasant Self-Defense Committees in their local churches and proposed to establish “farmer-worker cooperatives to bypass government marketing controls.”¹¹⁵ Many Polish peasants were incorporated into the proletariat after World War II by the often forceful establishment of socialist PGRs (National Agricultural Cooperatives) which coerced the farmers to give up their land and become agricultural employees of the state. Many peasants refused, risking intimidation, unfair competition, and other forms of repression – in the 1970s, however, eighty percent of the land in Poland was still privately owned.¹¹⁶ Although the regime attempted to blame Polish independent farmers for low productivity, people knew the truth: foodstuffs and other consumer products were exported, in massive quantities, to the Soviet Union, while the Polish population was facing rationing of elemental foods, long lines, and empty stores. The ‘black market’ of consumer products flourished, often with the help of local clergy, and some farmers refused to sell their products to the government. Although the economic position of the Polish farmers was undoubtedly much better than that of Salvadoran peasantry, especially where issues of land ownership were involved, both the Polish plutocracy and the Salvadoran oligarchy made the unfair distribution of national resources a reason of major social opposition and, eventually, unrest. The

¹¹⁴ Jonathan Spivak, “Polish Peasants Join Anti-Regime Protests, Giving Them Impetus: Shortage of Consumer Goods, Repressions Are Issues,” The Wall Street Journal, 2 January 1979, 1.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ David Binder, “Polish Strikes,”.

Polish Peasant Self-Defense Committees, facilitated and supported by the Church, were, in many ways, reminiscent of Salvadoran peasant unions, facilitated and supported by the CEBs. In both cases the Church provided logistic, legal, and material support. Clearly people in both countries considered the state mechanisms of distribution of power and resources as illegitimate, and turned to the Church for support in organization of alternative channels for social and economic justice.

Aside from the involvement in the organization of alternative modes of education, communication, distribution of goods and services, and social congregation, expressing its 'active power', the Catholic Church's most important role in both undermining the legitimacy of the oppressive regimes and building of new civil societies was its ceremonial-ritual role. This was its 'passive power', but it increased exponentially to the growth of economic and political repression. What infuriated the Polish authorities the most in Father Popiełuszko's 'activism', for example, was not his vocal support of *Solidarność* or even his work on behalf of imprisoned workers but his monthly "mass for the nation" at the St. Stanisław Kostka church in Warsaw. At the church the priest was on his own turf and able to use subtle but powerful symbolic ceremonies and rituals to imbue the congregation with emotional and spiritual interpretations of political, historical and social processes. Father Popiełuszko often invited poets, actors and musicians to his "mass for the nation" during which patriotic songs were sang, poems and plays with explicitly political meaning were read as pledges

of support of Solidarność.¹¹⁷ The ‘policeman’ was powerless in facing this kind of subversion. His only response was to kill.

“Rituals,” writes Peterson, “construct and express theological and ethical ideas in various ways. They do so in part by presenting an idealized version of real, less than ideal, actions of events. During rituals people represent things – themselves, the world, their own and other people’s behavior, and even historical and political events – the way they believe these things out to be.”¹¹⁸ In El Salvador, just as in other Latin American countries and in Poland, the Catholic mass during the civil war was an occasion for the reinterpretation of violence and suffering as an expression of social and political injustice. Priests, such as Archbishop Romero and Father Popiełuszko, presided over congregations not only of faithful Catholics but people who had no one else to turn to concerning their grievances against the state. The devotion to the Church and the Archbishop, just like the Polish devotion to the Black Madonna of Częstochowa and Pope John Paul II, was an expression of withdrawal of public trust in the legitimacy of the state, a social critique of the repressive regimes and its elites, a new “class consciousness”¹¹⁹ – most of all it signaled “devotion denied the regime which claimed to rule in the name of the people.”¹²⁰ The Catholic mass and other rituals and ceremonies functioned as symbolic instruments of dismantling of state hegemonies. In this way the Church was instrumental in building the collective identities of the new civil societies.

¹¹⁷ John Kifner, “Poland’s Priest Told to Shun Politics,” New York Times, 20 December 1983, A3.

¹¹⁸ Peterson, 74.

¹¹⁹ Peterson, 75.

¹²⁰ Weigel, 116.

In El Salvador the central themes of such rituals and ceremonies were poverty and violence. Through celebrating mass and performance of *vía crucis*, a public ritual common in much of Latin America in which Jesus' path to crucifixion is enacted in a kind of social play performed in open air, the Salvadoaran poor declared their position in society as unjustly denied sustenance, safety, and dignity. The mass, celebrated by a progressive Catholic priest like Archbishop Romero, was an occasion for new understanding of the situation of the poor. Denouncing the fatalism characteristic of evangelization of poor, often indigenous, Latin American populations before the Second Vatican Council, mass in civil war El Salvador was a confirmation of rejection of social injustice. "Many would like the poor to keep on saying," said Archbishop Romero in a sermon on September 10, 1978, "that it is God's will for them to live that way. But it is not God's will for some to have everything and other to have nothing. That cannot be of God. God's will is that all his children are happy."¹²¹ The focal point of a Catholic mass is the Eucharist, the reenactment of the last supper in which Jesus washes the feet of his disciples and shares wine and bread with them – a deeply democratic affair all throughout, this ritual easily took on a political meaning during Salvadoran civil war.

Peterson writes:

In a society with little sharing of material goods, the mass can symbolize unity, equality, and abundance, criticizing actual injustices while presenting a goal around which struggles for change can organize. More generally, the solidarity and participatory democracy experienced in grassroots rituals comment pointedly on the real political situation while also offering a taste of the improved community to come.¹²²

¹²¹ Romero, 106.

¹²² Peterson, 79.

The reenactment of Jesus' path to crucifixion, on the other hand, served as a commentary on the logic of violence and, most importantly, on martyrdom. The ritual of *vía crucis*, also known as 'Passion of the Christ', also revised the fatalism of pre-Medellín theology by viewing Jesus not only as God but as a human being who died a violent death for the poor and oppressed. In this way, martyrdom was redefined from witnessing to faith to imitating Jesus' sacrifice¹²³ -- from passive acceptance of suffering to active political act of defiance. "Each priest killed is for me a new concelebrant in the eucharist of our archdiocese," proclaimed Archbishop Romero in a sermon on September 2, 1979, "I know that they are here giving us encouragement by having known how to die without fear, because each one's conscience was committed to the law of the Lord: the preferential option for the poor."¹²⁴ Jesus's killers, in *vía crucis*, were, therefore, equated with those elements in Salvadoran society that exploited and murdered the poor: namely the economic elites and military apparatus. In this way 'Passion of the Christ' functioned as a social story of the conflict between the power of the wealthy and the marginalization of the poor – a social story, indeed, of class struggle.

