The Land of the Savior:
Óscar Romero and the Reform of Agriculture

by

Matthew Philipp Whelan

Graduate Program in Religion
Duke University

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J. Warren Smith

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy in the Graduate Program in
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

This study approaches Óscar Romero by attending to his intimate involvement in and concern for the problematic surrounding the reform of Salvadoran agriculture and the conflict over property and possession underlying it. In this study, I situate Romero in relation to the concentration of landholding and the production of landlessness in El Salvador over the course of the twentieth century, and I examine his participation in the longstanding societal and ecclesial debate about agrarian reform provoked by these realities. I try to show how close attention to agrarian reform and what was at stake in it can illumine not only the conflict that occasioned Romero's martyrdom but the meaning of the martyrdom itself.

Understanding Romero's involvement in the debate about agrarian reform requires sustained attention to how it takes its bearings from the line of thinking about property and possession for which Pope Leo XIII's 1891 encyclical *Rerum novarum* stands as a new beginning. The enclyclical tradition developing out of Leo's pontificate is commonly referred to as Catholic social doctrine or Catholic social teaching. Romero's and the Church's participation in the debate about agrarian reform in El Salvador is unintelligible apart from it.

What Romero and the encyclical tradition share, I argue, is an understanding of creation as a common gift, from which follows a distinctive construal of property and

the demands of justice with respect to possessing it. On this view, property does not name, as it is often taken to mean, the enclosure of what is common for the exclusive use of its possessors—something to be held by them over and against others. Rather, property and everything related to its holding derive from the claim that creation is a gift given to human creatures in common. The acknowledgement of creation as a common gift gives rise to what I describe in this study as a politics of common use, of which agrarian reform is one expression.

In Romero's El Salvador, those who took the truth of creation as common gift seriously—those who spoke out against or opposed the ubiquity of the concentration of land and who clamored for agrarian reform so that the landless and land-poor could have access to land to cultivate for subsistence—suffered greatly as a consequence. I argue that, among other things, their suffering shows how, under the conditions of sin and violence, those who work to ensure that others have access to what is theirs in justice often risk laying down their lives in charity. In other words, they witness to the way that God's work to restore creation has a cruciform shape. Therefore, while the advocacy for agrarian reform begins with the understanding of creation as common gift, the testimony to this truth in word and in deed points to the *telos* of the gift and the common life in the crucified and risen Lord in which it participates.

Dedication

For Natalie

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Introduction

> They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat.
>
> —Isaiah 65:21

> The Church proclaims the new heavens and the new earth; she also knows that no socio-political configuration can be exchanged with the final plentitude that God gives. But she has also learned that God maintains transcendental hope with signs of historical hope, even though they are signs apparently as simple as those Isaiah proclaims when he says: "They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit" (Isaiah 65:21). That in these words there is authentic Christian hope…can be learned by daily contact with those who do not have house or vineyard, with those who build so that others inhabit and work so that others eat the fruits.
>
> —Óscar Romero, *La dimensión política de la fe desde la opción por los pobres*

On 24 March 1980, Óscar Romero was shot and killed at the altar of the Divine Providence Chapel while celebrating mass. He had just finished the homily and was beginning the liturgy of the Eucharist. The person who shot him was a sniper connected to one of many death squads operating with impunity in El Salvador at the time. Romero was the sitting archbishop of San Salvador, El Salvador.

During his three years as archbishop, Romero had risen rapidly to international prominence for his work on behalf of the victims of a brutal military regime. In 1978, members of the British Parliament and the United States Congress nominated him for the Nobel Peace Prize.[1] News of Romero's death reverberated far beyond Central America's *pulgarcito* or little thumb—as the Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral affectionately dubbed El Salvador. "This death," Gustavo Gutiérrez declared not long afterwards, "divides the recent the Church in Latin America into a 'before' and an 'after.'"[2]

Most immediately, for many Salvadorans it marked the inevitability of civil war. Romero's biographer Roberto Morozzo della Rocca observes that it silenced the principal voice opposing the mounting violence. It eliminated the person who best represented the possibility of a peaceful solution to the country's crisis—who demonstrated day in and day out willingness for "mediation, encounter, and dialogue" among the opposing sides.[3] The repression of the 1970s not only left victims in its train; it also generated revolutionaries. And in the aftermath of Romero's death, the ranks of the armed opposition to the regime swelled.[4] Romero's very existence, Morozzo writes, stood as a "barrier" to the spread of the violence. Once he was killed, the "retaining walls" holding back war broke.[5]

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[1] James R. Brockman, *Romero: A Life*, 25th edition (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2005), 148–149.

[2] Quoted in María López Vigil, *La vida por el pueblo: cristianos de comunidades populares en América Latina* (Editorial Popular, 1981), 21; Scott Wright, *Oscar Romero and the Communion of the Saints: A Biography* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2009), 3; *La Iglesia en El Salvador* (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1982), 103.

[3] Roberto Morozzo Della Rocca, *Primero Dios: vida de Monseñor Romero* (Buenos Aires: Edhasa, 2010), 11, 21.

[4] Ibid., 26.

To what does the life and the death of Óscar Romero bear witness? What follows is in many ways an extended response to this question. For the repression in El Salvador not only left victims and generated revolutionaries; it also produced martyrs—witnesses. After his death, popular traditions recognizing Romero as a martyr and commemorating the day of his death arose almost immediately.[6] Since that time, his renown has only increased.

But the question as to what Romero witnesses has always been a complex and contested one. The *Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional* (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front, FMLN), which fought the Salvadoran government to a stalemate during the twelve-year civil war, was among the first to glorify Romero as a martyr of the people.[7] Carlos Mauricio Funes Cartagena, who in 2009 became the first

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[5] Ibid., 30.

[6] "To speak in public about Romero was extremely dangerous, and one could not trust anyone in this regard; the consequences of showing esteem for Romero could be deadly." Roberto Casas Andrés, *Dios Pasó Por El Salvador. La Relevancia Teológica de Las Tradiciones Narrativas de Los Mártires Salvadoreños IDTP, 2009* (Bilbao: Desclée de Brouwer, 2009), 193, 179–244.

[7] Morozzo Della Rocca, *Primero Dios*, 485.

FMLN candidate elected to the presidency of El Salvador, ran on a platform that drew direct inspiration from Romero[8] and publicly apologized for the state's role in Romero's death.[9] To this day in Latin America and beyond, one frequently encounters Romero's image emblazoned side-by-side with the likes of Ernesto 'Che' Guevara—an association that, among other things, suggests Marxism and revolutionary politics.

Yet in the initial years after Romero's death and in the midst of the civil war, Pope John Paul II visited El Salvador in 1983 during a trip to Central America. Against much opposition, he prayed at Romero's tomb and said to those present, "Romero is ours."[10] It is a fascinating assertion for many reasons, implying not only that Romero abided in full communion with the Church and her teaching to the end, but also that he has come to represent something quite alien from either. Pope Benedict XVI similarly spoke openly of Romero as a martyr,[11] calling his death "truly 'credible,' a witness to the faith."[12]

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[8] "I will govern like Monseñor Romero," Funes said, with "courage" and "prophetic vision," listening "to the cry of justice from the Salvadoran people." Quoted in Kevin Clarke, *Oscar Romero: Love Must Win Out* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2014), 136.

[9] "I am seeking pardon in the name of the state," Funes said. The right-wing death squads that killed him and terrorized the Salvadoran people "acted with the protection, collaboration or participation of state agents." Quoted in "Official El Salvador Apology for Romero's Murder," *BBC*, 25 March 2010.

[10] Carlos Colorado, "Romero: Whose Beatification Is It, Anyway?," *Super Martyrio*, May 11, 2015. John Paul spoke of Romero as a martyr. See Kenneth L. Woodward, *Making Saints: How The Catholic Church Determines Who Becomes A Saint, Who Doesn't, And Why* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 44. During the Jubilee Year celebrations and its commemoration of the martyrs of the twentieth century, John Paul insisted that Romero be included.

Some have written about Romero as a martyr of liberation[13] and of the popular church (*iglesia popular*),[14] while others have written about him as a martyr of the Eucharist[15] and of the magisterium of the Catholic Church.[16] His death has been understood as a consequence of the hatred of justice[17] as well as of the Gospel.[18]

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[11] In his 25 March 2007 Angelus address, Pope Benedict XVI said: "The 'yes' of Jesus and Mary is renewed in the 'yes' of the saints, especially the martyrs who are killed because of the Gospel. I stress this because yesterday, March 24, the anniversary of the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero, Archbishop of San Salvador, we celebrated the Day of Prayer and Fasting for Missionary Martyrs: bishops, priests, religious and lay people killed in fulfilling its mission of evangelization and human promotion."

[12] Pope Benedict XVI, *Interview of His Holiness Benedict XVI During the Flight to Brazil*, 9 May 2007.

[13] Jon Sobrino, *Romero: Martyr for Liberation*, Reprint edition (London: Catholic Institute for International Relations, 1986).

[14] Plácido Erdozaín, *Monseñor Romero, mártir de la Iglesia popular* (San José, Costa Rica: Departamento Ecuménico de Investigaciones, 1980).

[15] William Cavanaugh, "Dying for the Eucharist or Being Killed By It? Romero's Challenge to First-World Christians," *Theology Today* 58, no. 2 (2001).

[16] Ricardo Urioste, *Monseñor Romero mártir por el magisterio eclesiástico* (San Salvador: Fundación Monseñor Romero, 2012).

[17] Karl Rahner, "Dimensions of Martyrdom: A Plea for Broadening a Classical Concept," *Concilium* 3, no. 163 (1983): 10.

[18] See the preface, written by Jean-Dominique Durand, of the French edition of Roberto Morozzo Della Rocca, *Msr Oscar Romero*, trans. Chrystèle Francillon (Paris: Éditions Desclée de Brouwer, 2015), 6.

But even to this day, the meaning of Romero's witness remains contested. On 23 May 2015, he was beatified a martyr of the Church in downtown San Salvador. I was at work in the archdiocesan archives the week before the ceremony, and the solemnity of the place was striking. One might have expected a more celebratory atmosphere considering that the first Salvadoran martyr was about to be beatified. Media outlets were abuzz with controversy about how the Church was handling the preparations for the beatification. Is not the pomp and circumstance of the event, the marketing campaign promoting it, and the exclusive broadcast rights given to the corporate Telecorporación Salvadoreña a betrayal of Romero? Is this the best way to remember him and what he stood for? Why are artists being chosen to perform that had never before expressed interest in him, as opposed to those who had long been devotees and committed to maintenance of his memory? Is the very motto for the beatification (*Romero, mártir por amor* or Romero, martyr for love) an attempt to suppress the difficult truth that Romero was killed in hatred of the faith (*in odium fidei*)—a hatred that is still very much alive among the Church's detractors as well as her own membership?[19]

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[19] And these questions are just a small sampling of controversy. Additionally, there were concerns over seating arrangements—specifically, how representatives of marginalized communities were placed behind cardinals, bishops, and heads of state. Moreover, a group of civil war veterans occupied the site designated for the beatification to demand increases in their pensions. See Colorado, "Romero: Whose Beatification Is It, Anyway?"

Carlos Colorado insightfully observes that the beatification marked "the climax of an epic battle over the identity of Archbishop Romero"—a battle about "who owns the legacy of Romero" and about "who really has the right to claim Romero and speak for him," which began the day he was buried.[20] For some, it was as if, in beatifying Romero, the Church was wresting something that belonged to them.[21]

I raise these issues not to try to resolve them but to signal something of the complexity of the witness in question and the ongoing debates into which this study inserts itself. For this and for other many other reasons besides, I offer it with fear and trembling. I take comfort, however, in John Sobrino's admonition that "the greatest danger is to declare [Romero] an object of private property…as if grace and truth had an owner and did not belong to everyone."[22]

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[20] Ibid.

[21] In this connection, it is important to mention the concerns over the fate of Romero's relics the Carmelite nuns that have cared for them for decades but who fear they will now be taken from them. As Sister Elvia Elizett Cazun Penate, one of the nuns responsible for them puts it, "For 35 years, no one here in El Salvador offered us any help to preserve them; not even the hierarchy of the Salvadoran Catholic Church." Quoted in Octavio Duran, "What Will Happen to Romero's Relics?" *America*, 8 May 2015.

[22] John Sobrino, *Witnesses to the Kingdom: The Martyrs of El Salvador and the Crucified Peoples* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2003), 187. These words are apposite. They might very well have come from Romero himself, who often speaks in similar terms about martyrs

This study approaches Romero from somewhat of a different vantage than much of the existing scholarship on him. It does not aspire to a comprehensive account of his life.[23] Nor does it dwell upon debates about Romero's Pauline-like 'conversion' after the death of his friend Rutilio Grande[24] or about how best to classify Romero's relationship

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and their meaning for the Church. In the midst of the persecution in the late 1970s, for instance, Romero calls martyrdom a gift that the Church in the land of El Salvador is giving to the Church in other lands. It is a sorrowful gift, to be sure. But it is a gift nonetheless. The witness of the martyrs can and must be presented to the parishes of El Salvador and beyond because it shows the Church the one of whom she is member. What Romero means by this is that martyrs follow and image the love that founds and sustains the Church's life—the love that willingly faces the cross because in Christ that love was crucified but rose again on the third day. Martyrs therefore not only bear witness *to* the incarnation of that love in Jesus Christ. They bear witness to it *for* others—above all, for the upbuilding of Jesus's merciful body in the world. Neither they nor their memory can be therefore possessed like property; they are gift given to the Church in common. See chapter five.

[23] See for instance Morozzo Della Rocca, *Primero Dios*; Brockman, *Romero*; Roberto Morozzo Della Rocca, ed., *Óscar Romero: Un Obispo Entre Guerra Fría y Revolución* (Madrid: Editorial San Pablo España, 2013); Jesús Delgado, *Oscar A. Romero* (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1990); Robert S. Pelton, C.S.C, ed., *Archbishop Romero: Martyr and Prophet for the New Millennium* (Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 2006); Robert S. Pelton, C.S.C, ed., *Monsignor Romero: A Bishop For The Third Millennium* (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004); Rev Robert S. Pelton, C.S.C., ed., *Archbishop Romero and Spiritual Leadership in the Modern World* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015).

[24] Romero often depicted as having undergone a radical conversion with the death of his friend Rutilio Grande in 1977, transforming him from a timid, conservative cleric, blindly obedient to the Church, to a bold fighter for social justice and proponent of the preferential option for the poor. For approaches to Romero that subscribe to this view, see María López Vigil, *Piezas para un Retrato* (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1993); Jon

to the movement known as liberation theology.[25] Instead, it attends to Romero's intimate involvement in and concern for one specific set of issues, the significance of which has yet to be fully appreciated: the problematic surrounding the reform of Salvadoran agriculture and the conflict over property and possession underlying it.[26] In this study, I situate Romero in relation to the concentration of landholding and the production of landlessness in El Salvador over the course of the twentieth century, and I examine his

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Sobrino, *Monseñor Romero* (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1993); Leonardo Boff, "Monseñor Óscar Romero Martire Del Regno, Della Politica Di Dio," in *Óscar Romero* (S. Domenico di Fiesole: Ed. Cultura della Pace, 1993). Many others have sought to complicate this story. For a good discussion, see Morozzo Morozzo Della Rocca, *Primero Dios*, 185–195.

[25] Those who have most insistently called the world's attention to Romero typically identify themselves and Romero with liberation theology. Alfred T. Hennelly, ed., *Liberation Theology: A Documentary History* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1990), 264, 266, 268, 292–306, 314, 340, 389, 535. Once again, Morozzo and others have sought to complicate this identification. Morozzo Della Rocca, *Primero Dios*, 320–335. See the recent intervention of Michael E. Lee, "¿Era Monseñor Romero un verdadero representante de la teología de la liberación?" *El Faro*, 11 mayo 2015.

[26] I do not mean to suggest that there is no discussion of agrarian reform, or that what discussions do occur are not good. I simply meant to suggest that they are usually brief and in the background. Agrarian reform is not foregrounded in them in the way that it is here. Of the main biographies on Romero, there is no mention of agrarian reform in Delgado's *Oscar A. Romero*. There are short discussions in Brockman's *Romero: A Life* (see 2-3, 214-215, 237); Wright's *Communion of Saints* (109, 125); and Pelton's *Archbishop Romero: Martyr and Prophet for the New Millennium* (2), *Monsignor Romero: A Bishop For The Third Millennium* (89), and *Archbishop Romero and Spiritual Leadership in the Modern World* (56, 76, 117). An exception in this regard is Morozzo's *Primero Dios* (24, 130, 146, 148, 414-415, 433, 437-438, 452).

participation in the longstanding societal and ecclesial debate about agrarian reform provoked by these realities. I try to show how close attention to this problematic and what was at stake in it can illumine not only the conflict that occasioned Romero's martyrdom but the meaning of the martyrdom itself.

But understanding Romero's involvement in the debate about agrarian reform requires sustained attention to how his involvement takes its bearings from the line of thinking about property and possession for which Pope Leo XIII's landmark 1891 encyclical *Rerum novarum* stands as a new beginning. That the encyclical tradition developing out of Leo XIII's pontificate—a tradition commonly referred to as Catholic social doctrine or Catholic social teaching[27]—articulates its own call for agrarian reform is a fact that is not very well known.[28] But Romero's and the Church's participation in the debate about agrarian reform in El Salvador is unintelligible apart from it.

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[27] Pius XI was the first pope to speak of social doctrine as a unified body of teachings. In *Quadragesimo anno*, he writes that he inherited a "doctrine" handed on from the time of Leo XIII (§15). Since Leo, popes have issued more than two hundred and fifty encyclicals and other teaching letters. But this body of teaching also includes documents from Councils, Roman curial offices and synods, and regional synods and episcopal conferences. In this dissertation I focus upon the line of thinking that commemorates *Rerum novarum*. See chapter two and three.

[28] The only work of which I am aware that examines this tradition at any length is Marcelo de Barros Souza and José Luis Caravias, *Teología de La Tierra* (Madrid: Ediciones Paulinas, 1988), 336–384. But the work of Barros Souza and Caravias is more of a compendium of relevant texts than a study. For a brief examination of this tradition that

In arguing for the importance of the encyclical tradition for understanding Romero, this study supplements much existing scholarship on Romero and on the Church in El Salvador more generally. The hunger and thirst for justice that animated Romero those who looked to him for guidance is almost always narrated in terms of the ‘application’ of the Second Vatican Council to the life of the Church in Latin America beginning at the Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops at Medellín, Colombia in 1968.[29] In the words of Penny Lernoux, “Medellín produced the Magna Carta of today’s persecuted, socially committed Church.”[30] As it is often told, the story of Romero is the story of his embrace of Medellín and its Church. I say this study supplements much existing scholarship because I attempt to show that *in addition* to the crucial importance of the conciliar renewal upon Latin America, it is imperative to read

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focuses on the United States, see John Hart, *The Spirit of the Earth: A Theology of the Land* (Ramsey, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1984). For a brief examination that focuses on Brazil, see Roy H. May, *The Poor of the Land: A Christian Case for Land Reform* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991), 75–105.

[29] Hence the statement of Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, the postulator of the cause of canonization of Romero, that those who killed Romero “intended to strike at the Church that flowed from the Second Vatican Council.” Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, *Press Conference on Romero’s Martyrdom*, 4 May 2015. See also the representative comments in Wright, *Oscar Romero and the Communion of the Saints*, xii, 27–28, 32–33.

[30] Penny Lernoux, *Cry of the People: The Struggle for Human Rights in Latin America—the Catholic Church in Conflict with U.S. Policy* (New York: Penguin Books, 1980), 37.

Romero in relation to the line of thinking about property and possession Leo XIII articulates in *Rerum novarum*—a line of thinking about property and possession *that was itself carried through by the conciliar renewal.* To those already familiar with Romero, I can only plead that by setting out with me on a side trail through otherwise well-trodden terrain, they might come to appreciate features of the landscape that had previously escaped their notice.

In my treatment of Romero and the encyclical tradition, I frequently refer, as I do above, to the Church's social doctrine or Catholic social teaching. Here at the outset it is important to underscore that I am not attempting to make sweeping claims about Catholicism as such, whose history on the matters in question is diverse, complex, and even profoundly disturbing. By my use of these and similar formulations, I am referring to what Pope Pius XI in *Quadragesimo anno* calls the "doctrine on the social and economic question" that he receives from Leo XIII and that he seeks to defend and develop in *Quadragesimo anno* (§15). I therefore do not mean to imply some generalized singularity or uniformity in Church teaching, as if the understanding of property and possession to which I attend has been the only way Catholics or even the Church's teaching office has reflected upon these matters.

There are important divergences, for instance, between the understanding of property and possession I explore in these pages and that of the Franciscans, about which there has been much renewal of interest as of late.[31] Moreover, the understanding I explore was, needless to say, a minority position when Las Casas and other Dominicans sought to articulate it in the sixteenth century. In *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias (A Brief Account of the Destruction of the Indies)*, las Casas discusses Pedro de Alvarado—the figure who conquered Cuscatlán, the land that would one day become El Salvador—and "all the devastations, all the deaths, all the extirpations of peoples from their lands, all such savage acts of injustice" with which he is associated.[32] In writing of the way Alvarado committed "slaughters and acts of robbery, burning and stealing and destroying wheresoe'er he came" las Casas mentions that Alvarez did so with the use of a "title."[33]

The "title" in question is the *Requerimiento* or 'Requirement'—a document that played an important part in legitimating the blood and fire with which Christianity came to the Americas. It is a document, as Las Casas himself puts it, "to make one either laugh or weep"[34] Although it is beyond the scope of the present work to trace the theology of the Requirement and its understanding of pontifical authority in temporal affairs—much less the ways figures like Alvarado used it to terrorize, dispossess, and enslave—even a cursory consideration of the Requirement and the debates surrounding it should dispel any notion of uniformity of Church teaching on property and possession over time.[35]

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[31] See Giorgio Agamben, *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-of-Life* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2013); Kelly Johnson, *Fear of Beggars: Poverty and Stewardship in Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007); Brian Hamilton, "Pauperes Christi: Voluntary Poverty as Political Practice" (Ph.D., Notre Dame, 2015); Brian Hamilton, "The Politics of Poverty: A Contribution to a Franciscan Political Theology," *The Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 35, no. 1 (2015).

[32] Fray Bartolomé Las Casas, *An Account, Much Abbreviated, of the Destruction of the Indies With Related Texts*, trans. Andrew Hurley (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2003), 37.

[33] Ibid., 38.

The burden of the present work is to attend to what is admittedly one among many approaches to property and possession—a line of thinking I trace in relation to Leo XIII's *Rerum novarum* and the commentarial tradition inaugurated by it. For the purposes of this dissertation, my primary interest in it is to show its significance for Romero's El Salvador, the debate about agrarian reform, and the conflicts that occasioned Romero's martyrdom.

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[34] Quoted in Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Las Casas: In Search of the Poor of Jesus Christ* (Orbis Books, 1993), 125.

[35] Related documents can be found in Klaus Koschorke, Frieder Ludwig, and Mariano Delgado, eds. *A History of Christianity in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, 1450-1990* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 282-293. See also Lewis Hanke, "The Requirement and Its Interpreters," *Revisita de Historia de America* 1, no. 28 (1938); Gutiérrez, *Las Casas*, 110–125, 502–503.

Lewis Hyde has written, “How we imagine property is how we imagine ourselves.”[36] What he means by this is that discussions about property are never simply about property understood simplistically as objects to be possessed, like land, for instance. Such discussions always also involve questions about human agency, just as they always also implicate the wider social world in which people live and move and make claims about what and how they possess. Jedediah Purdy writes about property in similar terms. He shows that for many early-modern thinkers, property understood in terms of the owner’s exclusive control of access, use, and disposal concerned not only the objects in question. It became “the centerpiece” of a “new way of understanding society”—“the keystone institution” of a whole “social vision.”[37]

In what follows, I focus on a conflict over property and possession underlying a debate about agrarian reform in El Salvador between 1950s and the 1980s. But if Hyde and Purdy are right, that is, if distinct imaginings of property yield distinct imaginings of human existence and visions of sociality, then we should expect the significance of what transpired to extend well beyond this place and time or even the issue of agriculture.

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[36] Lewis Hyde, *Common As Air: Revolution, Art, and Ownership* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2012), 26.

[37] Jedediah Purdy, *The Meaning of Property: Freedom, Community, and the Legal Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 5, 16.

What Romero and the encyclical tradition share, I argue, is an understanding of creation as a common gift, from which follows a distinctive construal of property and the demands of justice with respect to possessing it. On this view, property does not name, as it is often taken to mean, the enclosure of what is common for the exclusive use of its possessors—something to be held by them over and against others. Rather, property and everything related to its holding derive from the claim that creation is a gift given to human creatures in common. Commonality is the most fundamental feature of property and what it means to possess it.

Among other things, what this calls for is a use of created goods whose hallmark is inclusivity rather than exclusivity—a use that seeks to preserve what is given as common by including others in the use of it or by facilitating their access to it. In other words, the claim that creation is a common gift makes claims upon human creatures in terms of how they use creation. It generates a simultaneous, twofold 'pressure' upon their use: downward, to take only what is necessary for their needs; and outward, to return what they have in excess of their needs to those to whom it belongs in justice. As we will see, the call for agrarian reform that we find both in the encyclical tradition and in Romero flows from this understanding of creation and its implications for property and for justice in its holding.

While the debate about agrarian reform therefore certainly implicates states and policies of facilitating a better distribution of land, the 'politics' of agrarian reform is not state-centered and the focus upon agriculture opens out into other considerations besides it. When read in terms of the encyclical tradition, the debate concerns the way the Church catechizes—or more accurately, has failed to catechize—her members to understand, hold, and use what they have been given to build up the life of the societies of which they are members. It concerns not simply the proliferation of property but the proliferation of what we might call political life more generally—politics understood in an expansive sense.

The acknowledgement of creation as a common gift gives rise to what I describe in this study as a politics of common use, of which agrarian reform is one expression. But it is by no means the only one. Morozzo helps us begin to see the contours and content of the politics of common use when he writes:

> As archbishop, Romero understands better than before that the poverty of his people is a product of social injustice. For this reason, he denounces social injustice strongly and publicly, as is well known. But he does not abandon the practice of charity, the aid of individuals. In his correspondence, he includes alms for those who write him. He happily signs letters of recommendation to help people find work, to introduce people to one another, to help needy families. He shelters the needy in a hospital for the sick and terminally ill, and he

> visits them each month. For Romero, petitioning for structural reforms was never an alternative to direct relief for those in need.[38]

As Morozzo intimates in this passage, the politics of common use implies addressing the injustice embedded in structures and institutions while at the same time embracing what he describes here as the work of direct aid or charity—or as I will refer to in the pages that follows as almsgiving or the work of mercy. Structural reform and the work of mercy are not alternatives because for Romero and for the traditions upon which he is drawing both derive from the claim that creation is a gift given to human creatures in common; both articulate a politics of common use. What is more, the work of mercy—feeding the hungry, slaking the thirsty, clothing the naked, welcoming the stranger, and visiting the sick and the imprisoned—is the paradigmatic expression of the politics of common use. Above all, it is the merciful who acknowledge that creation is a gift God gives to all people in common.

The point is important to underscore at the outset of this study because one so frequently encounters suggestions to the contrary. Consider Martin Maier's comment that Romero underwent a transformation "from charity to structures,"[39] which is cognate to the insistence—often associated Karl Marx—that the impoverished need justice, not charity. The insinuation is that the significance of Romero's transformation resides in the movement *from* an emphasis upon the work of mercy *to* a prioritization of structural reform instead.

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[38] Roberto Morozzo della Rocca, in *Óscar Romero: Un obispo entre guerra fría y revolución*, ed. Editorial San Pablo España (Editorial San Pablo España, 2013), 41. See also Morozzo Della Rocca, *Primero Dios*, 285, 324–325.

The problem here is not with how Maier quite rightly points to Romero's sense of the importance of structural reform. Indeed, one of the central purposes of this study as a whole is show how Romero grapples with agrarian reform as a response to an injustice embedded in the Salvadoran landscape. Rather, the problem with Maier's comment lies in its suggestion that structural reform and the work of mercy are somehow alternatives to each other, and that to be serious about the former is to abandon the latter. On this view, charity does not presuppose and perfect justice. Instead, justice seems to replace charity altogether. Such a suggestion and the presumptions about justice and charity that inform it make it difficult to perceive the politics of common use and its significance.

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[39] Martin Maier, *Monseñor Romero: maestro de espiritualidad* (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 2005), 56–58, 39–41. To be fair, what prompts Maier's discussion is a false construal of charity, which assigns charity alone the work of addressing injustice. I think the problem is that Maier fails to see that this is a false construal of charity. On this point, see also Pius XI's *Quadragesimo anno* §4.

Romero is himself a witness to the way structural reform and the work of mercy need not be mutually exclusive alternatives. We will examine Romero's involvement in the debate about agrarian reform at length. But to appreciate the shape of that involvement is to see it in relation to the work of mercy. From the beginning of his life to its end, we constantly find Romero minimizing his own needs and living with simplicity in order to have something to give others;[40] welcoming the excluded at meals;[41] inviting beggars into his home and sharing table and food with them;[42] prioritizing the most vulnerable in pastoral visits to villages and hamlets;[43] attending to the sick and infirm in their homes;[44] opening the property of the Church to those who have no place to sleep;[45] living as archbishop on the grounds of a hospital founded to shelter and care for terminal cancer patients;[46] receiving personally in the archdiocese and intervening on behalf of the families of the arrested, the tortured, and the disappeared who came to him pleading for help.[47] Romero's life and death is unintelligible apart from the work of mercy.

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[40] As an example of this in Romero's life see Delgado, *Oscar A. Romero*, 19–20. Morozzo 302-303

[41] Ibid., 27.

[42] Ibid., 32; Maier, *Monseñor Romero*, 39–41.

[43] Delgado, *Oscar A. Romero*, 61, 105.

[44] Ibid., 61.

[45] Maier, *Monseñor Romero*, 40; Wright, *Oscar Romero and the Communion of the Saints*, 18, 34.

[46] Wright, *Oscar Romero and the Communion of the Saints*, 55.

It is here that we encounter another central contention of this study. I have been suggesting that Romero and the encyclical tradition share an understanding of creation as a common gift. But what Romero's El Salvador makes clear is that not all acknowledge this truth. Instead of understanding their land and property as given in common, many see their land and property as given for themselves alone and their own exclusive use—an exclusive use to be protected by law and to be defended from encroachment by violence. In other words, property and possession in El Salvador, like everywhere else, is deeply and complexly implicated in sin and the violence it unleashes in the world—sin and violence woven into structures, institutions, and landscapes.

There is a temptation, which I studiously try to avoid in what follows, to narrate Romero in terms of the Church in El Salvador's resistance to a neo-pagan state and its regime of absolute property. It is a temptation because it evades the difficulty of the reality with which Romero's martyrdom and the persecution of the Church present us. It lures us into forgetting that the Church's members were also behind *Operación Piña*—as the plot to kill Romero was called[48]—just as they also carried out the persecution itself. Avoiding the temptation means seeing the Church as, in Augustine's words, a "mixed body" (*corpus permixtum*)—a body comprised of wheat and weeds, saints and sinners, merciful and unmerciful alike.[49] John Paul II writes in his 1993 encyclical *Veritatis splendor* that the martyrs are an "eloquent and attractive example of a life completely transfigured by the splendor of moral truth," and they "light up every period of history by reawakening its moral sense" (§93). In the case of Romero, the light is a harsh and unflattering one, and the glare is on the Church herself. Among other things, what Romero's martyrdom 'lights up' is the widespread and public resistance to the politics of common use within the Church's own membership.

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[47] Morozzo Della Rocca, *Primero Dios*, 250.

In Romero's El Salvador, those who took the truth about God's creation as common gift seriously—those who spoke out against or opposed the ubiquity of the concentration and misappropriation of land and who clamored for agrarian reform so that the landless and land-poor could have access to land to cultivate for subsistence—suffered greatly as a consequence. Among other things, their suffering shows how, under the conditions of sin and violence, those who work to ensure that others have access to what is theirs in justice often risk laying down their lives in charity. As Romero himself said just months before he died: "The greatest sign of the faith in a God of life is the testimony of those who are willing to give their lives. 'No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends' (Jn. 15:13). And this is what we see daily in our country."[50]

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[48] See chapter five.

[49] See Augustine of Hippo, *On Christian Teaching*, trans. R.P.H. Green (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3.32; Augustine, *Augustine: The City of God Against the Pagans*, ed. R. W. Dyson (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 18.49.

The relationship of justice and charity is therefore also central to what follows. *Gaudium et spes*, the Second Vatican Council's Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World, describes the relationship between these virtues as it pertains to property and possession this way: "God intends the earth with everything contained in it for the use of all human beings and peoples. Thus, under the leadership of justice and in the company of charity, created goods should be in abundance for all in a like manner" (§69). In this passage we again encounter the problem identified above about opposing charity and justice or direct aid and structural reform. *Gaudium et spes* similarly suggests that these pairs should not be construed oppositionally because if God's purpose for creation is to be fulfilled—if a politics of common use is to be enacted—then justice and charity must walk together.

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[50] Óscar Arnulfo Romero, "La dimensión política de la fe desde la opción por los pobres," in *La voz de los sin voz: la palabra viva de monseñor Oscar Arnulfo Romero*, ed. Rodolfo Cardenal, Ignacio Martín-Baró, and Jon Sobrino (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1980), 191.

On the terms of *Gaudium et spes* and the sources upon which it is drawing, justice must guide because the claim that the earth is for the use of all is first and foremost a claim about justice. But under the conditions of sin and violence, charity must accompany justice's work, strengthening and supporting it. Charity's act of mercy gracefully helps people learn to hold what is common in ways that preserve it as common.

Charity accomplishes this by conforming people to the pattern of the cross. God works in Christ to restore what God has made not by withdrawing God's life but by giving it in its fullness—by giving it even to the point of laying it down willingly for the life of what God has made. This is the way the one through whom and for whom "all things were created"—the one in whom "all things hold together"—brings peace to the violence sin unleashes in the world (Col. 1:15-20). Among the central claims of what follows is that this is also the horizon under which to approach Romero's martyrdom. Romero witnesses to the way God's work to restore creation is cruciform. Therefore, while Church teaching on property and possession begins with creation as common gift, the testimony to this truth in word and in deed points to the *telos* of the gift and the common life in the crucified and risen Lord in which it participates. What becomes perceptible in the process is how the entire economy of salvation, like God's work of creation, is ordered by and to gifts given in common.[51]

This study consists of five chapters. Drawing principally on Romero's life and homilies, the first chapter focuses on the problematic of agrarian reform in El Salvador. It locates Romero in relation to the concentration of agricultural land and the production of landlessness over the course of the twentieth century. In attending to how Romero 'reads' the Salvadoran landscape, this chapter isolates the theme of creation as common gift and its import for agriculture and agrarian reform.

Chapters two and three delineate the moral and theological landscape within which agrarian reform emerges as a topic within the encyclical tradition and its relation to a politics of common use. Chapter two turns to some of the principal sources of the teaching upon which Romero draws, tracking its development in Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum novarum* and in the commentarial tradition that follows it, and focusing upon how the construal of property and possession in it derives from the claim that creation is a common gift.

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[51] On this last point see Paul J. Griffiths, *Intellectual Appetite: A Theological Grammar*, New edition (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 2009), 51; Kathryn Tanner, *Economy of Grace* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 26–29.

Chapter three similarly follows the encyclical tradition, showing how the claim that creation is a common gift shapes, not only the approach to property and possession, but also to work, wages, workers' associations and organizations, and so on—in short, that it establishes a whole moral and theological landscape within which a politics of common use becomes perceptible. The chapter concludes by tracing the emergence of agrarian reform within it. My purpose in approaching agrarian reform in this manner is to display how it coheres with the wider moral and theological landscape of the encyclical tradition as a whole and its articulation of a politics of common use.

Chapter four returns to Romero's El Salvador. It explores the debate about agrarian reform, and how the Church's participation in it draws upon the encyclical tradition. The chapter focuses upon Romero's homilies during a particularly crucial period—the period spanning the announcement of a major agrarian reform initiative in December 1979 and its implementation the first week of March the following year—during which time there was a massive escalation of repression. The chapter attends to how Romero reflects upon the theological significance of agrarian reform in the midst of the repression, and it narrates Romero's death in relation to it.

The fifth and final chapter examines Romero's martyrdom. It returns to the question with which the dissertation as a whole began: To what does the life and the death of Óscar Romero bear witness? The chapter offers an extended theological reflection upon Romero's martyrdom and its witness to Christ's presence in the world.

Before moving into these chapters, I want to comment briefly on the title—*The Land of The Savior*—in order to clarify the multiple senses of land in view.

First, there is the land of El Salvador—the country that takes its name from the Savior (*el Salvador*), whose capital city's patron saint is *El Divino Salvador del Mundo* (the Divine Savior of the World). There is also the agricultural land implicated in agrarian reform, and the efforts of Romero and others to ensure that all those living in El Salvador have access to the land and livelihood they need to flourish. Next, there is the Church herself as a land under cultivation by God (1 Cor. 3:9)—a field in which weeds and wheat can be found growing together until the harvest (Mt. 13:24-30). Finally, and inextricably related to the previous sense, there is the heavenly land of which the author of Hebrew's speaks (Heb. 11:16)—the common homeland that all people have in Christ.

As we will soon see, on Romero's handling, these lands, though distinct, are not strictly separate from one another. The relationship between them is complex and one of interpenetration—a complexity and an interpenetration I try to display in the pages ahead. But the heart of their relationship is how, as Romero puts it in the epigraph above, for the people of God on pilgrimage, building in order to inhabit and planting in order to eat can become signs of the new heavens and the new earth.

PART I: GIFT OF THE EARTH

CHAPTER 1: “YOU POSSESS THE LAND THAT BELONGS TO ALL SALVADORANS”

> The story of Naboth is an old one, but it is repeated every day. Who among the rich does not daily covet others’ goods? Who among the wealthy does not make every effort to drive the poor person out from his little plot and turn the needy out from the boundaries of his ancestral fields? Who is satisfied with what is his? What rich persons’ thoughts are not preoccupied with his neighbor’s possessions? It is not one Ahab who was born, therefore, but—what is worse—Ahab is born every day, and never does he die as far as this world is concerned. For each one who dies there are many others who rise up; there are many more who steal property than those who lose it. It is not one poor man, Naboth, who was slain; every day Naboth is struck down, every day the poor man is slain.
>
> —Ambrose of Milan, *On Naboth*

1.1 Introduction

On the morning of 18 February 1979, the seventh Sunday of ordinary time, Archbishop Óscar Romero ascended to the pulpit of the Metropolitan Cathedral of San Salvador to deliver his homily to those present, as well as to all those listening throughout El Salvador and beyond, through the transmission of the archdiocesan radio station YSAX.[52] It had been almost a month since he had last said mass in the cathedral because he travelled to Puebla de los Ángeles, Mexico to participate in the Third General Assembly of the *Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano* (Latin American Episcopal Council, CELAM). The homily he was about to deliver was, among other things, a reflection upon his time there.

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[52] Romero’s homilies were enormously popular. Most of the people of El Salvador listened to them. Over the course of his tenure as archbishop, they were increasingly broadcast to an international audience as well. James R. Brockman, *Romero: A Life*, 25th edition (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2005), 64; Scott Wright, *Oscar Romero and the Communion of the Saints: A Biography* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2009), 18–20, 56–57, 120–121.

By this point in his tenure as archbishop there had been a notable shift in Romero's homilies. Not only had they become longer, lasting for well over an hour. But his homilies, like the work of the archdiocese more generally, increasingly took upon itself the burden of truth-maintenance in the midst of the disinformation campaign of the military regime and official media outlets.[53] Oftentimes, Romero would conclude his homilies with lengthy discussions of Church life and the week's events, offering a kind of theological narration of the everyday.

Moreover, for many, Romero's homilies became an important source for what was happening in the country. One of Romero's biographers, the historian Roberto Morozzo della Rocca, refers to the cathedral during this time as "a living school of journalism," where reporters could learn what media outlets either ignored or falsified.[54]

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[53] See Roberto Morozzo Della Rocca, *Primero Dios: vida de Monseñor Romero* (Buenos Aires: Edhasa, 2010), 15. Cf. also Brockman, *Romero*, 6.
[54] Morozzo Della Rocca, *Primero Dios*, 15.

"It is no accident," Morozzo writes, "that many defined the homilies of Romero with a single word: truth."[55]

Despite the importance of the CELAM assembly at Puebla, something that happened just prior to his departure put Romero's participation in the assembly in doubt. On the morning of 20 January, he received news of the death of another priest, along with a nun. Father Octavio Ortiz and Sister Chepita were offering a retreat in the parish of San Antonio Abad. Early in the morning, security forces battered open the gate with an armored car and entered with guns drawn. Father Octavio was later found in the courtyard, his head and face crushed, as if he had been run over. The corpses of four young men were found on the roof, pistols in hand. While the national press ran stories the next day of a fierce gun fight between those in the retreat center and the security forces, it was soon discovered that the corpses of the men had been dragged to the roof and pistols placed in their hands.[56]

Ortiz and Chepita were the fourth priest and the first nun, respectively, to be murdered since Romero assumed the archbishopric in 1977. Their deaths were further

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[55] Ibid., 286.

[56] Brockman, *Romero*, 154–155. Cf. also Secretaria de Comunicación Social del Arzobispado, "Boletín Informativo Internacional No. 55" (San Salvador, enero 1979); Secretaria de Comunicación Social del Arzobispado, "Boletín Informativo Internacional No. 56" (San Salvador, enero 1979); *Estudios Centroamericanos* enero-febrero, no. 363–64 (1979).

confirmation that, in the words of the Jesuit Rutilio Grande, the first priest to be killed as the persecution of the Church intensified in the 1970s, "It is dangerous to be a Christian in this place," where "the mere proclamation of the Gospel is considered subversive." "I am very afraid," Grande continued, "that soon the Bible and the Gospel will not be able to cross the border. All that will reach us will be the covers."[57] Approximately a month after preaching this homily in Apopa on the occasion of the deportation of Father Mario Bernal Londono from the country, Grande was gunned down along with two others near El Paisnal as they drove through the cane fields on the way to celebrate mass. The killings of this time lent reality to the infamous slogan scrawled on walls and distributed in leaflets in San Salvador and elsewhere: "Be a patriot, kill a priest."[58] In this predominantly Catholic country, the military regime and its allies had increasingly come to see large segments of the Church as a foreign organism, which they were moving to surround and expel.

During Romero's three years as archbishop, more than fifty priests had been attacked or threatened—six of whom were murdered. Many others were tortured or deported or both. In 1977, a death squad (*escuadrón de la muerte*)[59] known as the *Unión Guerrera Blanca* (White Warrior Union, UGB) claimed responsibility for the murder one of the priests, Father Alfonso Navarro. Soon afterwards, the UGB publically called upon all Jesuits to leave the country within the month or else become, along with their supporting institutions, "military targets." [60]

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[57] Salvador Carranza, Miguel Cavada Diez, and Jon Sobrino, *XXV aniversario de Rutilio Grande: sus homilías* (Centro Monseñor Romero, UCA, 2002).
[58] Morozzo Della Rocca, *Primero Dios*, 35.

The Jesuit-run *Universidad Centroamericana* (University of Central America, UCA) had already become a target. It, along with the archdiocesan radio station YSAX, as well as numerous other educational and ecclesial institutions, had been repeatedly bombed or otherwise attacked or threatened. Several parish communities had been raided, their altars desecrated.[61]

Months before he was shot by a sniper as he said mass at the Divine Providence Chapel, in an address at the Catholic University of Leuven in Belgium Romero described the persecution of the Church in the following terms: "If all this has happened to the Church's most visible representatives, imagine what has happened to ordinary

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[59] Amnistía Internacional, "El Espectro de Los 'Escuadrones de La Muerte'" (London, 1996).
[60] Brockman, *Romero*, 65.
[61] Ibid., 1–2, 6–7, 65. Report of the Latin American Bureau, *Violence and Fraud in El Salvador* (London, 1977); *Persecución de la Iglesia en El Salvador* (Publicaciones del Secretariado Social Interdiocesano, 1977).

Christians, to the *campesinos*,[62] catechists, lay ministers, and to the ecclesial base communities. There, the threats, arrests, tortures, murders number in the hundreds and thousands."[63] Throughout the 1970s, public demonstrations and gatherings were repeatedly attacked by military and police forces. As the decade progressed, these forces—and especially the death squads—increasingly relied on tactics of disappearance and torture. The legal aid office of the archbishop recorded and monitored hundreds of such cases. Most of the victims were *campesinos*, members of grassroots organizations, leaders or members of trade unions, teachers, students, journalists, and many others who spoke out against or challenged or were associated with those who challenged the existing order.[64]

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[62] The terms *campesino* or *campesina* refer to smallholders who subsist or aspire to subsist mostly by growing their own food, especially maize, beans, and other subsistence crops. Typically, they do not hire others to work for them for wages, instead depending on household or community members. They can be tenants, sharecroppers, smallholders, squatters, claimants to untitled land, and so on. *Campesinado* refers to *campesinos* as a group or class.

[63] Óscar Arnulfo Romero, "La dimensión política de la fe desde la opción por los pobres," in *La voz de los sin voz: la palabra viva de monseñor Oscar Arnulfo Romero*, ed. Rodolfo Cardenal, Ignacio Martín-Baró, and Jon Sobrino (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1980), 177.

[64] There are obvious similarities between the situation in El Salvador and that described by Cavanaugh in his very important book, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ*, Challenges in Contemporary Theology (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008).

In the Louvain address, Romero underscored the selectivity of the violence from which the Church has suffered: "Not any and every priest has been persecuted, not any and every institution has been attacked. That part of the Church has been attacked and persecuted that put itself on the side of the impoverished and went to their defense."[65] What was the violence from which the impoverished of El Salvador needed defense in the first place? How best to characterize that violence? Why did the attempt to offer defense lead to threats, arrests, tortures, and murders of the state and its security apparatuses? Additionally, why did it exacerbate divisions within the Church herself? These are among the central questions with which the present chapter is concerned.

Romero's homily upon returning from Puebla provides the beginning of a response. In it, Romero addresses one of the central forms of violence from which his people suffered and the shape of the Church's defense when he mentions the announcement by the Salvadoran *Instituto Salvadoreño de Transformación Agraria* (Institute of Agrarian Transformation, ISTA) that it will soon be distributing 26,293 hectares of land to 356 *campesino* households in San Antonio Silva, in the department of

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[65] Romero, "La dimensión política de la fe desde la opción por los pobres," 177.

San Miguel. At the time of the announcement, only seven people held the land targeted for distribution.[66]

With the following programmatic words, Romero speaks to the significance of the problem of land and land concentration in the light of Puebla and the Church's teaching more generally:

> As we gather together in this archdiocese reflecting on God's Word, I want to remember how the bishops at Puebla saw the Latin American reality: "If we focus our gaze on our Latin American world, what do we see? No deep scrutiny is necessary. The truth is that there is an ever increasing distance between the many who have little and the few who have much." These words…perfectly describe our Salvadoran reality…except that in El Salvador we must speak of the distance between the many who have nothing and the few who have everything. This is not communism. This is the message of Puebla, the message of the popes, the message John Paul II proclaimed in Santo Domingo, in Oaxaca, in Monterrey, and in Guadalajara: that the Church must serve human beings and guard their rights. And as the Holy Father stated in Santo Domingo, by 'rights' we mean that *campesinos* should have land, and that workers must be able to organize and to be paid just salaries.[67]

In this passage, Romero mentions two of the central preoccupations that by 1979 had come to occupy a prominent place in his ministry as archbishop of San Salvador and in the life of the Church in El Salvador more generally: first, the problem of pervasive landlessness and the pressing need for agrarian reform; and second, the related problem of the persecution of workers' associations and organizations—particularly associations and organizations of rural and agricultural workers—as they gathered to improve wages and working conditions.

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[66] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. IV, 212-213, 280. Cf. also *La Prensa Gráfica*, 14 febrero 1979; *El Diario de Hoy*, 10 febrero 1979.

[67] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. IV, 214-215, quoting from Puebla.

The passage also suggests that to broach the topics of land and work in this way courted the accusation of communism—an accusation that in El Salvador and elsewhere during this time was often deadly. As Lesley Gill observes, "fighting 'communists'" was "an enormously elastic category that could accommodate almost any critic of the status quo."[68] In the midst of the geopolitics of the Cold War and the efforts of the United States and its allies to contain the spread of communism in Latin America—especially after the revolution that ousted the Cuban president Fulgencio Batista in 1959—to question or to seek to transform existing property arrangements was conflated with the communist threat. Hence Grande's articulation of the danger of being a Christian in El Salvador. Romero insists, however, that the growing distance between people, as well as the need to facilitate access to land for *campesinos* and the ability of workers to organize, are not the concerns of communists alone. They are the Church's concerns as well.

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[68] Lesley Gill, *The School of the Americas: Military Training and Political Violence in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 10.

As the homily continues, Romero acknowledges that these concerns are closely related to the Church's so-called "preferential option for the poor."[69] Such an option, he continues, is frequently understood to be exclusionary of the rich—to be construed, that is, in terms of class conflict, which further fuels the accusation of communism.[70] Romero disagrees with such a construal, but not because he denies that class conflict characterizes El Salvador. Rather, he disagrees with it because he thinks the common life God shares with humankind in Christ is ultimately more determinative than any conflict. Everyone—"without distinction of class"—is invited to walk the path toward it, which is an invitation, as Romero says, for everyone "to assume the cause of the poor as if they were…assuming their own cause (*su propia causa*), which is also Christ's cause: 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me'" (Mt. 25:31-40).[71] Such an invitation, Romero says, is Gospel—good news—for all people.[72]

In addressing the manifest injustice of landholding and the ability of workers to organize and to achieve living wages, Romero's purpose, then, is not to exclude anyone, much less the wealthy and powerful of El Salvador. It is simply to call upon the

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[69] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. IV, 216.
[70] Ibid., 215-216.
[71] Ibid., 216.
[72] Ibid.

Church's membership to learn "to feel as their own (*como suyo*)" the reality being faced by the landless and land-poor, to join with others to study the problem, to dialogue about why so many lack the basic bodily support that they need, and to contribute to the efforts already underway to address the problem—in short, to show solidarity.[73]

It is in relation to the common life people have in Christ and the path toward it in the preferential option for the poor that Romero assesses what the Puebla document describes as the "distance between the many who have little and the few who have much"—or as Romero glosses it, the distance between "the many who have nothing and the few who have everything." Elsewhere, he speaks of "the brutal social inequality" that makes some feel themselves to be "strangers to the immense majority of those born in their own land."[74] As we will see over the course of this study, such distance and brutal inequality are a problem for Romero because he thinks they blatantly contradict the communion that sustains the Church's life and toward which her members are on pilgrimage.

The issue of property and property holding, Romero thinks, is close to the heart of the matter. Commonplace understandings of property, in which property is regarded as essentially private and its hallmark is the power to exclude others from access to it only serves to exacerbate the distance. For that reason, Romero goes on to claim that the proper response is the rediscovery of what he refers to as the "true social sense" of property.[75] He cites Pope John Paul II's opening address at Puebla, which describes how all property "bears a social mortgage" (*hipoteca social*). "It is here," Romero says, "that the message of Puebla is the history of our peoples."[76]

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[73] Ibid.

[74] Quoted in Morozzo Della Rocca, *Primero Dios*, 78.

Romero's homily upon his return from Puebla helps us to begin to understand what was at stake in the Church's involvement in the reform of agriculture in El Salvador and why so many of her members came to regard it, in Romero's words, as "a theological necessity."[77] Romero explains: "Land…groans when the unjust hoard it and do not leave land for others…There will not be true reconciliation between our people and God while there is no just distribution of land, while the goods of the land of El Salvador do not benefit and bring happiness to all Salvadorans."[78] As will gradually become clear, in claiming that agrarian reform is a theological necessity Romero is not primarily interested in the policy details of the various agrarian reforms under discussion during his brief tenure as archbishop, nor does he think it is his competence as archbishop to intervene with regard to them. Rather, he is trying to articulate a theological truth, which is that enabling all Salvadorans to share in the land and the harvests of the country reveals God's purpose for creation. Any talk of reconciliation that neglects the injustice embedded in the landscape is not true reconciliation but its simulacrum.

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[75] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. IV, 216.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. VI, 363.
[78] Ibid., 393, 312.

Where do these preoccupations about access to land and living wages come from? We have already seen Romero insist that he is not speaking as a communist. Rather, he says he is speaking out of a tradition of teaching, whose implications for the life of his country he is trying to convey. As Romero puts it, these are the preoccupations of Puebla and of Medellín before it.[79] They are the preoccupations of the popes—preoccupations to which John Paul II gave voice repeatedly throughout his journey to the Dominican Republic and Mexico in 1979, when he spoke in Santo Domingo, Oaxaca, Monterrey, and Guadalajara.[80] Since Romero's death, they have become the preoccupations of national bishops' conferences in Latin America and throughout the whole world.[81]

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[79] Cf. Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano, *Río de Janeiro, Medellín, Puebla, Santo Domingo: documentos pastorales* (San Pablo, 1993).

[80] In Santo Domingo, for instance, John Paul explicitly mentions lack of sufficient food and education, lack of land to farm, the need for better wages and treatment, the disintegration of families under the pressures of poverty, the juxtaposition between the few who live in "superabundance" and the many who "through no fault of their own lack everything," as well as the law's lack of protection for the vulnerable (§3). In Oaxaca, he speaks explicitly about agrarian reform, saying: "The Church does indeed defend the legitimate right to private property, but she also teaches no less clearly that there is always a social mortgage on all private property, in order that goods may serve the general purpose that God gave them. And if the common good requires it, there

The present work as a whole seeks to display how the Church in El Salvador's embrace of agrarian reform draws upon and is shaped by what is commonly referred to

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should be no hesitation even at expropriation, carried out in the due form." Here John Paul is citing Paul VI's 1968 encyclical *Populorum progressio,* which states: "If certain landed estates impede the general prosperity because they are extensive, unused or poorly used, or because they bring hardship to peoples or are detrimental to the interests of the country, the common good sometimes demands their expropriation" (§24). The texts from John Paul's trip can be found in *Puebla: A Pilgrimage of Faith* (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1979).

[81] Apart from the documents of the General Conferences of Latin American Bishops held in Rio de Janeiro (1955), Medellín (*La Iglesia en la actual transformación de América Latina a la luz del Concilio,* 1968), Puebla (*La Evangelización en el presente y en el futuro de América Latina,* 1979), Santo Domingo (*Nueva evangelización, promoción humana, cultura cristiana,* 1992) and Aparecida (*Discípulos y Misioneros de Jesucristo, para que nuestros pueblos tengan en Él vida*, 2007), cf. the following: Episcopal Conference of Paraguay, *La tierra, don de Dios para todos* (Asunción, 12 June 1983); South Andean Bishops, *La tierra, don de Dios - Derecho del pueblo* (30 March 1986); Episcopal Conference of Guatemala, *El clamor por la tierra* (Guatemala de la Asunción, 29 February 1988); Apostolic Vicariate of Darien, Panama, *Tierra de todos, tierra de paz* (8 December 1988); Episcopal Conference of Costa Rica, *Madre Tierra. Carta pastoral sobre la situación de los campesinos y indígenas* (San José, 2 August 1994); Episcopal Conference of Honduras, *Mensaje sobre algunos temas de interés nacional* (Tegucigalpa, 28 August 1995). The National Episcopal Conference of Brazil, and particularly the Pastoral Commission for Land, have spoken out several times on the subject of agrarian reform: *Manifesto pela terra e pela vita a CPT e a reforma agrária hoje* (Goiânia, 1 August 1995); *Pro-memória da Presidência e Comissão Episcopal de Pastoral da CNBB sobre as consequências do Decreto n. 1775 de 8 de Janeiro de 1996* (Brasília, 29 February 1996); *Exigências Cristãs para a paz social* (Itaici, 24 April 1996).

as the Church's social doctrine, which we will explore at greater length in the chapters that follow. But for the purposes of this chapter, in order to approach the problematic of agrarian reform and its relationship to the Church's defense of the impoverished it is helpful to attend to creation's grammar as it emerges from this tradition of teaching, specifically what *Gaudium et spes* calls the "common destination of earthly goods" (§§69, 71). By this phrase, *Gaudium et spes* means that creation is a common gift—a gift given by God for the use of all people. What follows begins to sketch the landscape opened up by this understanding of creation and the possibilities it generates for description and moral agency.

The notion that creation is a common gift also yields a distinctive construal of property and property holding, upon which the Church's embrace of agrarian reform is patterned. Romero alluded to this construal above when he speaks of property's "social sense" and cites John Paul's phrase about property's "social mortgage." On this view, property is not, as it is often understood to be, essentially private. Rather, it is essentially common. The social sense of property and the social mortgage upon it are therefore not additional considerations appended onto a doctrine of property, in which property is first and foremost private. They suggest that the most basic purpose of property and its associated institutions is to facilitate access for all to what God gives for common use. Property's distinguishing characteristics are therefore inclusion and gathering, not exclusion and scattering. What I aim to show in this chapter is that in the conflicts surrounding agrarian reform that seized the Church in El Salvador in the 1970s, and in the life and eventual death of Romero more generally, we see a concerted attempt to bear witness to the belief that creation is a gift God gives to humankind in common. But in order to do so, we must first attend to the problem to which agrarian reform is a response.

1.2 Enclosure and its Consequences

Above we saw that Romero makes what might be considered a strange suggestion, namely, that the reality of landlessness, and its associated vulnerabilities and deprivations, is a form of violence from which the Salvadoran people need defense, and that the Church's attempt to help provide such defense leads to *additional* violence: of the state, its security apparatuses, and its associated death squads. The suggestion, in other words, is that the effort to achieve a better distribution of land and to improve the condition of the *campesinado* in places like San Antonio Silva is best understood, not as an attempt to disrupt a serene and tranquil order with subversive activities, but something like the opposite: It is a response to an order that it already violent. It is an attempt to embark upon a path toward peace where there is presently no peace.

There is a distinctive conception of violence that is operative here, which we need to examine. It is not unrelated to the repressive violence unleashed by the Salvadoran regime Romero faces and its threats, surveillance, arbitrary arrests, deportations, disappearances, torture, and massacres. Nor is it unrelated to the revolutionary violence of the regime's opponents for that matter and its kidnappings, occupations, bomb attacks, targeted murders, and (eventually) armed insurrection. But the violence to which Romero is referring is distinct from repressive and revolutionary violence. Moreover, according to Romero, neither repressive nor revolutionary violence is the deepest source of the violence afflicting El Salvador. They are, in an important sense, epiphenomenal. They are the violent responses to a more primordial form of violence.

As we will see, the formation and consolidation of the Salvadoran state likewise contributes to the violence to which Romero is trying to attend. Segundo Montes's addresses this when he writes of the way the entire "state apparatus" and "economic and financial system"—and integral to these, the emergence, establishment, and zealous defense of a novel system of property—"function to reproduce a capitalist mode of agricultural production."[82] But Romero is at great pains to articulate a still more primordial form of violence, the paradigmatic expression of which is the privation of the basic bodily support his people need in order to live a fully human life. In Romero's El Salvador, this more primordial form of violence was especially concentrated in the countryside, and its principal Salvadoran face was that of the landless. One of the central purposes of the present chapter is to get a handle upon this ordinary violence and why it led to the call for agrarian reform.

When Romero became archbishop of San Salvador in 1977, El Salvador was, to the eyes of most observers, hurtling towards war. In the countryside, conditions were, by all accounts, desperate. The picture that consistently emerges in scholarship is one of extreme concentration of land and wealth into the hands of the few in a country in which the livelihood of the vast majority depended directly upon agriculture.[83] Official data released by the Ministry of Agriculture in 1979 showed that less than 1% of the population owned about 40% of the land in El Salvador.[84] Closely associated with such

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[82] Segundo Montes, *El agro salvadoreño: 1973-1980* (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1986), 104. Cf. also James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: Why Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

[83] According to the *World Handbook of Political and Social Indicators*, El Salvador had a GINI coefficient of 83, among the highest in the world at the time. *World Handbook of Political and Social Indicators: Cross-National Attributes and Rates of Change v. 1*, 3rd edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983). On the general conditions in James Dunkerley, *Political Suicide in Latin America: And Other Essays* (London: Verso Books, 1992), 70–73; Roy Prosterman and Jeffery M. Riedinger, *Land Reform and Democratic Development*, 1st edition (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 143; Elisabeth Jean Wood, *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador* (New York:

Cambridge University Press, 2003), 24. Many scholars have understood the civil war to be a textbook case of agrarian insurrection. For some examples of this cf. William Durham, *Scarcity and Survival in Central America: Ecological Origins of the Soccer War* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1979); Manus I. Midlarsky and Kenneth Roberts, "Class, State, and Revolution in Central America Nicaragua and El Salvador Compared," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 29, no. 2 (June 1, 1985): 163–93; Lisa North, *Bitter Grounds: Roots of Revolt in El Salvador*, 2nd ed. (Westport, Conn.: Lawrence-Hill, 1985); David Mason, "Land Reform and the Breakdown of Clientelist Politics in El Salvador," *Comparative Political Studies*, 18, no. Jan (1986): 487–516; Charles D. Brockett, *Land, Power, And Poverty: Agrarian Transformation and Political Conflict in Central America, Second Edition*, 2nd edition (Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 1998). The purpose of much of this literature is to offer a causal explanation of what led to the Salvadoran civil war. The focus tends to be on material conditions and their relative weight in contributing to the war. More recent work, like Joaquín Chávez's *On Poets and Prophets: Popular Intellectuals and the Origins of El Salvador's Civil War* and Elisabeth Jean Wood's *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador,* for instance, have sought to offer a corrective to this emphasis on material conditions. The central concern of this vast literature is what led to the war.

[84] See "Presentación Del Ministro de Agricultura y Ganadería, Enrique Álvarez Córdova, En La Cadena de Radio y Televisión," *La Prensa Gráfica*, diciembre 1979. Figures from the Salvadoran government's own 1971 agricultural census provide some sense of the extent of the problem by the 1970s. For instance, according to the census, landholdings of between 0-9.9 ha constituted approximately 84% of total plots of land but only 17.8% of all cultivated land. In contrast, landholdings of 100 ha or more constituted only 1.55% of total plots of land but 43.4% of all cultivated land. The census figures are analyzed in detail in Montes, *El agro salvadoreño*.

concentration was landlessness, which by this time was endemic. By 1975, about 40% of all rural households were classified as landless.[85]

How did this come to be? How did the concentration of land and wealth, and with it, landlessness, become such a problem in El Salvador? How did the distance between the many who have nothing and the few who have everything grow so wide? In this section, I examine the story told by most scholars of Salvadoran history, which focuses upon two expansions of export-agricultural production and the dispossession of the *campesinado* associated with them. The first expansion was the rise of coffee in the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth centuries, which led to the enclosure of common lands in El Salvador. The second expansion—again in coffee, but also additionally in cotton, sugar cane, and cattle—occurred after the Second World War. The twofold expansion of export-agricultural production is crucial for understanding Romero's description of the distance between the many who have nothing and the few who have everything and what the message of Puebla on property has to do with the history of his people.

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[85] According to Almeida, by 1975 over 40% of rural families were classified as landless in 1975 and up to 65% in 1980. Paul Almeida, *Waves of Protest: Popular Struggle in El Salvador, 1925-2005* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 90, 114. Cf. R.G. Kirby,
"Agrarian Politics in El Salvador: 1950-1984" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1992), 112; Wim Pelupessy, *The Limits of Economic Reform in El Salvador* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 38; Jenny Pearce, *Under the Eagle: U.S. Intervention in Central America and the Caribbean* (Boston: South End Pr., 1983), 209; Prosterman and Riedinger, *Land Reform and Democratic Development*, 143. For those interested in the debates over the census data, cf. Mitchell A. Seligson, "Thirty Years of Transformation in the Agrarian Structure of El Salvador, 1961-1991," *Latin American Research Review* 30, no. 3 (1996): 43–74; Martin Diskin, "The Disappearance of the Agrarian Question in El Salvador," *Latin American Research Review* 31, no. 2 (1996): 111–26; Jefferey M. Paige, "Land Reform and Agrarian Revolution in El Salvador," *Latin American Research Review* 31, no. 2 (1996): 127–39.

While I cannot do justice here to the depth and breadth of the scholarship, I can draw attention to some important features of it, particularly the enclosure of the common lands, the vision of agricultural development and private property associated with it, and enclosure's contribution to the concentration of land and wealth in El Salvador. The roots of these problems, of course, run much deeper and sink deep into the Conquest.[86] But there is considerable consensus among historians that in El Salvador it is especially in the twentieth century and in the wake of enclosure that the concentration of land became particularly acute. The historian Adolfo Bonilla does not exaggerate by much when he writes: "The existing literature is unanimous in its agreement that with coffee cultivation came the concentration of land in few hands, as well as the development of the agrarian oligarchy in El Salvador, which after the Second World War was well established as a coffee and agrarian oligarchy."[87] A closer examination of these developments is therefore warranted.

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[86] See Fray Bartolomé Las Casas, *An Account, Much Abbreviated, of the Destruction of the Indies With Related Texts*, trans. Andrew Hurley (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2003). In this work, Bartolomé de las Casas offers a glimpse of the cataclysm that was the Spanish presence in "the vast and new world of the Indies" (3). It is not just a brief chronicle of relentless cruelty and brutality of the Spaniards towards those they encountered. It concerns the uprooting of peoples and the overturning of worlds—the blood and fire through which Christianity came to these lands. Las Casas writes extensively about Pedro de Alvarado—the figure who led the conquest of Cuscatlán, the land that eventually became El Salvador (37-43). See also Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven Conn.: Yale University Press, 2011), 15–64, 65–116.

Enclosure, or what historians of El Salvador generally call "privatization" (*privatización*), refers to a series of laws passed between 1879 and 1882 that abolished what were known as *tierras de resguardo*—the various forms of communal land tenure arrangements that had gradually developed after the cataclysm of the Conquest in the late-fifteenth and early sixteenth-centuries.[88] Similar processes of privatization or enclosure transformed the European landscape much earlier, beginning in England around the sixteenth century, before eventually spreading to the rest of Europe and then to Europe's colonial holdings, which we will examine in the following chapter.[89] There were precedents for enclosure in El Salvador. For instance, the colonial *hacienda* or large estate was held privately and exclusively.[90] But until the enclosure legislation, land tenure in El Salvador was radically plural, consisting of a complex patchwork of formal and informal arrangements.[91] What marked the new enclosure legislation was not only its scope, which embraced the whole nation, but also its sweeping nature. In one fell swoop, it sought to replace by force of law this complex patchwork with a new system based exclusively upon individual private ownership.

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[87] Adolfo Bonilla Bonilla, *Tenencia de la Tierra y Reforma Agraria En El Salvador: Un Análisis Histórico*, vol. 2, Cuadernos de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades (San Salvador: Centro Nacional de Investigaciones en Ciencias Sociales y humanidades, 2013), 8, 41-42.

[88] During the colonial period the Spanish Crown came to recognize various forms of land tenure, including *ejidal* and communal landholdings, in addition to the private freehold estate. The latter—an individual and exclusive form of property—was principally associated with the *hacienda*. David Browning, *El Salvador: Landscape and Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 87–94; David Weeks, "European Antecedents of Land Tenure and Agrarian Organization of Hispanic America," *Journal of Land and Public Utility Economics* 23, no. February (1947): 60–65; J. Friede, "Proceso de Formación de La Propiedad Territorial En La America Inter-Tropical," *Jahrbuch Fur Geschichte von Staat, Wirtschaft Und Gesellschaft Lateinamerikas* 2 (1965).

The communal holdings abolished by enclosure had taken shape in the colonial period and were based on medieval forms land tenure, subsequently extended to the

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[89] Menjívar explicitly draws parallels between El Salvador and England. Whereas in Mexico and Guatemala, the Church had extensive landholdings that were enclosed, this was not the case in El Salvador, where the majority of the enclosed lands were communal and *ejidal* (lands held by municipalities). Cf. Rafael Menjívar, *Acumulación originaria y desarrollo capitalista en El Salvador* (San Salvador: Editorial Universitaria Centroamérica, 1980), 86.

[90] Earlier in the nineteenth century, the newly-independent Salvadoran state occasionally privatized unclaimed public lands and granted titles. See Aldo Lauria-Santiago, *An Agrarian Republic: Commercial Agriculture and the Politics of Peasant Communities in El Salvador, 1823–1914* (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1999), 230–232.

[91] Browning, *El Salvador*, 78–137.

Americas.[92] As the historian Aldo A. Lauria-Santiago has extensively shown, by the end of the colonial period, the *hacienda* system was languishing, and Ladino and indigenous communities controlled extensive landholdings through legal title.[93] Despite the incentives and concessions *hacendados*[94]and merchants received—including land and the brutal coercion of labor—communal holdings persisted well into the republican period and continued to function with relative autonomy before emergent Salvadoran state.[95] The *hacienda* system blocked neither their access to land to farm nor their ability to cultivate subsistence crops like maize or even to participate in commercial production of indigo.[96] At the beginning of the nineteenth century and even after independence, these communal landholdings expanded at the expense of the *hacienda*.[97]

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[92] Aldo Lauria-Santiago, *An Agrarian Republic: Commercial Agriculture and the Politics of Peasant Communities in El Salvador, 1823–1914* (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1999), 25–26; Weeks, "European Antecedents of Land Tenure and Agrarian Organization of Hispanic America"; Friede, "Proceso de Formación de La Propiedad Territorial En La America Inter-Tropical."

[93] Lauria-Santiago, *An Agrarian Republic*, 17–33.

[94] The owner of an estate or *hacienda*.

[95] Lauria-Santiago, *An Agrarian Republic*, 17–33.

[96] Ibid.

[97] Ibid., 43–103. According to Lauria-Santiago, the decline of the *hacienda* system had to do with obstacles to large-scale indigo production—the primary commercial crop of colonial El Salvador—after independence. The breakdown of the Spanish colonial empire disrupted markets and trade routes. But labor was also now an issue because with independence the coercion of labor upon which the *hacienda* system was based was abolished.

In El Salvador, the common lands consisted of *ejidos,* or lands held by municipalities; *tierras communales,* or lands held by communities, whether indigenous or ladino; and finally *baldíos,* or unclaimed, state-owned land.[98] The *ejidos* and *tierras communales* as forms of tenure were based upon the recognition of the right of towns to have sufficient land for their subsistence needs,[99] and that the occupation and use were legitimate grounds for land ownership.[100] These lands preserved the notion that the use of land was part of communal organization itself, embedded in communal forms of life. Though they raised many crops, household cultivation centered upon maize.[101]

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[98] There are important differences among the processes of enclosure related to these different forms of tenure, but for the purposes of the present chapter I tend to discuss them in general terms. For a more detailed portrait of the complexity of enclosure, cf. especially Lauria-Santiago, *An Agrarian Republic*. The classic work on enclosure, which is the essential background to Lauria-Santiago's, is Browning, *El Salvador*.

[99] These lands were protected by the laws of the Spanish crown. Browning details some of the ways that community members were sometimes able to check infringements on their rights by local landowners through appealing to colonial authorities. Browning, *El Salvador*, 146.
(87- and they were protected by the laws of the Spanish crown

[100] Ibid., 150.

[101] Ibid., 14–15, 18–19; Lauria-Santiago, *An Agrarian Republic*, 17–33. As Pedro Cortés y Larraz, the archbishop of Guatemala, described such cultivation as he traveled through these lands about a century earlier: "Everything they did and said so concerned maize that they almost regarded it as a god….as though the *milpa* [the maize field] were their final purpose in life and source of their felicity." Pedro Cortés y Larraz, D*escripción Geográfico-Moral de la Diócesis de Goathemala* (*Moral and geographic description of the Diocese of Guatemala*), A.G.I, Audiencia de Guatemala, leg. 940, fol. 35 (2001) [1770].

What is crucial to see is that while the land targeted for enclosure did not belong to households in the sense that it was their private property, the use of it did belong to them. They had rights to usufruct. In other words, households had access to land to cultivate, which was their common right as member of the community. Browning can therefore write of “a sense of possession of land” on the part of these households, “but only as far as the use of land was concerned”—or alternatively of the “ancient belief” as it pertains to the “right of accessibility” to land.[102] The lands to which households had access for farming were loosely defined, at least in part because of the nature of the cultivation of maize and other subsistence crops, which was migratory. Households did not cultivate particular lands in perpetuity but were periodically assigned them by communal leaders.[103] Additionally, households also had rights of access to common lands for hunting, fishing, timber, and so on.[104] Because the holdings of the *ejidos* and *tierras communales* were common in the sense of belonging to all members of the community, land could not be subject to alienation by individual claims to ownership.[105]

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[102] Browning, *El Salvador*, 16–17, 28–29.

[103] Ibid., 16–17.

[104] Ibid., 17.

[105] Communal leaders could, however, petition for additional lands if the needs of the *ejidos* or *communidades* changed. Ibid., 17, 150, 196; Lauria-Santiago, *An Agrarian Republic*, 25.

Though the enclosure legislation itself passed relatively rapidly, its implementation was a drawn-out, conflict-ridden process, which had immense consequences for the future of El Salvador.[106] As one newspaper editorialized at the time, "enclosing and dividing land" amounted to nothing short of a "revolution" in agricultural and social life.[107] Most scholars of El Salvador have tended to narrate enclosure as the work of a land-hungry coffee elite and to judge its consequences to be the dispossession and proletarianization of the *campesinado*.[108] Jeffrey Paige's assessment is typical: enclosure amounted to "a revolution from above," and its eventual harvest was "the pattern of concentrated land ownership in the agro-export sector and mass poverty and landlessness among much of the population in the 1980s."[109]

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[106] Lauria-Santiago, *An Agrarian Republic*, 163–194.

[107] Citied in Browning, *El Salvador*, 189. As Jeffrey Paige has noted, agrarian reform in agrarian societies is revolution rather than reform. Paige writes, "The causes as well as the consequences of land reform are revolutionary. Land reform is not really reform at all. In an agrarian society, land reform is a revolutionary act because it redistributes the major source of wealth, social standing, and political power. Successful large-scale land reforms in Latin America and elsewhere occur only during social revolution or through the actions of invading armies imposing revolution from above…Fundamental land reform without social transformation is a logical and practical impossibility." Paige, "Land Reform and Agrarian Revolution in El Salvador," 127.

[108] David Browning's *El Salvador: Landscape and Society* is among the most articulate exponents of this view. Cf. also Jeffery M. Paige, *Coffee and Power: Revolution and the Rise of Democracy in Central America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); Menjívar, *Acumulación originaria y desarrollo capitalista en El Salvador*; Abelardo Torres, *Tierras y colonización* (San Salvador: Instituto de Estudios Económicos, 1961); Edelberto Torres-Rivas, *Interpretación Del Desarrollo Social Centroamericano* (San José: EDUCA, 1971); E. Bradford Burns, "The Modernization of Underdevelopment: El Salvador, 1858-1931," *Journal of Developming Areas* 18 (1984): 293–316; Cifro Cardoso, "Historia Económica Del Café En Centroamérica," *Estudios Sociales Centroamericanos* 4, no. 10 (1985); Hector Lindo-Fuentes, *Weak Foundations: The Economy of El Salvador in the Nineteenth Century 1821-1898* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

In his poem, "The Judges," Pablo Neruda describes the spread of enclosure legislation throughout Latin America and the fate of the *campesinado* in the face of it. In the poem, Neruda writes as if addressing the landless themselves: "there is no/law, there is no judge to protect/your land, your house with maize." There is neither law nor judge to protect them because law and judge are synonymous with the forces of dislocation. Upon losing their lands and houses, people find themselves, in Neruda's words, "on the border/of the most precipitous calamity,/dispossessed, solitary, vagrant."[110] They are not only without land and house. Neruda associates the forces of dislocation with the production of new forms of individuation. People have become "solitary." There are pressures bearing down that distance them from one another. He also associates the forces of dislocation with the imperative to move in order to make ends meet. People have become "vagrant."

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[109] Paige, *Coffee and Power*, 46. In his memoir chronicling his and the Church's work with *campesinos* and on agrarian reform in the 1970s, José Inocencio Alas writes of the way it "dispossessed those who worked on and lived from their lands. At that time the immigration of Salvadorans to Honduras began, and the roots of hunger and future revolutions were planted." José Inocencio Alas, *Iglesia, tierra y lucha campesina: Suchitoto, El Salvador, 1968-1977* (San Salvador: Asoc. de Frailes Franciscanos OFM de C.A., 2003), 123.

[110] Pablo Neruda, *Obras Escogidas*, vol. I (Santiago: Andres Bello, 1972), 370.

According to Browning, in the decades after independence the emerging Salvadoran state steadily implemented policies that prioritized commercial agriculture and sought to remove any obstacles to its establishment and spread.[111] The state imagined progress primarily in terms of increased production of crops for export and justified its policies, agricultural and otherwise, by an appeal to *laissez-faire* economic theory.[112] At least at first, most newly independent republics, including El Salvador, did not challenge the legitimacy of the common lands.[113] Their goal was reform rather than revolution.[114] But government officials increasingly regarded the confusion surrounding the extent, use, and ownership of land to be a particularly problematic colonial legacy, and so they set to work streamlining land tenure so that agriculture could be more organized and efficient.[115] The principles undergirding common lands, such as sufficient land for subsistence needs, and occupation and use as grounds for ownership began to come under pressure.

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[111] Browning, *El Salvador*, 142–148.
[112] Ibid., 145–146.
[113] Lauria-Santiago, *An Agrarian Republic*, 14, 17–33.
[114] Browning, *El Salvador*, 174–203.
[115] Ibid., 145–148; Lauria-Santiago, *An Agrarian Republic*, 135.

In the mid-nineteenth century, municipalities began to pass laws granting preferential treatment for those who cultivated coffee on *ejidal* land.[116] Increasingly, such cultivation became the sole criterion for claiming land.[117] Disorderly land scrambles often ensued.[118] Those who won them tended to have not only the capital to plant coffee, not to mention the time to wait three years for the first harvest, but also the ability to fend for themselves in courts of law.[119] Gradually, such legislation and its implementation began to undermine access to land altogether on the part of those who engaged in subsistence agriculture.[120]

At the same time, the *ejidos* and *tierras communales* as such increasingly posed a problem to the emerging Salvadoran state's vision of progress. The central plateau of El Salvador, with its highlands and rich volcanic soils, was the ideal location for coffee cultivation. It also happened to be the most populated area in the country, with strongly established common lands.[121] Coffee, however, was synonymous with progress, and its path ran directly through the central plateau.[122] Therefore, as the complexity of implementing change at the level of municipalities became apparent, and as the commercial importance of coffee became clear, government officials increasingly began to regard the colonial inheritance of land tenure as unsalvageable, which needed to be torn down and fashioned anew in the name of agricultural development and progress.[123]

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[116] Browning, *El Salvador*, 177–178.
[117] Ibid., 178.
[118] Ibid., 142–149.
[119] Browning, *El Salvador*, 176–178, 182, 211.
[120] Ibid., 183–185.
[121] Ibid., 171–172.
[122] Ibid., 147–189; Lauria-Santiago, *An Agrarian Republic*, 132–162.

We catch a glimpse of this vision of development and progress in the language of the enclosure legislation itself. The 1881 Decree, for instance, states that the existence of communal lands is "contrary to the economic, political, and social principles that the Republic has accepted," because they "impede the development of agriculture, obstruct the circulation of wealth, and weaken family bonds and the independence of the individual."[124] The abolition of the *ejidos* came the following year. They were likewise declared an impediment to nation's agricultural development, which the state had the "grave obligation" to remove.[125] The *ejidos* "nullified the benefits of property (*anula los beneficios de la propriedad*) of the larger and most important lands in the Republic," which were dedicated to "crops of little value" or "abandoned altogether."[126] This state of affairs has to do with the "precariousness of the right of their possessors, which leads them to maintain land in isolation, apathy, and indifference to all improvement."[127]

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[123] Browning, *El Salvador*, 154, 172–173, 203; Héctor Lindo-Fuentes and Eric Ching, *Modernizing Minds in El Salvador: Education Reform and the Cold War, 1960-1980* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2012), 30–38; Lauria-Santiago, *An Agrarian Republic*, 132–162.

[124] *Diario Oficial*, 26 Febrero 1881, tomo 10, no. 49.

[125] *Diario Oficial*, 14 Marzo 1882, tomo 12, no. 62.

[126] Ibid.

As the language of decrees suggests, the architects of enclosure were members of the liberal revolution of nineteenth-century Latin America, who viewed themselves as the vanguard of modernity, leading those mired in backwardness into a new age of enlightenment.[128] A novel conception of property occupied a prominent place in this vision of progress. In Jedediah Purdy's words, property was emerging as "the centerpiece" of a "new way of understanding society,"[129] "the keystone institution" of a whole "social vision."[130] One of the defining characteristics of this institution was the power to exclude.[131] In Latin America, like elsewhere, liberals closely associated—even conflated—liberty and private property, tending to argue that a political economy based on private property and its protection uniquely embodied liberty. As Arthur Lee puts it in reference to the U.S. Constitution, but which is nevertheless applicable to this case as well, "the right of property is the guardian of every other right, and to deprive a people of this, is in fact to deprive them of their liberty."[132] On this view, the relationship between private property and liberty is intimate, often even indistinguishable. Private property both guards freedom and expresses it.

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[127] Ibid.

[128] Lindo-Fuentes and Ching, *Modernizing Minds in El Salvador*, 30–38; Paige, *Coffee and Power*, 44–45, 55–56; Torres-Rivas, *Interpretación del Desarrollo Social Centroamericano*, 85. Liberalism interacted in novel and complex ways with its new environs. Latin American liberals tended to favor reliance upon a powerful, centralized state, not only to enclose common lands so as to facilitate agro-exports like coffee, but also to embark on infrastructure projects like roads, ports, and railroads; to intervene actively in labor markets through vagrancy laws and to maintain social order through the police and military, etc. Therefore, liberalism in El Salvador was strongly associated with, in addition to export agriculture and *laissez-faire* economics, authoritarian politics. In the latter half of the twentieth century, it especially embraced anticommunism and libertarianism.

[129] Jedediah Purdy, *The Meaning of Property: Freedom, Community, and the Legal Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 5.

[130] Ibid., 16.

Salvadoran liberalism fused *laissez-faire* economic theory and a vision of agricultural development centered upon diversification and agricultural export.[133] The common lands, liberals typically argued, hindered such development, first and foremost, because the inalienability of land prevented the establishment of markets.[134] Common lands embedded cultivation, as well as decisions regarding cultivation, within communities and municipalities, and much of the cultivation centered upon the subsistence needs of households. To the eyes of liberals, the whole system appeared inherently inefficient and wasteful.[135] Adán Mora, the Minister of the Interior at the time of the enclosure legislation, characterized the common lands as an "anti-economic institution, which kept large portions of land in the hands of a few people and which the system of administration regularly rendered unproductive, with negative consequences for public wealth."[136]

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[131] Ibid.

[132] Quoted in James W. Ely, *The Guardian of Every Other Right: A Constitutional History of Property Rights*, 3rd edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 26. See also Robbins Lionel, *The Theory of Economic Policy in English Classical Political Economy* (London: Macmillan, 1961); Gerald F. Gaus, "Property, Rights, and Freedom," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 11 (1994): 209–40.

[133] Browning, *El Salvador*, 145–148, 172; Lauria-Santiago, *An Agrarian Republic*, 6–7, 207, 230–231.

[134] Browning, *El Salvador*, 196.

Instead of communal control, liberals saw the market as the best way to ensure that equal citizens had equal access to land. Their vision was a nation of flourishing entrepreneurial farmers cultivating their own lands and pursuing their own private good, which would accumulate to promote the common good.[137] As Lauria-Santiago observes, it was a conception of the common good "defined clearly…in commercial terms."[138] Emerging markets for agricultural goods would automatically channel private self-interest toward socially desirable ends, as if by an invisible hand.[139]

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[135] Lauria-Santiago, *An Agrarian Republic*, 164–169.

[136] Quoted in Ibid., 168. As Mora's remarks suggest, Salvadoran liberals regarded the common lands not just as inefficient and wasteful but also as inequitable and anti-republican. The hierarchies endemic to the common lands seemed to them to be the vestige of colonialism, and the control of extensive landholdings by communities and *ejidos* an ongoing injustice. Ibid., 164–171.

[137] Lauria-Santiago, *An Agrarian Republic*, 231.

Often, liberals diagnosed the root of El Salvador's ills to be the very idea of common property as such—a diagnosis we see, for instance, in the pages of the government-sponsored publication, *Boletín de Agricultura*. Common lands, we are told, have "no particular owners, since their possessors cannot consider them as their own."[140] Because of this lack of individual ownership, the continued existence of common lands "deprives farmers of the benefits of cultivating their own property, defrauding (*defraudando*) both the state and the individual."[141] There is no good reason for their continued existence. With the establishment of a system of individual property, however, "a rich and extensive source of prosperity will be opened to the Nation," because individual cultivation makes land more "productive."[142] There is moral outrage in the article's criticism of the inefficiency and wastefulness of common lands. Their mere existence is understood as a kind of institutionalized thievery—taking from the state and its citizens what is rightfully belongs to them.

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[138] Ibid.

[139] Ibid., 230–231. Cf. Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2010), IV.I; Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, Reprint edition (New York, N.Y: Bantam Classics, 2003), IV.II.

[140] Lauria-Santiago, *An Agrarian Republic*, 165.

[141] Ibid., 165–166.

[142] Ibid.

The advocates of enclosure typically regarded communal tenure itself as insecure, which, they thought, discouraged *campesinos* from investing in it by raising long-term tree crops like coffee, rubber, and cacao. Communal tenure therefore stood as an obstacle to progress. It kept *campesinos* mired in backwardness, preventing them from becoming entrepreneurs.[143] Liberals therefore drew a lesson in human ecology from communal tenure: the inefficiency and wastefulness of common property bred inefficiency and wastefulness in people and their work habits. Those *campesinos* content, for whatever reason, with cultivating maize for subsistence on existing landholdings were often viewed as mired in their traditions or simply lacking in the industriousness crucial to the nation's flourishing. The resistance of *campesinos* to cultivating export crops or their preference for subsistence agriculture over working for wages in coffee *fincas* (farms) was considered parasitic upon progress.[144] Versions of this view were frequently articulated, such as in an editorial of a leading Salvadoran daily around the time of enclosure, which states that communal lands represent a form of ownership that "prejudices and diminishes [the value of land] through encouraging vagrancy, providing excuses for disputes, and thereby daily eroding man's progressive spirit."[145] Communal and *ejidal* lands not only prevented progress and development. It produced laziness and lawlessness.

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[143] Ibid., 164–169.

[144] Browning, *El Salvador*, 180; Lauria-Santiago, *An Agrarian Republic*, 136.

As we have already begun to see, an emphasis on productivism characterized the liberal vision of agricultural development in El Salvador. Production was the primary and often exclusive lens through which agriculture was evaluated.[146] By production, however, liberals did not mean the increased production of what most Salvadorans relied upon for their subsistence, namely, maize, beans, sorghum, rice, and manioc. These crops, like the people who cultivated them, were implicated in backwardness and traditionalism. What liberals meant by production was production of crops for export, especially coffee. As Gould and Lauria-Santiago point out, such productivism interacted in complex ways with traditions of *machismo*. Opportunities for the agricultural display of manliness were manifold, evidenced in, among other things: the extensiveness of landholdings; the heroic applications of skill, technology, and hard work to previously unproductive land; and the productivity one's land, which, in Gould and Lauria-Santiago's words, represented "manliness, measured in *quintales* [about 101.4 lbs.] produced."[147]

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[145] Quoted in Browning, *El Salvador*, 185. Or consider the following, from the *Boletín de Agricultura:* "The towns that have more *ejidos* have been the least industrious, because their residents, due to the uncertainty [or land tenure], remain happy with plantings of little importance and enough produce to fulfill their needs, which is as far as their aspirations go." Quoted in Lauria-Santiago, *An Agrarian Republic*, 166.

[146] Cf. Thompson's helpful examination of productionism in Paul B. Thompson, *The Spirit of Soil: Agriculture and Environmental Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

Gould and Lauria-Santiago also show some of the ways this liberal vision was bound up with a pervasive racialized discourse, which tended to collapse all darker-skinned rural inhabitants into the category *indio*.[148] On this view, indigenous and rural *mestizo* communities were practically indistinguishable—the embodiment of backwardness. As one *cafetalero* put it, "the lower class … is a primitive mass that instead of forming the basis of progress is a drag on it and a denial of it."[149] The backward would therefore have to be led—even forced if necessary—into their modern future.

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[147] Jeffrey L. Gould and Aldo Lauria-Santiago, *To Rise in Darkness: Revolution, Repression, and Memory in El Salvador, 1920–1932* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 10–11. Cf. Mauricio Alvarez Geoffroy, *Los Alvarez: Recuerdos de una Familia* (Privately printed, 1995). The *quintal* as a unit of measurement derives from the Roman *centarius*. What unites the different instances of the *quintal* is that they are or were 100 or some small unit of mass.

[148] In *To Rise in Darkness*, Gould and Lauria-Santiago examine what they call two key "ensembles" of élite discourse: the first is "progress, European imaginary, racial superiority," and the second is "productivism, masculinity, patriarchy." Gould and Lauria-Santiago, *To Rise in Darkness*, 14, 12–13, 20, 47–49, 100–101, 116–118, 191, 209, 227, 257, 283. The history of this racialized discourse likewise includes the Conquest. On this point see especially Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*.

[149] Gould and Lauria-Santiago, *To Rise in Darkness*, 12.