In Poland Catholic ceremonies and rituals centered on themes of faith as resistance and national identity. To Poles Communism was, most of all, atheism; in the same way, perhaps, that the ostentatious wealth of the Salvadoran oligarchy represented idolatry to the Salvadoran poor. Poland's "ceremonial revolution"¹²⁵, as

¹²³ Peterson, 81.

¹²⁴ Romero, 195.

¹²⁵ Kubik, 251.

Kubik calls it, centered on the gradual dismantling of the mechanisms of Communist hegemony. Religious ceremonies and rituals, in Communist Poland, performed in the only unrestrained social domain – the Church – were, like in El Salvador, meant to reject the legitimacy of the regime, specifically by pointing out its hypocrisy and, therefore, lack of democratic, charismatic, and moral authority. Kubik writes:

After the Communist takeover, democratic discourse was barred from public domain. At the same time, the regime never lived up to the new set of standards (including, for instance, egalitarianism of social justice) it claimed as the foundations of its legitimacy.¹²⁶

Thus the political symbols of Communist power: May Day parades, marches, military displays, and party conferences, were gradually replaced, as the new Polish civil society developed, by religious symbols of resistance. The visits of Pope John Paul II to his native land became occasions for the full-on display of symbols of devotion to the Pope and to his socio-political ideology. The authorities, unable to deny the Pope an entrance to his native land, unless prepared to risk a massive revolt, loathed the visits as challenges to their public image, their monopoly over the public domain, and the ideological integrity of the propaganda of socialist success. What follows is a fragment of a pamphlet titled “Our Attitude toward the Holy Father,” published by PZPR – the leading Communist party, shortly before the Pope’s first pastoral visit to Poland in May of 1979:

The main purpose of this visit is an attempt to soften our system ideologically. It is not a visit that will be of help to us, but it is better that it takes place in this year. Therefore, it is necessary through additional actions to counterbalance this tension, which as the visit approaches – will be stirred up by the clergy, activists, and various committees. And here comes the very important role of organized celebrations of the thirty-fifth anniversary of the Polish People’s Republic and the fortieth anniversary of the German invasion of Poland. Our major task is to preserve our party in a good ideological help.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Kubik, 253.

¹²⁷ Kubik, 135.

The people's spontaneity in celebrating the Pope's visit overwhelmed the authorities, who could do nothing but allow it its natural unfolding. Hundreds of thousands of people came out to city squares to participate in masses celebrated by the Pope. But the most surprising element of the celebrations was the symbolic involvement of people who were nowhere near the Pope: flowers and Vatican flags hung from windows, light poles and fences in every village and town across Poland, people congregated in local churches to pray and sing with the Pope even when far away. Two years later, in May of 1981, after the botched assassination attempt on the Pope's life and as he was recovering from his wounds in the hospital, the Polish Independent Student Union organized, what became to be known, as "White March" as an expression of devotion to the Pope. Three hundred thousand students marched in the streets of the Pope's native Kraków, dressed in papal white, united in solemn prayer for his swift recovery.¹²⁸

But the most unprecedented use of religious symbol in undermining the legitimacy of the Communist state was invented by Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński in 1966, the year in which Poland was to celebrate its Millennium of Christianity – Poland was formally admitted to Christendom by the Holy Roman Emperor Otto III in the year 966. First, Cardinal Wyszyński undertook his Great Novena pilgrimage through Poland visiting almost every parish in the country between 1956 and 1966.¹²⁹ Then he came up with the idea that the Icon of Black Madonna, housed in Częstochowa shrine, should also visit every parish in the country. This Icon has been in possession of Polish Catholics for long centuries. Legend had it that it was actually painted by the biblical St. Luke and made its

¹²⁸ Kubik, 221.

¹²⁹ Kubik, 112.

way to Poland as a relic in Middle Ages.¹³⁰ The icon had also been known for its power to sabotage conquest of Polish territories by Sweden in mid-17th century, and more generally for interceding, through prayer and miracles, on behalf of the poor and oppressed. The devotion of the Polish nation to the Black Madonna, designated by the Pope as the protectress of Poland, reached fever pitch during the Communist regime and especially during the Great Novena. Instead of visiting only parish churches the Icon went door to door, well into the early 1980s, visiting every Polish family that cared to invite the Black Madonna in. Initially, the authorities attempted to fold Black Madonna's pilgrimage and actually 'arrested her' and put her under house detention in Warsaw Cathedral; an eyewitness thus reported the curious event:

One day when the icon was to come to Olsztyn, workers were kept at the factories until seven in the evening and students of the agricultural school were explicitly forbidden to take part in the festivities.

In any case, the icon never arrived in Olsztyn: the police stopped it on the road and directed it to Frombork. After the celebrations in that town, the icon was to travel to Warsaw, but a few kilometers outside Frombork, motorized police stopped the motorcade in which the Primate and the icon were riding, seizing the painting, and took it away, to what destination no one could guess.¹³¹

This did not stop people from displaying their devotion to the Icon and the Church. For a time, an empty frame of the painting, adorned with bible, rosaries and jewelry donated by the people, visited homes. Later, replicas of the painting made pilgrimages through Poland.

The visit of an icon in each home was an occasion for the entire neighborhood, friends and family to congregate. It was understood that this religious activity was also a highly symbolic political act of defiance, a collective counter-hegemonic mechanism of

¹³⁰ Weigel, 116.

¹³¹ Quoted in Kubik, 116.

renunciation of the Communist state's legitimacy and of the Communist system's sustainability. The Black Madonna, in the popular view, had been the Queen of Poland for long centuries; the Communists, just like many invaders before them, were just passing through. By inviting the Black Madonna into their homes the Poles were not only defying the power of the Soviet tyranny but also emphasizing their Christian roots – to be a Pole meant to be a part of Western Christendom as opposed to the Russian house of Eastern Orthodoxy. Clearly, this was a society engaged in a project of nation-preservation. Religious symbols in Poland, such as the Cross, the Black Madonna, and even the Pope, eventually became absorbed in the ethos of worker's strikes, and inevitably became the iconography of the Polish non-violent revolution. *Solidarność* used those symbols in their publications, pamphlets, monuments, songs, and several other means of social, intellectual and visual mechanisms of communication.