Gould and Lauria-Santiago argue that as households lost land and depended increasingly on wage labor for their livelihoods in the wake of enclosure, such racialized discourse shaped arguments for the protection of an order characterized by low wages, deteriorating living and working conditions on coffee *fincas,* and the increasingly unequal distribution of land. The belief that all so-called *indios* would waste higher wages or revert to idolatry if given land through agrarian reform comprised "part of the commonsense of the Central American planter class."[150]

1.2.1 "It moves in the manner of the conquistador"

As mentioned above, enclosure has often been understood by historians in terms of a land grab by the elite—a kind of legalized theft that dispossessed the *campesinado* and forced them to sell their labor in the coffee *fincas* that devoured their lands. The work of Aldo Lauria-Santiago, however, has helpfully pointed to some of the ways the process of enclosure was more complex and open-ended than has been typically understood.[151] What is especially helpful about Lauria-Santiago's account is the way it nuances and deepens our understanding of enclosure's consequences.

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[150] Ibid., 12, 49; Paige, *Coffee and Power*, 46.

[151] Lauria-Santiago argues that the "revolution" of enclosure was not simply from above but from below as well. For instance, he argues that many *campesinos* who participated extensively in commercial production of indigo since the second half of the eighteenth

According to Lauria-Santiago, among the most significant of these consequences for our present purposes was the generation of new forms of vulnerability on the part of the *campesinado*—particularly the risk of land loss. With commercial agriculture came the need for credit to finance cultivation. Under the new property regime, because land was now alienable, it could serve as collateral. The practice of commercial agriculture in the wake of enclosure therefore meant the potential forfeiture of land to creditors.[152] Another of these consequences was a new form of land scarcity, which was closely associated with the establishment of a market in land. In nineteenth-century El Salvador, the implementation of a land market led to a rush to stake and title claims, with vast tracts of land being sold at low prices to claimants, many of whom were not farmers but

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century also experienced the common land system as an obstacle to their aspirations. He also shows that communal lands were not always torn away from those who previously farmed them; that the legislation oftentimes simply legitimated *de facto* ownership; that in its immediate aftermath enclosure appeared to increase rather than diminish access to land; and so on. But even Lauria-Santiago's revisionist account is, on certain points, not always as revisionist as he suggests. For instance, he acknowledges, though seems to downplay, the existence of communities—especially indigenous communities—that resisted enclosure because they regarded the new legislation not just as a threat to their land but their identity and way of life. Lauria-Santiago, *An Agrarian Republic*, 9–10, 17–33, 132–221, 230–234.

[152] Ibid., 157, 193, 233–234.

speculators or investors. Because of this andf a growing population, the agricultural frontier was shrinking rapidly. It would close by the early twentieth century.[153]

Immediately following the enclosure legislation, many *campesinos* became landowners for the first time. But such ownership turned out to be short-lived. The newly acquired lands, which perhaps initially met the subsistence needs of households, became insufficient as households grew in size.[154] Moreover, households increasingly found it difficult to acquire additional lands as their needs changed. The opportunity for descendants to remain landowners began to diminish dramatically. The population was growing. All the available land was being claimed and titled. And in the new property regime, the basic currency to acquire more was no longer the subsistence needs of households but capital.[155]

While the advocates of enclosure sought to facilitate a better distribution of land, they in fact ended up facilitating its concentration and establishing the conditions within which access to it became increasingly difficult. Enclosure effectively locked *campesinos* in landholding patterns that permitted little flexibility and provided no possibility for expansion as needs changed. In Lauria-Santiago's words, it "institutionalized and rigidified a decidedly flawed system" and perpetuated "many of the limitations, contradictions and inequalities of the community land system and created new problems as well."[156] Lauria-Santiago therefore assesses the consequences of enclosure in the following terms: "The inheritance of a successful and dynamic peasantry became within decades the diminishing toe-hold of a majority of peasants whose growing numbers of descendants could only become migrant workers or tenants on other people's lands."[157] In 1882, the year the decrees abolishing the *ejidos* were passed, Teodoro Moreno, the author of the legislation, stated on the floor of the National Assembly that the common lands were first established to defend Salvadoran sons and daughters "from the ambitions of the conquerors."[158] Because "there are now no longer any conquerors," it has become necessary to enclose the commons and establish a market in land.[159] Apparently, Moreno did not envision the kind of conqueror that enclosure itself would generate.

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[153] Ibid., 159, 191, 233–234.
[154] Ibid., 192–194.
[155] Ibid., 193; Browning, *El Salvador*, 213.

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[156] Lauria-Santiago, *An Agrarian Republic*, 191, 193; Lindo-Fuentes and Ching, *Modernizing Minds in El Salvador*, 32.

[157] Lauria-Santiago, *An Agrarian Republic*, 233.

[158] Quoted in Ibid., 167.

[159] Quoted in Ibid.

At the time of enclosure, a handful of families of Spanish descent held *haciendas* dedicated primarily to raising indigo, coffee, sugar cane, cattle, and so on.[160] As I mentioned above, the *hacienda* did not flourish in the late colonial and early republican period. Their owners were relatively impoverished by regional standards and were often deeply indebted. El Salvador lacked the silver mining or large-scale agriculture found elsewhere in Latin America. For the first fifty years after independence, the *hacienda* further declined in significance, and *campesinos*—both indigenous and ladino—retained control of large expanses of the new nation's land. The situation changed dramatically after the enclosure legislation, which effectively elevated the individual and exclusive form of land tenure epitomized by the *hacienda*.

A coffee elite began to emerge, which was comprised of a small group of old landed families of Spanish descent that intermarried with new immigrants from Europe and North America.[161] These families increasingly began to control credit, as well as the processing, marketing, and exporting of coffee. As coffee boomed, land values rose, and profits soared. El Salvador became a leader in the application of new technologies to coffee, which, along with the incorporation of new lands into cultivation, made the large Salvadoran coffee plantations among the most productive in the world. El Salvador's coffee elite grew fabulously wealthy as a consequence. Wealth from coffee led to re-investments in coffee but also to investments in other crops such as cotton and sugar cane, as well as other ventures such as finance, real estate, commerce, tourism, and manufacturing.

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[160] This paragraph draws on Lindo-Fuentes and Ching, *Modernizing Minds in El Salvador*, 31; Lauria-Santiago, *An Agrarian Republic*, 14, 17–33.

[161] The best treatments I have found on the rise and consolidation of coffee, and the engrossment associated with it, upon which this paragraph draws, are Browning, *El Salvador*, 138–221; Lauria-Santiago, *An Agrarian Republic*, 132–133, 153–157, 228–229, 233–234; Lindo-Fuentes, *Weak Foundations*, 152–186; Paige, *Coffee and Power*, 1–95. Cf. also Eduardo Colindres, *Fundamentos Económicos de La Burguesía Salvadoreña* (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1977); Lindo-Fuentes and Ching, *Modernizing Minds in El Salvador*, 33; Gould and Lauria-Santiago, *To Rise in Darkness*, 1–31; L. Sebastian, "El Camino

In this way, the new property regime presented an unprecedented opportunity to turn land into capital, which could then be used not only to diversify investments and build more wealth, but also—and especially pertinent to our present considerations—to expand landholdings. In El Salvador, the concentration of credit, processing, marketing, and export of crops like coffee was therefore closely connected to the concentration of land, especially in the central plateau. One newspaper described the coffee's expansion in the following terms: "The conquest of territory by the coffee industry is alarming. It

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Económico Hacia La Democracia," *Estudios Centroamericanos* 35, no. 372/373 (1979): 950–951; Enrique A. Baloyra, *El Salvador in Transition* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 22–32.

has already occupied all the high ground and is now descending to the valleys, displacing maize, rice, and beans. It moves in the manner of the *conquistador*, spreading hunger and misery, reducing the former proprietors to the worst conditions."[162]

By the early decades of the twentieth century, indebted smallholders were increasingly losing their mortgaged farms to many of these same elite coffee families. "About forty-five years ago," the Salvadoran scholar Alberto Masferrer wrote in 1928, "the land in the country was distributed among the majority of Salvadorians, but now it is falling into the hands of a few owners.…El Salvador is moving toward *latifundia* at a time when most countries are attempting to move away from it."[163] In the famous testimony given to Roque Dalton, Miguel Mármol, a prominent Salvadoran communist who participated in the 1932 *campesino* uprising known as *La Matanza* (The Massacre), concurred that by the twenties *latifundism* was becoming a widespread problem. The land hunger of the elite was so intense that Mármol described it in terms of *geophagia*—literally the eating of the earth.[164]

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[162] *La Patria*, 22 diciembre 1928, cited in Everett Alan Wilson, "The Crisis of National Integration in El Salvador, 1919-1935" (PhD, Stanford University, 1970), 122.
[163] *La Patria*, 29 diciembre 1928, cited in Ibid., 121.
[164] Roque Dalton, *Miguel Marmol* (New York: Curbstone Books, 1995), 99.

By the twenties, the *campesinado* was in the midst of, as Gould and Lauria-Santiago put it, an "agonizing decomposition."[165] The landless increasingly looked for occasional wage labor, especially on the large coffee *fincas*. Many became *colonos* or permanent resident laborers on these same plantations—an arrangement in which landlords typically provided land in exchange for work and a portion of the harvest of the *colono*.[166] Others migrated to the hot and humid coastal plains, to the cities, or to the banana and sugar plantations of Honduras.[167]

Historians continue to discuss and debate the intricacies of this process. But the end result is uncontroversial: a handful of families controlling not only coffee but much of the rest of the country as well, including its arable land, with the vast majority working for these families or finding a way to survive on land marginal to coffee cultivation. In this way, the benefits of enclosure came with a heavy price, namely, *campesinos* increasingly lost their lands, as well as the subsistence guarantees of the old order. Widespread land concentration and chronic landlessness increasingly prevailed as the twentieth century progressed.

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[165] Gould and Lauria-Santiago, *To Rise in Darkness*, 3.

[166] The *colonato* system in El Salvador embraced different kinds of arrangements. As permanent resident laborers, *colonos* were typically provided housing by landlords (or were permitted to construct housing) and a parcel of land to cultivate. In exchange, they typically gave the landowner some combination of the following: a share of the harvest (*censo*), work for a certain number of days per year without charge or for less than the going rate. Cf. Montes, *El agro salvadoreño*, 265, 318.

[167] Molly Todd, *Beyond Displacement: Campesinos, Refugees, and Collective Action in the Salvadoran Civil War* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010), 27–29.

While we cannot examine it in detail here, the rise of sugar cane, cattle, and especially cotton production after World War II ushered in another intensive period of land concentration, further contributing to many of the trends we have been examining.[168] The coastal plain, to which many of those dispossessed by coffee migrated, was the principal site for the cultivation of these new crops, which led to a further wave of dispossession. According to Browning, this second expansion of export-oriented agriculture largely completed, not just the dispossession of the Salvadoran *campesinado,* but also the domination of the landscape by privately-owned agricultural land dedicated principally to a single export crop.[169] During the first expansion of coffee cultivation in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, the large plantations could absorb many of those who lost their lands because of the high demand for labor. But by mid-twentieth century, the widespread use of agrochemicals and higher-yielding varieties made coffee cultivation considerably less reliant on labor. This was even more so the case with cane, cotton, and cattle. Therefore, instead of absorbing labor, this second expansion of export-oriented agriculture tended to expel it, further contributing to the swelling numbers of those in search of land and work.

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[168] For more on this second expansion, upon which this paragraph draws, cf. Browning, *El Salvador*, 224–269; Brockett, *Land, Power, And Poverty*, 41–65; Robert G. Williams, *Export Agriculture and the Crisis in Central America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1986); Durham, *Scarcity and Survival in Central America*, 21–62; Paige, *Coffee and Power*, 29, 92–93; Ridgeway Satterthwaite, "Campesino Agriculture and Hacienda Modernization in Coastal El Salvador, 1949-1969" (University of Wisconsin, 1971); Santiago Ruíz Granadino, "Modernización Agrícola En El Salvador," *Estudios Sociales Centroamericanos* 22 (1979): 71–95; Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1984), 176–177. Commenting on the rise and consolidation of export agriculture in El Salvador, Segundo Montes writes, "The entire economic and financial system, as well as the state apparatus, functions to reproduce this capitalist mode of agricultural production." Montes, *El agro salvadoreño*, 104.

The post-war period also witnessed the disintegration of the *colonato* system in the large coffee plantations. *Colonos*, we will recall, are permanent resident laborers who typically exchange work and a portion of their harvest for usufruct. By the 1950s, those who had lost ownership of their own lands had grown heavily dependent upon this institution for their livelihood. According to Posada and López, in response to governmental reform measures, especially the establishment of a minimum wage law, large landowners began to evict *colonos* and rely instead exclusively on wage workers. Between the 1950s and 1970s, the *colonato* system began a rapid decline, and by 1971, it had virtually disappeared altogether.[170] With the eviction and the disintegration of the *colonato* system, thousands of families were forced to leave the lands they had previously cultivated.[171]

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[169] Browning, *El Salvador*, 225, 248.

What did the dispossessed do to survive? Some remained in rural areas, but had weak ties to land or steady employment. When they found land to farm, they did so as renters or as squatters. The land was typically marginal, like hillsides, with thin, rocky soils and steep inclines, and therefore susceptible to degradation and erosion. These lands, moreover, were almost always insufficient to rely upon exclusively for subsistence.[172] When they found wage work it was typically migratory and seasonal—with peak employment around harvest time—for the booming agro-export economy.

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[170] This process is described in detail in Marcelo Germán Posada and Mario López, "El Salvador 1950-1970: Latifundios, Integración y Crisis," *Revista de Historia de América* 115 (1993): 37–62. Cf. also Lauria-Santiago, *An Agrarian Republic*, 238.

[171] On the wave of displacement and migration during this time, cf. Browning, *El Salvador*, 248–253; Durham, *Scarcity and Survival in Central America*, 50–78; Brockett, *Land, Power, And Poverty*, 68–76; James Dunkerley, *Power in the Isthmus* (New York: Verso, 1989), 179–201; Victor Bulmer-Thomas, *The Political Economy of Central America since 1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 201–207; Williams, *Export Agriculture and the Crisis in Central America*.

[172] On this dynamic, cf. Durham, *Scarcity and Survival in Central America*; Jenny Pearce, *Promised Land: Peasant Rebellion in Chalatenango, El Salvador* (Latin America Bureau, 1986); Carlos Rafael Cabarrús, *Genesis de una revolución: Análisis del surgimiento y desarrollo de la organización campesina en El Salvador* (México, D.F: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropologia Social, 1983); Williams, *Export Agriculture and the Crisis in Central America*; Posada and López, "El Salvador 1950-1970: Latifundios, Integración y Crisis," 45, 54–57; Paige, *Coffee and Power*, 90–94.

Others left the countryside altogether, joining the rural exodus of migrants to the cities, typically squatting in settlements and finding work in a growing urban informal sector of merchants, artisans, day laborers, and so on.[173]

There are unmistakable resonances between these developments and the story Karl Polanyi tells in *The Great Transformation* about what he calls the "utopian endeavor" to "disembed" the "economy" from "society" and to subordinate the latter to the former.[174] Hence Montes's claim that state, property regime, and the economic and financial apparatus all functioned to establish and sustain agriculture ordered by and to production for export, with implications for the entirety of social life. We also see why it would be inaccurate to describe what was transpiring in the Salvadoran countryside exclusively in terms of the language of exploitation. What was at stake was not just the exploitation of *colonos* and wageworkers but the devastation that produced them in the first place.[175]

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[173] Durham, *Scarcity and Survival in Central America*, 56–62; Paige, *Coffee and Power*, 29–30, 94; Posada and López, "El Salvador 1950-1970: Latifundios, Integración y Crisis," 42–43.
[174] Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 29–30, cf. xxv–xxvii, 80–81, 11–102, 141, 150, 178.
[175] For this reason, Polanyi sees important parallels between the devastation of enclosure and the devastation of colonialism. Cf. Ibid., 158–160. On the singular devastation of colonialism, see especially Jennings's comments on Sabine MacCormack's use of the Incan concept of *pachacuti,* which means "world turned around" or "world turned upside down." Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*. Cf. also Sabine MacCormack, *On the*

Attending to these developments, however briefly, also helps us to appreciate better why scholars consistently characterize the Salvadoran agricultural economy not just in terms of the concentration of land and wealth but as exclusionary.[176] Another way to put the point is to say that the expansion of export agriculture did not just produce coffee, cotton, sugar, and beef; it also produced exclusion and marginalization. It produced, as Pope Francis puts it in *Evangelii gaudium*, "people without work, without possibilities, without any means of escape."[177] In El Salvador, it especially produced *campesinos* without land—and it produced them in abundance.

Writing in the early 1970s, Browning notes that in order to make ends meet the landless increasingly turned to squatting, that is, they began to settle upon and often to cultivate land for which they had no legal title. Everywhere the landscape evidenced this

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Wings of Time: Rome, the Incas, Spain, and Peru (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, & Colonization* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003).

[176] Posada and Lopez write of El Salvador's "exclusionary agrarian structure," Durham of the "competitive exclusion of rural inhabitants" from land, and Lauria-Santiago of the way the elite accumulated property in ways that "cannibalized" it. Examples of such descriptions could be multiplied. Posada and López, "El Salvador 1950-1970: Latifundios, Integración y Crisis," 46; Durham, *Scarcity and Survival in Central America*, 50; Lauria-Santiago, *An Agrarian Republic*, 238.

[177] Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2013), §53.

phenomenon: the eroded hillsides, the deforestation, the makeshift huts of sticks and straw by the sides of the roads, maize and beans planted in every available patch of land, the settlements at the outskirts of cities and towns, and so on. Large landowners lived with the constant threat of spontaneous occupation of land left untended. If land were to be kept free of *paracaidístas*, or parachutists, as they were often called, landowners had to be vigilant and patrol the boundaries or rely on police or other security personnel to do so. Those who squatted on land in the cotton-growing lowlands risked being bathed from the sky by crop dusters spraying agrochemicals.[178]

Squatters have no legal title to the lands they occupy, so their position is always precarious before the law. Salvadoran civil code did recognize the law of *usucapio* or adverse possession. But under the new property regime and in the context of a closed agricultural frontier, access to land became a pressing issue and the squatter came to prominence as a new kind of problem plaguing the nation.[179] Acquiring land as a squatter, while possible, was not only difficult but also dangerous. At a time when even raising the question of the justice of existing property arrangements was risky, the transgression of those arrangements was even more so. Especially as the situation deteriorated in the 1970s, transgressing the boundaries of private property led to repression.

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[178] Browning, *El Salvador*, 256. Browning does not provide details but similar accounts are common. Michael Samers, *Migration* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 176. For a fictional portrayal of one such episode, see Leslie Marmon Silko, *Almanac of the Dead* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 459.

[179] Browning discusses these matters in Browning, *El Salvador*, 260-264.

Browning makes an important observation about what was at stake for squatters when he writes that they often behaved as though any unused land was theirs—as though access to it *belonged* to them. *Campesinos* in Honduras spoke of *recuperaciones* or recoveries, implying the return of what belongs to them.[180] Certainly they were fully aware they had no legal title to these lands. The kinds of dwellings they built and crops they planted evinced the sense that they could be evicted and forced to move at a moment's notice. But as Browning writes, "They continued to act in accordance with the belief in their ancient right of access to land."[181] They became a people, we might say, perpetually in search of a commons. Because of their need, they regarded any unoccupied land as theirs to cultivate. Therefore, although the *ejidos* and the *tierras communales* had long since been enclosed and their legal basis dismantled, in some fundamental sense their existence or something like their existence—certainly the need for their existence—continued and found new forms of expression outside the protection of law. In El Salvador, the production of an excluded people—a people whose way of life was marked by dispossession, migration, and squatting—was a particularly prominent manifestation of this reality.

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[180] On Honduras, see Philip McManus and Gerald Schlabach, eds. *Relentless Persistence: Nonviolent Action in Latin America* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1991), 64-77; Anders Corr, *No Trespassing: Squatting, Rent Strikes, and Land Struggles Worldwide* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press), 39-50.
[181] Browning, *El Salvador*, 256, cf. 145–146, 150.

These are complex matters, and in the foregoing I have only offered a brief sketch of them. Nevertheless, such a sketch, however brief, is important in order to appreciate what Romero calls the "difficult and desperate situation of the *campesinado,*" who have no land upon which to subsist, and so who, in order to survive, sell their labor for "miserable wages, which are insufficient to meet the most minimal necessities of subsistence, either for themselves or for their families."[182] It helps us to begin see why Romero took with such seriousness the struggles of his people to make ends meet, to find sufficient food for their families, to secure the land and the tools they need to farm, and to organize on behalf of what he calls "the vital things of life,"[183] or elsewhere, the "vital problems of subsistence, of land, of wages."[184] His sense of the importance of agrarian reform should be understood in this light.

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[182] Romero, *Homilías,* vol. V, 178.
[183] Romero, *Homilías,* vol. II, 384.
[184] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. III, 153, 346; Romero, *Homilías,* vol. II, 384; Romero, *Homilías,* vol. IV, 103.

Moreover, these considerations also help us to fill out Romero's characterization of agrarian reform as a response to a situation that is already violent. According to Romero, the clearest evidence of the ordinary violence is the presence of a people systematically excluded from the land and the work they needed to live fully human lives. The violence with which Romero is concerned is therefore distinct from that of the state and its revolutionary opponents, both of whose violence presuppose what Romero, drawing especially on the final documents of the Second Episcopal Conference that gathered Medellín, Colombia in 1968, calls "institutionalized violence"[185]—a violence woven into the fabric of the ordinary, akin to what Nancy Scheper-Hughes calls "the violence of everyday life."[186] As Romero sees it, neither the state nor its revolutionary opponents sufficiently discern the depths of the violence. Each in its own way therefore misconstrues the true shape of the work of peace: the former seeks it in the defense of a violent order with violence, while the latter seeks it in the use of violence to uproot the violence.

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[185] Cf. Romero, *Homilías*, vol. I, 215; Romero, *Homilías,* vol. II, 501. In the document on "Peace," the bishops at Medellín use the phrase "institutionalized violence" (*violencia institucionalizada*). The passage within which this phrase occurs reads: "No deja de ver que América Latina se encuentra, en muchas partes, en una situación de injusticia que puede llamarse de violencia institucionalizada cuando, por defecto de las estructuras de la empresa industrial y agrícola, de la economía nacional e internacional, de la vida cultura y política, 'poblaciones enteras faltas de lo necesario, viven en una tal dependencia que les impide toda iniciativa y responsabilidad, lo mismo que toda posibilidad de promoción cultural y de participación en la vida social y política,' violándose así derechos fundamentales." Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano, *Río de Janeiro, Medellín, Puebla, Santo Domingo*.

[186] Nancy Scheper-Hughes, *Death without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

It will take the remainder of the chapter to begin to fill out the theological significance of such an understanding of violence, and the assumptions about the world in which it is implicated. Romero's purpose in characterizing the Salvadoran reality in these terms is not to conflate distinct forms of violence or to exculpate the state's revolutionary opponents.[187] It is to offer a clearer picture of the way the world is. Romero's social analysis, I aim to show, is an outworking of the doctrine of the common destination of created goods—the notion that creation is a common gift, given for the use of all. It is to a closer examination of this understanding of creation that we now turn.

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[187] In an unpublished paper entitled "Fuller Definition of 'Violence,'" John Howard Yoder expresses the concern that the consequence of the "redefinition of violence" as structural and institutional is legitimation of the "liberating violence" of "righteous revolution in the third world." As we will see, while Romero embraces an understanding of violence as structural and institutional—which he would argue is not a redefinition but simply taking seriously sin's social and structural life—he does not do so in order to legitimize further violence. John Howard Yoder, "Fuller Definition of 'Violence'" (Goshen Biblical Seminary, March 28, 1973).

1.3 The Grammar of Creation

1.3.1 "The common destination of created goods"

As I indicated at the outset of this chapter, Romero's sense of agrarian reform as a theological necessity derives from his understanding of creation's grammar, specifically what *Gaudium et spes* calls the "common" or "universal destination of earthly goods." The passage in which these phrases appears in *Gaudium et spes* is the following, among the most authoritative magisterial articulations of the teaching:

> God intended the earth with everything contained in it for the use of all human beings and peoples. Thus, under the leadership of justice and in the company of charity, created goods should be in abundance for all in like manner. Whatever the forms of property may be, as adapted to the legitimate institutions of peoples, according to diverse and changeable circumstances, attention must always be paid to this universal destination of earthly goods. In using them, therefore, man [sic.] should regard the external things that he legitimately possesses not only as his own but also as common in the sense that they should be able to benefit not only him but also others. On the other hand, the right of having a share of earthly goods sufficient for oneself and one's family belongs to everyone. The Fathers and Doctors of the Church held this opinion, teaching that men are obliged to come to the relief of the poor and to do so not merely out of their superfluous goods. If one is in extreme necessity, he has the right to procure for himself what he needs out of the riches of others. Since there are so many people prostrate with hunger in the world, this sacred council urges all, both individuals and governments, to remember the aphorism of the Fathers, "Feed the man dying of hunger, because if you have not fed him, you have killed him," and really to share and employ their earthly goods, according to the ability of each, especially by supporting individuals or peoples with the aid by which they may be able to help and develop themselves…By its very nature private property

> has a social quality which is based on the law of the common destination of earthly goods (§§69, 71).

I will have much more to say about this passage as well as the traditions upon which draws in the pages ahead. In the remainder of this chapter, however, I want to focus on the notion that God gives the earth for the sustenance of humankind as a whole—in other words, that God gives the earth in ways that always look to open wide the doors that distinctions of worthiness or status attempt to close. As Romero puts the point in one of his homilies, "There are not two classes of people: those who have been born to own everything and leave the rest with nothing, while those with nothing are unable … to share in what God has given for all."[188]

The notion that creation is a common gift is admittedly easier to appreciate with respect to certain goods as opposed others.[189] Nevertheless, the understanding of creation as common gift with which Romero works applies to all created goods. It holds that God creates heaven and earth, and all things visible and invisible precisely as a gift given in common, and that the commonality of the gift must be realized to every degree possible. All created goods, including land and the hands that work it, are to be held up to its measure.

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[188] Romero, *Homilías,* vol. V, 61.

[189] For extended treatments of these matters, see Paul J. Griffiths, *Intellectual Appetite: A Theological Grammar*, New edition (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 2009), 139–162; Kathryn Tanner, *Economy of Grace* (Fortress Press, 2005), 22–29.

For the purpose of this chapter, I am isolating this understanding of creation as it pertains to land and its fruits. But when Romero speaks of creation, it often seamlessly opens into new creation. In other words, it opens into the theological landscape of God's work of salvation in Israel and in Christ, and humankind's calling to share in the common life of God through Christ and in the Holy Spirit—the communion that creates and sustains all created reality.

To take an example from Romero's homilies, from a passage in which he is reflecting upon God's triune life of eternal donation and re-donation: "Christ reveals that God is love, that God is not a solitary egotist. God is love because God communicates this love and offers us the divine nature. Without losing this divine nature, the Father shares it with the Son and the Spirit. Without losing it, the Son shares it with the Father and the Spirit. And without losing it, the Spirit shares it with the Son and the Father."[190] Romero goes on to say that God, without ceasing to be God, creates the world in love to offer creatures a share in God's own life of communion. Upon the refusal of that gift, God's response is not to give less but to give more. It is to give even unto the fullness of God's life by giving Christ—a fullness so replete that it makes all things new.[191]

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[190] Romero, *Homilías,* vol. I, 515.

God's purpose throughout, Romero says, is to enter into a "communion with human creatures that is familial."[192] It is in relation to the common destination of humankind to communion with God that Romero remarks upon the common destination of created goods and "how the earth groans beneath the weight of sin because humanity has not understood that creation is for the flourishing of all and not for a few to set themselves up (*instalarse*) in comfort."[193] Here as elsewhere, Romero locates creation as common gift within the wider divine economy ordered by and to such gifts, whose purpose is to offer creatures a share in God's life. Romero understands sin and the violence that sin unleashes as the refusal of this reality. Among the paradigmatic expressions of this refusal is a posture that holds the self and its possessions over and against others, and in so doing, denies the social sense of property, the social mortgage that all property bears.

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[191] Ibid., 515-516.
[192] Ibid., 516.
[193] Ibid., 516.

We see the emphasis on creation as a common gift throughout Romero's life and thought.[194] To take one particularly representative, if early, instance: in 1975, Romero started publishing a weekly periodical for the archdiocese of San Salvador. In the midst of the coffee harvest in 1976, the year before he became archbishop, he writes this in one of his articles about the situation of the Salvadoran coffee harvesters or "cutters" (*cortadores*), as he calls them:

> The coffee harvest is in full swing…and what is certain is that God, whose works are always full of splendor, is giving us this year a splendid rain of rubies that attracts thousands of workers from all parts to gather the rich gift of our mountains.
>
> And it is here where we see the way human sin makes God's beautiful creation, which is destined for the freedom of the glory of God's children, groan [cf. Romans 8:19-23]. For this reason, the Church cries out that God's command be heeded: "God intended the earth with everything contained in it for the use of all human beings and peoples. Thus, under the leadership of justice and in the company of charity, created goods should be in abundance for all in like manner. Whatever the forms of property may be…attention must always be paid to this universal destination of earthly goods" (*Gaudium et spes* §69).
>
> For this reason the flourishing that the harvest brings makes us happy, because it is not only the flourishing of the large landowners (*terratenientes*) but the height of the flourishing of so many 'cutters' among us, that with this harvest attain their only hope of income for the entire year. For this same reason, therefore, we are saddened and we are

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[194] See for instance Morozzo Della Rocca, *Primero Dios*; Zacarías Díez and Juan Macho, *"En Santiago de Maria me topé con la Miseria": dos años de la vida de Mons. Romero (1975-1976)* (Costa Rica, 1994); Monseñor Urioste, "Life and Legacy of Archbishop Romero" (Santa Clara University, April 28, 2010).

> preoccupied by the egotism with which methods are devised to deprive workers of their just wages….
>
> How we would like that the flourishing of this rain of rubies and of all the harvests of the earth are not darkened by the tragic words from Scripture: "Listen! The wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts" (James 5:4).[195]

In much literature about him, Romero is depicted as having undergone a radical conversion with the death of his friend Rutilio Grande in 1977, transforming him from a timid, conservative cleric, blindly obedient to the Church, to a bold fighter for social justice and proponent of the preferential option for the poor.[196] But in this passage, which was written before he became archbishop and two years prior to Grande's death, we can already begin to see that Romero and his story is more complex than is typically told.[197] The passage reprises many of the themes touched upon in the previous section regarding the expansion of coffee cultivation in El Salvador. As the economic center of gravity, coffee gathers workers "from all parts" to its fields. These workers, the passage suggests, must move, and what moves them is need. Wherever they reside, their own lands and livelihoods are insufficient. So they move throughout El Salvador to cut coffee.

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[195] Óscar Romero, *La Voz Del Pastor*, 28 noviembre 1977.

[196] For approaches to Romero that subscribe to this view, cf. María López Vigil, *Piezas para un Retrato* (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1993); Jon Sobrino, *Monseñor Romero* (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1993); Leonardo Boff, "Monseñor Óscar Romero Martire Del Regno, Della Politica Di Dio," in *Óscar Romero* (S. Domenico di Fiesole: Ed. Cultura della Pace, 1993).

[197] For an excellent discussion of this, cf. Morozzo Della Rocca, *Primero Dios*, 185–195.

In one sense, the coffee harvest brings flourishing. As Romero observes, it is for many the only source of income throughout the year—their only opportunity to earn what they need to support themselves and those who depend upon them.[198] But in the movement to make ends meet, and especially in the holding back of the wages due workers in justice, Romero perceives creation's groaning under the weight of sin. As we will examine in the third chapter, an important entailment of the understanding of creation that we are examining is justice in wages, that is, those who work for wages are due in justice a wage sufficient to provide a living not only for themselves but for their dependents as well. If God gives land and harvests for the benefit of all, the refusal of living wages for workers and their dependents by landowners only contributes to the groaning because it is the refusal of the gift and the life into which God gives the gift to draw humankind. The capacity to perceive such groaning comes from the conviction that creation is most fundamentally a gift given by God to meet the needs of all people.[199]

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[198] Cf. Romero, *Homilías,* vol. VI, 63.

[199] Though Romero does not say so here, the conviction that creation is a common gift comes into clearer focus when viewed from the vantage of Christ—creation's beginning

It is also important to notice that the verses from James with which Romero concludes the passage are not mere ornament or hyperbole. These and similar moral descriptions also arise from the view of creation as common gift with which Romero is working. Although the unpaid wages of the workers are not kept in the landowner's ledger, they are kept in God's. God sees the misery and hears the groaning. All of it cries out for redress. Such descriptions play an indispensable role in opening up a landscape for agency that would not otherwise be perceptible, in which people, we might say, can learn to enter into God's life by entering into God's language.

1.3.2 Land Concentration and Landlessness

Throughout Romero's homiletical and literary corpus, the notion that creation is a common gift, which God gives to meet the needs of all, occurs like a refrain. Romero's language often echoes that of the passage above. El Salvador's land, like the fruits of its harvests, he continually says, is for the flourishing of all Salvadorans, not just for the

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and end, the one in whom, through whom, and for whom all things were made (cf. Colossians 1:16, John 1:3, 1 Corinthians 8:6). As St. Paul puts it in the same chapter of the Letter to the Romans, the groaning is therefore perceptible to those who are "in Christ Jesus," who are "set free from the law of sin and of death," and who groan along with the rest of the created order while awaiting "the freedom of the glory of God's children" (Romans 8:1-2, 21, 23).

enrichment of the select few—a purpose they at best only partially fulfill.[200] This principle applies not just to Salvadoran land but also to all land, which leads to a relativization of national boundaries, which has important implications for immigration. As Romero observes in one of his homilies, if God has given the earth for all peoples, and if in El Salvador land access is a problem while in other countries there are abundant unused lands, then it follows that the unused lands should be made available to those who need them.[201]

Romero's concern in the passage quoted above is wages. But his homilies also record the deplorable working conditions of these same workers, often noting, for instance, that they have no shelter for themselves as they travel in the cold season from farm to farm looking for work, often sleeping on tarps or on improvised hammocks,[202] or commenting upon the inadequate protections for those who are routinely exposed to agrochemicals.[203] The problem is not just that they are deprived of what they need to live but that their vulnerability becomes the source of further exploitation. "I have seen it up close, on the farms," he says.[204]

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[200] Cf. Romero, *Homilías,* vol. I, 217, 243; Romero, *Homilías,* vol. II, 191, 197; Romero, *Homilías,* vol. III, 351, 357, 408; Romero, *Homilías,* vol. V, 103, 428; Romero, *Homilías,* vol. VI, 393.

[201] Romero, *Homilías,* vol. III, 78; cf. Romero, *Homilías,* vol. I, 217, 423; Romero, *Homilías,* vol. II, 19.

[202] Romero, *Homilías,* vol. IV, 103.

[203] Romero, *Homilías,* vol. V, 178.

In the background of observations like these is the whole question of why workers move in search of work in the first place, why the land and the wages where they live are insufficient for them. Romero, however, characteristically understands the struggles of workers—both urban and rural—for better wages and working conditions, as well as the right to gather without being repressed, in relation to what has transpired in the Salvadoran countryside, which we looked at in the previous part to this chapter. In one homily, for instance, Romero calls draws on the language of *Igreja e Problemas da Terra*, the important 1980 document of the Brazilian Bishops Conference, calling such struggles the "fruit of the injustice in the rural areas," because "people have had to abandon their land and now seek to earn a living in the city."[205] According to Romero, these struggles are part of the same story. As he sees it, the vast majority of the inhabitants of the Salvadoran countryside have collectively shared the fate of the man going down from Jerusalem to Jericho in Luke's Gospel, who was stripped, beaten, and left half-dead by a gang of anonymous thieves (cf. 10:30).[206] Migration has been one of the main survival strategies in response to this assault.

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[204] Óscar Arnulfo Romero, *Homilías (V)*, ed. Miguel Cavada Diez (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 2005), 178.

[205] Romero, *Homilías,* vol. VI, 396-397. Cf. *Igreja e Problemas da Terra* (Itaici: Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil, 14 fevereiro 1980).

According to Romero, the twin phenomena of land concentration and landlessness epitomize the refusal of the common gift of creation. Of course, the history of this refusal long predates the agrarian crisis of 1970s El Salvador or the process of enclosure in the late nineteenth century, just as it long predates Salvadoran independence or even the Spanish Conquest. On this point, Romero's position is similar to that with which Ambrose's treatise *On Naboth* begins, which was quoted in the epigraph to the chapter: "The story of Naboth is an old one, but it is repeated every day." The story of Naboth is the story of covetousness—of having enough and yet wanting more. The story is as deep as human history itself, and it centers upon the subversion of the social sense of property.[207] The cumulative history of the refusal of creation as a common gift is written into the Salvadoran landscape. Land concentration and landlessness are for Romero among its clearest signs.

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[206] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. II, 381. Adolfo Bonilla Bonilla describes the Salvadoran *campesinado* as "crushed without misery," and like so much rural life, "on the brink of extinction." Bonilla Bonilla, *Tenencia de La Tierra y Reforma Agraria En El Salvador: Un Análisis Histórico*, 22.

[207] Cf. Romero, *Homilías,* vol. I, 340-341. Above I noted the way that much literature on pre-war El Salvador is concerned with giving causal accounts of what led to war and weighing the relative weight of various factors. When one takes seriously institutional and structural violence, not only does the parsing of the relative weight of causal factors in contributing to the violence of war become more complicated, but in some sense, it is beside the point. The important question for Romero is: what are the roots of the

Romero returns to these phenomena repeatedly throughout his homilies. Above I noted that in March 1979 that there was a small agrarian reform in San Antonio Silva. The government expropriated 26,293 hectares of land, which owned by only seven families, which it then attempted to distribute to 356 *campesina* families. In commenting positively on this reform in one of his homilies, Romero speaks of "the enormous injustice of the distribution of land" in El Salvador and the stark polarizations it produces—a reality that "dominates our country."[208] The Church, he says, must name this reality for what it is: "institutionalized injustice."[209]

In another homily, in discussing the agrarian reform proposed by the *Junta Revolucionaria de Gobierno* (Revolutionary Government Junta, JRG), which came to power through a coup d'état on 15 October 1979, Romero cites recently released statistics by the *Ministerio de Agricultura y Ganaderia* (Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, MAG) about the dire state of the *campesinado*—the absence of prenatal and postpartum care for

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violence? Such a question calls for a different kind of social analysis, one which is theological, because it takes with full seriousness the depth sin's violence.

[208] Romero, *Homilías,* vol. IV, 280.

[209] Ibid.

women, the high rates of infant and childhood mortality and malnutrition, the lack of access to water and adequate shelter, and so on. He then goes on to assert that this "scandalous situation" cannot be understood apart from "the unjust and disproportionate distribution of the land of this country."[210]

In passages like these and many others, Romero characteristically regards the inequality in the distribution of land as itself a manifestation of injustice—an injustice so ubiquitous that it is coterminous with the extant order itself. Land concentration is an injustice—and this is crucial—that is in turn productive of further injustice. In this sense, it is like a taproot of injustice—the central tapering root from which many other forms of injustice sprout up.

We have been examining the way Romero's understanding of the injustice institutionalized in the maldistribution of land derives from his understanding of the refusal of the common gift of creation. In a country in which the vast majority of the people depend directly upon agriculture for their livelihoods, the fact that so few hands hold so much land stands as among the starkest counter-images to the commonality of the gift of creation. It obscures land's most fundamental purpose, which is to meet the needs of all. For this reason, Romero says in his penultimate dominical homily that the land "groans" because "the unjust have hoarded it (*la acaparan*), leaving nothing for others," before going on to name the way "agrarian reforms are a theological necessity."[211] Once again, they are a theological necessity because they bear witness to the common gift that land is and the common life God gives the gift to cultivate.

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[210] Romero, *Homilías,* vol. VI, 70.

1.3.3 "You possess the land that belongs to all Salvadorans"

As we have already started to see, the understanding of creation as a common gift with which Romero works involves claims like the following: that a sufficient share of created goods *belongs* to those in need; that a sufficient share is *theirs;* that when it is lacking, it is what is *due* them; and so on. In other words, it is an understanding of creation that implies certain claims about justice. Correlatively, it implies claims about injustice as well, for instance, its prevalence in places like Romero's El Salvador and wherever people lack the basic bodily support they need to flourish.

On this view, one of justice's principal works is to open others' access to what is theirs but what has been denied them. A sufficient share of created goods belongs to those who need it not because of what they have done or failed to do, and not because of the kind of people they are. It belongs to them on the basis of need alone. It belongs to them simply because they are hungry, thirsty, naked, shelterless, and so on. It belongs to them because the privation of what they need impairs their flourishing.

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[211] Romero, *Homilías,* vol. VI, 393.

If God intends the earth and everything in it for the benefit of all, it follows that created goods have an intrinsic and inescapable orientation to need, and that the needy have a unique claim upon them. This claim—the claim of need—is the most basic and fundamental claim human creatures have upon the created order. Among all other possible claims, it takes precedence. Moreover, it does not belong to those in need on account of the laws or institutions of the polities in which they live, though these can certainly facilitate—or hinder—people's access to what is theirs. The failure to recognize the claim does not negate its existence, only the acknowledgement of its existence. The basis of the claim is bodily need. Its law is the law of necessity.[212]

I take all this to be the inner logic of Romero's position, even if he does not expound upon the logic himself as I have just done. The logic is everywhere implied by what he says. The understanding of creation as common gift that I have attempted to articulate is crucial in order to understand what Romero means when he speaks about justice and why it is such an important virtue for him. He returns to it again and again, consistently characterizing the Church's defense of the *campesinado* in terms of what is their due, as well as the systemic denial of sufficient land and living wages as an injustice that is productive of still further injustice.

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[212] For a helpful discussion of this view and the extensive discussions about it among medieval canonists, cf. Brian Tierney, *The Idea of Natural Rights: Studies on Natural Rights, Natural Law, and Church Law* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 69–76, 84–85.

Daniel Bell has recently criticized the appeal to justice and its associated discourse of rights in liberationist thought and the Church's social doctrine more generally as individualist and proprietary,[213] beholden to a conception of politics as statecraft,[214] and ultimately unable to resist what Bell calls capitalism as a "technology of desire."[215] I do not wish to minimize Bell's concerns, nor do I want to delve into an extended discussion of them. What I do want to point out is that the appeal to justice for Romero addresses precisely what concerns Bell. It attempts to resist the tendency toward individualism, just as it unsettles dominant conceptions of property and the proprietary claims of individuals. Moreover, justice as Romero understands it is de-coupled from a conception of politics as statecraft. Its 'politics' is in tension with the regnant Salvadoran property regime and the state that oversees it, which is a main reason for the state's persecution of the Church and its repression of the Salvadoran people.

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[213] Daniel Bell, *Liberation Theology after the End of History: The Refusal to Cease Suffering* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 105.
[214] Ibid., 4, 85–143.
[215] Ibid., 1–2. Bell's project is framed in terms of resistance to capitalism, which he regards as antithetical to the Christian faith. He characterizes the contest between capitalism and Christianity as a contest between the different ways they shape desire, what Bell calls their conflicting "technologies of desire."

Bell's principal concern, however, is with desire—its formation and deformation—which is a good place to begin to examine further Romero's understanding of justice. For what concerns Romero and leads him to speak of justice is the formation of desire. According to him, the justice for which Christ's followers must learn to hunger and thirst is the redress of what people need but lack. His purpose in speaking of justice is to help encourage the formation of people who are just—people who seek to acknowledge, grant, and preserve others' access to what God has created for all.

Such an understanding of justice is intimate with solidarity. It does not lead to the atomization of social bodies but responds to and seeks to repair an atomization already suffered. What especially preoccupies Romero in this regard is what he calls *insensibilidad*, which might be translated as 'insensitivity,' 'indifference,' 'callousness'—or to use the scriptural idiom, 'hard-heartedness.' It is epitomized by the efforts of certain landholders and their representative organizations to deny the claims of others upon land, especially by the use of state-sanctioned violence in doing so. In terms of our present considerations, the work of justice entails, in the phrase associated with Brazil's *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* (Landless Worker Movement, MST), the pursuit of "order"—where order names "no one going hungry,"[216] everyone having sufficient access to the land and the harvests of El Salvador.

While the justice for which Christians hunger and thirst includes the struggle for daily bread, Romero always locates that struggle in relation to the justice of God manifested in Christ—the Bread of Life.[217] As Romero understands it, the path of justice looks to life with God as its final end, and the way of justice does not abandon charity.[218] He hews closely to the rule laid down by *Gaudium et* spes, quoted in the passage above, that the work of ensuring the abundance of created goods for all should proceed "under the leadership of justice and in the company of charity."