In comparison to the Salvadoran case, the Polish use of religious rituals and ceremonies placed much less emphasis on their scriptural dimensions while accentuating their historical scope but both approaches were highly successful in delegitimizing the oppressive regimes. In both struggles, moreover, the Church monopolized the court of public opinion in such an effective way that the states' symbols of power: violence, repression, and 'propagandas of successes' were losing audience and participants because of the power of the nonviolent Christian symbols of salvation and redemption. Although operating within different socio-political and economic structures the Polish and Salvadoran popular churches were highly successful, therefore, in reconfiguring the public discourse on the legitimacy of the methods by

which the respective governments ruled. The major result of this reconfiguration of the public discourse was the fact that because of the efforts of the Church new social actors -- peasants in El Salvador and workers in Poland – entered public domains previously unavailable to them.

CHAPTER THREE:

“Myths of Modernity” on Peripheries of Empires and Church’s “Third Road” Ideology

Yes, indeed, as the Mayan poem goes, all these things happened among us. Each one of us projected his own version of the truth as the universal truth. Each group or party saw its banner as the only banner in the Manicheism that held sway. And every individual or party loyalty was held to be the only real allegiance. In those days, all Salvadorians were so unfair one way or another to their fellow countrymen that the heroism of some became the immediate misfortune of others.

Moreover, the nation was a pawn in the East-West conflict; Salvadorians were buffed by a turbulent sea of waning ideologies and global contradictions. Although the victims hailed from many countries, they were mainly Salvadorians. One way or another, blame for this can be attributed to a complex web of events in El Salvador’s history and to unique circumstances in world history, so that it would be unfair to assign it to a particular individual, organization or party. (“From Madness to Hope” UN Security Council)¹³²

As a socialist I am opponent of capitalism. But as a socialist I consider not capitalism but totalitarianism to be the greatest night-mare of our times, the greatest enemy of progress, democracy, and socialism. All totalitarian regimes are the enemy: whether capitalist or communist, Chile, the USSR, China or any place else where basic human rights are trampled upon and people are beaten down and oppressed in the name of higher ideals, religious or secular.

When I speak of “dialogue” with Christianity I am not speaking of intellectual swordsmanship or a tactical play for power. I am speaking of basic human values. The Polish dialogue between the secular left and Christianity must be based on union in antitotalitarian resistance. The Left’s encounter with Christianity takes place on three different levels: an encounter with God, an encounter with the Church as an institution, and an encounter with Christianity as a system of values. (Adam Michnik)¹³³

For most of the twentieth century the majority of populations of peripheral countries such as Poland and El Salvador experienced economic progress and democracy in political life, espoused by both socialism and liberalism, as myths. Neither nation was ‘modern’ in either the economic or the political sense. The non-violent revolution in Poland and the bloody civil war in El Salvador were both brought about by the economic crisis which ‘modern’ systems of communism and capitalism inflicted upon peripheral countries. But both populations also had legitimate grievances against their respective political systems: in Poland socialism, which was supposed to bring about progress and egalitarian civil life, functioned as a Soviet-dependent oppressive

¹³²United Nations Security Council, Annex, From Madness to Hope, 184.

¹³³Michnik, 192.

plutocracy; in El Salvador proto-capitalism, which was supposed to modernize life and liberalize politics, functioned as an oligarchic U.S.-dependent military regime. Poles aspired, in many ways, to liberal democracy and capitalist free markets. Salvadorans, in many ways, aspired, to socialist communal economy and participatory democracy. The political radicalization of both populations, achieved by various forms of repression, was mediated by the Church's ideology of the "third road" which placed emphasis on the building of pluralistic, independent, morally sound civil societies. The Church, through Vatican II, Medellín, and Puebla, founded a new social ideology in which modernity had a different meaning and functioned in different dimensions: it was a question of ethics rather than material life – to be modern was to be humane, educated, socially responsible, conscious of other people's needs and suffering, and willing to forfeit profit or power for common good. Was this "third road" another utopia? How was one supposed to live an ethical and moral civic life in a world in which communist and capitalist materialism ruled, and democracy was reduced to power and capital driven pseudo-elections?

In Latin America economic underdevelopment provided a volatile environment for social upheavals and eventually, for the development of Liberation Theology. Of the failure of developmental capitalism, Dussel writes:

Ten years after the end of the war the expansion of North American capitalism destroyed the endeavors of peripheral national capitalism. [...] The pretence of aid in "capital" and "technology" (confronting the "capital" and "technology" of poor and backward national capitalism) did not produce "development", but implanted the "transnational corporations" which increased the extraction of wealth (in economic terms "profit" in theological terms the "life" and "blood" of the peoples and workers of the periphery).

The ethics of liberation originated historically as a theoretical attempt (in theology and philosophy) to clarify a praxis which originated in the failure of “developmentalism.”¹³⁴

The theory of developmental capitalism held that through foreign investment as well as aid and technology exported from highly developed nations, post-colonial underdeveloped societies would modernize and develop. After several attempts, in the 1950s and 1960s, at such development from the top failed all over Latin America and resulted in military coups and the return of power into the hands of oligarchic elites, it became apparent that true development was going to have to happen from below. From the start, therefore, Liberation Theology was not simply a utopian vision of spirituality of poverty, but a legitimate attempt to come up with an alternative model for development. As such it was always an economic and socio-political ideology as much as it was religious. Through Liberation Theology the post-colonial “other” was revealed to the industrialized, developed world as structurally oppressed. Those structures of oppression reached all the way into the centers of empires.

Before Liberation Theology took firm root in Latin America, however, there was the Cuban Revolution, which informed the ideological conflict between pro-Marxist and anti-Marxist understandings of liberation for decades to come. The Catholic Church in Cuba, although trying not to get involved in political polemics with the Castro regime, did eventually take a firm stand against Communism as atheism and social tyranny. In August of 1960, the Cuban Catholic hierarchy circulated a pastoral letter signed by Cardinal Manuel Arteaga and eight other Cuban Archbishops, by which the Church expressed its anxiety over the fact that Castro was establishing commercial, diplomatic

¹³⁴ Dussel, 137.

and cultural links with the Soviet Union.¹³⁵ “Only by deceit or coercion can the Cuban people be led into a Communist regime,” said the letter, while strongly condemning Communism for being a system “which brutally denies the most fundamental rights of men, since it establishes a dictatorship in order to obtain total state control over the means of production, because it establishes a terror police state and denies the right of the public to know the truth.”¹³⁶ On the other side of the debate were Cuban religious civic groups such as the Christians for Socialism, which attacked capitalism and liberalism for its structural oppression of marginalized peoples, while also touching on very sensitive historical subject of appropriating Christianity for purposes of oppression. The *Final Document* penned by Christians for Socialism reveals an ideological stance similar to ideas espoused by militant liberation theologians:

A free press, free trade, education, politics – all the “achievements” of liberalism – were the privilege of the elite. For the growing Latin American masses, under-nourishment, slavery and illiteracy, and later forced migration, unemployment, exploitation and crowding, and finally repression when they claim their rights – these are the harvest of the century of liberal democracy... The ideological appropriation of the Christian doctrine of reconciliation by the liberal capitalist system in order to conceal the brutal face of class and imperialist exploitation and conflict is the major heresy of our time.¹³⁷

This ‘structural sin’ of liberal capitalism became the center of Liberation Theology’s program for reform from below. If poverty and marginalization were going to be eliminated it had to happen through a complex set of social reforms through which issues of education, healthcare, housing and nutrition would be addressed alongside the paramount issue of land ownership and private property.

¹³⁵ R. Hart Phillips, “catholic Church in Cuba Criticizes Communist Gains,” New York Times, 7 August 1960, 1.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Quoted in Luxmoore and Babiuch, 268.

According to Jon Sobrino, the ‘structural sin’ of liberal capitalism also hid its ‘moral sin’. When attempting to answer the question of who was to blame for the violent deaths of Archbishop Romero and six of his Jesuit colleagues at UCA, Sobrino argued that the structures of marginalization and oppression of the Latin American masses were not only material but also psychological. He accused the Western world, therefore, of passivity, inertia in self-righteousness, and moral ignorance:

What about all the governments in Europe and the rest of the world claiming to be so democratic? What have they done effectively to stop the barbarities that have been going on in El Salvador for the last fifteen years? What effective words have been uttered by religious leaders, episcopal conferences, universities in democratic and Christian countries? [...] But perhaps they also keep quiet through unconscious feeling of guilt. It is not possible to keep on living in abundance, having practically everything and wanting more and more, when many millions of human beings are dying of hunger every day.¹³⁸

In 1979 several U.S. congressmen and members of the British Parliament supported the nomination of Archbishop Romero to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.¹³⁹ To theologians like Jon Sobrino, such gestures of appreciation towards the Archbishop’s heroic pastoral work were demonstrations of solidarity that were empty of meaning. If Liberation Theology preached the need for the de-colonization of Latin American psychology, it also stressed the need for a moral revolution of conscience in the Western world. The scope of the Church’s “third road” ideological option was, therefore, universal and proposed global transformation of principles upon which societies organized their systems of values.

In Eastern Europe, where the Catholic Church “was purged with its historic associations with wealth and power”¹⁴⁰ and where, the Communist economic fiasco

¹³⁸ Sobrino, 79.

¹³⁹ Karen DeYoung, “Latin Bishops Urge Concern for Poor,” *The Washington Post*, 14 February 1979, A16.

¹⁴⁰ Luxmoore and Babiuch, 167.

notwithstanding, people did not experience poverty to the extremes present in Latin America, the Church was facing the dilemma of combining “diplomacy towards the powerful with testimony towards the powerless.”¹⁴¹ In Poland, which more than any other European country shared with Latin America what Grenier calls, “class struggle inherited from colonialism”¹⁴² because of its experience of 19th century partitions, the Church’s discourse on liberation was framed too, in terms of social unity. If Liberation Theology proposed a social revolution from below and solidarity with the poor, the Pope’s theory of cooperation projected a social revolution from within and solidarity among the poor in spirit. The experience of over one hundred and fifty years of foreign presence on Polish territory (there was a period of complete Polish independence between 1918 and 1939) left the Polish population demoralized and in search of ‘modern’ identity. In Polish socio-political reality the class struggle was projected externally. In viewing the Yalta Conference’s partition of Europe into the Eastern and Western blocks as treachery against the wishes of the majority of the Polish population and the exclusion from the American Marshall Plan (investment, aid, and technology for development) as a missed chance for joining in the developed modern world, Poles expressed their frustration with underdevelopment. The ethos of grand Polish history, moreover, which centered on the pride of having adapted a truly modern liberal Constitution on May 3rd 1791, based on the French philosophy of Enlightenment, before the partitions of Poland made it an obsolete and symbolic document, had resulted in a collective culture of striving for Western democracy. On the other hand Poland, having

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Grenier, 140.

never fully participated in the industrial revolution and, therefore, having never developed a generic bourgeois class, and then being stifled by war and Communism, was bereft of political and economic tools to join in the developed world; it always existed on the very edge of it. Because of this complex set of historical circumstances it was natural that the discourse about modernity in Poland would center on bulwarks of liberal values – work, education, and family-- as Poland’s proletariat pursued transformation into a middle class shaped to resemble its Western model.

The Polish people always strove to deserve to belong to the circle of modern, civilized nations, therefore, and one example of the way the Church and Solidarność united in a crusade for the rehabilitation of the integrity of Polish society was the initiative against alcoholism. The ideology of Solidarność striving for sustainable progress based on Christian values sharply contrasted with the actual demoralization of society in which acute shortages of consumer goods, rampant inflation, and continued repression against political pluralism produced a culture of fatalism expressed in endemic alcoholism – “a staple of national life.”¹⁴³ Both the Church and the intellectual leadership of Solidarność decried alcoholism as ‘public enemy number one’, indeed, as “the best instrument for inducing the social state of passivity”, described by opposition historian Bronisław Geremek as not only an enemy “of Polish health but of Polish independence.”¹⁴⁴ Pervasive use of alcohol as “a reaction of escape and exclusion”¹⁴⁵, which was also targeted by the Liberation Theology activists across Latin America as an

¹⁴³ Jackson Diehl, “Church Decries Moral Disaster,” The Washington Post, 28 August 1985, A21.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

obstacle in embracing responsible civic life and eradicating poverty, in Poland was decried by the Catholic Church as a “moral and social disaster” posing “a danger for the very existence of the Polish family and fatherland.”¹⁴⁶ The targeting of alcoholism as social evil and linking it to the political and economic impotence of society became the hallmark of progressive Catholic neo-Christianity, and it also undermined another myth of modern world and its politics: that civic life was somehow divorced from ethical and moral issues. Amidst the *Realpolitik* of Cold War Poles and Salvadorans, with the help of the Catholic Church, established precedents for the inclusion of matters of ethics and morality in civic life.