We see this, for instance, in a homily in which Romero speaks on the perils of working for the bread that perishes, as if it had nothing to do with the bread that does not. God in God's goodness, he says, gives and sustains creation for the satisfaction of hunger. God provides for material support both through the fruits of the earth and the work of human hands, which is why Romero thinks the satisfaction of hunger requires the collective action of the so-called popular organizations (*organizaciones populares*) and their struggle for land and livelihood. But Romero goes on to say that this struggle, if separated from the faith that illumines the landscape through which all such struggles must move, remains "flat, myopic, and imperfect."[219] All struggles for justice must locate themselves in relation to "the justice of the reign of God," all desire for "the bread that fills the stomach" in relation to the Bread of Life.[220]

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[216] Wendy Wolford, *This Land Is Ours Now: Social Mobilization and the Meanings of Land in Brazil* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 2.

[217] Romero's view is similar to the one Pope John XXIII articulates near the beginning of his 1961 encyclical *Mater et magistra* in writing of the way Church teaching "joins…earth with heaven" (§2). It embraces the whole person—soul and body, intellect and will—and bids her to locate her life in relation to the "heavenly country" (§2). In specifying the shape of this joining, John cites the many miracles of feeding throughout the Gospels. Because his compassion for the crowds, Jesus takes, blesses, breaks, and gives bread to alleviate hunger. But the alleviation of hunger must not be separated from the way that, on the night he was betrayed, Jesus takes, blesses, breaks, and gives the bread that is his body. "This twofold commandment of *giving*"—both the bread of creation and the bread of new creation—contains "the full social teaching and action of the Church" (§6).

[218] Romero, *Homilías,* vol. I, 465; Romero, *Homilías,* vol. III, 38.

As we have seen, Romero's reflections upon justice typically take as their point of departure the reality of its absence and the ways so many of his people are being denied their rightful share of the created goods due them. The ordinary refusal of the commonality of creation, especially evident in covetousness, is among the principal forms of violence that has and continues to saturate El Salvador's fields with blood.[221] The covetous take more than they need and continue to want more. In doing so, they not only take what belongs to others in justice. Habitual taking and wanting more at the same time cultivates *insensibilidad* toward those who lack what they need.

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[219] Romero, *Homilías,* vol. V, 179.
[220] Ibid., 180.
[221] Romero, *Homilías,* vol. I, 450.

In one sense, injustice is deeply personal, epitomized by those who, in Romero's words, "take for their own (*acaparan*) what God has given for the flourishing of all."[222] John Paul II speaks in similar terms during his journey to the Dominican Republic and Mexico in 1979, to which we saw Romero allude above. In Oaxaca, for instance, John Paul speaks of "powerful classes" who possess lands that "hide the bread that so many families lack" (*que esconden el pan que a tantas familias falta*).[223]

In comments like this we discern how the understanding of creation as common gift with which Romero is working entails a distinctive conception of thievery. It is distinct because it does not correspond to commonplace conceptions of taking another's property, which are criminalized by positive law. Not only does it not correspond to such commonplace conceptions. It can even exist in tension with or even in outright contradiction to them. For instance, in the same homily in which Romero speaks of the theological necessity of agrarian reform, he directly addresses the Salvadoran oligarchy about its refusal to permit the reform proposed by the JRG to proceed without bloodshed. He says that they must realize "that they are possessing the land that belongs to all Salvadorans" (*están poseyendo la tierra que es de todos los salvadoreños*).[224]

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[222] Ibid., 216-217. *Acapar* is an important word for Romero. It means to appropriate or hoard all or most of something, to accumulate, capture, take up, and so on. Romero is here drawing on the Argentine Cardinal Eduardo Pironio's *Escritos Pastorales* (Madrid: BAC, 1973), 92.

[223] John Paul II, "Address in Culapan, Mexico," 29 January 1979.

In what sense does the oligarchy possess the land that belongs to all Salvadorans? Romero's point is not that they lack legal title to their lands or that they could not easily defend their possessions in a court of law. Rather, he is addressing them about a law concerning property and possession that is more basic and fundamental than that enshrined in Salvadoran law—a law to which positive law, including El Salvador's, is ultimately accountable. It is in relation to this more basic and fundamental law that the Salvadoran oligarchs are like thieves, unjustly taking what belongs to others. The point can be articulated as a question: If land belongs to all, is not the most fundamental form of thievery to hold created goods in ways that habitually fail to acknowledge their intrinsic and inescapable orientation to those who need them?[225]

Such a question haunts the tradition of reflection about property and possession upon which Romero draws. According to this tradition, among the most primordial violations of justice is the failure on the part of those who possess the world's goods to acknowledge the claims of the needy upon those same goods. The failure to do so amounts to a form of thievery.[226] These kinds of thieves take more than they need from what God gives to all people in common, and they take it for their own exclusive use. Such thievery, moreover, is particularly insidious, not only because it can serenely coexist with positive law, but also because such law often protects it with violence.

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[224] Romero, *Homilías,* vol. VI, 420.

[225] On this point, see the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, whose treatment of the Seventh Commandment, "You Shall Not Steal" (cf. Ex. 20:15; Deut. 5:19), follows a similar logic. The discussion of stealing begins not with an account and defense of property rights as enshrined in law but with the common destination of created goods (§§2402-2406).

This conception of thievery articulates from a different angle one strand of thinking about almsgiving or the work of mercy in the Christian tradition: feeding the hungry, slaking the thirsty, clothing the naked, welcoming the stranger, visiting the sick and the imprisoned. According this strand of thinking, giving alms is not to give what belongs to the almsgiver. It is to give to others what is theirs. It is to return to them that from which they have been excluded because of the injustice of the world. The work of mercy is therefore at the same time a work of justice—a work of justice permeated with love for those who suffer from lack of basic needs. The justice is restorative, with the merciful giving back to others what belongs to them. It is a response to a previous injustice, which aims to recover an equality that has somehow been lost, denied, or otherwise obscured. Understood in these terms, the work of mercy does not involve giving from a position of height but rather from a position of lowliness—from a position of penitence animated by the acknowledgement of complicity in the injustice of a world that excludes so many from access to the basic bodily support they need in order to flourish.

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[226] It can also amount to a form of murder, if we are to take seriously *Gaudium et spes* and the traditions upon which it is drawing: "Since there are so many people prostrate with hunger in the world, this sacred council urges all, both individuals and governments, to remember the aphorism of the Fathers, "Feed the man dying of hunger, because if you have not fed him, you have killed him" (§69).

In this regard, the work of mercy is crucial to what we might call a 'politics of common use'—a politics that acknowledges creation as common gift and prioritizes access of all to its use for basic bodily support. Above we saw Romero articulate how taking seriously the claim of need and its politics relativizes as it transgresses the boundaries of nations. Here we also begin to see how it relativizes as it transgresses the boundaries of ownership as enshrined by positive law. We see another expression of this politics—which is extremely applicable to our examination of production of landlessness and its association with dispossession, migration, and squatting—in the above passage from *Gaudium et spes*, which alludes to the law of necessity (*ius necesitatis*), namely, the law by which those in extreme need can procure what they need from what others have in abundance (§69). We will have more to say about all of this in the pages ahead.

In the meantime, what emerges in the understanding of thievery and mercy that we have been examining is admittedly a rather strange conception of property and possession, which is distinct from the ways these words are ordinarily used. Consider again Romero's statement that the oligarchy possesses the land that belongs to all Salvadorans. What does it mean that land *belongs* to some people while others are in *possession* of it? How best to understand this sense of belonging without actually possessing and the gap that opens up between them—a gap that can remain permanently in place? For those who endeavor to do so, what does the work of suturing the gap look like? What risks does the work encounter? These are some of the questions raised by Romero's understanding of creation as it pertains to property and possession. What must be underscored for our purposes is that, in Romero's case, the work of suturing the gap between belonging and possessing is an attempt to bear witness to creation as a common gift in the face of its refusal. Because of the magnitude of the refusal, such work, it seems, will always be provisional, incomplete, unending.

Once again, the language of thievery, like the language of creation's groaning under the weight of sin, might be very tempting to dismiss as ornament or hyperbole. But to dismiss it would be to neglect the important work these words are actually doing in disclosing a landscape for moral agency that would otherwise be imperceptible—a landscape within which, to reference once again the passage from *Gaudium et spes* quoted above, to fail to feed those dying of hunger is to be complicit in their death. To learn to act within such a landscape requires new modes of perception. It requires, for instance, learning to hear the cries of wages held back and the suffering of harvesters, as well as the way land groans when some hoard it and block others' access to it. As Romero puts it at the funeral mass for one of his priests, Father Rafael Palacios, it means "trying to interpret the language of so much blood being poured out…in the mountains, in the streets…, on the beaches"—the language of "pain and anguish" that the blood speaks.[227] According to Romero, the blood saturating the fields of El Salvador is not only the consequence of those who defend their property with violence. It is above all the consequence of those who take the land that belongs to all Salvadorans in the first place.

1.3.4 Liberation

We have been examining the way that, according to Romero, the roots of injustice reside in the enclosure of the self and its possessions from the claims of others, and that such enclosure wounds the human creature's capacity for communion. Because of the kind of creatures humans are, such injustice cannot be 'contained' and so repercusses, crystallizing in structures, institutions, and landscapes. In one of his homilies, Romero therefore compares injustice to an invasive weed, which has infested a field—for instance, a weed like Bermuda grass, whose rhizomes branch downward from nodes beneath the field's surface. Even when the top growth is removed or dies, the underground shoots can survive, often for years, with small piece of the shoot sufficient for regeneration. The shoots can then surface in the same space or find new space to colonize. Hence Romero's question: "When the roots are firmly in place, should we be surprised to find new weeds sprouting up everywhere?"[228]

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[227] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. V, 25.

The immediate context for Romero's words is instructive. Around Holy Week in 1978 in a town called San Pedro Perulapán in the department of Chalatenango, the Salvadoran military attacked a demonstration of *campesinos,* who had arrived for an appointment at a bank to discuss the need for land to work. Finding the bank closed, which they interpreted as a gesture of disdain on the part of those who agreed to meet with them, they immediately took to the streets to protest, only to be met with repression. The violence around San Pedro Perulapán continued throughout Holy Week and took additional victims, including Tránsito Vásquez, who was disappeared and then later found, decapitated and hanging from a tree—a kind of Salvadoran icon of the events of Good Friday.[229] "Because our people are hungry," Romero says in his Palm Sunday Homily, in which he reflects at length upon what transpired in San Pedro Perulapán, "they need land to work; they need someone with whom they can dialogue in order to find a solution to their problems. Death and dismemberment is the response to those longings."[230]

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[228] Romero, *Homilías,* vol. II, 384-385.
[229] Brockman, *Romero*, 107–108.

Calling attention to this state of affairs in Romero's El Salvador was itself seen as an act of violence. The defenders of the existing order characteristically conflated Romero with the regime's revolutionary opponents on the left and the tactics they employed. "The Salvadoran ruling classes," Morozzo writes, "did not waste time trying to understand the internal distinctions of the magmatic Catholic social movement. Each and every one of the *campesino* meetings were, at a minimum, suspect of subversion. To the ruling classes, each demand for justice was an outstretched hand toward communism."[231] Romero is well aware of this reality, which is why his homilies repeatedly return to it, both to distinguish the Church from the revolutionary left, but also to insist time and again that "the Church is not sowing violence; injustice is sowing violence."[232] In other words, rather than sowing the seeds of violence, Romero understands himself to be involved in a very different kind of task, namely, showing the salvific tools God offers to uproot it. He understands himself to be involved in the task of unimagining the inevitability of the recourse to violence—and not just the reactionary violence of the state or the revolutionary violence of its opponents but above all the more insidious and ubiquitous violence in which a people without land and living wages is taken for granted as part of the order of things. He is trying to imagine the conditions under which the seeming inevitability of all this violence might become, as he often puts it, increasingly "hypothetical"—unreal.[233]

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[230] Romero, *Homilías,* vol. II, 331.
[231] Morozzo Della Rocca, *Primero Dios*, 32.
[232] Romero, *Homilías,* vol. II, 384.

One of Romero's basic contentions is that it is impossible to understand what is happening in El Salvador without attending to the ways injustice—epitomized not only by the lack of land and livelihood but above all by *insensibilidad* in the face of it—is itself, in its very ordinariness, a form of violence, which is in turn productive of and implicated in additional forms of violence. Because the violence is as ordinary as the order itself, it is often taken for granted and therefore difficult to see clearly for what it is. "As we analyze the real roots of violence in our society," Romero says, "we want to remember that if we do not create social and political possibilities that enable the poorest members of our society and the *campesinos* to present their just demands and their urgent needs, then unfortunately violence will increase."[234] The violence will increase because its rhizomes are already lodged deeply within the landscape, thoroughly colonizing it.

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[233] Romero, *Homilías,* vol. III, 70; Romero, *Homilías*, vol. VI, 271.
[234] Romero, *Homilías,* vol. II, 383.

Romero compares such violence not only to weeds infesting a field but also to thick smog, which fills "the air we breathe."[235] We inhale it, he says, in our "ordinary respiration."[236] It enters us "through all the pores of our being."[237] Such images unsettle an understanding that holds many treatments of violence captive: that violence interrupts the ordinary, peaceful course of events, that it is a state of exception to the everyday rather than constitutive of it. Romero's sense of the ordinariness of violence unsettles this picture because it suggests that what many call peace is in fact soaked with blood. According to Romero, peace demands justice's work, which means, among other things, no one dying from lack of basic material support, and no indifference to this lack. At the same time, as these various images of violence suggest, violence, though ubiquitous, is never total. The field is distinct from the weeds that infest it. The air is distinct from the smog that fills it. The commonality of the gift persists despite the long and ongoing history of its refusal.

One important implication of Romero's understanding of ordinary violence relates to what I mentioned above about the work of justice always being provisional, incomplete, and unending. As we have seen, Romero thinks the reform of Salvadoran agriculture is imperative. However, as important as the transformation of structures and institutions are, he thinks there is no simple or straightforward solution along these lines upon which to hang hope—certainly not one that centers exclusively upon measures like agrarian reform. In calling agrarian reform a theological necessity, Romero's primarily purpose is catechizing his people in the Church's social doctrine and its implications for agriculture. He is trying to articulate the truth that working to ensure that all Salvadorans have access to the country's land and harvests reveals God's purpose for creation.

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[235] Romero, *Homilías,* vol. V, 60, 273.
[236] Romero, *Homilías,* vol. IV, 435.
[237] Romero, *Homilías,* vol. I, 381.

According to Romero, the problem with solutions centering exclusively upon the transformation of structures, institutions, and even landscapes is that they are not comprehensive enough. They locate injustice primarily in sources exterior to human agency: structures, institutions, landscapes, and so on. Moreover, they imagine that once people are liberated from these sources of injustice, peace will necessarily blossom. But as Romero sees it, such solutions fail to grapple with the deepest, most intractable sources of injustice, whose roots are lodged in the human person and have most fundamentally to do with the abuse of agency. In Romero's estimation, solutions centering exclusively upon the transformation of structures, institutions, and landscapes fail to deal with this abuse, and because of this failure, establish new fields for weeds to infest.[238]

In contrast, Romero thinks the Christian proclamation centers upon the formation of just people, without whose work and witness there cannot be true justice. This is well put in a letter from an ecclesial base community expressing appreciation for the message of Romero's homilies and their emphasis upon "build[ing] a more just order, beginning with ourselves."[239] Along these same lines, Romero frequently references a passage from the final documents of Medellín that reads: "There will be no new continent [of Latin America] without new persons (*no habrá continente nuevo sin hombres nuevos*)."[240] According to Medellín, the principal source of the injustice and violence of the continent is the abuse of "human freedom."[241] It is an abuse of such depth and complexity that addressing it is no easy or straightforward task but requires a "profound conversion," "a permanent work of rectification."[242]

What Romero appreciates about this passage is that, while not ignoring the injustice of structures, institutions, and landscapes, or the crucial importance of their transformation for that matter, Medellín focuses upon the deepest sources of injustice and the difficult work of dealing with it. The new people who will bring a new continent are those whose lives have been recreated in Christ.[243] These people are new because they have been transformed by faith and by baptism, and filled with the Holy Spirit.[244] Consequently, their life and work will take its bearings from the love of God revealed in Christ, drawing them deeper into relationship with God, with others, and with everything God has made.[245] Such love by no means dispenses with justice. Rather, it "hungers and thirsts" for it because the God who "sends the Son in the flesh, so that he might come to liberate all people from all the slavery to which sin has subjected them" is the same God who created "the earth with everything in it for the use of all human beings and peoples," so that "under the leadership of justice and in the company of charity, created goods should be in abundance for all in like manner."[246] Romero follows Medellín on this point: it is primarily through God's graceful work in forming new people that Christians hope for new structures, institutions, and landscapes. Changes in structures, institutions, and landscapes follow the "conversion" of persons.[247]

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[238] See Romero, *Homilías,* vol. V, 69-70.
[239] Quoted in Alas, *Iglesia, tierra y lucha campesina*, 269.
[240] *Documentos Finales de Medellín* in Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano, *Río de Janeiro, Medellín, Puebla, Santo Domingo*, "Justice" §3.
[241] Ibid., §3.
[242] Ibid.

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[243] Ibid., §4.
[244] Ibid.
[245] Ibid.
[246] Ibid., §3, quoting *Gaudium et spes* §69. The exact words quoted in the Medellín document differ slightly from those in *Gaudium et spes* but the same passage is cited.

According to Romero, the most pressing liberation his people need is therefore liberation from sin, especially the enclosure that holds both the self and its possessions over and against others.[248] This is what leads El Salvador's fields to groan, and for creation to long for the revealing of the children of God (cf. Rom. 8:19). "The justice of God," Romero therefore says, "is liberation from sin"[249]—a justice infused by God's grace.[250] Romero characteristically understands the work of justice in relation to God's work of liberation in Christ, which means the path of perfect justice is Christoform. To paraphrase *Gaudium et spes*: while justice may be called upon to lead so that there are abundant created goods for all, justice for Romero must always walk with charity.

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[247] Ibid., §3.

[248] Romero, *Homilías,* vol. I, 93; Romero, *Homilías,* vol. III, 107.

[249] Romero, *Homilías,* vol. III, 38-39.

[250] William C. Mattison III thus sees Romero as an exemplification of infused justice. Mattison writes, "Archbishop Oscar Romero spoke out for economic justice on behalf of the poor not simply because the conditions of his society impeded natural human happiness—which they did—but also because they violated the dignity of people created in God's image, and particularly the poor, for whom God has a special love." "Such virtues," Mattison writes, "concern inner worldly activities in the larger perspective of our supernatural destiny. They give a different meaning to those activities (commonly leading to different particular actions), and are possible only with God's grace." William C. Mattison III, *Introducing Moral Theology: True Happiness and the Virtues* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2008), 326.

What concerns Romero most about commonplace construals liberation is their neglect of sin and its death-grip upon the human person. He agrees with the imperative for "economic, political, and social liberation," but he thinks it comes "in addition (*por añadidura*)."[251] It comes in addition because what comes first is the formation of a new people for whom death itself has become a site of liberation.[252] True Christian liberation, as Romero puts it in another homily, simply is "communion with God"[253]—a communion so determinative that it relativizes and transcends not only the boundaries of nation and legal ownership but also the boundaries of death and its proprietary claim upon human life. The common destination of humankind to communion therefore continues and even finds its consummation on the far side of death. Nothing, not even death, can bind it, which is why for Romero every other liberation is a figure of what was accomplished by Christ on the cross,[254] and which is also why the true point of contention between him and many of those who espouse liberation in his milieu is not the need for liberation but the shape of it—specifically, whether and how it reckons with death.

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[251] Romero, *Homilías,* vol. III, 38.

[252] Ibid.

[253] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. V, 181.

[254] As Romero puts it, "The cross of Christ is the key to true liberation." Romero, *Homilías,* vol. I, 302-303.

According to Romero, the mark of liberation is conversion, by which he means the pilgrimage whereby Christians learn to enter into the life God shares with them in Christ. In Christ, what comes into focus is the way the God who creates and recreates does not do so in order to enclose what is God's but to share it with what God has made. In sending the Son, God shares God's life in its fullness. That is why those on pilgrimage toward the common life they have in Christ must prepare for it by embracing justice and its work of opening others' access to what God has created for all people. As Romero makes clear, such work is incumbent upon all Christians. The enclosure of the self and its possessions from the claims of others, which wounds the human creature's capacity for communion, does not simply afflict the wealthy alone. "Here I am not only speaking to those who have great wealth," Romero says, "but to all of us."[255] "When we have something to eat, even an ice cream, a piece of bread, or a tortilla, we can be insensitive (*insensibles*) to those who do not have even this. In these situations, why not share, as the prophets tell us, even from our poverty? To do otherwise…is to betray God's covenant."[256]

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[255] Romero, *Homilías,* vol. I, 343.

[256] Ibid. At the same time, according to Romero "a true Christian conversion" must always look toward "the social mechanisms that make the worker and the *campesino* marginal persons." It asks questions like, "Why is there only income for *campesinos* during the time of the coffee, cotton, and cane harvest? Why does this society need to

Or to return again to what transpired in San Pedro Perulapán: in response to these events Romero urges his listeners to learn to practice justice in their own lives, so that the shoots of injustice do not continue to regenerate repeatedly. He tells them to follow the example of those in the small community of Ilopango, who fasted in order to have something to offer the families victims, thus fulfilling the words of the prophet Isaiah: “Is not this the fast that I choose: … to share your bread with the hungry[?]” (Isa 58:6-7).[257]

What I have been trying to show is that the logic of Romero’s position is that the work of justice is training for the life to which humankind is destined. People must learn to share their property so that they can learn to share their selves, which is how they learn to share in the life God offers them in Christ.[258]

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have *campesinos* without work, workers who are badly paid, people without a just salary?” Romero clarifies, however, that when he speaks about attending to social mechanisms of marginalization, he does not mean doing so “like those who study sociology or economics.” He means doing so, as he puts it, “as a Christian, in order to resist complicity in this machinery that makes people increasingly poor, marginalized, and indigent.” Such social analysis is an outworking of the doctrine of the common destination of created goods. Romero, *Homilías (VI)*, 63.

[257] Romero, *Homilías,* vol. II, 385-387.

[258] Romero, *Homilías,* vol. VI, 323.

In his homilies on the First Epistle of John, Augustine explicitly comments on this feature of justice's work. In his gloss on the verse, "How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?" (1 John 3:17), Augustine writes that the work of mercy is "the inception of charity."[259] To bestow "superfluities upon a needy person who is in difficult circumstances" is charity's "beginning."[260] But for this beginning to grow, it must be tended—"nursed," as Augustine puts it—"by the word of God and the hope of future life."[261] One day it might eventually grow to perfection—where perfection names the readiness to lay down one's life for one's friends (John 15:13; cf. 1 John 3:17).[262]

Seen from this vantage, the work of justice discloses the grammar of creation as common gift and the goodness of what God has made. But at the same time, the depth of creation's groaning becomes perceptible, along with the way God works in Christ to pull creation back towards its original purpose.

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[259] Saint Augustine, *Homilies on the First Epistle of John*, trans. Boniface Ramsey, Works of Saint Augustine (New York: New City Press, 2008), 87.

[260] Ibid.

[261] Ibid.

[262] Ibid.

CHAPTER 2: THE GRAMMAR OF CREATION

> This manner of life [those who lived in such a way that all things were common to them in the Lord] is all the happier since it is an imitation of the life of the future, when all things will be common.
>
> —Bonaventure, *Defense of the Mendicants*[1]

> This mercy, therefore, is called justice because the giver knows that God has given all things to all in common—that his sun rises for all, his rain falls on all, and he has given the earth to all. On that account the giver shares with those who do not have the abundance of the earth.
>
> —Ambrose, *Commentary on Second Corinthians*

2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I began the work of locating Romero sense of the theological necessity of agrarian reform within the wider context of the Church's social doctrine. There I attempted to describe how his understanding of creation's grammar—what *Gaudium et spes* calls the common destination of created goods—shapes the Church's involvement in the reform of Salvadoran agriculture. We saw Romero say that to speak of access to land and the ability of workers to organize and to be paid living wages is not communism but the teaching of the Church. The burden of this chapter and the next is to turn explicitly to that teaching and some of its sources, particularly in terms of the way they bear upon the issue of agrarian reform.

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[1] St. Bonaventure, *Defense of the Mendicants*, vol. XV, Works of St. Bonaventure (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 2010), Ch. 7.4 (citing Bede on Acts 4:34–35 from the Glossa Ordinaria apud Lyranum).

Romero's concerns about land and work, not to mention his life and significance more generally, are usually narrated in relation to the Second Vatican Council and its 'application' to the life of the Church in Latin America both at Medellín and beyond. As far as I can tell, this narration is nearly ubiquitous in the existing scholarship on Romero. Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, the postulator of the cause of canonization of Romero, presumed it when he said at the news conference that those who killed him "intended to strike at the Church that flowed from the Second Vatican Council."[2] There is truth to Paglia's words. However, insofar as they suggest that Romero's concerns about land and work are *exclusively* conciliar or post-conciliar, or insofar as they suggest that what flows from the Council is a new Church *completely at odds with the old one*, his words mislead.

Later at the same press conference, Paglia clarifies my point: "From his [Romero's] papers there clearly emerges his familiarity with the documents of Vatican Council II, Medellin, Puebla, the social doctrine of the Church and other pontifical texts in general."[3] It is the last part—the part about the social doctrine of the Church and the other pontifical texts in general—that is often overlooked in the existing scholarship on Romero.

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[2] Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, *Press Conference on Romero's Martyrdom*, 4 May 2015.
[3] Ibid.

The present chapter therefore aims to show how the understanding of creation as common gift we have been examining likewise governs Leo XIII's treatment of property and possession in his landmark encyclical *Rerum novarum* (1891), as well as the line of thinking it inaugurates within Catholic social doctrine. Attending to this wider context of Church teaching, I want to suggest, helps us to understand better Romero and the efforts of the Church in El Salvador regarding the reform of agriculture.

It is important to underscore what I am not doing in these chapters: I am not making a sweeping claim about the Catholic tradition as such, the history of which is incredibly diverse and complex on the matters in question. Rather, I am focusing upon one particular line of thinking among others. Interestingly and tellingly, the line of thinking under consideration emerges with force with the end of the papacy's temporal rule in Italy and crumbling of the altar-throne alliance in Europe.[4]

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[4] Russell Hittinger, "Leo XIII (1810-1903)," in *The Teachings of Modern Roman Catholicism on Law, Politics, and Human Nature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 43.

There have and continue to be debates about continuity and discontinuity within the Church's modern social doctrine, which I do not want to enter into here.[5] My purpose in this chapter is more limited, namely, to follow the line Leo's successors trace to *Rerum novarum*, which they regard as a watershed in its development. Leo's successors repeatedly refer to it as the "Magna Carta" of Catholic social doctrine.[6] One way to appreciate *Rerum novarum*'s significance is precisely by attending to the line of thinking it occasions within the broader ambit of the Church's social thought. The line includes, for instance, Pius XI's *Quadragesimo anno* (1931), Pius XII's 1941 Pentecost Radio Message, John XXIII's *Mater et magistra* (1961), Paul VI's *Octogesima adveniens* (1971), and John Paul II's *Laborem exercens* (1981) and *Centesimus annus* (1991).[7] As the dates make apparent, each document marks a major anniversary of *Rerum novarum.* Each was promulgated to commemorate *Rerum novarum* and to assess its ongoing significance in light of new developments. One reason the present chapter centers upon *Rerum novarum* and its construal of property and possession is because Leo's successors do, continually commending it to their own readers.[8] In this sense, the line of thinking under consideration provides its own 'rule of reading,' which I am simply following.[9]

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[5] If these pre-Leonine encyclicals are taken into consideration, it has been argued, the semblance of continuity diminishes. As Michael Schuck helpfully observes, the Church's social teaching does not originate with *Rerum novarum*. Schuck is of course right to point to the importance of the encyclical literature prior to Leo's pontificate, especially with regard to the critique of certain conceptions of society and personhood, often associated with the so-called Enlightenment, which the popes tend to think work on social life like an acid. Claudia Marlene Rivera Navarrete, "La Denuncia Profética de La Riqueza: Resonancia de La Patrística En La Teología Latinoamericana de La Liberación" (Maestría, Universidad Centroamericano, 2015); Thomas Green, "La Opción Por Los Pobres En Las Homilías de Monseñor Romero Y de San Juan Crisóstomo: Análisis de Las Convergencias Y de Las Peculiaridades En Los Presupuestos Teológicos Y En Las Orientaciones Morales" (Doctorado, Universidad Pontificia Comillas, 2003); Ricardo Urioste, *Monseñor Romero Mártir Por El Magisterio Eclesiástico* (San Salvador: Fundación Monseñor Romero, 2012); Ochoa Márquez, *No Basta La Justicia, Es Necesario El Amor: Compendio de La Catequesis Social de Mons. Romero* (San Salvador: Comunidades eclesiales de base de El Salvador, 2007). Ultimately, it seems that discussions of continuity and discontinuity in Church teaching ultimately resolves into questions about ecclesiology and continuity and discontinuity in the ongoing life of the Church as a people.

[6] Cf. *Quadragesimo anno* §39; "Discourse of His Holiness Pius XII to Commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Encyclical Rerum Novarum of Pope Leo XIII on the Social Question," in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, vol. 33, 1941, 220–221; "Radiomensaje Del Santo Padre Pío XII a Los Trabajadores de España," in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, vol. 43, 1951, 213–216.

Over the course of the twentieth century, the approach to property and possession examined in this chapter increasingly begins to incorporate an explicit and insistent call for agrarian reform. Among the central contentions of the present work as a whole is that this is what shapes Romero's embrace of agrarian reform proposals during his tenure as archbishop. However, in order to appreciate Romero's sense of the theological significance of agrarian reform, we must to continue to familiarize ourselves with the landscape within which it is situated.

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[7] A rather different line was inaugurated by Paul VI in his encyclical *Populorum progressio* (1967), which was continued, off-date, by Benedict XVI in *Caritas in veritate* (2009).

[8] For much more detailed accounts of this understanding of property and possession, see Matthew Habiger, *Papal Teaching on Private Property (1891-1981)* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1990); Albino Barrera, *Modern Catholic Social Documents and Political Economy* (Washington, D.C: Georgetown University Press, 2001).

[9] For instance, in his 1961 encyclical *Mater et magistra*, Pope John XXIII reads *Rerum novarum* in line with *Quadragesimo anno* (1931) and Pius XII's Pentecost Radio Message (1941). He then casts his own encyclical, written sixty years later, in continuity with this trajectory (cf. §§10-45). See also *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2004), §§89–104. For more on the significance of Leo, see Hittinger, "Leo XIII (1810-1903)."

To this end, in the present chapter I argue that *Rerum novarum* proposes a distinctive response to the realities of massive dispossession of people and migration to urban centers, along with increasing concentration of productive property like land—developments associated with the spread of capitalism both in Europe and beyond. Against these dispossessions and concentrations, and against what socialism's false remedy of further dispossession of the remaining private property holders and the concentration of property into different hands, Leo insists upon the diffusion of property. He wants the dispossessed to be repossessed. He wants them to have a share in the land they work, akin to the vision of the prophet Isaiah: "They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat" (Isaiah 65:21, cf. 32:18, 37:30, 62:9; Jeremiah 12:15, 31:5; Amos 9:14).

The understanding of creation that informs the vision of Leo and his successors for the diffusion of property is that of common gift. As Leo puts it in *Rerum novarum*, "the blessings of nature and the gifts of grace belong to the whole human race in common" (§25). God creates heaven and earth and all things visible and invisible for humankind as a whole—an axiom that applies to all created goods, including land.

2.2 Rerum novarum

2.2.1 Enclosure

Rerum novarum directs itself to what at the time was called "the social question." The specification of what that phrase means was itself the subject of debate and controversy.[10] We get at least some sense of its meaning in the opening sections of the encyclical, where Leo states that his purpose in writing is to address "the condition of the working class" (§2). "Some opportune remedy must be found quickly," he continues, "for the misery and wretchedness pressing so unjustly on the majority of the working class: for the ancient workingmen's guilds were abolished in the last century, and no other protective organization took their place." As a consequence of these and other developments, "it has come to pass that working men have been surrendered, isolated and helpless, to the hardheartedness of employers and the greed of unchecked competition."[11] Leo characterizes the situation as one in which "a small number of very rich men have been able to lay upon the teeming masses of the laboring poor a yoke little better than that of slavery itself" (§3).

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[10] For Leo on the social question, cf. Habiger, *Papal Teaching on Private Property (1891-1981)*, 4–8. On the social question more generally, cf. John Augustine Ryan and Raymond Augustine McGowan, *A Catechism of the Social Question* (Paulist Press, 1921); Douglas Moggach and Paul Leduc Browne, *The Social Question and the Democratic Revolution: Marx and the Legacy of 1848* (University of Ottawa Press, 2000); Warren Breckman, *Marx, the Young Hegelians, and the Origins of Radical Social Theory: Dethroning the Self* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 149–150.

How did these developments come about? What has generated this misery and wretchedness, this complex process that Leo describes in terms of the disintegration and atomization of social bodies, in which persons are increasingly uprooted from the societies that previously offered at least some measure of protection? These are important questions to keep in mind. Leo mentions, for instance, the abolition of the "ancient guilds" (§3). Note, however, that he does not call for their reestablishment. The problem, as Leo presents it here, is not that the guilds were abolished. The problem is that "no other protective organization took their place" (§3). The problem is that forces are being unleashed that see no need for such protection, much less the imperative for any society, as Leo puts it later in the encyclical, "to shield from misery those on whom it so largely depends for the things that it needs" (§34). As a consequence of these developments, people encounter employers who exploit the vulnerability of those flooding into their cities, as well as economic realities that are not just dominated by greedy persons but in which greed takes new institutional and structural forms.

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[11] Leo's language here resonates with Cavanaugh's descriptions of the state's strategy of torture under the military dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet Ugarte in Chile, from 1973-1990. Cavanaugh presents the effects of torture as disciplining "the citizenry into a complex performance scripted by the state," a performance that "atomizes the citizenry through fear, thereby dismantling other *social* bodies which would rival the state's authority over *individual* bodies." This process, he argues, is not simply as an attack upon individuals but as the very formation of individuals. It is homologous with the more general state project of "usurping powers and responsibilities which formerly resided in the diffuse local bodies of medieval society and establishing a direct relationship between the state and the individual." Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ*, 2–3. What we witness in the developments associated with enclosure is likewise an important part of this process.

In order to understand Leo's articulation and defense of property in *Rerum novarum*, it is helpful to consider what had been happening in Europe, especially in the countryside over the previous several centuries. Karl Polanyi rather euphemistically writes of these developments as "the great transformation," in the book bearing the same title.[12] An important part of the story Polanyi and others tell concerns the enclosure of common fields and pastures upon which commoners throughout Europe and elsewhere previously relied for sustenance. Enclosure, we will recall, names the surrounding, bounding, and containing of land, usually with fences or hedges. Such land is then deeded or entitled to owners, and the claims others have upon such land is curtailed or eliminated altogether. Enclosure is often enacted in the name of progress, agricultural and otherwise.[13]

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[12] Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*.

As we glimpsed in chapter one, when historians use the term 'enclosure,' they often refer to developments that began in England around the fifteenth century, before expanding to Continental Europe and the rest of the world.[14] Enclosure, however, has not been relegated to the mere past. When, for instance, Subcomandante Marcos, the spokesperson of the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (Zaptatista National

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[13] As Thompson writes about the case of England: "The arguments of the enclosure propagandists were commonly phrased in terms of higher rental values and higher yield per acre." E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage, 1963), 217. Of course, this understanding of progress is hotly contested. Also writing about England, Neeson argues that modern critiques of "backward" or "traditional" agriculture often assume that productivity alone is not only the most important consideration but the exclusive consideration. She makes an important point when she writes, "Commoners had little but they also wanted less. The result may have been that they lived well enough for themselves, but invisibly and poorly in the eyes of outsiders…Perhaps having 'enough' was unimaginable to men who wrote about crop yields, rents, improvements, productivity, economic growth, always more, as it has been incomprehensible to twentieth century historians living in constantly expanding market economies, albeit on a finite planet." J. M. Neeson, *Commoners: Common Right, Enclosure and Social Change in England, 1700-1820* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 41, 157.

[14] The literature on this topic is voluminous. Treatments of it that I have found helpful include: Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. I (New York: Penguin, 1976); Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*; Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*; J.L. Hammond and Barbara Hammond, *The Village Labourer, 1760-1832: A Study of the Government of England before the Reform Bill* (Longmans Green, 1911); Neeson, *Commoners*; Mark Overton, *Agricultural Revolution in England: The Transformation of the Agrarian Economy, 1500-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); E. C. K. Gonner, *Common Land and Inclosure* (Taylor & Francis, 1912).

Liberation Army, EZLN), publically released his famous missive from the Lacadona jungle in 1994, "Chiapas: The Southeast in Two Winds," he was articulating grievances related to a contemporary enclosure. Specifically, his concern was the modification of Article 27 of the Mexican constitution, the legal basis for the distribution of *ejidos*, which the Mexican government enacted in preparation for signing the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

At least in Europe, the form of agriculture that enclosure typically replaced in the centuries leading up to *Rerum novarum* was 'open field,' the specific characteristics of which of course varied considerably across place and time.[15] Speaking in the most general terms, however, open field was a form of agriculture typically marked by large fields, which were divided into numerous narrow strips of land. Sometimes these strips were separated by some kind of barrier, such as grass. But often there was no discernable boundary between them, hence the designation 'open field.' Particular households cultivated these strips. Besides common fields, there were woodlands from which community members had rights to gather fuel and timber. There were also pastures upon which they had rights to graze livestock.[16]

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[15] Carl J. Dahlman, *The Open Field System and Beyond: A Property Rights Analysis of an Economic Institution* (Cambridge University Press, 2008); Warren Ortman Ault, *Open-Field Farming in Medieval England* (Allen and Unwin, 1972); Grenville Astill, *The Countryside of Medieval England* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1992); Rosemary Lynn Hopcroft, *Regions, Institutions, and Agrarian Change in European History* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999); Tom Kemp, *Industrialization in Nineteenth Century Europe* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 32–78; Trevor Rowley, *The Origins of Open-Field Agriculture* (London: Croom Helm, 1981); Tom Scott, *The Peasantries of Europe: From the Fourteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries* (London: Longman, 1998).

In the previous chapter, we saw in discussing enclosure in El Salvador that while the lands targeted by enclosure did not belong community members, the use of it did—a use that was called common right. The same applies here. For instance, even when a lord owned land, such ownership did not give exclusive rights over the use of the land. Others had rights to its use as well. Such common right was a *profit à prendre,* or a right of taking, amounting to a nonpossessory interest in land—a right, not to own land, but to own the access and use of it.[17]

Often, it is thought that commons or common land belong to no one in particular, or that they belong in some diffuse way to the public or to the community. But these are misconceptions.[18] The commons is a form of property, not its absence. Specifically, it is a form of property in which more than one person has rights to the use of it.[19] We must therefore differentiate between commons and common land, on the one hand, and common ownership, on the other. The former are owned as other lands are owned. What distinguishes them is the existence of common rights.

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[16] As Kemp and others describe it, successful open field agriculture "was necessarily a collective effort." It involved a tremendous degree of cooperation among community members. Cf. Kemp, *Industrialization in Nineteenth Century Europe*, 34.
[17] Neeson, *Commoners*, 1.
[18] Overton, *Agricultural Revolution in England*, 24.

Consider, for instance, *The Charter of the Forest (The Charter)*, first issued in 1217 as a companion document to the *Magna Carta*, which was later joined to it in the *Confirmation of Charters* in 1297.[20] *The Charter* presupposes and seeks to extend rights of access to the forest—the royal forest as commons. It is replete with discussion of herbage and agistment, which are rights to pasture livestock, as well as pannage, which are rights to pasture pigs. Moreover, it specifies that widows shall have "reasonable estovers in the common."[21] The word 'estover' derives from the Old French verb *estover* or *estovoir*, generally used as a substantive to mean sustenance, that which is necessary.[22] As it is used here, the term has to do with customary rights of the widow to gather from the woods what she needs to repair her house, hedge, tools, and so on.[23]

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[19] Something like the absence of property is what Garrett Hardin presumes in his 1968 essay, "The Tragedy of the Commons." Hardin's essay begins with the premise that the pasture under consideration is open to all, the excessive use of which leads to the degradation of the land in question. Hence the tragedy. But as Hyde observes, commons survived because there were strict limits placed on use rights. The commons were stinted. Hardin's account anachronistically presumes a *laissez-faire* individualism. As Hyde puts it, "[U]se rights in the common were typically stinted, rarely absolute. No common was 'open to all' and no 'rational herdsman' was ever free to increase his herd at will. A true commons is a stinted thing; what Hardin described is not a commons at all but what is nowadays called an unmanaged common-pool resource." Hyde, *Common as Air*, 35, 32-35. For more on these matters see Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
makes some helpful points in this regard in discussing the stinting of the commons.

[20] David Charles Douglas and Harry Rothwell, *English Historical Documents, 1189-1327* (Oxford: Psychology Press, 1996), 485.

The rights enumerated in *The Charter*, as archaic as they might seem, lead us to the commons and the claims people have upon it for subsistence and survival. For this reason, J.L. and Barbara Hammond refer to the commons as "the patrimony of the poor."[24] Over time, common law and custom came to protect these and numerous additional rights in the commons. Definitions and discussion of the rights we find in *The Charter*—herbage, agistment, pannage, estovers, and so on—easily obscure appreciation of the complexity and variability in local custom and usage of them. "In reality, on the ground," Neeson points out with regard to England, but which is likewise applicable beyond it, "the range of common produce was magnificently broad, the uses to which it was put were minutely varied, and the defense of local practice was determined and often successful."[25]

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[21] Katherine Fischer Drew, *Magna Carta* (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004), 141.

[22] *Oxford English Dictionary,* 2nd ed., s.v. "estovers."

[23] In his *Institutes of the Laws of England,* Coke writes, "When estovers are restrained to woods, it signifieth housebote, hedgebote [the rights to take timber from the land of another for repair and upkeep of a house or other necessary purposes] and ploughbote [the right to take timber for making or repairing ploughs or other agricultural implements]." Edward Coke, *The Second Part of the Institutes of the Laws of England Containing the Exposition of Many Ancient and Other Statutes* (The Lawbook Exchange, Ltd., 1817), 17. Cf. Neeson, *Commoners*, 158–159.

[24] As Hammond and Hammond write, "The commoner's child, however needy was born with a spoon in his mouth. He came into a world in which he had a share and a place." Hammond and Hammond, *The Village Labourer, 1760-1832: A Study of the Government of England before the Reform Bill*, 103–104.

With enclosure came the loss of common right. Enclosure was associated with engrossment of the croplands and the commons upon which people previously relied, to greater and lesser extent, for sustenance. It is therefore closely associated with dispossession and migration, often to urban centers, and with it, people's increasing and often exclusive reliance upon wages to make ends meet.[26] Throughout Europe, the problems surrounding the new agricultural production system and its underlying property regime became particularly acute, especially in the nineteenth century. Unlike, for instance, in Britain and France, where enclosure began earlier and extended over a longer period, industrialism in Germany, in Ralf Dahrendorf's words, "occurred late, quickly, and thoroughly."[27] Various factors, including enclosure and the abolishment of guilds, contributed to the rise of a new class of landless workers.[28] People at the time spoke of *landflucht,* or flight from the land, to describe the depopulation of the countryside and the exodus to the cities,[29] which was among the topics discussed by the *L'Union catholique d'études sociales et économiques*—the so-called Fribourg Union—a circle of scholars that met in Fribourg, Switzerland beginning in 1884, and which had an important influence upon *Rerum novarum*.[30]

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[25] Neeson, *Commoners*, 313. As Neeson describes it, commoning therefore involved adaptation to place. The commons entailed not only that the use of land belonged to a community, but that a community, in an important sense, belonged to its place, in order to survive. The knowledge necessary for a community to draw subsistence from land and to do so with restraint is what it meant for them to have it in common.

[26] Ibid., 22–23, 34. Those who continue to debate enclosure and its aftermath do tend to agree that it led to workers' complete dependence upon wages and widespread proletarianization. The crucial issue is whether such developments are to be welcomed or not.

There are extraordinarily complex matters, and it is well beyond the scope of the present chapter to examine them in sufficient detail. Enclosure and its effects continue to be debated by scholars, with some maximizing and others minimizing its explanatory power and historical significance.[31] I bring it up here not only to draw attention to enclosure's relationship to the conditions Leo describes at the outset of *Rerum novarum*. I bring it up also because of the conception of property it presumes and writes into the landscape. The jurist William Blackstone approximates its ideal type when he famously defines property as "that sole and despotic dominion which one man claims and exercises over the external things of the world, in total exclusion of the right of any other individual in the universe."[32] By no means is Blackstone's understanding of property limited to the modern period. But in modernity it clearly acquires a new kind of power and pervasiveness. As Jedediah Purdy's writes, it increasingly came to function as the

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[27] Ralf Dahrendorf, *Society and Democracy in Germany* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1992), 33; Theodore S. Hamerow, *Restoration, Revolution, Reaction: Economics and Politics in Germany 1815-1871* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1966).

[28] Breckman, *Marx, the Young Hegelians, and the Origins of Radical Social Theory*, 149–150. Cf. also Richard J. Evans, *Proletarians and Politics: Socialism, Protest and the Working Class in Germany before the First World War* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1990).

[29] Ludwig Von Mises, *Economic Policy: Thoughts for Today and Tomorrow* (Auburn: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2006), 8; George F. McLean and John Kromkowski, *Urbanization and Values: Volume 5 of Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change* (Washington, D.C.: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1991), 56.

[30] Normand J. Paulhus, "Social Catholicism and the Fribourg Union," *Selected Papers from the Annual Meeting of the Society of Christian Ethics*, 1980; Normand J. Paulhus, *The Theological and Political Ideals of the Fribourg Union* (University Microfilms, 1986).

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[31] Marx, of course, regarded enclosure and the expropriation of the commons as perhaps the interpretive key to explain the transformations in the relations of production in the transition from feudalism to capitalism. For those influenced by Marx, such as Polanyi and Thompson, enclosure, while certainly not the interpretive key, plays an important role in their respective accounts of the great transformation and the rise of the working class. Others, like Armstrong, have seen peasants themselves, especially better-off members, as active participants in the process, eager to escape the drudgery of the subsistence agriculture of the open-field system. Chambers and Mingay seek to temper what they regard as an overemphasis upon enclosure, situating it instead within "a much broader and more complex process of historical change." Marx, *Capital*, I:877–904; Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*; Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*; W.A. Armstrong, "The Influence of Demographic Factors on the Position of the Agricultural Labourer in England and Wales, c.1750–1914," *The Agricultural History Review*, no. 29 (1981); J.D. Chambers and G.E. Mingay, *The Agricultural Revolution, 1750-1870* (London: Batsford, 1982), 104.

[32] William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England [1765]*, vol. II (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 3.

"centerpiece" of economic and social life, the "keystone institution" of a whole "social vision."[33]

In practice, the "sole and despotic dominion" to which Blackstone refers is hedged with restrictions.[34] Nevertheless, what characterizes this vision of dominion is that property is essentially private and control over it is absolute. Absoluteness has to do with the individual's complete control over the access, use, and disposal of property—a control thought to be total, or to use Blackstone's word, "despotic." This vision of property, then, is marked by the dyad 'owner' and 'owned,' from which the picture emerges of the owner standing apart, over and against a world of passive objects. The owner stands at the center of the picture. Practically speaking, the most important expression of the absoluteness of the right is the owner's power to exclude others—"any other individual in the universe," as Blackstone puts it—from what is owned. Ownership of land, for instance, becomes synonymous with exclusive rights over its use. Perhaps one of the reasons enclosure continues to be a locus of such controversy it that it so strikingly enacts the power of exclusion over people previously included in property—people who enjoyed use rights over what they understood to be theirs.[35] Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler, the Bishop of Mainz who had an important influence on Leo XIII and *Rerum novarum*, called the absolute right of private property a "crude doctrine" that effectively "sanctions the right to steal, since…stealing means not only to take what belongs to others, but also to hold back what rightfully ought to belong to others."[36]

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[33] Purdy, *The Meaning of Property*, 5, 16.
[34] For instance, easements, covenants, nuisance laws, zoning laws, regulatory statutes, and so on.

For this reason, those who opposed enclosure frequently did so with accusations of thievery: enclosure, after all, took what once belonged to them. This is well and famously expressed in the popular protest jingle, which James Boyle tracked to a handbill distributed against the intended enclosure of Waltham Forest in 1821: "The law locks up the man or woman/Who steals the goose from off the common/But leaves the greater villain loose/Who steals the common from off the goose./The law demands that we atone/When we take things we do not own/But leaves the lords and ladies fine/Who take things that are yours and mine." The jingle ends with a call to resistance, suggesting that the geese will lack their commons "till they go and steal it back."[37]

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[35] In this regard, there is an important distinction between absolute property and private property. One of the purposes of this chapter is to show how Leo and his successors, though they write about private property, mean something very different by this term than Blackstone.

[36] Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler, "The Six Sermons," in *The Social Teachings of Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler* (Washington, D.C: University Press of America, 1981), 16.

Another instance of this opposition to enclosure is an illuminating 1796 letter entitled, "Reflections on the Cruelty of Inclosing," which an anonymous author wrote to the bishop of Lincoln in Lincolnshire. The author evokes a range of scripture, focusing especially on Ahab's robbery of Naboth's vineyard in 1 Kings 21 to describe the "unchristian practice" of enclosure:

> It is not *doing as we would be done unto* [cf. Mt. 7:12, Lk. 6:31]: it is *not loving our neighbor as ourselves* [cf. Lev. 19:18, Mt. 22:39, Mk. 12:31, Lk. 10:27]; but is *removing his landmark* [cf. Dt. 19:14, 27:17; Hos. 5:10], contrary to his inclination; and therefore *joining field to field by iniquity* [cf. Is. 5:8]. The history of Ahab and Naboth is not altogether inapplicable here. It does not appear from the sacred pages, that the wicked prince intended to rob his subject of his vineyard; but to make him, as he supposed, a proper recompense. Under an act of parliament, the poor man's land is frequently taken from him; and what is allotted to him is by no means a compensation for his loss.[38]

Nearly a millennia and a half prior, Ambrose would use similar words in his treatise *On Naboth* to describe the long and bloody history of covetousness, in which those in its grip expel the needy from their "little plot," driving them from the boundaries of their "ancestral fields."[39] The anonymous author of the letter to the bishop locates the parliamentary enclosures in England of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which enacted enclosure through the mechanism of the state, within the same story Ambrose tells about the daily repetition of what Ahab did to Naboth.

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[37] Cf. James Boyle, "Fencing off Ideas: Enclosure & the Disappearance of the Public Domain," *Daedalus*, no. 13–25 (2002); Peter Linebaugh, *Stop, Thief!: The Commons, Enclosures, and Resistance* (Oakland: PM Press, 2014); Neeson, *Commoners*, 292; David Bollier, *Silent Theft: The Private Plunder of Our Common Wealth* (New York: Routledge, 2013), xi.

[38] Neeson, *Commoners*, 221.

The jingle and the letter, like Neruda's poem quoted in the previous chapter—"the law came to depopulate your sky,/to seize your revered fields,/to debate the river's water,/to steal the kingdom of trees"—all share the unmistakable sense that what is transpiring is a form of thievery perpetrated in the name of law itself.[40] Speaking in such terms testifies to and tries to make perceptible a law about property and possession that is older and more basic even than the laws of states.

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[39] Ambrose of Milan, *De Nabuthae (On Naboth): A Commentary with an Introduction and Translation*, trans. Martin R.P. McGuire (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 1927), §1.1.

[40] In *After Virtue*, Alasdair MacIntyre puts the charge of thievery in wider perspective when he writes that modern property owners "are the inheritors of those who…stole, and used violence to steal the common lands of England from the common people, vast tracts of North America from the American Indian, much of Ireland from the Irish, and Prussia from the original non-German Prussians." Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 251. Polanyi and Thompson see the matter in similar terms. The title of Polanyi's book—*The Great Transformation*—is therefore something of a misnomer. In his view, advocates of enclosure were not transforming the world. They were turning the world upside down. "They were," as Polanyi puts it, "literally robbing the poor of their share in the common, tearing down the houses which, by the hitherto unbreakable force of custom, the poor had long regarded as theirs and their heirs." Or as Thompson writes about England, "Enclosure (when all the sophistications are allowed for) was a plain enough case of class robbery, played according to fair rules of property and law laid down by a

2.2.2 Property in *Rerum novarum*

Consideration of enclosure helps us better to understand Leo's understanding of property in *Rerum novarum*. What is crucial to underscore is that he does not regard developments associated with enclosure as the advance of property. He regards them, rather, as a threat to it. When in *The Communist Manifesto*, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels address those who are "horrified" at their proposal to abolish private property, they respond to the horror with the following riposte: "But in your existing society private property is already done away with for nine-tenths of the population."[41] On this point at least, Leo agrees with Marx and Engels.

Rerum novarum critiques a socialism that would make all possessions "the common property of all, to be administered by the State or by municipal bodies" (§4, cf. §5). But it must not be overlooked that what *Rerum novarum* and socialism share is an

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Parliament of property-owners and lawyers." Cf. Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 35; Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 218.

[41] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 1 edition (London; New York: Penguin, 2004), 98.

opposition to the forces of dispossession and dislocation, which have scattered people and atomized the social bodies in the first place, and which have generated the conditions within which people have nothing to sell but their labor to strangers who prey upon their need. These forces, Leo thinks, represent a threat to property more fundamental than that of socialism.[42]

Leo puts it in no uncertain terms: "To exercise pressure upon the indigent and the destitute for the sake of gain, and to gather one's profit out of the need of another, is condemned by all laws, human and divine. To defraud any one of wages that are his due is a great crime which cries to the avenging anger of Heaven" (§20). Leo then cites this verse from James: "Listen! The wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts" (5:4). We saw Romero cite the same verse in the first chapter. Here and elsewhere, Leo, like Romero, describes the existing order—which systematically denies workers not only property but also sufficient wages to support themselves and their families—as criminal (cf. §44). The verse from James suggests that it is an order haunted by the cries of those who are robbed of what is theirs.

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[42] See Pope Pius XI, *Quadragesimo anno*, §§3-4.

The crucial point is that Leo critiques socialism as a false remedy to an injustice of which the socialists are not the source (§4).[43] Socialism, as Leo presents it here, has a parasitic character. It feeds upon the injustices associated with the advance of capitalism. As Pius XI will later put the point in his encyclical *Divini redemptoris* (1937), if we want to understand socialism's appeal to workers, "we must remember that the way had been already prepared for it by the religious and moral destitution in which wage-earners had been left by liberal economics" (§16).[44] According to Leo and the line of thinking that follows him, the best way to overcome what socialism represents is to work to instantiate a truer and more perfect justice.[45] For socialism is not so much an evil threatening civilization as an indicator that things are already rotten.

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[43] Indeed, as Leo states at the outset, *Rerum novarum* is written to address, not the problems associated with what he calls liberal economics—a topic he takes up at great length elsewhere—but socialism's abolition of private property and its "absorption" by the state. This is of a piece with the state's absorption of what pertains to individual and social bodies more generally (cf. §§2, 4, 14, 35, 47). Leo takes it for granted that liberal economics is not a solution but the one of the sources of the problem. Habiger is therefore right that Leo's argument in this encyclical centers on the socialist "remedy," which conditions his own articulation of the importance of private property. Cf. Habiger, *Papal Teaching on Private Property (1891-1981)*, 15, 19.

[44] Or as Pius XI puts it in *Quadragesimo anno*, "let all remember that Liberalism is the father of this Socialism that is pervading morality and culture and that Bolshevism will be its heir" (§122). Cf. "Discourse of His Holiness Pius XII to Commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Encyclical Rerum Novarum of Pope Leo XIII on the Social Question," 219.

With regard to property, the principal disagreement between Leo, on the one hand, and Marx and Engels on the other, is their distinct responses to the reality of dispossession and dislocation. Marx and Engels contend that the "necessary condition" for the existence of private property is "the non-existence of any property for the immense majority of society," an analysis upon which they base their proposal to abolish all private property.[46] Leo, in contrast, questions Marx's and Engel's necessary condition. Rather than abolish the remainder of private property, Leo's seeks its diffusion. His wants the dispossessed to be repossessed. "The law," he writes, "should favor ownership, and its policy should be to induce as many as possible of the people to become owners" (§46). Such ownership, moreover, must include productive property, which for Leo is paradigmatically property in land (cf. §§5, 10, 47).[47] The imaginative reach of *Rerum novarum* is striking. Leo is, in effect, imagining something like the renewal of common right in a world being built upon its repudiation. He is trying to preserve the possibility of commonwealth.

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[45] Leo writes describes the proletariat as the "needy and powerless multitude, sick and sore in spirit and ever ready for disturbance" (§47). He associates its readiness for disturbance with its dispossession. Forty years later, Pius XI concludes his re-lecture of *Rerum novarum* on the topic of property with an admonition: that without a better distribution of created goods "let no one persuade himself that public order, peace, and the tranquility of human society can effectively be defended against agitators of revolution" (§62). Again, we see the parasitic character of socialism. The solution it proposes is in response to a deeper disorder, a disorder upon which it feeds. It is that deeper disorder—the disorder that dispossesses people from their lands and sends them streaming, propertyless, into the cities—with which he, like Leo, is concerned. On this point see also *Mater et magistra* §14.

[46] Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 98.

As Leo states repeatedly throughout *Rerum novarum*, the solution to the social question lies not in the elimination of property but in its protection (cf. §§8, 13, 15, 38, 46-47), where 'protection' is synonymous with laws, institutions, and polities that facilitate greater access to property, permitting all to share in it. Protection of property, in other words, is synonymous with property's ongoing circulation and distribution to meet the needs of all rather than its accumulation and concentration for the benefit of the few at the expense of the many.[48]

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[47] Pius XII notes the centrality of land—"the holding in which the family lives, and from the products of which it draws all or part of its subsistence—to Leo's social vision. "Discourse of His Holiness Pius XII to Commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* of Pope Leo XIII on the Social Question," 224. This is one of the reasons why *Rerum novarum* has became a source of inspiration and encouragement for Catholic agrarian movements, which we see, for instance, in *Flee to the Fields: The Faith and Works of the Catholic Land Movement. A Symposium* (London: Heath Cranton Limited, 1934). One particularly important figure in this regard was the Dominican priest Vincent McNabb, who had an important influence on Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin of the Catholic Worker. On McNabb's work cf. especially Vincent McNabb, *The Church and the Land* (Norfolk: IHS Press, 2003); Vincent McNabb, *Nazareth Or Social Chaos* (Norfolk: IHS Press, 2009). For a general overview of McNabb's Catholic agrarianism, cf. Matthew Philipp Whelan, "Land, Economy, and the Measure of Christ: The Catholic Agrarianism of Vincent McNabb, O.P," *Nova et Vetera* 10, no. 1 (2012).

Consider the benefits Leo thinks follow from such protection. The first is that widespread distribution of land will begin to bridge the "wide chasm" between classes and advance peace where there is presently no peace. "If working people can be encouraged to look forward to obtaining a share in the land," he writes, "the consequence will be that the gulf between vast wealth and sheer poverty will be bridged over, and the respective classes will be brought nearer to one another" (§47). Leo is clearly concerned with expanding the share people have in the wealth of their respective lands. He takes seriously the notion of a commonwealth, which presumes sharing goods in common. But the failure to share land and shield the most vulnerable members of a society from misery reflects a more fundamental failure of a people to share life together in any meaningful sense. In this regard, Leo's central concern is to surmount the "wide chasm," the "gulf"—or, as he puts it elsewhere, the "separation" (§24)—that the new property regime increasingly erects between people in order to establish spaces for nearness, intimacy, and the sharing of life. The underlying issue is that the greater the distance between people, epitomized by disparities in the distribution of property, the more difficult the sharing of goods other than property with one another—in other words, the more difficult the sharing of life.

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[48] This point is especially important for the movement known as Distributism, for which the defense of property became synonymous with the diffusion of property. They therefore advocate widespread ownership of productive property. Only in this way, they think, can property realize its purpose. Distributists characteristically frame their position in contrast both to socialism and to capitalism as well. They see themselves as a "third way." It is crucial to their understanding of property that *both* capitalism *and* socialism represent modern distortions of property. Classic Distributist texts include: G.K. Chesterton, *What's Wrong with the World* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1912); G.K. Chesterton, *The Outline of Sanity* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1927); Hilaire Belloc, *The Servile State* (Boston: Le Roy Phillips, 1913); Hilaire Belloc, *An Essay on the Restoration of Property* (IHS Press, 2012).

As Leo discusses the matter here, widespread distribution of land will have at least two additional benefits as well. Leo observes that people not only tend to work harder on what is theirs. But he also notes that in the process, they also learn to know it and care for it as well—they learn to, in his words, "love the very soil" that brings forth the "abundance of good things" upon which their lives depend.[49] Widespread distribution of land therefore facilitates practical wisdom in the care and use of land. Finally, and intimately related to this, Leo writes if people have enough land to live well, they will consequently set down roots and “cling to the country in which they were born” instead of migrating in order to make ends meet (§47). In other words, Leo suggests that having access to sufficient land not only facilitates practical wisdom in the care and use of land. It also provides the necessary stability over time to establish true mutuality of belonging between land and people.

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[49] There are important similarities between Leo and Wendell Berry, along with other contemporary agrarians. In the essay "Private Property and the Common Wealth," for instance, Berry explains his own position this way: "I believe that land that is to be used should be divided into small parcels among a lot of small owners; I believe therefore in the right of private property. I believe that, given our history and tradition, a large population of small property holders offers the best available chance for local cultural adaptation and good stewardship of the land-provided that the property holders are secure, legally and economically, in their properties." Wendell Berry, *Another Turn of the Crank: Essays* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2011). Central to Berry's own work is the sense that people care for that which belongs to them, and that property rightly understood can therefore safeguard, as he puts it, the "mutual belonging of people and

2.2.3 A Derived Principle

As we have been examining, Leo’s response to a reality characterized by dispossession of people and concentration of property into the hands of the few is to look for better distribution of property. Rather than call for the further abolition of property, he calls instead for its diffusion—a position that puts him in tension both with capitalism and socialism. Even before the 1970s when Romero assumes the

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places without which there can be no lasting and caring human communities.” Wendell Berry, *Sex, Economy, Freedom & Community: Eight Essays* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993), 96. For a similar understanding of private property, cf. Eric T. Freyfogle, *The Land We Share: Private Property And The Common Good* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2003).

archbishopric of San Salvador, agrarian reform comes to be understood by this line of thinking as one prominent instance of such protection of property through its diffusion.

Leo's call for the diffusion of property, however, is not simply a call for the expansion of access to property through the mechanisms of the state or some other governmental body. Its basis is the need for reformation of ownership more generally, which presumes an understanding of property whose hallmarks are inclusion and gathering rather than exclusion and scattering.[50] Part of the problem in interpreting *Rerum novarum* on property, then, is that Leo and Blackstone mean something very different by their use of this term. In other words, 'property' is not univocal—a fact that has generated considerable interpretive difficulties and misunderstandings of the line of thinking to which I am trying to attend. A good rule of thumb in approaching these texts therefore is not to assume to know what terms like property mean before closely attending to its articulation, to the ways of life out of which it arises and towards which it gestures.

Near the beginning of *Rerum novarum*, Leo makes an important statement about the grammar of creation, which will be reiterated time and again by his successors. He writes that God has given the earth for the use and enjoyment of the whole human race.

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[50] This logic is likewise behind much of Leo's and his successors' defense of workers' associations, living wages, partnership contracts, profit sharing, and so on.

But this gift, Leo continues, "can in no way be a bar to the owning of private property" (§8). What could he possibly mean by this? How can the earth be given to all and yet that common gift not *ipso facto* bar the possession of property? Does not the very adjective 'private,*' which here modifies the word property, suggest a use that is restricted to particular person or persons—a use, in other words, which is exclusive and therefore precisely not common? In short, h*ow does Leo understand the commonality of the gift of creation, and what does that commonality have to do with property as Leo understands it?

Leo mentions the common gift of creation in passing and sees no need for further elaboration. He then continues that God, in giving the earth to all, does not assign particular parts of it to particular peoples but instead leaves the precise arrangements of property-holding to human beings themselves. These diverse arrangements, Leo thinks, show us something important about the unique character of God's gift of land to humankind. Land, even as it is used by different peoples in different ways, "ceases not thereby to minister to the needs of all, inasmuch as there is not one who does not sustain life from what the land produces." "All human subsistence," Leo continues, "is derived either from labor on one's own land, or from some toil, some calling, which is paid for either in the produce of the land itself, or in what is exchanged for what the land brings forth" (§8).

Leo seems to be working here with a distinction between the possession and transfer of ownership of the products of labor, on the one hand, and the possession and transfer of ownership of land, on the other. Land is *sui generis* in its contribution to the giving of life. Statements like these gesture towards the basic creaturely sharing of life in land—and with it, sunlight, air, water, and so on—that precedes and conditions any particular property holding arrangements, despite the importance of property for the facilitation of this more basic sharing.

What begins to emerge from these initial sections of *Rerum novarum* is that, as Leo sees it, all property—including private property—is, as Habiger describes it, a "derived principle."[51] It derives from the common use of all created goods. Property, like what Leo calls industry and law, is not extrinsic to God's gift of the earth for the use and enjoyment of all. Rather, they are intrinsic to the way God gives the gift and seeks to accomplish God's purpose in giving it. Even as Leo and his successors affirm property, then, they will continue to insist that the earth is a gift given in common, which means its purpose is to minister to the needs of all. Indeed, it is through property and its institutions that the common destination of created goods is accomplished. On this view, any understanding of property ownership derives essentially from God's giving of the earth in common. Property finds its proper place only in relation to the common gift, and all use and enjoyment of the earth must therefore seek to preserve and maintain the earth's character as common gift. The purpose of private ownership is to conduce to common use and enjoyment.[52]

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[51] Habiger thinks that Leo is not as clear as he could be on this point, writing that "Leo does not closely differentiate between the principle of private property and the more fundamental principle of the common use of all material goods. The source he draws upon for *Rerum novarum* [*Summa theologiae* II-II 66.1,2] is clear about this distinction, but that is not reflected as clearly in *Rerum novarum*." Habiger, *Papal Teaching on Private Property (1891-1981)*, 32–33.

2.2.4 Possession and Use

Oftentimes considerations of property in *Rerum novarum* concentrate on its initial sections, where Leo defends the importance of private property against the socialists' different response to the dispossessions and concentrations of capitalism. But this neglects the significance of an important shift in Leo's argument. Later in the encyclical, Leo distinguishes between the possession of property and its use, subordinating the former to the latter. Here we begin to glimpse something of Leo's larger, theological vision of human flourishing and the role of property within it. Property's derived status becomes especially evident.

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[52] Hospitality, and the forms of property-holding that make hospitality possible, is a striking case in point. In *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*, Christine Pohl observes that "sustained hospitality requires a light hold on material possessions … The most potent setting for hospitality is in the overlap of public and private space." In other words, hospitality has everything to do with ways of using what is common that seek to preserve it as common. Chistine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 12.

After critiquing socialism's proposed remedy, and after having established the importance of property to improve the condition of workers, Leo turns to what he takes to be the true and abiding solution to the social question (§15), which is simply the Church herself (§16), a body sustained by a communion more determinative than class conflict (§19). The Church's task is not only to remind people of their obligations to one another in justice (§§19-20). She "aims higher still" than the cessation of conflict (§21). She aims at overcoming the "separation" between people and at the establishment of "friendly concord" (§24) and unity in "bonds of friendship" (§25).

The language of friendship is not naïve optimism. Leo is drawing on Thomas Aquinas's understanding of friendship as the love that in Christ "communicates" across the infinite distance between Creator and creation—a communication that establishes the possibility of a mysterious form of friendship between God and human creatures (cf. John 15:15).[53] On its basis, humans can share life with God because God shared that life with them in Christ. The friendship based on the sharing of this life is *caritas*, which extends even to enemies (cf. Matthew 5:44, Luke 6:27), who are likewise the objects of God's communication in Christ.[54] One of the characteristic marks of such friendship is the breakdown of barriers between people.

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[53] Cf. *ST* II-II 23.1 resp. In my treatment of the *Summa theologiae* I rely upon the revised Latin/English edition of the English Dominicans, based on the Leonine text. St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 61 vols., Blackfriars (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

Leo therefore locates the possibility of overcoming the distances property erects between people in the discovery of the good they hold in common, which is Christ, the common good of all creation. For in Christ, they discover that they have more in common than a creator who brings them into existence and sustains them in it; they discover that they have in common a redeemer as well, and that "all have alike the same last end, which is God" (§25). The friendship God offers in Christ is the basis of Leo's hope that those whose lives are separated by property and its lack might come to see "the blessings of nature and the gifts of grace belong to the whole human race in common" (§25).

When Leo returns to the topic of property-holding in these sections, he now does so in relation to humankind's destiny to share more fully in God's life in Christ. Viewed in relation to this destiny, commonplace conceptions of earthly treasure are transfigured as human creatures learn to understand themselves as created for life with God and hence their place in the world as pilgrims, which is why Leo writes that a person cannot understand "the things of the earth" without "taking into consideration the life to come, the life that will know no death." The life of which Leo speaks is founded on Paul's claim that the last enemy Christ defeats is death, and that Christ's work has broken death's hold on human life (1 Cor. 15:25-26, 54-56; cf. Isaiah 25:8). God creates humankind not for what is "perishable and transitory" but for what is "heavenly and everlasting."[55] The present life, broken by sin and dominated by death, is not humankind's "abiding place." It is a "place of exile" (§21). The crucial question therefore becomes, what kind of ownership best befits exiles?

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[54] *ST* II-II 23.1 ad. 2.

It is here, now in relation to the *telos* which founds and orders the Church's life, that Leo returns again to reflect upon property, this time not in terms of its possession but under the heading of what he calls "use" (§21). The whole register of the discussion changes. These sections are now marked by ambivalence, as reflection upon the vocation to store up heavenly treasure transfigures the meaning of earthly treasure. The "only important thing" regarding property, Leo now states, is "use" (§21). In other words, unlike the earlier sections in the encyclical, where Leo emphasizes the importance of the possession of property *per se*, now possession pales in comparison to what Leo calls use, by which he simply means the use people make of what they have so as to share more fully in the life for which they are destined (§21).

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[55] At times Leo's language suggest that he is counseling resignation for the poor and renunciation for the rich. To interpret him in this way, however, would be to fail to take seriously the extent to which the very categories of rich and poor are being destabilized and reconfigured by Christ.

Leo takes the distinction between possession and use from a passage in Thomas Aquinas's *Summa theologiae*, in which Thomas writes of a "twofold competence (*duo competunt*) in relation to material things": "The first is the power to procure and dispense (*procurandi et dispensandi*) them. Understood in this way, it is not merely legitimate for a man to possess things as his own (*propria possideat*), it is even necessary for human life."[56] The first competence tracks with what Leo has said earlier in *Rerum novarum* about possession as distinct from use.

Leo's concern at this juncture of the encyclical, however, is not the first competence with regard to created goods but with the second, which Thomas explains as a competence as to their "use (*usus ipsarum*)." Thomas explains it this way: "Now with regard to this, no man is entitled to manage things merely for himself, but as common (*ut proprias, sed ut communes*), so that he is ready to share them easily (*facili*) with others in the case of necessity. This is why Paul writes to Timothy, *As for the rich of this world, charge them to give easily [facile], to communicate to others, etc.* [1 Tim. 6:17-18]."[57]

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[56] *ST* II-II 66.2 resp.

[57] *ST* II-II 62.1 resp.

Consider carefully the kind of claim that is being made here, which is evidenced in the subtle construction of the sentence just cited: people are to regard what they have not as theirs exclusively but as common. In holding what they have, they must draw others into the orbit of concern, taking them into consideration in the very manner in which they hold what they have. On this view, to have anything at all is to have it as member of a wider commons, which begins, but does not end, with those nearest, the neighbor. Indeed, the horizon of this commons is humankind itself.[58]

As we will continue to see, the understanding of creation as a gift given to humankind in common profoundly unsettles widespread assumptions about what belongs to the self and what belongs to others. It not only unsettles them in the present. It unsettles them across time. For the commonality of the gift unfolds temporally, such that a person's use of created goods should seek to preserve them as common, available to the claim of both present and future need.

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[58] Of course, that humankind comprises such a unity, which transcends memberships of family, race, class, nation, and so on, is not at all self-evident. But as Henri de Lubac observes, "The supernatural dignity of one who has been baptized rests, we know, on the natural dignity of man, though it surpasses it in an infinite manner: *agnosce, christiane, dignitatem tuam—Deus qui humanae substantiae dignitatem mirabiliter condidisti* [*Recognize, O Christian, your dignity—God, who in a wonderful manner created and ennobled human nature*]. Thus, the unity of the Mystical Body of Christ, a supernatural unity, supposes a previous natural unity, the unity of the human race." Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988), 25.

At least in this sense, the personal possession of property does not inherently conflict with property's more fundamental common destiny. Private possession is legitimate only in the restricted sense that people hold what they have as members of a wider, more comprehensive commons. Particular persons are always already embedded as creatures within creation and as possessors within the wider community of common use. They therefore engage in an ultimately impossible and profoundly damaging task—to themselves, to others, to the created order itself—if they seek to disembed their manner of possessing from these memberships.

Hence what this line of thinking calls the 'private' (or 'personal') and 'social' senses of ownership are not separate such that they could stand over and against one another. The 'private' is internal to the 'social.' To pit these senses against one another is to presume a prior disembedding of the human creature from creation and the person from social bodies. For people to learn to hold what they have as common is tantamount to using it to support the life of the societies of which they are members, beginning but not ending with their households and those nearest. The designation 'private property,' like all forms of property, derives from the more primordial and comprehensive claim of commonality. Private property names the way that people—precisely as members of a wider community of use—have a claim upon created goods just as others do. This is why, as we have seen, an important part of Leo's solution to rampant dispossession is to call for the diffusion of property. It is also why, as Leo goes on to note in the section under consideration, people are not bound to distribute what they require for themselves or the needs of their households (§22).

Of course, the assessment of need is a complex cultural accomplishment, which is by no means guaranteed. Jean-Yves Calvez and Jacques Perrin remind us that needs have a "discipline," which means that "the order of needs can be debased and true needs exploited."[59] In *Rerum novarum*, Leo counsels taking into account the maintenance of social station in the determination of what is superfluous (§22).[60] But as this line of thinking develops into the twentieth century, the criteria for the determination of what is superfluous shifts, and "the measure of the needs of others," as John XXIII puts it, increasingly becomes paramount.[61]

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[59] Jean-Yves Calvez and Jacques Perrin, *The Church and Social Justice: The Social Teaching of the Popes from Leo XIII to Pius XII (1878-1958)* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1961), 190. For a beautiful meditation on what humans need in order to flourish, cf. Ignatieff Michael, *The Needs of Strangers* (New York: Penguin, 1986). Pius XII meditates at length upon this in his Address to Italian Catholic Workers on the 60th anniversary of *Rerum novarum.* Cf. Pius XII, "Adscriptis Sodalitati Catholicae ex Operariis Italicis, Ob Commendationem Litterarum Encyclicarum Rerum Novarum Coadunatis," in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, vol. 45, 1953, 406–408.

[60] Citing Thomas, Leo writes that a proper assessment of need includes a person's station and what it means to live well within it (§22, citing *ST* II-II 33.6 resp.). But in the article from the *Summa* under consideration, Thomas writes that there is nothing "fixed or final" about what is necessary for a person to maintain her station. Moreover, there are times when even consideration of station must bend before "extreme need." This is because, according to the axiom cited elsewhere in the *Summa*, "in the case of necessity everything is common" (*in necessitate sunt omnia communia*)" (cf. *ST* II-II 66.7). Thomas's argument is that a person can give alms from what is required for her own needs but she is not bound to do so. In the *sed contra*, he quotes Jesus's words to the rich young man: "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me" (Mat 19:21, cf.

What is crucial to underscore is that, according to this line of thinking, the formation of people who are able to distinguish between what they need and what they do not is indispensable. The understanding of creation as a common gift makes claims upon human creatures. It generates a downward pressure on property as people aim to take only what is necessary—a downward pressure well expressed by the questions

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Mk. 10:17-31). Like the widow who gives out of her impoverishment (cf. Lk. 21:1-4, Mk. 12:41-44), Thomas thinks it is better for a person to give alms even from what she needs for herself. But he calls it a matter of counsel rather than precept. As Jesus himself suggests, it is about the pursuit of perfection, which Thomas sees exemplified by those religious who give away their possessions upon entering an order. Leo would seem to agree, citing those Christians who have throughout history "despoiled themselves of their possessions in order to relieve their brethren" (§29). In arguing that Christians are not bound to be like the poor widow in the Gospels or like those who renounce all property in order to follow Christ more completely, Thomas is, in effect, making room for people to be less than perfect. What we might call the tolerance of mediocrity—to use R.A. Markus's phrase—distinguishes Thomas's Augustinianism position from Pelagian perfectionism. R. A. Markus, "Augustine: A Defence of Christian Mediocrity," in *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 55.

[61] The full quotation reads: "The obligation of every man, the urgent obligation of the Christian man, is to reckon what is superfluous by the measure of the needs of others, and to see to it that the administration and the distribution of created goods serve the common good." John XXIII, "Radio-Television Message," in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, vol. 54, 1962, 682. Cf. *Gaudium et spes* §69.

Catherine Doherty's community constantly asks about its practice of farming: "How can I do without this? How can I substitute something less expensive?"[62] The pressure is not only downward but outward as well. People are to take only what is necessary so that they have something to give to others. Once their needs are met, they are bound to give what remains in alms.[63] This is why, in *The Labor Problem and Christianity*, Ketteler states that the owner who does not give alms "is likened in Christian teaching to a thief."[64]

There are "many ways," Leo writes, Christians can practice the work of mercy. But in all of them it is possible to discern how the "laws and judgments" of sinful human creatures bend before "the laws and judgments of Christ the true God" (§22). Leo cites two verses in this regard. The first is from Paul's meeting with the Ephesian elders in Acts, in which he recounts Jesus's words that "it is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). The context is instructive. Paul is speaking to the elders about "the message of [God's] grace," which, Paul says, builds up the ecclesial body in Ephesus, giving it a share in “the inheritance among all who are sanctified” (v. 32). As an exemplification of the creaturely imitation of Christ’s words, Paul mentions his work with his own hands to support not only himself but his companions and the weak as well (vv. 34-35), which resonates with Leo’s and Thomas’s understanding of the management of created things as common.

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[62] Catherine de Hueck Doherty, *Apostolic Farming* (Madonna House Publications, 2001), 46.

[63] Leo principally associates such work with the virtue of charity, admitting that in "extreme cases," which are left unspecified, giving what remains is a matter of justice. The context suggests that Leo's concern is that it would be inappropriate to the state to determine when peoples' needs are adequately met and what is and is not superfluous to those needs. The determination of need is "a duty not enforced by human law" (§22).

[64] Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler, "The Labor Problem and Christianity," in *The Social Teachings of Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1981), 367.

The second verse specifies the *telos* of such management, concretizing how the work of mercy bends human laws and judgments to God’s. Leo cites Christ’s warning from the parable recorded in Matthew about the separation of the sheep and the goats: “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (Mat 25:40). The suggestion is that Christians follow a God who does not just command mercy but who receives it in his very person—who himself bears the face of the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, and the infirm. Giving is therefore “more blessed” because by it Christians learn to know and love their Lord in the visage of those in need. Here we begin to see the way mercy bends human laws and judgments to God’s by preparing people for the life for which they are destined, which is simply God’s life as offered in Christ.

Putting aside the controverted issue of the assessment of need, then, what must be emphasized is that this whole discussion presupposes that people’s management of what they have will always be the management of what is common, and that it is their vocation as pilgrims to learn to see it as such. On this view, while people hold property, they do so in a distinctive way, which puts them at profound odds with Blackstone's understanding of property. Their task is to attend both to their own needs and to the needs of others in the use of what they have. In contrast to Blackstone's "sole and despotic dominion," with its "total exclusion," what marks this manner of possession is therefore not exclusion but the refusal of exclusion. They look for ways to include others in what they have because what they have is a gift given in common. It is never fully or exclusively theirs. It always belongs to them as well as to others—especially to those others in need of it. In acknowledging that they hold what belongs to others, they therefore also acknowledge an additional need that they have: the need to learn the habits of returning their possessions to those to whom they belong.[65]

The commonality in view here is therefore not extrinsic to the manner of possession. It does not impinge upon it as an afterthought or as an additional consideration. Nor is it achieved as the aggregate result of self-interested action, for instance, through the workings of an invisible hand. Rather, commonality is intrinsic to the manner of possession.[66] Thomas and the verses from 1 Timothy suggest the best evidence of this manner of possession—what we might perhaps call non-possessive possession[67]—is that people acknowledge the claims of others upon what they possess. They open their hands to others with ease, parting with what they possess when the need arises, and they does so, as Thomas puts it, *facili*—readily, without difficulty.

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[65] This feature distinguishes Thomas's and Leo's view from that of the socialists Leo criticizes. In making all private property common, they neglect the person's involvement in ordering her life and her goods in relation to her destiny.

We have been considering the common gift of creation in terms of property and possession. In summarizing the previous discussion, Leo makes clear the wider horizon of the commonality he has in view. It has to do with the way God creates heaven and earth, and all things visible and invisible. It has to do with the way, as he puts it, "the blessings of nature and the gifts of grace belong to the whole human race in common." Common gift, in other words, is the grammar of creation itself. Everything people receive from God—whether "temporal blessings" or "gifts of the mind"—they has received both for their own benefit and "at the same time" for the benefit of others. Creation understood as common gift includes not only how people learn to regard their possessions as gift; it involves how they learn to 'possesses' their selves as gift (§22).[68]

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[66] One of the crucial features distinguishing Thomas's account of property from John Locke's is precisely the way commonality inheres in the manner of possession. The problem that Locke sets out to address in the *Second Treatise of Government* is how, given that God grants the world to humankind in common, "any one should ever come to have a *property* in any thing" (§25). The solution to the problem as Locke frames it is that a human person has exclusive property in his own person. Therefore, whatever a person works with his own hands becomes his. "Whatsoever then he removes out of the state that nature hath provided and left it in, he hath mixed his *labour* with, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property." In so doing, the laborer has "removed" a thing from "the common state nature hath placed it in," a removal that "excludes the common right of other men." As a consequence, "no man but he can have a right to what that is once joined to." Locke thinks such a state of affairs holds so long as "there is enough, and as good, left in common for others" (§27). This *removal* of something from the common state, this *exclusive right* consequent to the removal, distinguishes Locke from the line of thinking I sketch in this chapter.

[67] Joan Lockwood O'Donovan and Christopher Franks use similar language. Cf. Joan Lockwood O'Donovan, "Christian Platonism and Non-Proprietary Community," in *Bonds of Imperfection: Christian Politics, Past and Present* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003); Christopher A. Franks, *He Became Poor: The Poverty of Christ and Aquinas's Economic Teachings* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009).

2.3 Thomas Aquinas and his Sources

As we have already begun to see, Thomas Aquinas exercises a considerable influence upon the line of reflection that we have been examining. That modern social encyclicals on this and other matters hew so closely to his thought is due in no small measure to Leo himself, who in his 1879 encyclical *Aeterni patris* called for a renewal in the study of the common doctor—a renewal we see bearing fruit, among other places, less than two years later in Leo's own use of Thomas in *Rerum novarum* to address the so-called social question.[69] Before moving on to consider the way *Rerum novarum's* teaching on property is taken up by Leo's successors, I want to pause briefly and examine Thomas's treatment of it in the *Summa theologica* in order further to explore one of the principal sources of the encyclical tradition. In the process, we will find ourselves in a conversation with other figures, such as Basil the Great and Ambrose of Milan, because Thomas is in a conversation with them. We cannot attend to Thomas without attending to them as well.

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[68] Gregory the Great, *Forty Gospel Homilies*, trans. David Hurst (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian, 1990), 132.

The passages from the *Summa* upon which *Rerum novarum* draws comes from the treatise on justice in the *Secunda Secundae Partis*, specifically question sixty-six on theft and robbery.[70] With regard to the question, the first thing to notice is that there is an important shift between the first and the second articles of it. While the first concerns whether possession (*possessio*) of created goods is natural to humankind in general, the second concerns whether it is natural to particular persons to possess things as their own. Thomas begins by framing the whole issue of *possessio* first in relation to God's purpose for humankind as a whole. Only derivatively does he treat it in relation to particular persons. Thomas's understanding of *possessio*, in other words, has as its principle point of reference God's purpose of providing sustenance for humankind in common.

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[69] On the divergence of Leo from Thomas and the tradition of interpretation on this issue, cf. Mary Elsbernd, *Papal Statements on Rights: A Historical Contextual Study of Encyclical Teaching from Pius VI-Pius XI (1791-1939)* (Katholiecke Universiteit Leuven, 1985), 312–325; Schuck, *That They Be One*, 110, n. 97. For a different perspective, cf. Habiger, *Papal Teaching on Private Property (1891-1981)*, 27–36.

[70] For general treatments of the topic, I have learned much from Franks, *He Became Poor*; Paul Jude Weithman, "Justice, Charity and Property: The Centrality of Sin to the Political Thought of Thomas Aquinas" (Ph.D., Harvard, 1988); William McDonald, "The Social Value of Property According to St. Thomas Aquinas" (Catholic University of America, 1939); Anthony Parel, "Aquinas' Theory of Property," in *Theories of Property: Aristotle to the Present* (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1979); George Speltz, "The Importance of Rural Life according to the Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas" (Catholic University of America, 1945).

Another noteworthy feature of Thomas's account is that the first article begins with the distinction between God's possession and humankind's, which structures the entirety of what follows. In the initial article, on whether possession is natural to humankind in general, Thomas distinguishes between dominion (*dominium*) over the nature of a thing, which pertains to God alone, and *dominium* in terms of the use of a thing (*usum ipsius rei*), which is what pertains to humankind. The terms *possessio* and *dominium* are largely interchangeable.[71] Moreover, we once again encounter the notion of 'use,' which relates to the way possessions are means to an end. In this case, the end is the support of human life. “All possessions,” as Thomas notes elsewhere in the *Summa*, “come under the heading of the useful.”[72]

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[71] Marcus Lefébure notes that while the terms *dominium* and *possessio* are largely interchangeable for Thomas, *proprietas* is a species of *possession,* and that it is typically contrasted with terms like *communitas rerum*, *possidere communiter*, and so on. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, ed. Marcus Lefébure, vol. XXXVIII, Blackfriars (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1975), 63, note a.

God’s *possessio* over the nature of things has to do with being creator of heaven and earth, of all that is seen and unseen, and the way God brings all things into existence *ex nihilo* and constantly sustains them in it. Without God’s enlivening and sustaining presence, creation would return to the *nihilo* from which it was created. In contrast, Thomas indexes humankind’s *possessio* to its creaturely status—its ontological dependency upon God for its very being and agency. In the *responsio*, Thomas writes that the basis of human *possessio* is God’s creation of them as image bearers. Thomas is commenting on the first chapter of Genesis, where God says, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth” (Gen 1:26). Human *possessio*, like humankind itself, expresses God’s *possessio* over creation—a fact that stretches and makes strange Thomas’s speaking about divine and human *possessio* together as imaged and image.[73]

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[72] *ST* II-II 62.5 ad. 1; 117.3 resp.

[73] As the Fourth Lateran Council states, “For between creator and creature there can be noted no similarity so great that a greater dissimilarity cannot be seen between them.”

Hence to call creation a gift is to call it a gift in a unique sense. Creation is unlike other gifts in that it is a gift that makes all other gifts possible—a gift upon which all other gifts depend. The use of created goods is always the use of what has first been given. Moreover, human creatures, like all created things, are also themselves gifts, which is to say, human being and agency are likewise part of the gift. The gift in question therefore includes not only earth and its fruit and the work of human hands but also human life itself.

Thomas's understanding of *possessio* does not begin with the individual proprietor, standing over and against a world of objects, disembedded from the relationships that sustain life. Rather, it begins with human creatures in need of basic "material support"—goods such as food, drink, shelter, and clothing—and therefore in need of land and others' hands in order to live and to flourish.[74] As Thomas sees it,

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Norman P. Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils: Nicaea I to Lateran V*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Sheed & Ward, 1990), §2.

[74] *ST* II-II 66.1, ad 1. Thomas bases his comments here on the initial chapters of Genesis: "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be food for you; and to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the sky and to every thing that moves on the earth which has life, I have given every green plant for food" (Gen 1:29-30, cf. 2:9, 16-17). Because human creatures are embodied, sufficient sustenance is indispensable to human flourishing. As Thomas sees it, the virtues do not float free of the body. Rather, their

human creatures—their bodies, their goods, their agency—are embedded within the relationships that make human life possible. God in God's goodness makes provision precisely for such material support—a provisioning in which all human *possessio* participates. It would not be an exaggeration to say that, according to Thomas, human *possessio* simply is creaturely involvement in and conformity to God's provisioning for humankind as a whole, from which *possessio* derives its whole rationale and takes its basic shape.[75]

Central to Thomas's understanding of *possessio* is therefore what Christopher Franks calls its acknowledgement of humankind's "ontological poverty before God," which, he thinks, should empty a person "of all pretense to self-possession" and instead foster respect for the limits on all "claims to security."[76] According to Franks, acknowledgement of such ontological impoverishment likewise adequates human

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operation is bodily and so depends upon bodily needs being met, such as sufficient food, drink, shelter, clothing, and so on (*ST* I-II 4.7 resp.). Thomas's distinguishes himself from the Stoics on this point. While the Stoics hold that the only human good is virtue, such that bodily goods are not goods at all, Thomas contends that because humans are creatures in which soul and body are united, whatever preserves the life of the body, though not a final good, is still a good. Humans should therefore feel sorrow whenever those goods are lacking (*ST* I-II 59.3 resp.).