Another theme of the ideology of solidarity, deeply intertwined with both liberal and socialist values, was work. In September of 1981, Pope John Paul II published his monumental encyclical *Leborem exercens*, on which he worked while recovering from the assassination attempt. Previous Popes have written about work before, and the theme of the precedence of work’s dignity to work resulting in accumulation of capital was a familiar one.¹⁴⁷ But Pope John Paul II infused his treatise on work with allusions to both capitalism and socialism and concluded that both strip human labor of its inherent dignity. The Pope’s understanding of the way ideas about work, springing from the “philosophical foundations of industrialization”, shaped the capitalist-communist divide was very nuanced and refined. In primitive capitalism lay, the Pope believed, the original ‘error of economism’ which eventually led to Marx and his ‘dialectical materialism.’¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Luxmoore and Babiuch, 238.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 236.

Capitalism and socialism, therefore, were two faces of the same coin: they were equally complicit in reducing human beings to subjects of industrialization and in objectifying work as mere means of accumulation and manipulation of capital. Both systems, concentrated on possession of capital, the Pope reiterated in *Leborem exercens*, dispossessed workers of dignified ways of producing sustenance for themselves and their family:

Everybody knows that capitalism has a definite historical meaning as a system, an economic and social system, opposed to 'socialism' or 'communism'. But in the light of the analysis of the fundamental reality of the whole economic process – first and foremost of the production structure of that work – it should be recognized that the error of early capitalism can be repeated whenever man is in a way treated on the same level as the whole complex of the material means of production, as an instrument not in accordance with the true dignity of his work.¹⁴⁹

Whether in the capitalist system of private ownership of capital or in the communist system of collective ownership of capital, work had been devalued and subjugated, the Pope argued, to the impulses of the markets or the caprices of the state. It was imperative, therefore, to “liberate the various fields of existence from the dominion of subjugating economism” and to “put economic demands in their proper place” by creating “a multiform social texture that will avoid massification.”¹⁵⁰ The solution to the problem of subjugation of work to capital was to be found in Christian ethics, specifically in charity and avoidance of greed. The Catholic Church, therefore, helped to redefine the meaning of work in the modern world. Christian Base Communities, in El Salvador, as elsewhere in Latin America, as well as the Polish *Solidarność* espoused a new model for the understanding of the work of peasants and urban populations. By demanding land reforms in El Salvador, and striving for worker’s rights in Poland, they redefined the

¹⁴⁹ Quoted in Luxmoore and Babiuch, 236.

¹⁵⁰ John Paul II, “Politics Must Serve the Common Good,” in Quade, 127.

modern paradigms of ownership of one's labor: redeeming it from being a possession of the state into the proprietorship of the people.

Many Catholic theologians, during the Cold War, advanced very intricate theories of the "third road" program for the economic and political transformation of the world order. Blasé Bonpane, for example, advocated a New International Economic Order based on regionalism and integration and, most of all, avoidance of practicing the supply-side economics propagated by transnational corporations. Bonpane advised starting with need-based regional economic development and proceeding to the formation of common currencies and banking systems, which would naturally lead to political integration:

Instead of having many separate island states in the Caribbean, I believe we need to have a Caribbean Federation with a common currency and a regional economy. I believe that Central America will be a single nation in the future, including Belize and Panama. A region would be made of the Andean states, another of the nations of the Southern Cone, and Brazil would stand on its own.¹⁵¹

Not surprisingly, "third road" ideologies such as that of Bonpane also called for the rethinking the insinuation, common in Cold War rhetoric, that some parts of the world were "free" and some were not. This was, according to Bonpane, one of the most misleading myths of the modern world. What did it mean to belong to the "free world"? By what virtues did the despotic dictatorships in Chile, Guatemala, Paraguay, Philippines, Haiti, Taiwan, South Korea, or El Salvador belong to the "free world"? "Clearly," answered Bonpane, what distinguished "free world" from "slave world" in the minds of "government propagandists" was whether a country allowed "U.S.

¹⁵¹ Bonpane, 102.

corporations to export its wealth” or at least gave them a chance to do so.¹⁵² He also questioned the logic of the free market economy based on the presumptions that money represents a “constant value”, rather than a historically dynamic value resulting in its reciprocal relationships with crime, education, and health care¹⁵³, and on the notion that an “economy will operate without planning” – as according to Ronald Reagan and Adam Smith.¹⁵⁴ Functional and just economy had to be based, according to Bonpane, on self-determined needs of the people rather than in the logic of supply-side economics:

Once conscious of reality, we can understand that production determines consumption. Military production creates wars. [...] The power of production determining consumption is obvious in the world of ideas, music, television, movies, Twinkies, and Coke. We “eat” these items not because of inherent value but simply because they are produced and advertised. They are what is available and known.¹⁵⁵

Functional and just society could not be built, however, without the complete overhaul of people’s system of values. This transformation would have to start with education of children, with home-growing new generations of conscientious and generous people, freed from the misleading ideals of consumer-induced individualism:

Selfishness as a necessity permeates our environment. The natural communal feelings of children are successfully crushed by our school systems. They are taught to get smart and to realize that “business is business” and that “this is not a charitable institution.” We are teaching them the problem. The solution is to free up their natural selflessness, their natural humanism, their natural desire to view society in a familiar manner.¹⁵⁶

For Bonpane, therefore, just like for the Pope, the solution to the most pressing problems in society resided in the development of a civic culture of a specific kind of

¹⁵² Ibid, 90.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 91.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 91.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

individualism, certainly having little to do with what in the Western world was propagated as individualism. Neo-Christian individualism was to be based on self-respect and self-knowledge, audacity to think for one self and against socio-political dogmas, resistance to the culture of mass consumption of ideological and material products, and, most of all, on genuine concern with one's duty in society and responsibility to it expressed as unequivocal rejection of greed and selfishness.

In 1980s Poland, *Solidarność*, because of its neo-Christian ideology, broke and inverted two major myths of modernity: the inevitability of violence in revolution and the predominance of economism in class the consciousness of proletariat. The first myth, championing the idea that all revolutions inescapably either started or resulted in endemic violence, and therefore lacked self-controlling mechanisms, reached back to the paradigm established by the French Revolution. Weigel writes:

Solidarity, which was born during those stirring August weeks in the Lenin Shipyards, was a test of whether any revolution in the modern world could be both self-regulating and nonviolent. The history of modern revolutionary practice, and the theory of revolution first adumbrated during the French Terror, suggested that both were impossible dreams. Initial intentions notwithstanding, revolutions inevitably took on a life of their own, and the life inevitably led to (when it did not begin in) violence.¹⁵⁷

The Polish final revolution of 1989, which proved to be the 'straw' that broke the Soviet Union's back, reversed the logic of two hundred years of modern revolutionary history by proving that self-control and nonviolence were indeed possible. Moreover, it also established, through the explicit influence of the Catholic Church, a principle for revolutionary action novel in European politics: adherence to nonviolence and self-

¹⁵⁷ Weigel, 139.

restraint as the only “morally acceptable” form of resistance.¹⁵⁸ Second, the Polish revolution “inverted the vanguard claims of Marxism-Leninism”¹⁵⁹: it rose against, not to preserve, the Communist state and it concerned itself with issues of political pluralism, civic duty, and universal rights of men, rather than limiting itself to the narrow economic concerns of the proletariat. Timothy Garton Ash writes about the August 1980

Solidarność strike that initiated the peaceful revolution:

In eighteen days Poland’s workers had blown a huge hole through the Leninist myth that the working class cannot see beyond immediate economic wants, and is therefore doomed to founder in mere economist *tredyunionism* until its sights are raised by a communist party. [During the Solidarity August of 1980] the roles were reversed: the party clung to economic issues, while the workers raised their own sights to the higher plane of human rights and political participation. It was the beginning of a worker’s revolution against a “Worker’s State.”¹⁶⁰

Józef Tischner, the chaplain of Solidarność, remarked that the Catholic Church, and especially the Pope, taught Poles “a new way to be partisan.”¹⁶¹ Amidst the 1980 strikes the workers proudly proclaimed their transformation into mature citizens and boldly taunted the regime by assuring it they would not be provoked into violence. The editors of “Solidarity Strike Bulletin” thus introduced them:

The Polish worker of 1980 is a conscious, reasonable member of our society whom one shouldn’t try to threaten nor to calm down, for he can’t be frightened and he doesn’t create disorder. The calm, the moderation, and the discipline of the inhabitants of the coast are the best proof of this.¹⁶²

The workers learned from the Church, much like the Salvadorans through CEBs, to abandon fatality and defeatism and become conscientious and dignified social agents of their own political destiny. In a sense, the moral guidance of the Church prevented

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 140.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Quoted in Weigel, 140.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Quoted in MacDonald, ed., The Polish August, 65

Polish workers and Salvadoran peasants from aspiring to become ‘bourgeois’ and educated them, instead, to become neo-Christian citizens striving for participatory democracy. By doing so the Church helped to undermine another important myth of modernity: the middle class’s historical attachment to elections as an expression of democracy – a procedure which, often times, had less to do with participatory democratic process and more with commercialized spectacle.

The documentation of the “Gdańsk Agreement”, which ended the strike on August 31 1980 that initiated Poland’s peaceful revolution, reveals the extent to which the Church’s, and especially the Pope’s ideology of progressive neo-Christian citizenship permeated the workers’ philosophy. The workers demanded: political room for “self-managing society”¹⁶³, decision making power in the “division of the national assets between consumption and accumulation” and the “division of social consumption fund (health, education, culture”, and direction of investment, prices, and wages,¹⁶⁴ egalitarian human relations between employers and employees,¹⁶⁵ a new agricultural structure of “autonomous institutions and genuine cooperative system,”¹⁶⁶ an end to illogical, unsustainable, and abusive “plunder of the nation’s property” and resources, and an end to “manipulation of investment funds according to the internal rivalries of different groups.”¹⁶⁷ The analogy to Liberation Theology’s theory of the structural conditions of underdevelopment is self-evident in the documentation of the demands of *Solidarność*. As to the dire economic situation into which the Communist regime had

¹⁶³ Ibid, 156.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 103.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, 67.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, 60.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 48.

driven the nation by the 1980s, Polish workers explicitly compared it to the results of military regimes' economic politics in Latin America:

We would like to know, and furthermore we have the right to know what the purpose of all our efforts of the past 36 years has been. We have the right to know what had happened to the fruits of our labors, -- which have not been small -- that we should now find ourselves in this situation. [...]

For 30 years at least my generation, the one which is just retiring from the scene, and the generation which was born during the war have done nothing except work for the health of the economy. They have accepted to this end continual sacrifices, poverty and renewed efforts. We are something of an anomaly on the European scene, subject as we have been to three decades of monumental errors and governmental reshuffles reminiscent of Latin America.¹⁶⁸

Liberation Theology, especially in its intensely intellectual and activist form, such as found in El Salvador during Cold War, and the ideology of neo-Christian anti-totalitarianism, such as that of Polish Solidarność, invented thus a new revolutionary style: one which avoided the 'sins' of the oppressive regimes: violence, propaganda, and manipulation. The new revolutionaries – workers or peasants – were educated in civics, self-disciplined, well organized, methodical, but, above all, Christian activists who confronted the regime's domination over cultural life, national histories, and channels of communication. The leader of Warsaw's Solidarność Zbigniew Bujak remarked: "Once, resistance had meant taking up a gun. Now people instinctively took up typewriters."¹⁶⁹ The meaning of revolution was thus transformed from a spontaneous and violent outburst of resistance to oppression to a systematic and nonviolent grassroots organization of resistant civil society, which operated with the help of national and international public opinion and based its political values in Christian ethics.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 40.

¹⁶⁹ Quoted in Weigel, 153.

Finally, the conclusions of Cold War struggles in Poland and El Salvador provided new paradigms for modern conflict resolution. Throughout the history of the 20th century despotic regimes and totalitarian empires toppled each other in military coups and constant warfare. The Cold War was the ultimate expression of the mentality of militarization pervading the modern political psyche. The Polish peaceful revolution, culminating in the 1989 Round Table Talks, provided a new model for conflict resolution by showing that it was possible to delegitimize the center of power by pressure from peripheral civil movements. The Salvadoran Peace Talks, culminating in the 1992 Chapultepec Agreements, proved that military regimes and oligarchic political structures were no longer hermetically enclosed in regional milieus but subject to international public opinion and policy.