[75] *ST* II-II 66.1, ad 1.

[76] Franks, *He Became Poor*, 3.

creatures to membership within the relationships upon which they depend—relationships that are antecedent to them and shape the possibilities for their flourishing.[77] Not only do humans depend upon God for their very being. As embodied creatures, they depend upon the wider created order and on societies within it for food, drink, shelter, clothing, and so on. Having a body embeds humans within this order and occasions dependencies that are constitutive of human life.

2.3.1 Thomas's Interlocutors

In his understanding of God's provisioning for humankind as a whole, Thomas is of course not alone. He is himself part of a much older and deeper line of reflection, which it is beyond the bounds of the present chapter to explore at any length. Many in the early church, drawing not only on scripture but on older Greek and Latin sources, regarded creation as a common gift. For them, it was axiomatic that God created goods like sun, moon, sky, water, wind, land as common—*koina*, *communia*. God makes such goods available and accessible to all.[78] Cyprian of Carthage's words from *Works and Almsgiving* are representative:

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[77] Ibid.

[78] Saint Cyprian, "Works and Almsgiving," in *Treatises*, trans. Roy J. Deferrari, The Fathers of the Church (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1958), 25, PL 4:644. In *Paidagogos (The Instructor)*, Clement of Alexandria describes the way God supplies

> For whatever belongs to God, belongs to all by our appropriation of it, nor is anyone kept from God's benefits and gifts, nor does anything prevent the whole human race from equally enjoying God's goodness and generosity. Thus the day illuminates equally; the sun radiates, the rain moistens; the wind blows, and for those who sleep there is one sleep; and the splendor of the stars and the moon is common. With this example of equality the possessor on the earth who shares his returns and fruits, while he is fair and just with his gratuitous bounties, is an imitator of God the Father.

In his effort to clarify the difference between divine and human *possessio* over the course of these articles, Thomas repeatedly turns to one of these figures from the early church for help: Basil the Great, especially his homily *Destruam horrea mea* ("I Will Tear Down My Barns"). The title of the homily refers to the words of the rich fool as

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humankind with the necessities of life, making "all things for all," such that "everything is common." In *On Naboth* insists that "the earth was established in common for all, rich and poor." Clement of Alexandria, *Paidagogus* §2.12, PG 8:541-544; Ambrose, *On Naboth* §§1.2, 3.11, 12.53. Avila compiles and comments on much of this material in Charles Avila, *Ownership: Early Christian Teaching* (Orbis, 1983). However, at times he tends to read it straightforwardly as a "socialist doctrine" which is in fundamental alignment with modern socialism. An account with even more breadth (but with less depth) is Marcelo de Barros Souza and José Luis Caravias, *Teología de La Tierra* (Madrid: Ediciones Paulinas, 1988). For a brief, general treatment cf. O'Donovan, "Christian Platonism and Non-Proprietary Community," 78–79. On the Greek and Latin influence cf. Arthur O. Lovejoy and George Boas, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); Peter Garnsey, *Thinking about Property: From Antiquity to the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 107–135.

recounted in Luke's Gospel—a passage that became a *locus classicus* for later discussions of covetousness. The following is the parable as Luke recounts it:

> Then Jesus told them a parable: "The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?' Then he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, *Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry*. But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God" (Luke 12:16-21).

As both Basil and Thomas see it, the problem with the *possessio* displayed by the rich fool is not merely, Charles Avila notes, its practical denial of God.[79] The problem is that it parodies God's *possessio*. In Luke's recounting, God asks the fool a single question: "And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" (v. 20). God's question leads Ambrose to observe in his *Exposition of Luke:* "The things we cannot take away with us are not even 'ours.'"[80] Contemplating their eventual demise can help people learn to see themselves rightly, especially the way that if their grip over their possessions does not loosen in life, then death will eventually pry it open. Death will help their possessions achieve their true purpose, which is to reach the hands of others.

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[79] Avila, *Ownership*, 52. Basil puts it this way: "You deny God, since you neither recognize your Creator, nor are grateful to the One who gives these things to you" (§7).
[80] Ambrose, *Exposition of Luke* §7.122

Interestingly, Thomas cites Basil as asking two additional but related questions: "Tell me, what is your own? What did you bring into this life?"[81] The questions highlight the way that for Basil, like Thomas, the fool seeks to establish himself as the organizing center of the universe, treating grain and goods as if he brought them into existence and sustained them in it.

Thomas's comment on the *possessio* of the rich fool is instructive: the fool thinks what he has is his "absolutely" rather than "received from another, namely God."[82] Sin has warped his will and darkened his intellect. He fails to see, according to Basil, that he not only receives himself from God but also "fertile soil, temperate weather, plenty of seeds, cooperation of the animals, and whatever else is required for successful cultivation."[83] He fails to see the way that even land, in multiplying seed into heads of grain for the sower, can be an icon of God's goodness.[84]

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[81] *ST* II-II 66.1 obj. 2. I quote from Basil the Great, "I Will Tear Down My Barns," in *On Social Justice*, trans. C. Paul Schroeder (Crestwood, N.Y: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2009), §7. Informing these questions is surely the one St. Paul poses to the Church at Corinth: "What do you have that you did not receive?" (1 Cor. 4:7). Thomas's citation reads: "Tell me, what are your possessions, and where did you get them from to bring them into your life?"

[82] *ST* II-II 66.1, ad 2.

[83] Basil the Great, "I Will Tear Down My Barns," §1.

[84] Ibid., §3. Cf. Ambrose of Milan, *De Nabuthae (On Naboth): A Commentary with an Introduction and Translation*, §7.37.

The *possessio* for which the fool aspires, in other words, is a parody of God's, the clearest indication of which is the exclusive claim upon what he has. As Basil writes, instead of saying, "I will satisfy the souls of the hungry, I will throw open the gates of my barns and summon all those in need,"[85] he regards land and harvest as given for himself alone, to the exclusion of all others. It is an exclusion, moreover, that ramifies outward. It implicates fields and barns, takes the form of landscape and structure. As Basil puts it, the fool wants nothing to "slip through his fingers" or "trickle down" to others.[86]

The picture emerges of a man being showered by gifts, in vast excess of his needs, but who frenetically works to gather everything for himself alone. He misconstrues himself and his possessions because he misconstrues the world he inhabits. Hence Basil's and Thomas's shared sense that the fool is engaged in the futile attempt to place himself in the position of God, desiring the kind of *possessio* over the nature of things that belongs to God alone.

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[85] Basil the Great, "I Will Tear Down My Barns," §2.
[86] Ibid., §1.

2.3.2 *Possessio*

Having established that human *possessio* is embedded within God's purpose of provisioning sustenance for humankind in common, the next article turns to *possessio* as particular persons exercise it. This is the article from which Leo XIII quotes in *Rerum novarum*, in which Thomas understands human beings to have a twofold competence regarding the goods of creation: the power to procure and dispense, and the power to use. The former, Thomas writes, makes it not only legitimate but also necessary for people to possess goods.[87] But the latter determines the shape of such *possessio*.

Above we elaborated upon the way that, on this view people must learn to see and to hold what they have not for themselves alone but as common. As Basil exhorts the rich fool, "Resolve to treat the things in your possession as belonging to others."[88] Property, even when held by particular persons, does not thereby cease to be common. To possess anything at all is to do so as a member of a wider commons, which is why the hallmark of *possessio* is not exclusivity but inclusivity. On this point, Thomas's understanding of *possessio* and *dominium* must be distinguished from that of his Franciscan contemporaries, who tended to associate these terms with possessive lordship, absolute control, exclusive use, and so on.[89] Once again, we see that these terms are not univocal, and that the line of thought under consideration here contests rather than accepts such associations.

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[87] *ST* II-II 66.2 resp. The reasons he gives are largely taken from Aristotle, *The Politics*, trans. T.A. Sinclair (Penguin Books, 1981), 1262b37–1264b25.
[88] Basil the Great, "I Will Tear Down My Barns," §2.

While the horizon of the commons is humankind itself, sin has broken the unity and scattered humanity. Indeed, the fact that evidence for such unity and commonality are so obscure is itself sin's consequence. Implicit in Thomas's articulation of *possessio* is therefore the disintegrating effects of sin upon human life. That some have goods in vast excess of their needs while others die from lack of them is wholly the consequence of sin. Sin—humankind's long and ongoing refusal to conform its *possessio* to God's—is the only 'reason' for it. Hence in a later article, Thomas finds another rationale for *possessio* by particular persons: “Those who suffer want are so numerous and they cannot all be supplied out of one stock, and this is why it is left to each individual to decide how to manage his own things [*dispensation propriarum rerum*] in such a way as to supply the wants of the suffering.”[90] As Thomas articulates it here, human *possessio* assumes the conditions of sin but also the leaven of mercy—mercy working in and through *possessio* itself. More precisely, Thomas associates *possessio* with the work of justice tempered by mercy—with the work of opening others’ access to what has been closed off to them by sin. Ambrose expresses this well when he writes of a mercy that is also called justice precisely because “the giver knows that God has given all things to all in common—that his sun rises for all, his rain falls on all, and he has given the earth to all.”[91]

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[89] Franks's discussion of differences between Thomas and many Franciscans on *dominium* is helpful in this regard. According to Franks, the Franciscan rejection of *dominium* in the state of innocence had to do with its association with possessive lordship, absolute power of control, exclusive use, and so on. Thomas's own understanding is different. In contrast to the Franciscans, he understands *dominium,* as Franks puts it, "in a more minimal sense as any power—however limited and subordinate—to use goods." *Dominium* is therefore characteristically "limited, social, and defined by the power of use that is necessary to human beings in order to accomplish the purpose of sustenance established for them by the divine order. It is a *dominium* whose contours are defined by a yielding to the prior fabric of natural and social membership that encompasses human beings. In short, this *dominium* is nonproprietary." Franks, *He Became Poor*, 58–59. For a very good exposition of the significance of Franciscan thought in this regard, see Giorgio Agamben, *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-of Life*, trans. Adam Kotsko (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013).

2.3.3 Mercy

This feature of *possessio* becomes particularly clear in almsgiving. According to Thomas, almsgiving embraces all work that seeks to bring about the good of those in need, and so it involves both bodily and other forms of relief.[92] In other words, almsgiving is the work of mercy, and as such, it is the work of all Christians. Moreover, just as all Christians must be merciful, all Christians find themselves in need of mercy.

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[90] *ST* II-II 66.7 resp.

[91] Ambrose, *Commentarium in epistolam II ad Corinthios*, §9,9, PL 17:313-314.

[92] *ST* II-II 32.5.

Indeed, the Christian life itself is founded on God's work of mercy on behalf of the wounded in Christ. The focus here is bodily or corporeal works of mercy, as they are often called, which are largely patterned on Matthew 25:31-46: feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, receive the stranger, visit the sick, ransom prisoners, and bury the dead. Thomas does not take these as exhaustive of mercy's work but as representative of all the necessities—all the lack of basic material support—that afflict humankind as a result of sin.[93]

In the context of mercy, Thomas reiterates the same distinction we saw above between the power to procure and dispense, on the one hand, and the power to use, on the other.[94] The issue under consideration is whether holding property is compatible with the work of mercy, which would seem to entail not holding it but giving it away. As we have seen, Thomas's view is that what people possess is not exclusively theirs with respect to the use of it. They must learn to open what they has to the needs of others, for which the basic criterion is that they must give to the needy what they have over and above their needs. What remains is not theirs to do with as they wish. Though they possess it, it does not belong to them. By justice, it belongs to others, especially those whom sin has deprived of basic material support—whether food, drink, clothing, shelter, and so on. Thomas cites Basil's words: "The bread you are holding back is for the hungry, the clothes you keep put away are for the naked, the shoes that are rotting away with disuse are for those who have none, the silver you keep buried in the earth is for the needy. You are thus guilty of injustice toward as many as you might have aided, and did not."[95]

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[93] *ST* II-II 32.2 ad 2. He also includes leading the blind, supporting the lame, coming to the aid of those who are oppressed.

[94] *ST* II-II 32.2 ad 2.

Again, the point here is not people should lack sufficient food, clothing, and so forth, for their own needs. The point is that they must distinguish between what they need and what they do not, and that what remains after these needs are met is no longer theirs. It belongs to others, specifically those lacking in such goods. Learning to acknowledge the claim that creation is a common gift therefore places considerable demands upon those who hold the world's goods. They are given the difficult and complex work of assessing their own needs and ensuring that what remains finds its way to those to whom it belongs. In this way, the work of returning to others what is theirs necessarily draws possessors out of themselves, towards those who lack basic material support. The difficulty and complexity can also be seen in the way that, as Basil observes in another homily, a person's excess possessions can become a part of her, like members of her own body, such that separation from them can be as painful as the amputation of a limb.[96] But for Basil, the pain is curative. It is like losing the self in order to find it.

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[95] *ST* II-II 66.7 resp. Thomas attributes this passage to Ambrose but it is from Basil the Great, "I Will Tear Down My Barns," §7.

In these and other ways, learning to acknowledge that creation is a common gift begins to manifest the healing and restorative work of grace.[97] The virtue of mercy is itself a gift of God's mercy. Through it, God invites what God has made to participate in repairing the damage sin does to creation, including to themselves. The merciful uniquely see the way God gives the earth to feed, slake, clothe, shelter, and comfort humankind in common. As Ambrose puts it, the merciful regard others as "common partakers of nature, which produces fruits of the earth for the use of all."[98] The cleansing effect of mercy on perception leads Cyprian of Carthage, here drawing on the book of

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[96] Basil the Great, "To the Rich," in *On Social Justice* (Crestwood, N.Y: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2009), §1.

[97] According to Thomas, when humans were in a state of "integrity" (*integritate*) before the fall into sin, they could will and do the good of acquired virtue. The capacity to do so was given by God with the gift of human nature. It was natural to them. Sin, however, diminishes the inclination to virtue and makes it impossible to do all the good of acquired virtue (cf. *ST* I-II 85.1). Because human nature is sick—not vitiated—humans need grace to heal them from sin and restore even the inclination to will and do the good they were created with the capacity to do. Thomas often reverts to medicinal metaphors to describe the healing effects of grace. Humans therefore need grace both to be healed from sin and to be elevated to friendship with God (*ST* I-II 109.2 resp.).

[98] Ambrose, *De officiis ministrorum*, §1.11, PL 16:34-35.

Revelation, to write of it as "the eye-salve of Christ" with which a person's eyes must be anointed in order to see the world as it is.[99]

2.3.4 "Everything is common to all"

As a possible objection to his own position regarding the legitimacy of *possessio* by particular persons, Thomas cites the axiom that, according to natural law, "everything is common to all" (*omnia sunt communia*).[100] The holding of possessions would seem to contradict this commonality.[101] Thomas's response does not oppose this axiom, only a certain construal of its application, namely, that it must necessarily entail the kind of common ownership found, for instance, in monastic orders.[102] Particular property arrangements, he thinks, are not a matter of natural law but of convention. As such, they are contingent and diverse. Thomas calls them "additions" to the natural law.[103] But precisely as additions to natural law, they do not subtract from it. Their purpose is clearly secondary and subordinate, always embedded within and circumscribed by God's gift of creation, in which everything is common to all.

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[99] Saint Cyprian, "Works and Almsgiving," §14. The verses in Revelation are those directed to angel of the church in Laodicea: "For you say, 'I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing.' You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. Therefore I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may be rich; and white robes to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen; and salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see" (Rev 3:17-18). The cleansing effect of mercy on perception is likewise a major theme of the Basilian homilies collected in *On Social Justice*.

[100] The relevant texts from Gratian's *Decretum* read: "The Law of Nature stands apart from Custom and Ordinance. *For by the Law of Nature everything is shared by everyone*. This is believed to have been observed not only by those of whom it is written: 'Among the multitude of believers there was one heart and soul,' etc., but it is also found in an earlier tradition handed down by philosophers. In Plato that polity is said to be most justly ordered in which each person does not know his own attachments. By contrast, by the Law of Custom and Ordinance, this is mine, while that is another's" (Dist. 8, col. 12). And: "Many authorities pronounce that clergy should possess nothing … *All men ought to have the use in common of all that is in this world*. It is through the iniquity that one thing came to be called one man's and another thing another's" (*Causa* 12, qu. 1, col. 676-677). Quoted in Garnsey, *Thinking about Property: From Antiquity to the Age of Revolution*, 81.

[101] *ST* II-II 66.2 obj. 1.

Perhaps another way to put the point is that Thomas takes it as a given that the axiom everything is common to all is more perfectly approximated by monastics and clerics whose way of life models itself upon the first Christians who gathered in Jerusalem—those who "had all things in common," and who sold their possessions and distributed the proceeds "as any had need" (Acts 2:44-45, cf. 4:31-35).[104] While such communities might be the best witnesses to a form of life in which everything is common to all, they are not the only witness to it. For instance, we have been examining how the work of mercy, which is incumbent upon all Christians, is likewise ordered by such an understanding. Thomas's purpose, then, is to envision how those who have the world's goods can likewise learn to acknowledge creation as common gift. For they too are summoned to communion, called to be perfected by the charity of Christ.[105]

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[102] *ST* II-II 66.2 resp.

[103] *ST* II-II 66.2 ad. 1.

[104] *ST* II-II 66.2 sed contra. On the day of Pentecost those who repented at Peter's preaching were baptized. The passage reads: "All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need" (Act 2:44-45). Later, Acts describes the Christian community as being filled with the Holy Spirit, of which the following way of life was the fruit: "Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person

2.3.5 Thievery

Toward the end of his discussion, Thomas once again turns to Basil's homily on Luke 12 to specify the character of human *possessio*, citing Basil's observation that those

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among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need" (Act 4:31-35).

[105] This sense is bolstered by the *sed contra* of the article, in which Thomas cites Augustine's critique of the so-called "apostolic." As their name suggests, the apostolic model themselves upon the Christian community Acts describes. But in the process of doing so, they exclude from their fellowship those who possess property (along with those who marry). The problem, as Thomas sees it, is not that they hold their goods in common (or choose celibacy for that matter). The problem is that in their embrace of common ownership and celibacy they exclude others from their fellowship. They "cut themselves off from the Church," Thomas writes, because they allege that those who possess property "have no hope of salvation." Cf. *ST* II-II 66.2 sed contra. In other words, Thomas defends the hope that those who possess property might likewise be saved.

like the rich man who enjoy exclusively what is given for the benefit of all in common "seize common goods before others have the opportunity, then claim them as their own by right of preemption." Basil compares them to those who take a seat in a theatre and then prevent others from attending and watching the performance.[106] Thomas agrees with Basil's concern. He simply clarifies the conception of *possessio* implicit in it. As Thomas sees it, the crucial issue regarding *possessio* is not the taking but the character of the taking. There is no problem for people to take from what is common in order to satisfy their needs. To continue with Basil's theatre image: people might go to the play and take seats, allowing others to do the same. They might come to see that the performance is a good best enjoyed not alone in an empty theater but together with others. In this case, acknowledgement of the commons shapes the character of the taking. As Thomas puts it, some might arrive first, not in order to hoard the seats and to block entry, but “to get things ready for others,” busying themselves with making preparations so that all might enjoy the performance.[107] Or to elaborate still further upon the image: when faced with the clamoring for seats while some hoard and block entry, others might very well renounce their seat altogether in order to make room. The important point is that while Thomas indeed defends *possessio*, its characteristic mark is inclusion, making room.[108] To refuse the use and management of property in the common interest is nothing but “violent expropriation.”[109]

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[106] *ST* II-II 66.2 obj. 2. Cf. Basil the Great, "I Will Tear Down My Barns," §7. The theatre image is not original to Basil. It appears in Cicero, Seneca, Epictetus, among others. Basil's use of it is therefore grafted onto these older narratives about humankind's original state. For these older narratives, the principal concern is how to mark the transition from the original state of common property to private property and especially of the legitimacy of *occupation* or first acquisition. Cf. Cicero's *On Ends* (§3.67); Seneca's *On Benefits* (§7.2). But even in *On Ends*, Cicero quotes from an older source from whom there are no remaining treatises: Chrysippus. On the image's Stoic background, cf. A.A. Long, "Stoic Philosophers on Persons, Property-Ownership, and Community," in *Aristotle and After* (London: Institute of Classical Studies, 1997). On the use of the image more generally cf. Garnsey, *Thinking about Property: From Antiquity to the Age of Revolution*, 113–117, 132, 137, 216.

Violent expropriation comes more clearly into view in the article on theft, which Thomas, following Aristotle and Isidore, defines as the surreptitious taking of another’s property, as opposed to robbery, in which the taking is not surreptitious but in the open.[110] Thomas cites Basil’s claim that “it is just as wrong to take something from somebody else as it is to refuse to give to the needy when you are in plenty and could do so."[111] An adequate understanding of thievery must include such refusal. Once again, Thomas is in fundamental agreement with Basil. "Retaining what one owes another," Thomas writes, "does the same sort of harm as taking something from another, and this is why unjustifiable taking must be held to include unjustifiable retention."[112] Keeping for one's own exclusive use what belongs to others in justice is a kind of thievery.

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[107] *ST* II-II 66.2 ad. 2.

[108] *ST* II-II 66.2 ad. 2. Basil the Great, “I Will Tear Down My Barns,” §7.

[109] *ST* II-II 66.2 ad. 3. Here Thomas is quoting a passage from Gratian’s *Decretum*, which he attributes to Ambrose but is in fact from Basil the Great. In it, Basil condemns those who “charge more than the expenses warrant.” The context of the articles on theft and robbery we are considering concern vices opposed to commutative justice (cf. *ST* II-II 64 pref.), that is, vices opposed to the mutual dealings between people (cf. *ST* II-II 61.1). In the article under consideration, Thomas, like Basil, regards buying as cheaply as possible while selling as dear as possible to be a violation of such justice.

[110] *ST* II-II 66.3-4.

On this account of *possessio*, then, there are two distinct but related conceptions of thievery involved that must be held together. The first is the more commonplace view of the thief who takes in secret what is possessed by another. The second is a subtle form of thievery, epitomized by Basil's theatregoer, who occupies the seats and refuses entry to others.[113] Basil articulates it in the following passage, in which he addresses the rich fool and the covetous more generally:

> Who are the greedy? Those who are not satisfied with what suffices for their own needs. Who are the thieves?[114] Those who take for themselves

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[111] Again, Thomas takes this passage from the *Decretum* and erroneously attributes it to Ambrose. *ST* II-II 66.3 obj. 2.
[112] *ST* II-II 66.3 ad. 2.
[113] Such a view casts in a different light the whole issue in property law and theory of *occupatio* or first acquisition. See Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler, "The Six Sermons," in *The Social Teachings of Wilhem Emmanuel von Ketteler* (Washington, D.C: University Press of America, 1981), 16.
[114] The word Basil uses here to designate the thief are derivations of the Greek *apostereó*, which means to defraud, or to deprive of. The English translations I have at my disposal translate it as robber. Avila, *Ownership*, 50; Basil the Great, "I Will Tear Down My Barns," §7.

> what rightfully belongs to everyone. And you, are you not greedy? Are you not a thief? The things you received in trust as a stewardship, have you not appropriated for yourself? Is not the person who strips another of clothing called a thief? And those who do not clothe the naked when they have the power to do so, should they not be called the same?[115]

The lines that immediately follow are those we have already cited above about the bread held back being for the hungry, the clothes stored away for the naked, the unused shoes for the discalced, and so on. Once again, it is important not to dismiss Basil's words, because they arise directly from the account of creation as common gift that we have been examining in this chapter and the previous one. Among other things, they show the extent to which sin distorts human *possessio* as it is commonly practiced. Those who take in excess of what they need—those who take in ways that refuse to hold open what they have to the needs of others—are like thieves. But as we have already seen, the thievery under consideration, which is neither penalized by nor always visible to positive law, is distinct from commonplace conceptions of thievery, which are.

Note also the way this passage closely associates covetousness (*pleonexia*)—which Nietzsche translated as "having and wanting to have more (*haben und mehrwollhaben*)," acquisitiveness as such[116]—with thievery. It is a strange association for modern sensibilities. But what it indicates is that the problem Basil identifies is not just having and wanting more—taking too much in the abstract. Rather, the problem is taking too much of what God has also given for those who lack basic material support. Hence the violation of justice and the charge of thievery. In *On Naboth*, which itself draws heavily on Basil's homilies, Ambrose puts the matter this way: "You [the rich fool, the covetous] keep for yourself what God wished to grow for the many through you."[117] Such taking rejects the fellowship that it is property's purpose to support. The person fails to conform her possessions and herself to the original communality of creation and God's stated purpose in providing "every plant yielding seed" and "every tree which has fruit yielding seed": that it be "food for you" (Gen. 1:29), where 'you' is the entirety of humankind.

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[115] Thomas attributes this passage to Ambrose in *ST* II-II 66.7 resp. I am quoting it as it appears in Basil the Great, "I Will Tear Down My Barns," §7.
[116] Quoted in MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 137.

2.3.6 Law of Necessity

Thomas offers another angle on this matter in his discussion of whether theft is legitimate in cases of necessity. Above we saw that, according to natural law, "everything is common to all" (*omnia sunt communia*). Moreover, we saw that Thomas regards particular property arrangements as a matter not of natural law but of human convention, which marks them with a certain sense of contingency.[118] In discussing whether theft is legitimate in cases of necessity, Thomas once gain cites a variant of the above axiom: that "in the case of necessity everything is common" (*in necessitate sunt omnia communia*)—the law of necessity or the law by which those in need can take from what others have in abundance.[119]

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[117] Ambrose of Milan, *De Nabuthae (On Naboth): A Commentary with an Introduction and Translation*, §7.37.

Thomas argues that humans depend on the wider created order in order to meet their needs, which it is the purpose of property arrangements to foster. Moreover, whatever a person has above her needs belongs by natural law to the needy, and he once again quotes Basil's words about excess bread belonging to the hungry, clothing to the naked, and shoes to the discalced in making the point. From this, Thomas draws the conclusion that a person who in extreme need either thieves or robs is justified in doing so.[120]

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[118] Cf. Marcus Lefébure's comments about the contingency of such arrangements in *ST* II-II 66.7, note a., which I discuss briefly below.

[119] *ST* II-II 66.7. For more on medieval debates about the *ius necessitatis*, cf. Tierney, *The Idea of Natural Rights: Studies on Natural Rights, Natural Law, and Church Law*, 69–77; Virpi Mäkinen, "Rights and Duties in Late Scholastic Discussion on Extreme Necessity," in *Transformations in Medieval and Early-Modern Rights Discourse*, vol. 56, The New Synthese Historical Library (AA Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, 2006). According to Prümmer, moral theology manuals often distinguish between distinct senses of need: common, in which a person can rely upon the immediate family to meet need; grave, in which the person cannot; and finally, extreme, in which the person similarly cannot rely upon the immediate family but also in which the person's life is in danger without help. Dominic Prümmer, *Handbook of Moral Theology* (New York: P.J. Kennedy and Sons, 1957), 99. For a contemporary recovery of it, which I discuss at greater length below, cf. *Gaudium et spes*, which explicitly articulates the way that "in necessity everything is common" (*in necessitate sunt omnia communia) (§69).*

Observe that Thomas's position is not, as the framing of the article would seem to suggest, that people *can justifiably steal in cases of necessity*. Rather, his position is that in doing so *they are not even thieves or robbers*. The point is absolutely crucial. Simply put, the descriptions 'thief' and 'robber' are inaccurate because in such a case there is, in Thomas's words, "strictly speaking no theft or robbery."[121] Why not? Because those in question do not in fact take what belongs to others. They take what belongs to them but what others presently possess. They take, as Thomas puts it, what "necessity has made common" (*necessitatem sibi factam commune*).[122] Their necessity has made what they need to support their lives their own, and their actions simply facilitate such support when it is otherwise lacking—when, for instance, the particular property arrangements of the locale or the *possessio* of particular property holders fail them. Moreover, those who need the goods need not ask for consent, for the goods belong to them. Need makes the goods common, irrespective of consent. Once again, we see that the claim of need is the most basic and fundamental claim that human creatures have upon the created order and even taking precedence over the claims of property owners upon their possessions.

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[120] *ST* II-II 66.7.
[121] *ST* II-II 66.7 resp.
[122] *ST* II-II 66.7 sed contra.

I do not mean to overstate Thomas's position on this matter. Such taking, as Thomas envisions it, is clearly a last resort and should only happen in extreme cases.[123] If people were to behave like this all the time, Thomas observes, societies would be "undone."[124] Nevertheless, in these considerations, we see that, as Marcus Lefébure puts it, "a particular human system of distribution of [the world's goods] may be, as it were, resolved back into the primitive state of undifferentiated community in the case of blatant and extreme necessity."[125] We see, in other words, how particular property arrangements are subordinate to the common gift of creation, and how the circumvention of such arrangements can witness to God's purpose for them.

How do we think of such arrangements when extreme cases are not occasional but commonplace? Or when property arrangements and particular property holders structurally and institutionally fail to return to others what is theirs? Or when the advance of a certain kind of order undoes property for the many? As we have already begun to see, these questions are raised by *Rerum novarum*. But an important line of magisterial thinking that follows it likewise takes them up. It is to this line that we now turn.

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[123] *ST* II-II 66.7 resp.
[124] *ST* II-II 66.6 resp.
[125] *ST* II-II 66.7, note a.

2.4. Beyond Rerum novarum

2.4.1 The "twofold character of ownership"

Leo's *Rerum novarum* does not answer all the questions it raises. But the ongoing process on the part of Leo's successors of returning to these questions—addressing some, leaving others to the side, and raising additional ones—constitutes the Church's social doctrine as a tradition handed down through time, developing by way of clarity and application.

In commemorating the fortieth anniversary of *Rerum novarum*, Pius XI in *Quadragesimo anno* refers to a "doctrine on the social and economic question" that he inherits from Leo. He states that his purpose is to clarify, to defend, and to develop it. But above all, it is "to give thanks" for it (§15, cf. §§14-16). Pius receives a gift given to "the Church and to human society" by Leo, who himself received what he gave from others. In promulgating *Quadragesimo anno,* Pius therefore witnesses to what it means to receive such a gift by involving himself in work of handing it over to others. In this particular case, the complexity and the enormity of the task of handing over a teaching whose purpose is to transfigure lives should not be underestimated. Even within the precincts of the Church, it is never completely removed from the risk of betrayal and misunderstanding.[126]

When Pius XI turns to the topic of ownership in *Quadragesimo anno*, he is attempting to clarify certain features of his predecessor's teaching that have been misunderstood, and to reaffirm and apply it anew in light of developments since it was written. In this section, my purpose is to consider the line of commentary *Rerum novarum* inaugurates. Specifically, I want to examine it in terms of what Pius XI in *Quadragesimo anno* calls "the twofold character of ownership"—ownership's personal and social senses—and its relation to creation understood as common gift.

At the outset of his treatment of ownership in *Quadragesimo anno*, Pius XI addresses the accusations of those who regard the Church "as if she had taken and were still taking the side of the rich against the non-owning workers" (§44) and consequently inserting a "pagan" conception of ownership into her teachings (§46).[127] Apparently this is how *Rerum novarum*'s defense of property was read by some. But Pius XI contends that Leo neither denies nor questions “the twofold character of ownership” (*duplicem dominii rationem*). What Pius XI means by this phrase is ownership’s personal and social character, depending upon whether it considers particular persons or the common good.

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[126] We see an indication of this, for instance, when Pius mention of all those within the Church who continue to bow down before the "idol" of capitalism that *Rerum novarum* smashed (§14, cf. §30),

[127] In these sections, Pius XI is primarily concerned about how particular persons and families hold what they have (§76). Elsewhere in the encyclical, he acknowledges the existence and importance of other forms of property, for instance, public property (§114), and even the proximity of certain strands of socialism to the Church's own understanding of property and its purpose (§§113-115).

The twofold character of ownership is another description for what we have been discussing throughout this chapter. It is a distinction within ownership itself, which has to do with the way that ownership concerns not only peoples’ support for themselves and their dependeants but also the way “the goods which the Creator destines for the entire human family may through this institution truly serve this purpose” (§45). Ownership, on this view, entails “inherent duties” with regard to common use (§47),[128] which have everything to do with the way that “the earth, even though apportioned among private owners, ceases not thereby to minister to the needs of all” (§56, cf. *Rerum novarum* §8). The language Pius XI uses to integrate the personal and social character of ownership should by now be familiar: in her possession and use of things, people must not simply consider their “own advantage” but at the same time the “common good” (§49).

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[128] Here Pius reiterates the distinction Leo takes from Thomas, namely, that the right to property is distinct from its use. Pius associates the former with commutative justice, which entails respect for the “division of possessions,” forbidding “invasion” of others’ rights. He associates the latter with other virtues, especially social justice (cf. §§57, 58, 71, 74, 88, 101, 110, 126). In this way, Pius insists ownership and use have distinct “boundaries” that must be kept in view (§47).

As indicated above, the twofold character is therefore a distinction *within* ownership itself, a point that is important to emphasize given the tendency among some interpreters of this line of thinking to construe distinction as a division, thereby subtly but unmistakably envisioning ownership as essentially private and its relation to the common destination of created goods as if it were an extrinsic feature of it. Albino Barrera, for instance, suggests as much in an otherwise extremely thorough and careful treatment of the topic, when he writes that *Quadragesimo anno* follows *Rerum novarum*'s defense of the right to private property, "counterbalancing" it by reiterating the conviction that God gives the earth to meet the needs of all.[129]

The term 'counterbalance' is misleading in this context, for it suggests two separate weights, forces, or influences, which offset or check one another. The problem is that there is no need to counterbalance what Pius XI writes about ownership with the claim that creation is common gift because they are not separate principles. As we have been examining throughout this chapter, the affirmation that creation is common gift concerns the very notion of ownership itself, how people learn to consider what they possess as common. Ownership's twofold character therefore does not consist of separate principles that must be offset, checked, or balanced. Rather, as Pius XI emphasizes throughout this discussion, both the personal and the social character are *internal* to ownership itself, which is why they cannot be prised apart in the ways both capitalism and socialism attempt to do.[130]

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[129] Barrera, *Modern Catholic Social Documents and Political Economy*, 197.

Indeed, even proponents of the line of reflection we have been examining speak as if what is called for is, in effect, a complex balancing act, in which the right to private property, which is essentially private, must be limited and circumscribed by the social character of property. The picture that often emerges is that of discrete rights in inherent tension with one another that must be adjudicated. Though proponents acknowledge creation's common destiny, they often do so in ways that subtly imagine property first and foremost as private, consequently generating the conundrum as to how to coordinate property thus understood with the commons.[131]

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[130] In *Quadragesimo anno*, Pius regards both liberalism and socialism alike as the product of a modernism that separates the twofold character of ownership. As Pius sees it, liberals emphasize the individual and the socialists exclusively emphasize the social. The former Pius calls "Manchesterian Liberals," who hold that the law of capital is to appropriate everything to itself and leave workers with only enough to sustain their ability to work—a way of thinking, Pius notes, that has in the modern world increasingly taken institutional form (§54). In contrast, socialists seek to remedy this state of affairs by flipping the liberal position on its head. They claim that all products and profits belong not to owners but to workers (§55). Thus, the denial of property's social character results in what Pius calls "individualism," while the denial of property's personal character results in "collectivism" (§46). Both therefore misconstrue the way that, as Pius puts it, quoting *Rerum novarum*, "However the earth may be apportioned among private owners, it does not cease to serve the common interests of all" (§56, cf. *Rerum novarum* §8).

Consider the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace's 1997 document, *Toward a Better Distribution of Land,* which addresses the "scandalous situations of property and land use, present on almost all continents" ('Presentation'). In attempting to articulate an account of ownership that is distinct from Blackstone's, the authors consistently write of the need to place "limits" on the "right of ownership" (§§25, 30). In one case, they tellingly cite as instances of such limits the bans in Leviticus and Deuteronomy on picking the fruit of a tree during its four years (cf. Lev. 19:23-25), reaping to the edges of the field, and gathering the fruit and grain that has been overlooked or has fallen to the ground (cf. Lev. 19:9-10, 23:22; Deut. 24:19-22)—abuses that lead to Isaiah's condemnation of those who "join house to house, who add field to field" (5:8) (§25).

As with the language of counterbalance above, the language that *Toward a Better Distribution of Land* employs about placing limits on the right of ownership misleads because it fails to appreciate that notions like property and ownership are not univocal, and that what is at stake is precisely what property is. The document's description gives the impression of discrete property rights—some individual and others social—which are in tension with one another and must be reconciled. Property is imagined as essentially private, and the social function as if it acts on property from the outside, circumscribing and limiting it.[132]

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[131] Spieker is typical in this regard. With regard to the natural right to private property, on the one hand, and the universal destination of goods on the other, he writes that "it is not easy to determine their proper relationship." The private and the social must be balanced, and care must be taken not to swing too much in one way or the other. Manfred Spieker, "The Universal Destination of Goods: The Ethics of Property in the Theory of a Christian Society," *Journal of Markets & Morality* 8, no. 2 (2005): 333.

But if we turn briefly to the scriptural texts under consideration, we see that they betray no notion of property or ownership that is solid or secure enough that it could be subsequently limited or constrained by an outside force. God tells the children of Israel not to harvest to the edges of their fields or to strip them bare, for what remains belongs to the poor, the alien, the orphan, and the widow. They are told to remember that the God who gives land and its fruits is the same God who has called them out of slavery in Egypt and who seeks a life with them. These laws have been given, in other words, to them to help them learn what it means that their land and their harvests are gifts from God—given to draw them deeper into God's life. Therefore, to seek to accumulate land by joining house to house and adding field to field, or to use the fruits of the land in a way that reaps to the fields' edges and strips them bare, is not to fail to place the proper limits on ownership. It is to fail to own at all. It is to deprive the poor, the alien, the orphan, and the widow from what is theirs, which is perhaps why the verses after the ban on reaping to the edges of the fields in Leviticus move immediately into the topic of thievery (cf. Lev. 19:11).

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[132] *Toward a Better Distribution of Land* is not always consistent in this regard. Elsewhere the document states that the sociality of property is "directly and naturally inherent in goods and their destination" (§30)

The shape of the line of reflection under consideration is therefore more complex than it often appears. Expositing it requires considerable care in the use of language, particularly in terms of the relationship between, in *Gaudium et spes's* words, the way the goods that people legitimately possess are not simply their own but are also common.[133] Again, the claim is not that commonality is an extrinsic feature upon an understanding of property that is first and foremost private. The claim is that commonality is intrinsic to what property is—to what it means for property to be property at all—and that owners are always already part of a commons, which they must learn to acknowledge in the ways they hold what they have.

As John Paul II writes in the encyclical *Laborem exercens* (1981) on the ninetieth anniversary of *Rerum novarum*, the Church's understanding of the right to ownership or property is distinct from capitalism's precisely in that the Church understands this right not as “absolute and untouchable” but as embedded “within the broader context of the right common to all to use the goods of the whole of creation” (§14). When the Church speaks of the right to property, she always speaks of it as internal and subordinate to the right of all. It is an entailment of the right of all, and as such, its status is wholly derivative.

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[133] Along similar lines, *TBDL* affirms "individual appropriation" of goods, while at the same time acknowledging the "need to ensure that all persons always and in every circumstance enjoy the goods of the earth" (§29).

Indeed, the language of subsequent teaching continues to emphasize the sociality intrinsic to all property. Seventy years after *Rerum novarum*, John XXIII writes in his encyclical *Mater et magistra* (1961) that the right of private ownership “naturally entails a social obligation (*munus*),” which means “it is a right which must be exercised not only for one’s own personal benefit but also for the benefit of others” (§19). In *Mater et magistra,* John is particularly concerned with emphasizing, in his words, the “social function inherent in the right of private ownership” (*in privati dominii iure penitus munus inesse sociale*) (§119, cf. 120). In doing so, John, as well as the line of thinking more generally, repeatedly draws on the language of *munus,* which implies both rights and duties at one and the same time.[134] What is at stake, in other words, is not the assertion of an abstract, free-floating entitlement to ownership but the way ownership is part of a larger vision of sociality itself.[135]

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[134] For more on the language of *munus* and *munera*, cf. Russell Hittinger, “Social Roles and Ruling Virtues in Catholic Social Doctrine,” *Annales Theologici*, 385-408, 16 (2002).

2.4.2 Social Mortgage

Recall from the previous chapter Romero's contention that the concern for landlessness, as well as workers' wages and ability to organize, is the concern of "Puebla and the popes." There we also saw that in his opening address at Puebla, John Paul II uses a striking phrase to describe the derivative status of ownership when he says that according to the Church's teaching, "all private property bears a social mortgage" (*sobre toda propiedad privada grava una hipoteca social)*.[136] At this point in the address, John is articulating the specific shape of the Church's commitment to justice and how it is constitutive to her evangelizing mission, because the Church must respond to the disinherited with whom her Lord identifies (Mt 25:31ff). John Paul is speaking of Church's "constant preoccupation" with the question of property,[137] explicitly mentioning Ambrose's *On Naboth* and Thomas Aquinas's *Summa theologiae*, as well as "the social encyclicals of the recent popes."[138]

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[135] Cf. for instance "Discourse of His Holiness Pius XII to Commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Encyclical Rerum Novarum of Pope Leo XIII on the Social Question," 221–222. As Pius XII sees it, facilitating common use through property is indispensable to the promotion of human dignity, the growth in the virtues, and human flourishing, which flows from the acknowledgement that the goods sought by such facilitation can only be held in common.

[136] The English translation of John Paul II's speech contains the phrase "social obligation." However, the Spanish translation—the language of John Paul's address—contains "social mortgage." In his comments on John Paul's message, Romero speaks of a social mortgage. John Paul II, "Address at the Opening of the Third General Conference of the Latin-American Bishops," in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, vol. 71 (Puebla, Mexico, 1979).

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[137] In this connection, John Paul says in the same address, "This voice of the Church, which echoes the voice of human conscience, and which never ceased to resonate through the centuries in the midst of the most varied social and cultural systems and conditions, deserves and needs to be heard in our time also, when the growing wealth of the few parallels the growing poverty of the masses." I worry that these words suggest a uniformity of the Church's teaching voice regarding these matters that is simply not the case. Moreover, the passage itself seems to suggest as much. Does it not suggest that in John Paul's own time, the Church's teaching on property does not resonate? Or that it has not resonated? If it has resonated as he says, why he is addressing the bishops about "the growing wealth of the few parallels the growing poverty of the masses"? John Paul concludes the passage above with a call to the bishops gathered to return to work in this field. The need to return to the field implies that they have left it. Where did they go? Moreover, does not the widening gap between wealth and poverty in these lands—lands long ago evangelized in blood and fire—suggest that the failure is not simply a failure to hear the Church's voice but also a deeper failure? Perhaps it has something to do with the very constancy of the preoccupation on the part of the Church and her members? In the Puebla document, the bishops themselves admit as much, speaking of their own need for a divestiture of privileges and wealth, as well as for greater simplicity of lifestyle (§975).

[138] John Paul II, "Address at the Opening of the Third General Conference of the Latin-American Bishops."

Over the course of his pontificate, John Paul repeatedly uses the phrase 'social mortgage.'[139] The word 'mortgage' is of French provenance and literally means 'dead pledge' (*mort gaige*). It is the creation of interest in property by a debtor to a creditor as security for a debt, and it takes place on the condition that the interest in the property 'dies' either when the debt is paid or when payment fails. What is crucial to the way John Paul uses this phrase, however, is that it suggests the social mortgage on property—the obligation to fulfill the debt—never dies. Or at least it does not die not in the ordinary sense. The pledge remains even after legal debts are paid or foreclosed upon. It inheres in property *in se*—in what it means for property to be property. It is a pledge, we might say, that binds all property to the flourishing of others—a flourishing property holders must acknowledge in their holding of it.[140]

The teaching on property John Paul articulates in this passage figures prominently in the final Puebla document, which discusses the social mortgage on property in relation to the way, in Puebla's words, "the goods and the wealth of the world" are given by God for the "use and the advantage of all" (§492; see also §§1224, 1271, 1281).[141] Such use and advantage, which is simply the claim need, is the most "fundamental" claim creatures have on created goods—a claim that is "absolutely inviolable," the "first purpose" of property (§492). All other claims—whether of private property as enshrined in law or free trade—are subordinate to it (§492).[142] Puebla strictly opposes any construal of property as "absolute or unlimited" (§492), which it calls nothing but an idol (§§494-497).[143]

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[139] Cf. for instance *Sollicitudo rei socialis §42;* "Ad Limina Address to a Group of Polish Bishops," L'Osservatore Romano, December 18, 1987. *For a general overview of the John Paul II's use of the phrase see* Edward J. O'Boyle, "Blessed John Paul II on Social Mortgage: Origins, Questions, and Norms," Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture 17, no. 2 (2014): 118–35.