In Poland, after the death of Father Popiełuszko in 1984, which revived *Solidarność* and completely delegitimized the Communist government in the eyes of civil society, the Communist regime continued its pressure on Church resistance, but the Church continued to support *Solidarność* and endeavored to see the conflict through to its logical conclusions. In April and May of 1989 massive strikes at Warsaw's steel plant and Gdańsk's shipyards, as well as pro-*Solidarność* demonstrations led by workers and students in several Polish cities, pressured the government to negotiations.¹⁷⁰ The Soviet Union by that time, economically weakened by Star Wars (the proliferation of Soviet-American nuclear buildup), was led by the progressive Secretary Gorbachev who initiated *perestroika* – a series of reforms aimed at modernizing the Soviet Union. There

¹⁷⁰ Weigel, 154.

was a mood of change. General Jaruzelski's government attempted to involve the Church in the dialogue with Solidarność, but the Church abstained letting Solidarność build its own independent political identity at this crucial moment. That is not to say that the Church was not present in the Round Table Talks of 1989 that concluded the Polish "social civil war"¹⁷¹. As a result of the Round Table negotiations on June 4th 1989 partially free elections were held, in which an entire new stratum of neo-Christian, centrist, and pro-socialist parties took part – an expression of the pluralism for which Solidarność struggled. Solidarność, which never became a political party but, as an ideological faction, was to exert enormous influence in the new Polish Parliament, won 161 contested seats in Sejm (lower parliamentary chamber) and an unprecedented 99 out of 100 seats in the newly established Senate.¹⁷² On August 24 1989 Tadeusz Mazowiecki, one of the leading Catholic ideological architects of Solidarność and personal adviser to Lech Wałęsa, became the first noncommunist prime minister of pluralist Poland.¹⁷³ When asked by a foreign reporter whether he considered himself a social democrat, the new Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki replied: "Simply put, I am a Christian, a Catholic who follows the social teaching of the Catholic Church, which emanates from the instructions of Pope John Paul II."¹⁷⁴

In El Salvador, the name of which translates to The Savior, the Catholic Church was the savior. Still connected to elites and the government, but now firmly implanted in civil society through the "popular church" and the CEBs, the Church was now led by

¹⁷¹ Weigel, 155.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Bill Keller, "Soviet Congratulations Sent to New Premier of Poland," New York Times, 25 August 1989. A1.

Oscar Romero's replacement progressive Archbishop Arturo Rivera y Damas. The Church announced, in 1988, a National Debate for Peace, thus establishing a new form of conflict resolution – *Encuentro* – based on the premises of participatory democracy that linked modern practices of liberal politics with the traditional communal politics of rural and indigenous civic groups. The Salvadoran National Debate on Peace drew the participation of educational groups, cultural associations, universities, and popular organizations as well as four non-Catholic churches – 60 civic groups in total.¹⁷⁵ Political parties did not participate but instituted their own “forum on national reality” at the American Central University.¹⁷⁶ The differentiation between the official traditional political parties and civil society at large was an important development – it signaled the emergence of a wide stratum of civic activity aimed at reformulation of political processes. Not yet pluralistic, like that in Poland, but no longer passive in subjection to oligarchic patrimony, Salvadoran political culture was changing. The results of the National Debate for Peace testified to the fact that, the endemic violence of the civil war notwithstanding, Salvadoran civil society beyond the paramilitary groups and even the FMLN abhorred violence and was seeking salvation in politics based on Christian ethics and rational policies aimed at the inclusion of the now vibrant civil society into the political process. Klaiber writes about the National Debate for Peace:

Part of its success of its success was due to the fact that the most difficult part had been accomplished before the event itself. Each group had previously answered a detailed survey and sent in its observations. During the debate itself the representatives could see where everyone stood on every important issue. According to the survey, 82 percent of the participants condemned the war as the solution to the country's problems. Also, 82 percent held that “elections by themselves would not guarantee democracy.” There was total unanimity on the

¹⁷⁵ Klaiber, 185.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

proposition that “dialogue constitutes the most rational, just, and Christian method for a solution of the conflict.”¹⁷⁷

Archbishop Rivera y Damas handed the finished document from the National Debate to President José Napoleón Duarte as a symbol of “national consensus”¹⁷⁸ on the fact that the government and the FMLN were now not alone in deciding the fate of the country, as well as a symbol of the enormous influence of Christian political ethics on civic life. But the document also signified a mandate for continued dialogue expressly shifting the responsibility to the government and the FMLN to end violence and sit at a negotiation table.

The massacre of Jesuit intellectuals at UCA in 1989 interrupted preparations for Peace Talks but also prompted an intensification of pressure from within El Salvador and from international activists and governments to end the senseless violence. Thus, when FMLN and the government of newly ‘elected’ President Alfredo Cristiani of ARENA (National Renovating Alliance) finally met, in 1990 in Geneva, at the request of Central American governments the United Nations, rather than the Church, acted as the mediator.¹⁷⁹ The symbolic transference of the mediating function from the Church to the international community signified a dawn of a new era in modern diplomacy: from then on various human rights and religious groups would share in the processes of conflict resolutions. The 1990 Geneva meeting was followed by several more conferences, which resulted in the establishment of ONUSAL (the Mission of Observers of the United Nations in El Salvador) and COPAZ (the National Commission for the

¹⁷⁷ Klaiber, 185.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Klaiber, 190.