[140] While it is true that this mortgage does not die in the ordinary sense, there is a death in view: it is the death of the property holders themselves, and with it, the impossibility of taking their treasure with them to the dust.

2.4.3 Pius XII

I have been trying to provide a brief overview of how the line of reflection that follows *Rerum novarum* preserves its understanding of property and possession. The horizon of property's social function is God's common gift of the earth to humankind as a whole. René Laurentin has suggested that this aspect of the Church's teaching on property was abandoned in the sixteenth century, only reappearing in 1965 with

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[141] All citations from Puebla can be found in Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano, *Río de Janeiro, Medellín, Puebla, Santo Domingo*.

[142] In this connection, Puebla mentions the "lack of structural reforms in agriculture," which aggravates the conditions of the *campesinado* and prevents their "access to land" to cultivate (§68).

[143] Although it is an idol, Puebla does admit that it is one to which all the nations of Latin America are in thrall (§§494-497, 542-557).

Gaudium et spes.[144] But as I have attempted to show in this chapter, creation understood as common gift informs and structures the teaching of *Rerum novarum* and the line that follows it. However, in the writings and messages of Pius XII and beyond,[145] explicit articulation of and reflection upon the axiom of creation as common gift comes to the fore in a new way. We encounter an increasing insistence upon private property's derivative status—the way it is both internal and subordinate to creation's common destination.

Perhaps the most important of Pius's formulations along these lines is from his encyclical *Sertum laetitiae* (1939). In addressing the so-called 'social question' and widespread class conflict, Pius, like his predecessors, highlights the role of the maldistribution of land and its fruits in both the generation and the exacerbation of conflict. In describing the sources of the conflict, he states that "the fundamental point of the social question" is that "the goods created by God for all peoples should in the same way reach all, justice guiding and charity helping" (*cuius praecipuum caput id exigit, ut bona, quae pro hominibus universis Deus creavit, aequa ratione ad omnes affluant, iustitia duce,*

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[144] René Laurentin, *Liberation, Development, and Salvation* (Orbis Books, 1972), 94–101.
[145] Though Pius XII issued no major encyclical on the so-called social question, he delivered many addresses to farmers and workers over the course of his pontificate. Detailed treatment of them can be found in Habiger, *Papal Teaching on Private Property (1891-1981)*, 146–196; Rupert J. Ederer, *Pope Pius XII on the Economic Order* (Lanham Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2011).

caritate comite) (§34). During Pius's pontificate and beyond, the same or at least a very similar formulation continues to recur. The axiom that creation is common gift increasingly comes to be seen as, in Pius's words, the "fundamental point of the social question." John Paul II will later call it "the first principle of the whole ethical and social order,"[146] "the characteristic principle of Christian social doctrine."[147]

The pairing of justice with charity also recurs. In the absence of justice, the virtue of charity and its act of mercy become paramount. As we have seen, creation as common gift concerns above all the virtue of justice—an understanding that informs Gregory the Great's remark in *Regula pastoralis* that "when we attend to the needs of those in want, we give them what is theirs, not ours. More than performing works of mercy, we are paying a debt of justice" (§3.21).[148] In pairing justice with charity in this way, however, Pius calls attention to the centrality of charity and its act of mercy in the pursuit of justice. Along these lines, in his 1942 Christmas address Pius speaks of the relation between charity and justice in terms of complementarity and "synthesis." Justice "clears the way" for charity. Charity and mercy, in turn, make justice "less stern" and elevate it, such that even in the midst of injustice what Pius calls "community of life" is possible.[149]

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[146] Laborem exercens §19.

[147] Sollicitudo rei socialis §42.

[148] Gregory the Great, *Regula pastoralis,* §3.21

The implication is that in a creation groaning from the weight of injustice, what is in excess of justice is required to fulfill the demands of justice. Nevertheless, justice remains the guide. The virtues of charity and mercy help it to find its way. They transfigure and perfect justice without dissolving it. The justice in view is therefore one with which charity and mercy are intimate, which they suffuse. But attending to the needs of those in want remains a matter of justice because in so attending, to restate Ambrose, the giver acknowledges that "God has given all things to all in common—that his sun rises for all, his rain falls on all, and he has given the earth to all."[150]

As we saw in the previous chapter, this formulation from *Sertum laetitiae* finds its way into *Gaudium et spes's* teaching on property, which we will turn to again shortly. It likewise structures Pius XII's remarks on "the use of material goods" in his 1941 Pentecost message, which commemorates the fiftieth anniversary of the "epoch making"

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[149] Pius XII, *Radiomessaggio Di Sua Santitá Pio XII Alla Vigilia Del Santo Natale*, 1942. The motto of Pius XII's pontificate was *opus justitiae pax*.

[150] Ambrose, *Commentarium in epistolam II ad Corinthios* §9,9, PL 17:313-314. The view being articulated here is therefore not what concerns Pius XI in *Quadragesimo anno* in his critique of those speak as if charity alone could "veil the violation of justice," and as if "the whole care of supporting the poor" could be "committed to charity alone" (§4). According to Pius XI, a charity that neglects justice is a false conception of charity.

Rerum novarum.[151] Pius regards the encyclical's teaching on property and human sustenance to be among its most important legacies—a teaching, he adds, that has not lost its relevance or urgency with the passage of time.[152] Moreover, Pius retains the emphasis on the access to productive property in land—in Pius's words, "the holding in which the family lives, and from the products of which it draws all or part of its subsistence"—and the benefits following from it.[153] According to Pius, *Rerum novarum*'s "basic idea" regarding these matters is that "the goods created by God for all peoples should in the same way reach all, justice guiding and charity helping."[154]

Correlative to the prioritization of the axiom of creation as common gift, we can discern related shifts in the language Pius employs to speak about property. As we have already seen, his predecessors speak of a right to property or a right to ownership to describe the fundamental right in question. In contrast, Pius XII prefers to speak of "the fundamental right to make use of the material goods of the earth" or "the native right to the use of material goods," which belongs to all people.[155] In *Populorum progressio*, Paul

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[151] "Discourse of His Holiness Pius XII to Commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* of Pope Leo XIII on the Social Question," 221.
[152] Ibid., 220–221.
[153] Ibid., 224.
[154] Ibid., 220–221.
[155] Pius XII often uses the phrase right of use, for instance, in his 1942 and 1952 Christmas Messages. However, at other points he follows the language of his

VI will suggestively call this "the right to glean" (§22). As Jean-Yves Calvez and Jacques Perrin helpfully show, Pius is simply restating the position of his predecessors but now with the category of use rather than the category of property or ownership.[156] He operates with the same basic distinction, namely, between the fundamental right of property or ownership, on the one hand, and the actualizations of that right in particular property arrangements, on the other. Therefore, just as Leo XIII's right to property or Pius XI's right to ownership must be distinguished from particular institutions of property or ownership, so too must Pius XII's right to make use of material goods be distinguished from them as well.

I think it best to read these shifts as the Church's ongoing effort to clarify her claim that creation is a common gift, from which the entirety of her teaching about property derives. They should also be read as the Church's effort to distinguish her teaching about property from property as capitalism understands it. On this latter point, in his 1944 address Pius XII calls capitalism's conception of property "totally false" (*tutto*

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predecessors, speaking of the right of ownership, for instance, in his 1 September 1944 message, or the right to property in his 14 September 1952 message, accepting these statements without qualification.

[156] Jean-Yves Calvez and Jacques Perrin, *The Church and Social Justice: The Social Teaching of the Popes from Leo XIII to Pius XII (1878-1958)* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1961), cf. 194–200.

falso) because by it property arrogates to itself an "unlimited right," refusing "any subordination to the common good."[157] Common use is the fundamental imperative from which all other considerations regarding property follow. In *Mater et magistra*, John XXIII reads Pius XII in precisely these terms, writing that his predecessor taught the primacy of common use, and that "the right to property cannot stand in the way of the axiomatic principle that 'the goods created by God for all peoples should in the same way reach all, justice guiding and charity helping'" (§43).

The emphasis on use should therefore be read as an effort to relativize extant property arrangements—to bend them to their more basic purpose—which is to ensure that all people can make use of what is theirs. It is for this reason that, in the Pentecost message, Pius XII goes on to state that the axiom of common use is not only prior to and more elemental than institutions surrounding private property, commercial exchange, state regulation, and so on. He also underscores the fundamental orientation of these institutions to common use. They all remain "subordinate to the natural purpose of material goods" and can never "supersede" common use. Rather, their purpose is to

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[157] Pío XII, "Radiomessaggio Di Sua Santità Pío XII Nel V Anniversario Dall'inizio Della Guerra Mondiale," 1 settembre 1944, §22.

"serve" and "secure" it.[158] "Only thus," Pius XII states, can there be "peace" where presently there is no peace.[159] From this approach to property and possession, Calvez and Perrin draw the following implication: "If, in fact, the institution does not allow of the exercise of this right by *all*, it is in some disorder," from which arises "an obligation to reform social life," agricultural and otherwise.[160] As Pius XII sees it, the disorder had long since become established.[161]

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[158] "Discourse of His Holiness Pius XII to Commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Encyclical Rerum Novarum of Pope Leo XIII on the Social Question," 221–222. Barrera regards Pius XII's subordination of these institutions to common gift as a "step further' than his predecessors. Barrera, *Modern Catholic Social Documents and Political Economy*, 198. In *Populorum progressio*, Paul VI will later put the matter this way: "All other rights, whatever they may be, including the rights of property and free trade, are to be subordinated to this principle. They should in no way hinder it; in fact, they should actively facilitate its implementation" (§22).

[159] "Discourse of His Holiness Pius XII to Commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Encyclical Rerum Novarum of Pope Leo XIII on the Social Question," 221.

[160] Calvez and Perrin, *The Church and Social Justice*, 200. On this point see John XXIII, *Mater et magistra*, §113.

[161] On this point, Pius XII stands in continuity with *Rerum novarum* and *Quadragesimo anno*. Pius XII's messages and speeches are marked by an extremely critical posture toward extant property arrangements. In a 1944 address, for instance, Pius XII describes a situation in which workers find themselves up against "extreme concentrations of economic goods," whose "anonymous" character not only enables such goods to evade their "social obligation" but also puts workers in the "near impossibility" of having property of their own. Under these conditions, the struggle to preserve "medium and small property" has become "a defensive struggle ever more harsh and without hope of positive success" (§§25-27). Pío XII, "Radiomessaggio Di Sua Santità Pío XII Nel V Anniversario Dall'inizio Della Guerra Mondiale." Indeed, Pius XII's assessment of the situation in 1944 is close to that of the Pontifical Council of Justice and Peace's in 1998.

2.4.4 *Gaudium et spes*

In gathering and reflecting upon the line of thinking that we have been examining, the Second Vatican Council's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the

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Its document "Toward a Better Distribution of Land" addresses "the scandalous situations of property and land use, present on almost all continents" ("Presentation"). The document continues, "While social relations are not changing, and justice and solidarity remain absent and invisible, the doors of the future are closing, and the destiny of many peoples remain locked into an increasingly uncertain and precarious present" (§61).

The phrase "established disorder" (*le désordre établi)* is attributed to the French Catholic philosopher Emmanuel Mounier in Katherine Davies and Toby Garfitt, eds., *God's Mirror: Renewal and Engagement in French Catholic Intellectual Culture in the Mid-Twentieth Century* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 7. Regarding the phrase, we will perhaps recall Rutilio Grande's words from the previous chapter about the danger of being a Christian in El Salvador in the 1970s. In the same passage Grande goes on to say: "Because the order that surrounds us is radically founded upon an established *disorder*, before which the mere proclamation of the Gospel is subversive." Carranza, Diez, and Sobrino, *XXV aniversario de Rutilio Grande*, 79.

Interestingly, the phrase likewise appears in the Holy See's 1976 Statement on Disarmament to describe the armaments race, which it calls a perpetuation of "the established disorder" and "a form of theft." The relevant passage reads: "The massive budgets allocated to the manufacture and stockpiling of weapons is tantamount to misappropriation of funds by the 'managers' of the large nations or favored blocs. The obvious contradiction between the waste involved in the overproduction of military devices and the extent of unsatisfied vital needs *is in itself an act of aggression* against those who are the victims of it (in both developing countries and in the marginal and poor elements in rich societies). It is an act of aggression which amounts to a crime, for *even when they are not used*, by their cost alone *armaments kill the poor by causing them to starve*" (emphasis in original). "Vatican Statement on Disarmament," *Sysyphus Papers*, July 15, 1976.

Modern World, *Gaudium et spes,* likewise foregrounds the axiom that creation is common gift. The crucial passage, which we have already seen repeatedly but which I cite again for the purposes of our examination, reads:

> God intended the earth with everything contained in it for the use of all human beings and peoples. Thus, under the leadership of justice and in the company of charity, created goods should be in abundance for all in like manner. Whatever the forms of property may be, as adapted to the legitimate institutions of peoples, according to diverse and changeable circumstances, attention must always be paid to this universal destination of earthly goods. In using them, therefore, man should regard the external things that he legitimately possesses not only as his own but also as common in the sense that they should be able to benefit not only him but also others. On the other hand, the right of having a share of earthly goods sufficient for oneself and one's family belongs to everyone. The Fathers and Doctors of the Church held this opinion, teaching that men are obliged to come to the relief of the poor and to do so not merely out of their superfluous goods. If one is in extreme necessity, he has the right to procure for himself what he needs out of the riches of others. Since there are so many people prostrate with hunger in the world, this sacred council urges all, both individuals and governments, to remember the aphorism of the Fathers, "Feed the man dying of hunger, because if you have not fed him, you have killed him," and really to share and employ their earthly goods, according to the ability of each, especially by supporting individuals or peoples with the aid by which they may be able to help and develop themselves (§69).

This passage reprises many of the themes we already have been examining. Immediately evident is the considerable influence of Pius XII, not only in the notion that God gives the earth for "the use of all human beings and peoples," which evokes Pius's emphasis upon "the fundamental right to make use of the material goods of the earth."

We also see the influence in the phrase from *Sertum laetitiae* about justice leading and charity helping.

The heart of the passage is its articulation of creation as common gift in terms of the "universal destination of earthly goods" or the "common destination of created goods" (§69, cf. §71). In describing it, *Gaudium et spes* draws on language examined throughout this chapter: that people should not regard what they possess as exclusively theirs but as common, given both for their good and for the good of others. They can legitimately possess a sufficient share of goods because they are likewise members of the commons to which God entrusts what God has made. Acknowledging that membership means that their manner of possession must be open to the claims of others upon it. This is part and parcel of the acknowledgement that the goods are common—an outworking of the way that "the right of having a share of earthly goods sufficient for oneself and one's family belongs to everyone." The protection of property is therefore synonymous with the participation of all in it, just as the threat to property is synonymous with the systematic exclusion of some from it. For this reason, the passage evokes the law of necessity. In cases of extreme necessity, when those to whom a share belongs fail to secure it from others, they can themselves take what they need because it is theirs to take.

Dispossession and systematic exclusion from participation in property are commonplace in a world groaning under sin's weight. The story of Naboth, Ambrose reminds us, is an old one, but it is repeated every day. *Gaudium et spes* therefore suggests that in a world sick with sin, a politics of common use, which acknowledges creation as common gift, tends toward cruciformity. We see this, for instance, in its radicalization of the claim about what belongs to others. The passage, like the line of thinking of which it is a part, hinges upon catechesis about needs, wherein people learn to assess what is sufficient for their own needs and that of their dependents, returning what remains to others. But given the lack of basic material support afflicting so many, the passage suggests that superfluity alone is an inadequate criterion for assessment. Rather, the needs of others for material support intensifies the already considerable pressure upon people to reassess constantly their own needs, troubling any easy distinction between what belongs to them and what belongs to others. Under the pressure, people might find it difficult to justify holding back not only what they have in superfluity but anything at all before the claim of need—even themselves and their own lives. In this way, the claim not only pressures property to become what it most fundamentally is, which is common. It also pressures people to leave their paths to go out to the "relief" of others—perhaps even holding open what they need or even risking their lives in the process.[162]

As we have been examining, creation understood as common gift is intimate with mercy's movement toward those whose bodies require basic material support, such as food, drink, shelter, clothing, company, and so on. In effect, *Gaudium et spes* is calling for the formation of people who are willing to give not just the tortillas they have left over but the tortillas from their own mouths—people who are willing to deprive themselves voluntarily of what they have in order to draw nearer to those who have nothing. This accords with what we saw in the previous chapter, where the work of justice trains people not only to share their possessions but also themselves. The work of mercy, Augustine writes, is "the inception of charity," "where it begins"—a beginning must be tended, "nursed," in order to blossom into "the readiness to lay down your life" in love (cf. John 15:13).[163] The heart of *Gaudium et spes*'s teaching about property and possession, which is admittedly undeveloped, centers upon how people might hold open what they have in order to learn how to hold open themselves, refusing to secure either over and against the claim of need.

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[162] As Gustavo Gutiérrez observes in *A Theology of Liberation* in his comments on the parable of the Good Samaritan—Jesus's own response to the question about who is the neighbor (Luke 10:29)—the Samaritan becomes neighbor not by continuing along his path but by leaving it. He goes out towards the one who was stripped, beaten, and left half-dead. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Teología de la liberación: perspectivas* (Ediciones Sígueme, 1984), 237.

[163] Saint Augustine, *Homilies on the First Epistle of John*, 87, 85.

In language invoking the authority of the Council itself, *Gaudium et spes* cites the maxim from Gratian's *Decretum* that the failure to feed those dying of hunger is tantamount to killing them.[164] As I have continued to insist, such language, as difficult and as disturbing as it is to hear it for those who have the world's goods, must not be dismissed. To return to Cyprian's image, it is a kind of eye-salve—a healing of perception. The description reveals a landscape in which people are complicit not only for what they do but for what they fail to do, in this case, helping to feed those dying of hunger. We are in the same landscape when the sources we have been examining regard those who take in excess of their needs to be engaged in a kind of thievery. Gratian's maxim suggests that we see the violence that sin unleashes in the world not only in the lack of basic material support but also in the indifference toward that lack—an indifference epitomized by Cain’s response to God when asked about his brother’s whereabouts: “Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Genesis 4:9). Such is the landscape made perceptible by creation understood as common gift and the politics of common use associated with it.

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[164] Along these same lines, consider the much-commented upon section from his apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii gaudium*, "No to an economy of exclusion." In this section, Francis writes that we must say "'thou shall not' to an economy of exclusion and inequality." Francis then writes, "*Such an economy kills*" (§53, emphasis mine). How does it kill? The example he gives is the death from exposure of an elderly homeless person. It kills from indifference. Such death makes no news; it does not register. In the memorable lines from Auden's poem on Brueghel's paining of the fall of Icarus into the sea, the whole world "turns away/Quite leisurely from the disaster." Pope Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel*.

2.4.5 Common Good

The understanding of creation we have been examining in this chapter implies a conception of common good, which is important to specify. Indeed, the ultimate horizon of the common destination of created goods is the common good of all creation: God. The phrase ‘social function of property’ similarly implies a sociality it is property’s purpose to serve and promote. By way of conclusion, I want to comment upon this conception of common good and the vision of sociality in which it is implicated.

To do so, it will be helpful to return once again to Pius XI’s *Quadragesimo anno* and the reason Pius gives for why, as he puts it, “not every distribution among human beings of property and wealth is of a character to attain either completely or to a satisfactory degree of perfection the end which God intends” (§57). Pius XI’s thinks not just property but the wealth a people produces more generally should circulate across the lines of class “to the common advantage of all” (§57). As Pius XI sees it, such circulation is the basis—the minimum requirement—for the care of what he calls the common good (*bonum commune*).

By 'common good,' he means a good that can only be held together with others—a good that can only exist at all insofar as it is so held. People possess it by engaging with others in a common activity for a common purpose. The common good is therefore not a good that comes after some other purpose is achieved. Nor is it the sum total of the particular good of each of those coming together. It is the good being aimed at and sought—the good that unites the very coming together. Because the common good can only be held together with others, it is indivisible. It is not distributed or divided like other goods.[165] But as we will see in Pius XI's discussion below, supporting the good that is indivisible has extremely important implications for goods that are not. The basic point, however, is that people can only possess the common good by participating in it with others, and that it is a good that can be discovered and sought wherever two or three gather together.[166]

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[165] In this way, the common good (*bonum commune*) must be distinguished from common goods (*bona communia*). The land of El Salvador is the latter, in the sense that particular people and groups use the land that is common to all of them. The fruits of the land are consumed and enjoyed by particular people. In other words, the land and its fruits are goods that can be divided.

[166] As the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* states, "No expression of social life—from the family to intermediate social groups, associations, enterprises of an

Pius XI associates the support of the common good with the virtue of social justice. "By this law of social justice," he writes, "one class is forbidden to exclude the other from sharing in the benefits" (§57). The problem Pius XI is identifying includes but is not limited to lack of basic material support. The problem is that the lack of basic material support is symptomatic of a more fundamental problem, which is the very production of an excluded people. As Pius XI sees it, the exclusion from property and wealth is of a piece with exclusion from sharing in social life more generally, which imperils the possibility of such a society having any good in common.

Along these lines, and as we will see especially in the following chapter, Pius XI and his successors devote particular attention to what is transpiring in rural areas throughout the world, singling out those Pius XI in *Quadragesimo anno* calls "the huge army of rural wage workers, pushed to the lowest level of existence and deprived of all hope of ever acquiring 'a share in the land'" (§59, quoting *Rerum novarum* §47).[167] Pius XI

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economic nature, cities, regions, States, up to the community of peoples and nations—can escape the issue of its own common good, in that this is a constitutive element of its significance and the authentic reason for its existence" (§165).

[167] I have slightly altered the translation from *Quadragesimo anno* in light of the text of *Rerum novarum*. Among the places Pius might have mentioned in this regard is El Salvador. *Quadragesimo anno* was promulgated in 1931. As we saw in the previous chapter, the conditions in the Salvadoran countryside were deteriorating rapidly around

and his successors read landlessness—the exclusion of a whole people from a share in land—as symptomatic of other forms of exclusion. This is likewise the sense behind a claim Romero makes, namely, that in El Salvador, denying the landless land is of a piece with them other goods that are part and parcel of human flourishing. Such denial is but another attempt, as he puts it, "to hoard (*acaparar*) the goods that God has created for all."[168]

We have been considering Pius XI's understanding of the common good as it relates to social justice. Above he speaks of social injustice as the exclusion of others from sharing in property. In his encyclical *Divini redemptoris* (1937), he offers a positive formulation when he writes that the "very essence" of social justice is "to demand for each individual all that is necessary for the common good" (§51). Social justice as it is used here admittedly comes close to distributive justice, and since social justice first

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this time. In 1932, one of the largest peasant rebellions in Latin American history took place in western El Salvador. The event is known as *la Matanza*, or the massacre, because after General Martínez quickly quelled the rebellion, he took his troops through the countryside, systematically massacring suspected participants, sympathizers, and many others.

[168] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. I, 217.

appeared in the encyclicals, it has often been conflated with distributive justice.[169] But social justice is distinct from distributive justice in that it is not about the distribution of goods but the *telos* of the distribution. It concerns not giving what is due to another in justice but what such giving aims at, which is to cultivate the good that can only be held in common. In other words, social justice is the virtue that cares for the common good—the good for which there can be no envy because it cannot be had exclusively. To try to possess it exclusively is *ipso facto* not to possess it at all. Or more precisely, it is not to possess it as a common good.

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[169] For more on the emergence of the phrase 'social justice' and its association with the shift from the eighteenth century category *doctrina civilis* to the twentieth century category *doctrina socialis*, Russell Hittinger, "The Coherence of the Four Basic Principles of Catholic Social Doctrine: An Interpretation," in *Pursuing the Common Good: How Solidarity and Subsidiarity Can Work Together*, vol. 14 (Vatican City: Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, 2008), 112. The phrase 'social justice' was an effort to represent Thomas Aquinas's notion of legal or general justice. Just as charity is general insofar as it directs the acts of the other virtues to the divine good, so too is legal or general justice general insofar as it directs the other virtues to the common good. The common good is its object. For Thomas, legal or general justice "can be every virtue" insofar as every virtue is directed to the common good by it (cf. *ST* II-II 58.6).
But why the adjective *social* when all justice is social? Hittinger explains the rationale: "Justice always requires a relation to 'the other'. Therefore, all issues of justice have a social aspect. The cardinal virtue of justice pertains to particular justice, either bilaterally (commutative) or by distribution on the basis of merit (distributive). But there is another virtue that orders the myriad acts of the other virtues to the common good. It does not substitute for, or cancel-out, the justice of commutation and distribution. Rather, it is the practice of virtue 'looked at from the social point of view'—*sub specie societatis*." Hence the designation 'social justice' (114). These matters are elaborated at further length in Jeremiah Newman, *Foundations of Justice* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1954). Cf. Jeanne Heffernan Schindler, *Christianity and Civil Society: Catholic and Neo-Calvinist Perspectives* (Lexington Books, 2008), 26.

As we saw above, such an understanding of the common good hinges on a distinction between divisible and indivisible goods, or as Virgil explains to the pilgrim in Dante's *Purgatorio*, those goods of which "sharing apportions less to each" and those goods of which "the more there are who would say 'ours',/so much the greater is the good possessed/by each" (ll. 45-57).[170] Though distinct, these divisible and indivisible goods are not walled off from one another. The crucial issue in this regard is desire. As Virgil says to the pilgrim, what matters most are the goods upon which "your longings center" (l. 49). If the pilgrim's desires center upon those goods of which sharing apportions less to each person, then envy and rivalry ensue (ll. 45-51). But if the pilgrim's desires center upon the good that can only be shared—the good that becomes so much the greater because of it—then a different economy appears, beginning in the pilgrim's own life, wherein the "fear" that once seized him dissipates (l. 53). The common land toward which he travels transfigures and takes incipient shape in the land where he lives, as the pilgrim anticipates and seeks to live into it.[171] The path upon which he travels is partially constitutive of the final plentitude.

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[170] Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. Allen Mandelbaum (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), Purgatorio XV, ll. 45–57.

A vision of social life centered upon the discovery and care of the common good helps make sense of Leo's concern in *Rerum novarum* with the "immense chasm" and "the gulf between vast wealth and sheer poverty" (§47), or Pius XI's concern in *Quadragesimo anno* with "the huge disparity between the few exceedingly rich and the unnumbered propertyless" (§58) and the juxtaposition between "the immense multitude of the non-owning workers" and "the enormous riches of certain very wealthy men"

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[171] The legal scholar Carol Rose expresses such common enjoyment in terms of what she calls a "comedy of the commons" in an essay by the same name. In it, she explores the enduring recognition in property law of land that falls under the category either of private or public property. Rose argues that it is crucial to the notion of property that it becomes more rather than less of what it is the more there are who share in its use. On this view, the hallmark of property is not exclusion but inclusion, not holding privately but sharing in common. By the phrase "comedy of the commons" she means a kind of sharing in a good like land that does not exhaust the good—hence generating tragedy. Rather, such sharing has "an infinite capacity to expand our wealth," she thinks, because it makes us "more sociable and better attuned to each other's needs and interests." Her point of departure in this essay is with case law related to public access to beaches and waterways. But she concludes with some reflections on other versions of the comedy of the commons—goods that increase in value when they are made accessible to a wider public. The essay concludes with an observation of the anthropological implications of the absence of activities that take place on "inherently public property'": the public becomes, she writes, "a shapeless mob, whose members neither trade nor converse nor play, but only fight, in a setting where life is, in Hobbes' all too famous phrase, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." Carol M. Rose, *Property And Persuasion: Essays On The History, Theory, and Rhetoric of Ownership* (Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 1994), 111–112, 150.

(§60). Over the course of the twentieth century, the popes will continue to speak and write in similarly dichotomous terms about the growing inequalities, especially those generated by industrial capitalism—language, as we saw in the previous chapter, Romero adopts in addressing the growing "distance" between the many who have little and the few who have much.

As Calvez and Perrin point out, such language obviously fails as a detailed sociological investigation of class. Instead, it offers, they suggest, "an outline of a pathology,"[172] and the pathology is this: What is being threatened by regnant property regimes is not simply the social function of property but something like society itself—the very possibility of the discovery of a commons of which all are members. Hence the Church's social doctrine consistently associates vast inequalities in property and wealth with social injustice. Though the problem clearly involves maldistribution of created goods, the heart of the matter is that regnant property regimes undermine forms of life that it is the whole purpose of property to foster. The widening chasms, the deepening gulfs, and the mounting distances between people erode the very possibility of participating in the common good, as the lives and concerns of people increasingly separate from one another.

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[172] Calvez and Perrin, *The Church and Social Justice*, 345.

A comment Paul VI makes in his 1967 encyclical *Populorum progressio* helps concretize what is at stake in such an understanding of social justice and the kind of common life he thinks property should make possible. The aim of social justice, he writes, is not simply the elimination of hunger or the reduction of poverty. Rather, it is the establishment of forms of life "where the needy Lazarus can sit down with the rich man at the same banquet table" (§47).

The reference, of course, is to the parable in Luke's Gospel, in which Lazarus the beggar lies at the gate of a rich man—traditionally known as Dives (Latin for rich man)—who fails to offer Lazarus even the scraps from his luxurious banquet table (Luke 16:19-31). When both Lazarus and Dives die, the bridgeable distance between them in life becomes an unbridgeable *chasma* or chasm (v. 26) in death—with Lazarus at Abraham's side and Dives separated from them in agony.

In drawing upon Luke's parable in this way, Paul reveals how social justice concerns not only Lazarus's need for basic material support. More fundamentally still—and ultimately inseparable from the concern for basic material support—social justice concerns the need for Lazarus and Dives to overcome their distance from one another. It the need for forms of life wherein they can learn to hold goods in addition to food and table in common with one another.[173] The discovery of such a good has everything to do with the discovery of the land for which they are destined.

The line of reflection we are examining therefore continually returns to eschatology—to the consideration of creation as common gift in relation to humankind's common destiny in Christ, the common good of all creation. Consider, for instance, Pius XII's speech to Italian workers, commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of *Rerum novarum*. Given the concerns of the encyclical, that Pius XII would address his speech to workers is unremarkable. That he chose to commemorate it on the Feast of the Ascension is.

Indeed, Pius XII centers the whole speech upon Leo's claim in *Rerum novarum*, which we discussed above, that "the things of the earth cannot be understood or valued aright without taking into consideration the life to come, the life that will know no death."[174] Pius XII criticizes the exclusive focus upon the pressing problems of the earth apart from any relation to humankind's common destiny. The modern mentality of immanence focuses all its efforts upon the establishment of an earthly paradise, not unlike the rich fool of Luke's parable. On Pius XII's view, this mentality has both capitalist and socialist variants. Pius himself associates it with a certain kind of realism, which renders God secondary or even superfluous to more urgent matters—much like Bertold *Brecht's claim, "Erst kommt das Fressen; dann kommt die Moral,"* which W.H. Auden famously renders, "First grub, then ethics."[175] Pius XII expresses it this way: "[S]ocial reform must come first of all and afterwards care will be taken of the religious and moral life."[176]

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[173] Cf. John Paul II's treatment of this parable in *Redemptor hominis* §§51-52, as well as Benedict XVI's in *Caritas in veritate* §31.

[174] Pius XII, "Adscriptis Sodalitati Catholicae Ex Operariis Italicis, Ob Commendationem Litterarum Encyclicarum *Rerum Novarum* Coadunatis," in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, vol. 45, 1953, 405, citing *Rerum novarum* §21.

The problem with such a view, according to Pius XII, is that social reform, on the one hand, and religious and moral life, on the other, cannot be hived off from one another. Not only do this world and the next co-inhere in one another. But the human creature as a living whole cannot be severed into two parts.[177] Drawing on *Rerum novarum*, Pius XII seeks to destabilize the binary such a mentality erects between earth and heaven, contending that humans cannot understand where they are apart from where they are going.

None of this is to neglect the pressing problems of the earth. It is, rather, to locate the pressing problems of the earth in their proper perspective—to learn to see them and the world rightly. Indeed, Pius XII says that in *Rerum novarum*, Leo urged his contemporaries to keep "both feet on the ground."[178] But, according to Pius XII, he showed how human creatures who are created and saved by God cannot understand themselves or their problems, much less the very ground upon which they stand and from which they draw their lives, if they neglect God and "the true end of human life, which is union with God in heaven" (*il vero fine della vita umana, la unione con Dio nel cielo*).[179]

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[175] W.H. Auden, *The Faber Book of Aphorisms* (Faber & Faber, 1989), 368.
[176] Pius XII, "Adscriptis Sodalitati Catholicae Ex Operariis Italicis, Ob Commendationem Litterarum Encyclicarum *Rerum Novarum* Coadunatis," 405.
[177] Ibid.

We will recall that Leo wrote not only about the cessation of conflict between classes. He wrote about the Church's "higher aim," which is a friendship between people made possible by the friendship God offers humankind in Christ. As Pius XII puts it, what *Rerum novarum* teaches is that the Church wants justice. But her concerns do not cease with justice. She most of all wants what exceeds justice but what must be built upon it: the "bringing together" (*ravvicinare*) of classes, the overcoming of the distances between people that separate them—a bringing together and an overcoming, Pius XII says, that "derives entirely" (*deriva interamente*) from a destiny which is "common to all" (*a tutti comune*).[180] The crucial imperative therefore is how people might learn to discover—or rediscover—that they share a "common homeland" (*comune patria*), by which Pius XII means the sharing in God's life. Their participation in the land they have in Christ will generate new forms of sharing created goods in the lands where they presently live.

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[178] Ibid., 404.
[179] Ibid.
[180] Ibid., 405.

The common land of which Pius XII speaks—what Augustine refers to as "our really great and profitable common estate"[181]—transcends and relativizes the claims of all lands. But it can be entered into wherever the Gospel is proclaimed and baptism begins to break down the barriers between people, whether they be Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female (cf. Gal. 3:28). Pius XII in his speech is especially concerned with the boundaries between workers and owners, poor and rich, propertyless and propertied. The fuller the participation in their common homeland, the more the barriers between people can be overcome. It can be lived "day to day." Even farms or businesses, Pius XII thinks, can become sites of "close fellowship" (*stretta comunanza*) because of it.[182]

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[181] Augustine is here writing of the way he and his companions sold their property and gave the proceeds to the poor in order to join a monastery "so that we might live," he says, "on what we had in common." He goes onto note that "what would be our really great and profitable common estate was God himself." Saint Augustine, *Sermons 341-400 on Various Themes* (New City Press: 1995), 355.2, p. 166.

[182] Pius XII, "Adscriptis Sodalitati Catholicae Ex Operariis Italicis, Ob Commendationem Litterarum Encyclicarum *Rerum Novarum* Coadunatis," 405. Pope Paul VI's 1961 encyclical *Octogesima adveniens* describes the kind of 'micropolitics' associated with this view in turns of a remaking of the "social fabric" at the level of "the street, of the

Precisely at this point in the speech Pius XII reiterates Leo’s statement that “use” is the “only important thing” about property.[183] The implication is that the more peoples’ longings center upon the land they have in Christ—the land in which the more there are who say ‘ours,’ the greater the good possessed—the more they will seek to support the life of it. Indeed, it is property’s most fundamental purpose to support that life and to build up bodies that bear witness to it.

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neighborhood or of the great agglomerative dwellings.” He writes of the need to focus this remaking “at the community and parish levels with different forms of associations, recreational centers, and spiritual and community gatherings” (§8).

[183] Ibid.

PART II: WORK OF HUMAN HANDS

CHAPTER 3: AGRARIAN REFORM

> Without taking into account the question of what work is, what it represents in the life of a person and in shaping personal being, it is not possible to approach adequately the problem of agrarian reform.
>
> —Ignacio Ellacuría, *Veinte años de historia en El Salvador*

3.1 Introduction

The present chapter continues the task begun in the previous one: the examination of the place of agrarian reform within Church teaching. We now turn our attention to the topic of work and its relation to property. I have been showing how what *Gaudium et spes* calls creation's common destination shapes the Church's teaching about property, while attempting to situate that teaching within a much wider moral and theological landscape. My purpose in doing so is to help make sense of Romero's understanding of agrarian reform and why he regarded it to be a theological necessity.

In the previous chapter, we saw that, according to Leo, all property derives from God's gift of creation. He understands property and its institutions, along with what he calls industry and law, in terms of the gift and ordered to God's purpose in giving it. This leads him to formulate a distinctive response to the dispossession of people and the concentration of property associated with industrial capitalism, which is to call for a more just distribution of property, especially productive property like land. Leo is not alone in this regard. We saw that his sources, like the line of thinking *Rerum novarum* inaugurates, draw upon a similar understating of creation as common gift and continue the call for the diffusion of property.

The itinerary of the present chapter takes our examination of property and possession further, into the terrain of work, wages, and workers' associations as articulated in *Rerum novarum* and beyond—with a particular emphasis on farmers and other agricultural workers, as well as rural communities more generally. We will continue to familiarize ourselves with the landscape within which agrarian reform is located. Our consideration of these matters therefore prepares us for the final part of the chapter, which turns to agrarian reform itself.

One benefit of this approach is that it displays how agrarian reform is not an isolated topic in Church teaching. Rather, the call for agrarian reform, like the call for the diffusion of property more generally, entirely derives from the claim of creation's common destiny and its implications for property. Agrarian reform emerges in the wake of the Second World War as an important though admittedly limited means to achieve a more just distribution of land.

Along the way, then, we will see that we have not left the concerns of the previous chapter behind but, again, find ourselves within the very same landscape. The claim that creation is a common gift structures the Church's social doctrine in its deepest pattern. My aim here is therefore to show how the teaching on agrarian reform—like the teaching on work, wages, and workers' associations more generally—derives from the claim that God gives the earth in common and the politics of common use to which it gives rise. These are, we might say, extensions or applications of the claim within the world being generated by industrial capitalism.

In our examination of these matters, we will therefore continue to see how God makes provision for the material support of all through the fruits of the earth and the work of human hands. Human action presupposes and makes use of the gift of God's creation. But what is also crucial to see is that human creatures are also themselves gifts. Their life and work, along with the societies of which they are members, participate in God's giving of the earth in common.

3.2 Property and Work

3.2.1 Restoration

In the previous chapter we saw that Leo's response to the forces of dispossession and dislocation—the forces that have disrupted social bonds, dispersed people, and generated conditions in which the propertyless sell their labor for wages—is not the further abolition of property but its protection. He wants the dispossessed to be repossessed, which means he supports laws, institutions, and policies that seek to expand rather than restrict access to productive property. Crucial in this regard is land and the need for a better distribution of it.

At least as Leo and his successors see it, to be a propertyless worker is not a static social condition, which stands in fundamental opposition to being a property holder. Rather, Leo and his successors share a vision of restoration whereby societies might begin to favor ownership, helping as many as possible become owners, including the landless.[1] Their consistent goal is to enable the landless to have a share in the land, akin to the hope of the prophet Isaiah: "They will build houses and inhabit them, they will also plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They will not build and another inhabit. They will not plant and another eat" (65:21).

The notion of restoration implies the repair of something that is damaged or disordered by way of return to a prior or original condition. What is prior or original in this case is God's purpose for the created order and a use of created goods in conformity with it. Another way to put this is that the hope of a share in the land is not exclusionary. For the landless to acquire land—for them to have a stable and permanent possession upon it—should not be confused with an argument for absolute property in a Blackstonian sense. Rather, restoration presumes an understanding of property whose whole purpose is to enable people to provide for themselves and to extend that provision to others. Barrera articulates the theological stakes in the following terms: "God not only supplies our needs but also uses our mutual responsibility for each other as a channel for bestowing such provisions upon us…God provides for us through each other; God elicits human participation in effecting divine providence."[2] Restoration means that those who obtain a share in the land enable others obtain a share in it as well—that they involve others in the sharing. It is the work of all people to help make possible a common use of created goods.[3]

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[1] Cf. *Rerum novarum*, §27; *Quadragesimo anno*, §§15-16.

According to the line of thought that we have been examining, work, like property, is informed by the grammar of common gift. Work is a service of the commons, internally oriented to the needs of others. It is therefore never simply for the exclusive benefit of workers alone but is always for the benefit of others as well, which can be seen, for instance, in St. Paul's exhortation in Ephesians that the reformed thief no longer steal but rather perform "honest work with his hands, so that he may be able to give to those in need" (Ephesians 4:28). Or, as Paul puts it in words attributed to him in Acts, in working with his own hands to minister not only to his and his companions' needs, he has witnessed to the way that "by so toiling one must help the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'" (Acts 20:34-35). On this view, giving to those in need and helping those Paul calls "the weak" is not simply the product of work or what is done after work is over. It is work's source and wellspring, ordering it from the inside.[4] Paul's words also begin to suggest how the work of human hands is illumined and clarified by God's work in Christ.

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[2] Albino Barrera, *Economic Compulsion and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 77.

[3] On work as a route to property, cf. Jean-Yves Calvez and Jacques Perrin, *The Church and Social Justice: The Social Teaching of the Popes from Leo XIII to Pius XII (1878-1958)* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1961), 242; Michael Naughton, *The Good Stewards: Practical Applications of the Papal Social Vision of Work* (University Press of America, 1992), 12.

As we will see, this vision of restoration hinges upon a renewed understanding of work and the role it plays in the proliferation of property. On this view, there is an intimate and complex relationship between property and work, in which productive property like land is acquired through work in order to serve work.[5] For another way to articulate Leo's concern with the forces of dispossession and dislocation is that they are attempting to sever the bond between property and work. The logic of socialism tends in a similar direction insofar as it seeks to do away with personal property altogether. We must therefore consider the relationship between property and work, particularly the way that, as Calvez and Perrin put it, "the work relationship is…internal to the property relationship."[6]

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[4] In *The Life of Antony*, Athanasius recalls how Antony, in hearing the Gospel saying, "do not worry about tomorrow" (Matthew 6:34), gave away his remaining possessions to the needy, and devoted himself to the solitary life. He worked with his hands, which Athanasius describes this way: "And he spent what he made partly for bread, and partly on those in need." He works not only to provide for himself but to provide for others—a conception of work ordered to the inclusion of others in its provisioning. Cf. Athanasius, *The Life of Antony*, trans. Robert C. Gregg, The Classics of Western Spirituality (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1980), 3. Cf. Anna Silvas, trans., *The Rule of St. Basil* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2013), 243–44, 253–54, 386–87, 410, 422–23. For more on Basil the Great as an important patristic source for Catholic social doctrine, particularly on the topic of work, cf. Andrew Dinan, "Manual Labor in the Life and Thought of St. Basil the Great," *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 12, no. 4 (2009): 133–57.

3.2.2 Property and Work in *Rerum novarum*

Leo's treatment of the relationship between property and work in *Rerum novarum* begins with a closer consideration of work itself. Why do the workers streaming into the cities want to work in the first place? What does their work reveal? When they work for wages, Leo observes, they do so to receive what is necessary for the basic material support of themselves and their dependents. They do so "for the purpose of receiving in return what is necessary for the satisfaction of [their] needs" (§5).[7] Because the proletariat by definition does not own productive property, their only access to such material support is through wages paid for the work that they do.

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[5] On work as a route to property, cf. Jean-Yves Calvez and Jacques Perrin, *The Church and Social Justice: The Social Teaching of the Popes from Leo XIII to Pius XII (1878-1958)* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1961), 242; Michael Naughton, *The Good Stewards: Practical Applications of the Papal Social Vision of Work* (University Press of America, 1992), 12.

[6] Calvez and Perrin, *The Church and Social Justice*, 193.

As Leo sees it, implicit in these ordinary exchanges of work for wages is a certain intentionality on the part of the workers. In return for their work, they intend to receive what they need to survive. But they intend more than bare life. They also intend to acquire the use of their wages in order to assess what their needs are and how they are best met—what Leo calls power "over the disposal of such remuneration" (§5). In other words, Leo is suggesting that the right to use the wage follows from the right to a wage in exchange for work done.[8] I will have more to say about justice in wages below. But for the moment, I simply want to point out that, as Leo sees it, implicit in the institution of wage work is the desire to have stability and security in the use of the wage—a stability and security that is synonymous with the wage belonging to *this worker* rather than another.[9]

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[7] Leo introduces the dependents of workers in *Rerum novarum* §§12-13.

[8] Of course, none of this is to deny that workers, just like anyone else, can abuse their freedom or squander their wages.

[9] As we saw in the previous chapter and will continue to see in this one, Leo rejects any notion of absolute ownership in the Blackstonian sense. The example of agriculture, to which he continually refers, is helpful in appreciating his purpose. He is speaking of property not as sole and despotic dominion but as some measure of relative stability and

Leo begins his defense of personal property by associating it with the "power of disposal" implied in wage contracts themselves. As we will see, Leo thinks the wage contracts of his own day are a flagrant violation of justice and has no wish to defend them as they are. Nevertheless, he begins with them, not only in order to make explicit an understanding of property implicit in them. He also begins with them in order to make explicit the intentionality implicit within in them, which is that workers not only want to receive what is necessary for the satisfaction of their needs. They want to participate in the process of making provision. They want to improve the condition of themselves and their dependents (§5). As Paul VI will later write in *Populorum progressio*, workers want to move from "less than human conditions to truly human ones" (§20). Essential to this is their own involvement in provisioning, in distinguishing between what they need and what they do not, and in determining how their needs are best met. Such involvement is indispensable for anyone who would learn to hold what they have as common.