Consolidation of Peace).¹⁸⁰ Now, national and international civil societies were observing El Salvador. Finally, on January 16, 1992, in Chapultepec, in presence of the secretary general of the United Nations Boutros Ghali and several regional and European governments, the Peace Agreement was signed into law. President Cristiani and FMLN principal spokesman Shafik Handal shook hands.¹⁸¹ The Chapultepec Agreement abolished the National Guard and Rural Police, ordered immediate demobilization of FMLN and its absorption into Salvadoran civil life as well as the reduction and reorganization of the army, and established the Truth Commission for the investigation of crimes against humanity and other human rights abuses during the Salvadoran civil war. Although President Cristiani eventually issued general amnesty for those implicated by the Truth Commission as responsible for assassinations, massacres and other killings¹⁸², the international investigation into Salvadoran war crimes also established a new precedent – crimes against the poor, clergy, intellectuals and other members of civil society were not, from now on, going to go unnoticed. In September of 1992 Archbishop Rivera y Damas witnessed an oath ceremony in which the FMLN leadership and several guerrilla commanders and foot soldiers converted their Marxist army into a legitimate political party¹⁸³ – a symbol of the Church's role as an agent for social change and its effort to transform a violent revolution into a peaceful political process. In spite of the endemic violence, the Salvadoran Church's mission of peace resulted in the end not only in ceasefire but, equally importantly, in the establishment

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Klaiber, 192.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

of new socio-political mechanisms of prevention of violence, exploitation, and oppression.

The Polish Round Table and the Salvadoran Peace Talks signaled an ushering in of a new era in national and international politics. By compelling the Communist regime to negotiations resulting in political compromise the Polish workers, unionized with the spiritual and material help of the Church, successfully challenged the center of power – the Soviet Union, and propelled it into eventual reformation. The Salvadoran peasants, while not being able to directly challenge the center of power – the United States, became major actors, however, in an effective international public opinion campaign that eventually resulted in the formation of various international organizations dedicated to prevention and investigation of human rights abuses. Because of this new international social activism, in which Liberation Theology played a dominant ideological role, the United Nations was transformed into an institution devoted to ‘watching’ out for crimes against humanity.

CONCLUSION

That the Westminster Abbey adorned its walls with statues of Christian martyrs signified that the ecumenical Church has been gradually coming, at the dawn of the third millennium of its existence, to the acknowledgment that the Church's mission must ultimately be a populist one; that such recognition of martyrdom should take place at the ultimate center of colonial and imperial power is inescapably ironic. Those statues, representing people and their struggles in peripheral countries, signify both the liberal ideals of equality and justice and the fact that those ideals do not work for the majority of world's populations. Likewise, those statues signpost a sardonic comment on the role of the institutional Church in modern world, for the Church, throughout the nineteenth century and more than a half of the twentieth century, indirectly facilitated abuses to liberty and justice by remaining entrenched in the milieus of various national elites. The statues of martyrs, therefore, represent the uneasy conscience of the 'civilized' world which is inseparable, in general terms, from the Christian world. Symbolically, martyrdom challenges the existence of structures of oppression that colonialism, imperialism, and 20th century militarism imposed on 'underdeveloped' nations while also pointing the finger at the institutional Church's complicity in building of such structures. About martyrdom's challenge to the institutional Church from the Latin American perspective of struggle with poverty and marginality Jon Sobrino writes:

From the standpoint of Latin American reality, martyrs are (a) those who have lived as Jesus did and have been murdered for the same cause as Jesus (for example, Archbishop Romero); and (b) those who have been massacred, massively, cruelly, unjustly, and defenselessly, because their death was necessary for the perpetuation of injustice (the massacres of El Mozote, Guatemala, Haiti, Rwanda, etcetera).

It is those martyrs who challenge the Church; or to put it differently, if they cannot do so, it is doubtful that anything can. Quantitatively, there are too many of them to be ignored. Qualitatively, the horror and the love they express is sufficient to shake us and inspire us.¹⁸⁴

Historically, martyrdom challenges the Church to separate abstract spirituality from practical morality of everyday life – as in separating the mystic Jesus as an immaterial savior of humanity in the future from the historic Jesus as a revolutionary activist who died because of the actual oppression of one group of human beings over the other.

The emergence of the popular Church in the second half of the twentieth century, capable of producing such martyrs as Archbishop Romero or Father Popiełuszko, is indeed an extraordinary development in modern history. It signifies the first major attempt at soul searching, on the part of the rapidly civilizing world, for answers to questions left unanswered by the ideas of liberal secularism, to which, as my thesis has illustrated, communism belongs as much as capitalism does. The French Revolution along with the industrial and subsequent technological revolutions ushered, in the ‘developed’ world, an era of religion as abstract quality, expressed as and protected by the bourgeois idea of individual freedom from repression but also from responsibility. The revolutions of the late twentieth century, such as that in Poland or El Salvador, challenged this modern intangible understanding of religion by asserting that “democracy cannot be built on foundations of moral indifference.”¹⁸⁵ For the liberal secularism has ultimately resulted in the horrors of Nazism and Stalinism, and through the proliferation of Western economic colonialism threatened to incorporate the ‘third World’ populations into global proletariat at the service of international corporations producing immense wealth for some and resulting in massive poverty for others –

¹⁸⁴ Sobrino, 137.

¹⁸⁵ Weigel, 199.

comparable, indeed, to what absolutist, divinely sanctioned monarchies supported by extracting wealth from the colonies, endeavored to do before the French Revolution. The novelty in the popular Church's response to the challenges posed by the Cold War conflicts, therefore, rested in its historically unprecedented attempt to reconstruct the parameters of the Christian 'ultimate moral truth' as guidance for political and economic human activities. In 1991 encyclical *Centesimus Annus* Pope John Paul II thus spoke of the predicament of secularized democratic forms of modern political life:

Nowadays there is a tendency to claim that agnosticism and skeptical relativism are the philosophy and the basic attitude which correspond to democratic forms of political life. Those who are convinced that they know the truth and firmly adhere to it are considered unreliable from a democratic point of view, since they do not accept that truth is determined by majority, or that it is a subject to variation according to different political trends. It must be observed in this regard that if there is no ultimate truth to guide and direct political activity, then ideas and convictions can easily be manipulated for reasons of power. As history demonstrates, a democracy without values easily turns into open or thinly disguised totalitarianism.¹⁸⁶

Archbishop Romero and Father Popiełuszko, as well as the civil societies in which they thrived and for which they died, established models for new moral economy of modern life. That is, of course, not to say that post-Cold war El Salvador or Poland turned suddenly into oasis of equality and justice nor that the Catholic Church abruptly severed its historical ties to elitist political and economic structures of domination. But the memories of their lives and the ideals for which they died remain uncontained and inexhaustible reservoirs of inspiration to present and future generations – they keep on nudging at the conscience of the modern men as they boldly march into the third millennium of the Christian era, prodding it to ponder at the ultimate meaning of injustice: taking more than one needs for survival, especially the life of another.

¹⁸⁶ Quoted in Weigel, 199-200.