Leo extrapolates from this, positing a scenario in which workers, through their work and the practice of the virtue of temperance, invest in a small landholding—a

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security over land—a stability and security that is indispensable to the practice of agriculture, which is, in turn, indispensable to the sustenance of human life.

“little estate”—for the purpose of achieving “greater security” than reliance upon wages alone (§5).[10] On this basis, Leo argues for an analogy: just as the power of disposal applies to wages, so too should it apply to land.

Leo is not eliding the important differences between created goods like wages and land. Rather, he is drawing an analogy concerning a person’s relationship to them. Leo’s point is that people should be able to have an analogous stability and security in the use of the land upon which they depend for their sustenance. Though Leo does not say so here, the logic of his position leads to the conclusion that the work of agriculture presupposes what he calls “property.” It presupposes some basic level of stability and security in the use of land. In cultivating land, people should not, for instance, live in fear of eviction. If they plant, they should eat the fruits. If they build houses, they should inhabit them. In this regard, Leo’s sense of the benefits of a more widespread distribution of land are germane: he assumes that people not only tend to work harder on what is theirs; he likewise assumes that stability and security in the use of land can foster affection, such that people can come to “love the very soil” upon which their lives depend, enabling them to set down roots rather than having to move to make ends meet (§47).

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[10] An important part of the answer as to why Leo defends the importance of the possession of land has to do with what we saw in the previous chapter and will explore at greater length in the present one: sharing in property like land affords greater security for workers and their dependents against those who would exploit them. That so many in the modern world are deprived of this security is for Leo a troubling development.

Leo therefore thinks it characteristic of human life to use created goods, as he puts it, “not merely for temporary and momentary use, as other living things do, but to have and to hold them in stable and permanent possession; … not only things that perish in the use, but those also which, though they have been reduced into use, continue for further use in after time” (§6). Leo is working here with two sets of distinctions. The first set concerns the kinds of relationships of use that creatures can have with the created order that sustains them. There is one that is temporary and momentary, in which the goods used are used up in the act of use. We might call this kind of use consumption. Leo contrasts consumption with a use of created goods that is more stable and permanent, in which created goods come to exist for their users—become proper to them. In this way, he thinks, we can meaningfully speak of these goods being had, held, or possessed. He calls this property. Property therefore names a particular kind of relationship human creatures have with the created order that sustains them—a relationship that is marked by stability and permanency of use.[11] The stability and permanency is what distinguishes property from consumption.

These two sets of distinctions are closely related to one another. But while the first concerns kinds of relationships, the second concerns kinds of goods. Some goods are consumed in the act of using them, like food when it is eaten or water when it is drunk. Other goods, however, are not *ipso facto* consumed in the act of using them and can themselves bear repeated use, like land that is cultivated with care, aquifers that are not overdrafted, or fisheries that are not overfished. Leo regards it as axiomatic that human life is characterized by both kinds of relationships and by dependence upon both kinds of goods.

All this becomes even clearer, he thinks, if we consider how human beings make provision—making provision understood in the sense of providing beforehand, arranging in advance.[12] Human life, Leo observes, depends upon decision-making not only regarding present needs but anticipated future needs as well. Indeed, such decision-making is imperative given the constitutive neediness of human creatures and its bodily dependence upon the wider created order. As Leo puts it, these needs "do not die out, but forever recur; although satisfied today, they demand fresh supplies for tomorrow" (§7). Because of the temporal unfolding of need, human life must necessarily lean upon "a source that is stable and remaining" to which humans can turn "to draw continual supplies" and make provision. "[T]his stable condition of things," Leo continues, is found "solely in the earth and its fruits" (§7). According to Leo, it is therefore fitting for humans to possess not just "the fruits of the earth" but "the very soil" upon which they rely (§7).

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[11] It is on this point—regarding the stability and permanency of use—that the line of thinking I trace in this chapter differs from Franciscan approaches to property and possession. Agamben has recently articulated the legacy of Franciscanism this way: "how to think a form-of-life, a human life entirely removed from the grasp of the law and a use of bodies and of the world that would never be substantiated into an appropriation. That is to say again: to think life as that which is never given as property but only as common use." Giorgio Agamben, *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-of-Life*, trans. Adam Kotsko (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), xiii.

Once again, we see this tradition's attentiveness to the unique contribution of land to the support of human life. "There is no one," Leo observes, "who does not sustain life from what the land produces" (§8). As used here, the word "land" serves as an important trope for the wider created order within which all human life is located and upon which it depends. The gift of land is how God meets the needs of all God's creatures. Human creatures, moreover, do not simply *depend* upon land. Their bodies are

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[12] Activities as basic to human life as building, domestication, cultivation, and preservation and storage of food all display such provisioning.

constituted by land. In this connection, Christiana Peppard eloquently writes of the way the world "inscribes itself" in human life through bodies, which "mediate" the world that "supports" them.[13] Like other embodied creatures, humans live from land as they live in the flesh.

Attending to the constitutive neediness of human life, along with the importance of stability and security in the possession of land, leads for Leo into the topic of work, which provides for him yet additional justification for the personal possession of land. In articulating what work has to do with possession of land, he first begins by reiterating yet again the role of land for the material support of human life. "Truly, that which is required for the preservation of life, and for life's well-being," he writes, "is produced in great abundance from the soil" (§9). But he then goes on to specify what is necessary for land to play this role of preservation and promotion: human creatures must engage in yet another and even more complex relationship with the created order that sustains them, in which they bring land into "cultivation" through "solicitude and skill" (§9). They must engage in a use of created goods that modifies those goods and adapts them to human purposes. Human work as it pertains to agriculture must defer to the land's own work—the way "the earth produces of itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear" (Mk. 4:28). Nevertheless, humans must lend their own hands for land to bring forth fruit. They must not only, for instance, prepare land for cultivation and cast seed. They must also do all that is necessary to encourage and to protect the land's work along the way.

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[13] As Christiana Z. Peppard eloquently points out in her book, *Just Water*, "our porous bodies mediate the world that supports us. This is a quotidian reality, not just a philosophical datum, for we breathe the air surrounding us. We drink the water available to us. The world inscribes itself in us." Christiana Z. Peppard, *Just Water: Theology, Ethics, and the Global Water Crisis* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2014), 15, 19.

According to Leo, then, human creatures do not just depend upon *land*; they depend upon the *work of agriculture.* "It may truly be said," Leo writes, "that all human subsistence is derived either from labor on one's own land, or from some toil, some calling, which is paid for either in the produce of the land itself, or in that which is exchanged for what the land brings forth" (§8). Throughout this discussion, Leo continually returns to human dependence upon land, and agricultural work is for him perhaps the clearest enactments of this dependence. All human life and work trace their debt to agriculture and the way it uniquely conjoins the twofold work of land and of human hands. Agriculture epitomizes the way God provides food for God's creatures by means of this twofold work.

The intimacy and complexity of the relationship between human creatures and land as seen in agricultural work provides for Leo yet additional support for personal possession of land. Above, we saw that Leo thinks personal possession of land provides important stability and security for the supply of human need through time. In an important sense, work presupposes property. But the relationship goes the other way as well. The work relationship not only presupposes property; it should also establish it. Once again, the example he uses is agricultural. Cultivators leave, in Leo's words, the impress of their "personality" upon land (§9), such that the land "utterly changes its condition" (§10). But we should not neglect how those who cultivate land are likewise changed in the process. As we have seen, the personal possession of land brings "greater security" than reliance upon wages alone. Moreover, the possession of land can alter affections, leading cultivators to "love the very soil" upon which their lives depends. In the work of cultivation both cultivators and cultivated undergo transformation.

On the basis of the intimacy and complexity of the relationship between work and the wider world, Leo argues that it a matter of justice for personal possession to follow from work (§9). Agricultural work is an example of the way that work more generally is an essential expression of the human person—a kind of material extension of personhood into the world.[14] Leo therefore opposes those who, in his words, "assert that it is right for private persons to have the use of the soil and its various fruits, but that it is unjust for anyone to possess outright either the land on which he has built or the estate which he has brought under cultivation" (§10). Instead, possession should follow closely upon the work relationship. Workers should be able to possess the houses they build and the land they cultivate. Those who deny them this, Leo claims, are robbing workers—"defrauding" them—of what their "labor has produced." It is a violation of justice for the fruit of a person's "own sweat and labor" to be in the permanent possession of others (§10).[15]

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[14] There are resonances here with the work of Margaret Jane Radin. In her book *Reinterpreting Property*, Radin advances what she calls a "personality theory of property," by which she means "ownership is bound up with self-constitution or personhood." In the first chapter of the book, entitled "Property and Personhood," she examines a tacit and widespread legal and understanding of property that implicitly

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distinguish between what she calls personal or constitutive property (by which she means the property that a person is attached to as a person) and fungible property (by which she means the property to which someone is attached as a source of revenue). Of course, this distinction does not exhaust all possible relationships between persons and things. But she suggests that the distinction might helpfully be construed as a continuum ranging "from a thing indispensable to someone's being to a thing wholly interchangeable for money." Margaret Jane Radin, *Reinterpreting Property* (University of Chicago Press, 1993), 2, 35–71.

[15] On the basis of passages like this, some have argued that Leo advocates an individualized, labor theory of property, like that articulated by John Locke in his *Second Treatise on Government*. Cf. Richard Schlatter, *Private Property: The History of an Idea* (Rutgers University Press, 1951), 278–279; John Coleman, "What Is an Encyclical? Development of Church Social Teaching," *Origins* 2, no. 3 (1981): 53. As I pointed out in the previous chapter, among the features distinguishing Leo's account of property from Locke's has to do with the way that, according to Leo, commonality inheres in the manner of possession itself. There is no use of property that can escape the claim of common gift.

In contrast, in the *Second Treatise of Government*, Locke's concern is how, given that God grants the world to humankind in common, "any one should ever come to have a *property* in any thing" (§25). In this formulation, property stands in oppositional terms to what God gives in common, which generates the problem Locke sets out to resolve. His solution is that a human person has exclusive property in his own person, such that whatever a person works with his own hands becomes his. As Locke writes, "Whatsoever then he removes out of the state that nature hath provided and left it in, he hath mixed his *labour* with, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property." The laborer has "removed" a thing from "the common state nature hath placed it in." The act of removal "excludes the common right of other men," such that "no man but he can have a right to what that is once joined to"—a state of affairs that lasts as long as "there is enough, and as good, left in common for others" (§27). According to Locke, what a person owns as a consequence of human labor belongs to the laborer alone. An important difference between Leo and Locke therefore has to do with the notion that things can be removed from the common state and that exclusive rights can be established as a consequence of this removal. John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, ed. C. B. Macpherson (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett Publishing Co, Inc, 1980), Chapter V. For a more extended discussion about the differences between Leo and Locke, cf. Habiger, *Papal Teaching on Private Property (1891-1981)*, 343–346. Franks also helpfully contrasts Thomas and Locke, focusing especially upon the way Thomas assumes the embeddedness of human action within an encompassing created order, while Locke assumes unconditioned individual claims before an objectified world. Franks, *He Became Poor*, 53–70.

Locke's understanding of property has been read as a defense of large landowners and the emergent agrarian capitalist order of in seventeenth century England—another important contrast between his purpose and Leo's. Cf. Neal Wood, *John Locke and Agrarian Capitalism* (University of California Press, 1984); Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (University of Chicago Press, 1953), 202–251. But at Garnsey points out, Locke's legacy is far more complex. His account of property, for instance, was positively received not just supporters of the *status quo* but by opponents of it as well. Thomas Rutherforth, for instance, thought that the logic of Locke's account could be used to argue on behalf of landless laborers. This was precisely the use that was made of it by eighteenth and early nineteenth century English radicals like Spence, Ogilvie, Thelwall, Leo's position in *Rerum novarum* is clear: houses should belong to those who build them, and fields should belong to those who cultivate them. In Leo's words, "As effects follow their cause, so it is just and right that the results of labor should belong to those who have bestowed their labor" (§11). For the landless to come to share in the land is a direct entailment of creation as common gift. It is itself an enactment of property's social function. As Leo indicates above, the significance of the possession of land is that it provides greater security for workers over material support than does reliance upon wages alone. Leo's position not only resonates with the hope of restoration articulated by Isaiah. It also resonates with the hope for agrarian reform in El Salvador and elsewhere.[16] Regarding the 1975 agrarian reform proposal, Ignacio Ellacuría writes: "The

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and Hodgskin. They all drew upon Locke to make arguments on behalf of the laboring poor and communal access to land. Proudhon and Marx would later make similar arguments. Garnsey, *Thinking about Property: From Antiquity to the Age of Revolution*, 147. Katheryn Tanner has argued that Locke's views tend to be conflated with capitalist exclusive property but in fact represent an alternative logic of property, which is informed by theological claims. Tanner, *Economy of Grace*, 40–46, 54–55; Katheryn Tanner, "Economies of Grace," in *Having: Property and Possession in Religious and Social Life* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004).

[16] This is one of the reasons why *Rerum novarum* became a source of inspiration and encouragement for Catholic agrarian movements, which we see, for instance, in *Flee to the Fields*. One particularly important figure in this regard was the Dominican priest Vincent McNabb, who had an important influence on Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin of the Catholic Worker. On McNabb's work cf. especially McNabb, *The Church and the Land*;

aim is that those who work the land become owners and active agents in the agrarian transformation. It is only a step from this to the adage, 'the land belongs to those who work it.'"[17]

We have been examining how, according to Leo, the work relationship not only presupposes property; it should also lead to it. What are the implications of this understanding of property and work beyond *Rerum novarum*? On a practical level, matters become very complicated very quickly. Leo's examples in *Rerum novarum* presume a single worker or a single family cultivating unoccupied land. But what about when there are manifold hands doing the work? What about when the work is on the land or property of another? And with respect to the latter, does it make a difference if the land is under cultivation, idle, or otherwise insufficiently cultivated? Is the extensiveness or the use of the landholding relevant?

McNabb, *Nazareth Or Social Chaos*. For a general overview of McNabb's thought, cf. Whelan, "Land, Economy, and the Measure of Christ: The Catholic Agrarianism of Vincent McNabb, O.P."

[17] John J. Hassett and Hugh Lacey, *Towards a Society That Serves Its People: The Intellectual Contribution of El Salvador's Murdered Jesuits* (Georgetown University Press, 1991), 122. The phrase "land belongs to those who work it" is often associated with the Mexican revolutionary leader Emilio Zapata's claim that: "La tierra es de quien la trabaja." But its provenance is likely much older. Cf. Samuel Brunk, *The Posthumous Career of Emiliano Zapata: Myth, Memory, and Mexico's Twentieth Century* (University of Texas Press, 2008), 71, 76, 122, 164, 167, 183.

In another part of *Rerum novarum,* Leo does offer some indication of lines of response to these questions when he addresses a situation in which workers work for others and the reciprocal duties between workers and their employers. There, he states that among workers' duties to their employers is performance of the work agreed upon contractually, as well respect toward the employer's person and property. Above all, he writes, workers are "never to resort to violence in defending their own cause" (§20).

But this formulation suggests that workers have a cause worthy of defense. Indeed, as we will shortly see, Leo's discussion of justice in wage contracts indicates that when workers, by means of such contracts, are denied sufficient material support for themselves and their families, they are victims of "force and injustice" (§45)—a force and injustice that, by the time Leo wrote, had become systematic and institutionalized. Workers, then, clearly have a cause to defend; they are simply not to resort to violence in defending it. But this, then, raises additional questions: how might workers and their supporters legitimately seek to defend themselves from this ordinary force and injustice? Even if they do not resort to violence themselves, what kinds of non-violent actions can they use? How are they to involve themselves in the work of restoration?

3.2.3 Justice in Wages

As we have already begun to see, work, in an important sense, presupposes property. It also—and crucially for the purposes of the present chapter—*leads* to property. Work is how the propertyless might once again share in property and how the landless might once again acquire land. Work is how they might be more stably and securely involved in the process of making provision both for themselves and for others. Restoration therefore depends in large measure upon a renewed understanding of work and the role it plays in the diffusion of property. In order to appreciate this, it will be helpful to turn briefly to Leo's treatment of justice in wages.

According to Leo, the remuneration of workers as it exists in his own day suffers from a profoundly malformed conception of justice. What commonly passes for justice, Leo observes, is simply the consent of the parties involved. The parties arrive at a wage contract, and the mere fact of their consent indicates that they have entered into it freely. Nothing more is required. On this view, the demands of justice are met by consent to the contract. Justice is violated when the agreed-upon wages are held back by the employer, or when the agreed-upon work is left incomplete or is done inadequately. Only in such cases should public authority intervene to ensure that justice is met (§43). Michael Naughton refers to this understanding of justice in wages the "market wages" and observes that it "presupposes the infallibility of the market, that is, whatever the labor market determines as the wage is the just wage."[18]

According to Leo, the consent of the parties involved, though certainly necessary, is ultimately insufficient—radically insufficient—for the wage so understood to be a just wage. Why is this? The problem he identifies is not with consent but with the reduction of justice to it. On this understanding, there are crucial considerations that are being neglected, for instance, the dignity of workers and the need of all those persons involved. The wage, after all, is not simply payment for work. It is also the income upon which workers and their families depend.

In elaborating upon this line of thought, Leo returns to the situation of the proletariat. Because they lack land or other forms of productive property, their only access to what they need is through the wage itself. They depend exclusively upon wages in order to meet the needs of themselves and their dependents. In Leo's words, "The preservation of life is the bounden duty of one and all, and to be wanting therein is a crime. It necessarily follows that each one has a natural right to procure what is required in order to live, and the poor can procure that in no other way than by what they can earn through their work" (§44). What Leo is suggesting here is that sufficient material support is a demand of commutative justice—the justice that bears on the relations between particular persons. It is what workers are due, irrespective of other considerations.[19] Indeed, it is the most fundamental consideration regarding such work.[20]

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[18] Naughton, *The Good Stewards*, 19.

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[19] For a helpful discussion of the problems with a conception of commutative justice reduced to contractual obligations alone, cf. Jean-Yves Calvez and Jacques Perrin, *The Church and Social Justice: The Social Teaching of the Popes from Leo XIII to Pius XII (1878-1958)* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1961), 154–155.

[20] The basic shape of this understanding of wage justice will continue to be reiterated. Cf. "Discourse of His Holiness Pius XII to Commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* of Pope Leo XIII on the Social Question," in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, vol. 33, 1941; Pius XII, *Radiomessaggio Di Sua Santitá Pio XII Alla Vigilia Del Santo Natale*, 1942; Pius XII, "The Church and Labor," *Address to Workers in Rome*, 13 June 1943. As John XXIII writes in *Mater et magistra* (1961), "The remuneration of work is not something that can be left to the laws of the marketplace; nor should it be a decision left to the will of the more powerful. It must be determined in accordance with justice and equity; which means that workers must be paid a wage which allows them to live a truly human life and to fulfill their family obligations in a worthy manner" (§71). Or as John Paul II writes in *Laborem exercens* (1981): "In every system, regardless of the fundamental relationships within it between capital and labour, wages, that is to say *remuneration for work,* are still a *practical means* whereby the vast majority of people can have access to those goods which are intended for common use: both the goods of nature and manufactured goods. Both kinds of goods become accessible to the worker through the wage which he receives as remuneration for his work. Hence, in every case, a just wage is the concrete means of *verifying the justice* of the whole socioeconomic system and, in any case, of checking that it is functioning justly. It is not the only means of checking, but it is a particularly important one and, in a sense, the key means" (§19). Romero puts the point this way: "The worker is not merchandise, subject to the fluctuations of the market, but a human person, who, for the mere fact of being one, has the right to a just salary." Óscar Romero, "Soluciones humanas," *Orientación*, 24 octubre 1971.

We have seen the way Leo understands possession of land as an entailment of creation as common gift. Here it becomes evident that he understands wages in a similar fashion. The most fundamental consideration about wages is neither the contract nor what market forces dictate but what is due workers as God's creatures, to whom the goods of creation likewise belong and for whom the only access to those goods is through wages. Leo's reasoning begins with creation as common gift from which he then derives certain implications regarding wages.

That Leo is drawing out the implications of creation as common gift can likewise be seen in the way that he thinks wages should not only be sufficient to support workers. The wages should be sufficient to support the families of workers as well (§46). Calvez and Perrin call this "the family character of the wage,"[21] by which they mean the wage is indexed to the needs of families. Moreover, ensuring that workers and their dependents have what they need to survive and to flourish is not just the duty of the workers and those who employ them. It is the duty of the societies of which the workers and their families are member. The "preservation of life," as Leo puts it above, is "the bounden duty of one and all," such that those who neglect these needs are implicated in nothing short of a "crime."

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[21] "This has become the classical doctrine of the Church in social matters, that the right of the worker to the fruit of his labor has a family character." Jean-Yves Calvez and Jacques Perrin, *The Church and Social Justice: The Social Teaching of the Popes from Leo XIII to Pius XII (1878-1958)* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1961), 242-244.

On the question of wages and their familial character, we are once again seeing what I referred to in the previous chapter as the imaginative reach of *Rerum novarum*. Leo disputes the thesis, often associated with Marxism, that class conflict necessarily follows from the wage system itself, such that wherever there is wage work, there is exploitation of surplus value and the relegation of workers to want. As Calvez and Perrin write, Leo suggests that "there is no relationship of cause and effect between the existence of a system in which capital and labour are provided by different people, and a situation of class warfare. The Church lays down conditions….to which such a system must conform if it is to be acceptable. What is acceptable is not any wage system, but a wage system which has been amended and qualified."[22] The just wage, which is also a familial wage, is part of this emendation and qualification.

Leo thinks the present wage system is replete with injustice. But his response to this is not to reject the wage system as such and replace it with some other one. It is to lay down the conditions to which the wage system must conform to be just.

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[22] Ibid., 244.

One of the first tasks in this regard is to point out that its very understanding of justice is inadequate. It fails to consider a deeper justice—"more imperious and ancient"—than contract or consent, which arises from creation understood as common gift. In other words, it fails to consider that wages must be sufficient for the support of workers and their dependents (§45). If wages are insufficient in this regard—or "if through necessity or fear of a worse evil" workers are forced to accept degrading conditions—they are victims of "force and injustice" (§45). On the basis of this more imperious and ancient justice, Leo categorically rejects as violence and injustice all "pressure upon the indigent and the destitute for the sake of gain," all gathering of profit "out of the need of another" (§20).[23]

Defrauding workers of the material support they need through insufficient payment of wages rejects God's purposes for creation. It is nothing short of a "crime"—the ongoing perpetration of which, Leo thinks, continues to fuel social conflict (§20, §47).

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[23] In this regard, Leo works within much older traditions that regard it as violence when some purposefully exploit the vulnerabilities of others. Odd Langholm has helpfully examined classical, scholastic, and modern thought on this type of violence or coercion in exchange. Odd Langholm, *Economics in the Medieval Schools: Wealth, Exchange, Value, Money and Usury According to the Paris Theological Tradition 1200-1350* (New York: Brill Academic Pub, 1992), 578–579; Odd Langholm, *The Legacy of Scholasticism in Economic Thought: Antecedents of Choice and Power* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 52–132. For a contemporary articulation of what he calls "economic compulsion" that arises from chance and contingency, or adverse unintended consequences, cf. Barrera, *Economic Compulsion and Christian Ethics*.

Leo quotes the apostle James regarding the criminal character of this ubiquitous wage robbery: "Listen! The wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts" (James 5:4). As these and other passages suggest,[24] Leo regards the violence and injustice afflicting workers and their families as coterminous with the order he faces. His worry is that an "evil" that is already "so great" might one day grow to become "beyond remedy" (§62).

It is also on the basis of this deeper justice that Leo defends workers' access to property in land and articulates what justice in wages requires. We have seen that part of the significance of land is that it affords greater stability and security for workers and their families than reliance upon wages alone. It is therefore unsurprising that in the midst of a discussion of wages Leo returns once again to land and work's role in facilitating access to it. Wages must not only be sufficient for the material support of workers and their families. Wages must be sufficient for the landless "to look forward to obtaining a share in the land" (§47)—or some other form of productive property providing more stability and security than reliance upon wages alone. Leo's discussion of justice in wages immediately precedes and leads directly into his programmatic conclusion that "the law…should favor ownership, and its policy should be to induce as many as possible of the people to become owners" (§46). Once again, we see why Leo thinks the social question cannot be solved without a defense of property. But we also see that his primary purpose in so doing is not to defend those who hold property against those who do not. Rather, it is to imagine routes whereby the landless might themselves come to share in land.

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[24] Cf. Rerum novarum §3.

3.2.4 Beyond *Rerum novarum*

One of the questions raised by *Rerum novarum* that Pius XI addresses in *Quadragesimo anno* concerns when workers work on the land or property of another. Pius states that Leo was addressing a situation in which a worker cultivates unoccupied land. With regard to work hired out or done on the land or property of another, the situation is different. Pius XI's basic point is one he draws upon another part of *Rerum novarum* to articulate: that it is unjust *both* for landholders to claim everything for themselves over and against their workers *and* for workers to claim everything for themselves over and against those upon whose land they work. Construing these relationships solely in antagonistic terms misconstrues the intimate and complex relationship between property and work, as well as the more fundamental dependencies of workers and property-holders upon one another. In Pius XI's words, it is "wholly false to ascribe to property alone or to labor alone whatever has been obtained through the combined effort of both, and it is wholly unjust for either, denying the efficacy of the other, to arrogate to itself whatever has been produced" (§§52-53).

Pius XI therefore clarifies Leo on this point. But he does not sever the bond between work and property. When in *Quadragesimo anno* he elaborates upon how the propertyless might acquire property, he immediately turns to the topic of wages and salaries (§63). The topical shift from property to wages and salaries is subtle but important to notice. Until this point, Pius XI has been discussing property (§§44-53), and how the disparity between the propertied and the propertyless imperils the common good (§58, cf. §§59-63). But in specifying how the propertyless might "advance to the state of possessing some little property" (§63), Pius XI shifts to wages and salaries—a subtle but unmistakable indication that justice in wages is the hinge upon which access to productive property in an industrial order turns. The discussion of propertylessness and the discussion of wages and salaries are therefore not discrete discussions. They are united by the movement of restoration—from propertylessness to property, landlessness to land.

Thus, earlier and in reference to the fact that rural wageworkers are being "pushed to the lowest level of existence," Pius's immediate concern is lack of living wages. But it is also and crucially that these workers are being "deprived of all hope of ever acquiring 'some property in land'" (§59). These concerns are of a piece. Among the most important remedies for this situation is a living wage. But we must not neglect that the living wage aims at re-instilling the hope of—and eventually the reality of—sharing in land.

Pius XII continues to emphasize the bond between work and property. Citing the writings of his predecessors and his own messages on the topic of work, among the "practical conclusions" he draws in his 1942 Christmas message is the need to establish "a social order that will make possible an assured, even if modest, private property for all classes of society"[25]—an order in which such property is, as he puts it, "a natural fruit of work."[26] In his 11 March 1951 Radio Message to Spanish workers, Pius XII puts the point this way: "There are many factors which should contribute to a wider diffusion of property. However, the most important one will always be the just wage."[27] Together the diffusion of property and the just wage comprise "two of the most urgent requirements in the social program of the Church."[28] Pius XII likewise retains his predecessors' emphasis upon the the possession of land in particular—in Pius XII's words, "the holding in which the family lives, and from the products of which it draws all or part of its subsistence."[29]

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[25] Pius XII, *Radiomessaggio Di Sua Santitá Pio XII Alla Vigilia Del Santo Natale*. Here and elsewhere Pius indexes "social order" to God's purposes for creation. Social order is therefore fundamentally threatened by dispossession and dislocation because it is inseparable from sufficient access for all to the earth's land and harvests.

[26] Pius XII, "Radiomensaje En El V Aniversario Del Comienzo de La Guerra," September 1, 1944. Elsewhere he speaks of workers' share in the wealth they produce being sufficient to enable "a greater number of persons to attain the independence and security which come from possession of private property, and to participate with their families in the spiritual and cultural goods to which earthly goods are ordered." Pius XII, "The Problem of Fair Distribution," *A Letter Addressed to Semaine Sociale of Dijon, France*, 7 July 1952.

The politics of ensuring that all families have sufficient land transcends and relativizes the boundaries of between nations. Pius XII reads the phenomenon of migration in this light, referring to the sufficiency of "that surface [of the earth] which God created and prepared for the use of all."[30] Pius XII does not say much about the reasons people might leave their homelands. But he does say that if families cannot find land and livelihood where they are, they must be permitted to go in search of a new

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[27] "Radiomensaje Del Santo Padre Pío XII a Los Trabajadores de España," in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, vol. 43, 1951.

[28] Ibid.

[29] According to Pius, the possession of land is indispensable to the security and maintenance of a family as a society more fundamental than the state. It offers a way to bind people not only in place but across time, uniting generations to one another. "Discourse of His Holiness Pius XII to Commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* of Pope Leo XIII on the Social Question," 224–225.

[30] Ibid.

"homeland," and they should be welcomed upon their arrival. This is an entailment of creation understood as common gift and its politics of common use.[31]

As we have seen, Leo and his successors emphasize work—and particularly justice in wages—as an important path toward attaining the common destination of created goods in the emerging industrial order. At the same time, and inseparable from these discussions of work and wage justice, we have also discerned an underlying vision of restoration, articulated in terms of a movement from propertylessness to property, from lack of land to obtaining a share in it. The fundamental issue, then, is how work might be reimagined such that it can once again become a path to property. For, according to the line of thought we are examining, a condition like landlessness represents not only lack of basic material support—exclusion from access to what is due the landless as God's creatures. It also represents an insecurity and instability over such material support, an inability on the part of the landless to be participants in the process of provisioning, and a form of defenselessness before a world that refuses to shield them from misery. It indicates that the path between work and property is being obstructed.[32]

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[31] Ibid.

[32] We can also better appreciate why John Paul II in *Laborem exercens* (1981) considers work as a "as a hinge" (*veluti cardinem*) to the whole social question. In explaining what he means by this, John Paul cites a passage from *Gaudium et spes* addressing how "human life may be rendered more human" (§3). The horizon of this rendering more

3.2.5 Partnership Contracts and Worker Participation in Property

In my treatment of the relationship between property and work thus far, I have admittedly been attending closely to land and landlessness—themes which emerge rather straightforwardly from the texts under consideration and are of obvious relevance to understanding the call for agrarian reform as it eventually develops in the Church's social teaching. But by emphasizing land and landlessness, I do not mean to overlook the wider changes in economic life that have come to the fore over the course of the twentieth century. It is often observed that these changes have led to a precipitous decline in the importance of agriculture relative to the rest of economic life, and generated a situation in which possession of goods like know-how, technology, and skill rather than goods like land is determinative. For instance, in his examination of the common destination of created goods—or what he calls "the universal access

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human is the Holy Spirit's work of sanctification, which opens up to all human creatures life in Christ and the way of *caritas* (§38). Not only does this echo the earlier claim in *Gaudium et spes*, to which John Paul continually returns over the course of his pontificate, that it is only in the mystery of the Incarnate Word is the mystery of the human person illumined (§22). It also echoes Paul VI's emphasis throughout *Populorum progressio* that human life cannot be rendered more human apart from attending to the conditions that stifle human flourishing, that are themselves infrahuman. The movement from a "material poverty" that lacks "the bare necessities of life" to "the acquisition of life's necessities," which is associated with the greater diffusion of property, is inescapably part of this process (§21, cf. §§44, 79, 80, 82).

principle"—Barrera writes of the "major transformation away from a heavy dependence on natural resources to one that is knowledge based and skill driven in its value creation," and the "sea change in the relative importance of intangible knowledge over material goods." In relation to these transformations, Barrera and others suggest the need to examine the Church's understanding of the universal access principle afresh.[33]

Surely there is truth in this. But at the same time, describing these transformations well is difficult and often runs into problems. Not only is 'the economy' is highly differentiated, but changes in it are not uniform either in space or in time. All of this renders problematic simplistic stadial accounts of shifts in economic life.[34] For instance, many commentators relegate *Rerum novarum*'s "agriculturally based understanding of the economy" to obsolescence.[35] In some ways they are entirely correct. But in other ways, this relegation can obscure as much as clarify. A little less than a century after Leo wrote *Rerum novarum*, Romero's El Salvador still had not left its "agriculturally based understanding of the economy" behind.

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[33] This is examined in considerable detail in Barrera, *Modern Catholic Social Documents and Political Economy*, 193–225. Some have even argued that these developments pose problems with which the teaching has yet to reckon, as Daniel Finn puts it, that there remains an "important unresolved problem" with regard to the contribution of human work and creativity to the value of property in the modern world. Daniel Finn, "Creativity as a Problem for Moral Theology: John Locke's 99 Percent Challenge to the Catholic Doctrine of Property," *Horizons* 27, no. 1 (2000): 44. Finn poses the problem this way: "The classic Christian doctrine of property is founded on obligations arising from the use of material goods—land and other natural resources—given by God in creation for the benefit of all humanity. However, as Locke argued, most of the value of modern wealth—the value of goods and services produced in a modern economy—is the result of human creativity and effort, and only a small portion of that value is attributable to the natural resources embodied in it. The result is that the traditional obligations of property owners could seem to lose their moral force due to the changed character of wealth in the modern world" (45). Finn reads the axiom of creation as common gift through a strong nature-culture divide. His formulations throughout this article suggest not only that the obligations arising from the use of material goods are walled off from the issue of human creativity and effort, but also that human creativity and effort, like human creatures themselves, are somehow disembedded and separable from the world as created by God and ordained to meet human needs, that human creatures are not themselves part of the gift.

As I hope it is by now becoming evident, juxtaposing Leo's response in *Rerum novarum* to the upheaval of industrialization to the conditions of Romero's El Salvador is not inapposite. John Paul II acknowledges as much in his 1991 encyclical *Centesimus annus* commemorating the hundredth anniversary of *Rerum novarum* where he compares the "inhuman exploitation" described by Leo to those parts of the contemporary world where "the rules of the earliest period of capitalism still flourish in conditions of 'ruthlessness' in no way inferior to the darkest moments of the first phase of industrialization"— where "the land is still the central element in the economic process, but those who cultivate it are excluded from ownership and reduced to a state of quasi-servitude" (§32).

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[34] The phrase "stadial accounts" is Charles Taylor's. "The eighteenth century generated new, stadial theories of history, which saw human society developing through a serious of stages defined by the form of their economy: e.g., hunger-gatherer, agricultural, etc. culminating in the contemporary commercial society." Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009), 218.

[35] See John F. Donovan, "Pope Leo XIII and a Century of Catholic Social Teaching," in *The Heart of Catholic Social Teaching: Its Origin and Contemporary Significance* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2009), 60. Many more examples could be adduced.

However we understand these transformations in economic life, humans remain creatures of flesh and blood, whose bodies root them in and occasion dependencies upon a created order for the satisfaction of their needs. These accounts of transformations in economic life should therefore not be taken to mean that the universal access principle as it applies to land is no longer relevant. Rather, as John Paul observes in *Centesimus annus,* the possession of know-how, technology, and skill are "no less important than land" (§32). John Paul's point is not that the possession of know-how, technology, and skill has *replaced* the importance of the possession of land. His point is that they must be considered *in addition* to land. They raise new concerns, which is crucially different from saying the old concerns have gone away.[36] The spate of land grabs or large-scale land acquisitions in the wake of the 2007-2008 world food price crisis—which continue to this day—suggest as much.[37]

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[36] We see the same point being made in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, which states: "If forms of property unknown in the past take on significant importance…nonetheless, traditional forms of property must not be forgotten…An equitable distribution of land remains ever critical…In rural areas, the possibility of acquiring land through opportunities offered by labor and credit markets is a necessary condition for access to other goods services. Besides constituting an effective means for safeguarding the environment, this possibility represents a system of social security that can be put in place also in those countries with weak administrative structure" (§180).

All that said, while land must not be neglected, it is important to point out that land is not the only form of productive property to which the line of thinking we are examining wants to expand access. Land is one among many possible forms of property providing the requisite stability and security in the support of material needs through time.

One place this begins to emerge is in relation to developments in relation to Leo's critique of wage contracts and the reduction of justice to consent to them. In his opposition to the wage contracts of his day, some interpreted Leo to be suggesting that wage contracts and the wage system more generally were *ipso facto* unjust, such that in all cases they must be replaced by what Pius XI in *Quadragesimo anno* refers to as a "partnership contract" (*societatis contractum*) or some scheme of co-ownership or co-management of property, as well as co-sharing in the profits therefrom (§65).

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[37] Cf. Saturnino M. Borras et al., "Towards a Better Understanding of Global Land Grabbing: An Editorial Introduction," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 38, no. 2 (2011): 209–16; Maria Cristina Rulli, Antonio Saviori, and Paolo D'Odorico, "Global Land and Water Grabbing," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 110, no. 3 (2013): 892–97; Klaus Deininger and Derek Byerlee, *Rising Global Interest in Farmland: Can It Yield Sustainable and Equitable Benefits?* (Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 2014).

For his part, Pius thinks that such an interpretation misconstrues what Leo actually said. Commutative justice does not *per se* entail co-administration or co-ownership. Neither contracts nor the wage system are everywhere and in all cases essentially unjust. As John XXIII later puts it in *Mater et magistra*, there is an important distinction between these contracts and systems being unjust as such, and these contracts and systems being unjust in particular forms of implementation. That the latter is the case—that these contracts and systems are often "inhuman" and "unjust" in his own time and place—John thinks is patently obvious (§31). The underlying issue, then, is not to defend these contracts and systems in their present form but rather to specify "the terms and conditions to be observed if justice and equity are not to be violated (§31).[38]

What must not be overlooked in all of this is what Pius immediately goes on to write, which is that he thinks partnership contracts should be promoted "so far as is possible," such that "workers and other employees…become sharers in ownership or management or participate in some fashion in the profits received" (§65). Another way of putting the point is just because commutative justice does not necessarily entail partnership contracts does not mean that they are not the better way and that they should not be embraced by those who are able to do so.

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[38] Cf. *Mater et magistra*, §§31-32.

The emphasis upon partnership contracts and upon increased worker participation in ownership, management, and profit-sharing continues in Church teaching, applying to all aspects of economic life, agricultural and otherwise. Since *Quadragesimo anno*, there has been a continual emphasis upon fostering forms of organization and association that attempt to embody alternatives to the widespread antagonism between work and capital, in which the trajectory is always towards greater, not lesser, participation on the part of the worker in property. There is an abiding concern with fostering forms of organization and association that present alternatives to the widespread antagonism between labor and capital.

For instance, in his 1944 Radio Message, Pius XII speaks of the importance of protecting and supporting "small- and medium-sized properties," not only in agriculture, but in the arts and trades, in commerce and industry—in short, in social life more generally. What he calls "cooperative unions" (*uniones cooperativas*) are indispensable in this regard. But even in cases where large-scale agricultural enterprises are necessary, Pius XI follows his predecessor in speaking of the need to integrate "partnership contracts" into "work contracts" (§30; cf. *Quadragesimo anno* §64-65).[39]

In *Mater et magistra,* John XXIII writes of the way that "workers should be allocated shares in the firms for which they work (§75). There are "many ways in which the demands of justice can be satisfied," he writes. But one that is "especially desirable" in his own time is that "workers gradually come to share in the ownership of their company" (§77). He emphasizes the link between work and property, as well as the establishment of the conditions under which all can achieve some property of their own (§§112-115). *Gaudium et spes* likewise addresses the need to promote "the active sharing of all in the administration and profits" of enterprises (§68).

In *Laborem exercens*, John Paul II draws on these passages and others like them when he mentions the "special significance" of the many proposals his predecessors have bequeathed him regarding "joint ownership of the means of work, sharing by the workers in the management and/or profits of businesses, so-called shareholding by labor, etc." Such proposals, he thinks, point to "the proper position of labor and the worker in the production process" (§14).

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[39] Cf. "Radiomensaje Del Santo Padre Pío XII a Los Trabajadores de España," 11 March 1951, §2. Pius states that "The Church encourages all that which, as far as circumstances allow, tries to introduce elements of partnership contracts into work-contracts and improves the general condition of workers" (*Ella [La Iglesia] ve con buenos ojos y aun fomenta todo aquello que, dentro de lo que permiten las circunstancias, tiende a introducir elementos del contrato de sociedad en el contrato de trabajo y mejora la condición general del trabajador*) (§2). Elsewhere he suggests, like Pius XI, that the right to co-administration does not arise directly from labor contract itself. Cf. Pius XII, "A Radio Address to Austrian Catholics in Vienna," 14 September 1952. Cf. Habiger's comments on this in Habiger, *Papal Teaching on Private Property (1891-1981)*, 160.

In the language of the Church's social teaching, these matters are oftentimes formulated in terms of the relationship between work and capital, in which the former is said to assume priority over the latter.[40] Attention is characteristically drawn to the mutual dependencies of work and capital both in order to overcome any sense of originary or essential antagonism between the two, as well as to foster a sense of the contingency of current arrangements and the possibility of alternatives.[41] But as John Paul's words suggest, the practical and institutional enactment of these formulations is perhaps best understood in relation to partnership contracts and other attempts to foster and to increase worker participation in the ownership, management, and profits of property.

What is being advocated in these proposals is work as a path to property-holding—an reimagining of work that leads to a genuine sharing on the part of workers in the ownership and management productive property, as well as the profits deriving from it. Moreover, in these proposals we once again discern an emphasis upon restoration, articulated in terms of a movement from propertylessness to property, from landlessness to land. Moreover, all of this is integrated within the general emphasis we have been examining upon the need for a better distribution of productive property.

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[40] Cf. John Paul II, *Laborem exercens*, §§11-12; *Centesimus annus*, §32.
[41] Cf. Leo XIII, *Rerum novarum* §19; Pius XI, *Quadragesimo anno* §§53-55; John Paul II, *Laborem exercens*, §§11-13.

Lest we imagine the diffusion of property in terms of the spread of absolute property and successive waves of enclosure,[42] we must continually recall that the fundamental goal of the diffusion of property is to share in it and to include others in the sharing. It is the enactment of a politics of common use. With regard to the proposals we have been considering, this is well articulated by the anonymous author of an article entitled "Cooperativism" that appeared in *Orientación*, a weekly publication of the archdiocese of San Salvador, about the cooperative movement in El Salvador. In the article, the author points out that cooperatives:

> do not destroy private property but rather generalize it; they realize property's social function. Members of cooperatives are not at any moment divested of what belongs to them. Rather, they come to understand that it belongs to all of them in common, and so they practically discover that the common good is above the personal good because the common good includes the personal good and fulfills it.[43]

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[42] Hyde, *Common As Air*, 45, 54–59, 70–74.

[43] "El cooperativismo: una realización obrera," *Orientación*, San Salvador, del 29 de diciembre al 4 de enero 1970.

As this description suggests, cooperatives promote a practice of property that prioritizes inclusion and mutual responsibility, in which personal possession of property neither comes at the expense of others nor denies duties toward them. They exemplify a practice of property that attempts to include and gather rather than exclude and scatter in the very holding of property itself.

Among the primary purposes of cooperatives, partnership contracts, and similar attempts to establish alternative social spaces and practices of property, then, is to address existing class conflicts in ways that make visible, in Pius XII's words, "that higher unity which mutually binds all who collaborate in production…the unity and solidarity inherent in their joint duty of providing together for the common good and the needs of the entire community."[44] The trajectory toward greater worker participation in property is part of the process of overcoming the distance between people. Underlying and ordering the whole discussion is the question of how to enact a politics of common use, which acknowledges property as common gift that God gives to foster the common good.

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[44] Pius XII, "Preserving the Dignity of the Worker in the Workplace," *Letter Read at the Opening Session of the Italian Social Week in Turin*, 19 September 1952. Cf. John XXIII, *Mater et magistra*, §§85-103.

Pius does not use the language of institutional or structural sin in this passage. But that is precisely what is at issue. Institutions and structures have obscured the deeper unities and solidarities upon which the commonplace antagonism between work and capital are parasitic. The proper response to this situation, however, is not to succumb to the antagonism. It is to attest to its lack of ultimate reality—to show that things are and so might be otherwise.

3.2.6 Protection

We have been looking at partnership contracts and other proposals meant to foster and increase worker participation in property. I want to take a step back for a moment and note certain important features of workers' associations and organizations that are likewise pertinent to our present considerations.

Recall from the first chapter Romero's statement about the persecution of the Church in El Salvador. "That part of the Church has been attacked and persecuted," he said in his Louvain address, "that put itself on the side of the impoverished and went to their defense."[45] In other words, members of the Church were attacked and persecuted because they sought to protect the impoverished from a violence lodged in the social order itself—a violence prior to the repression of the state or the full-fledged uprising of the guerillas. In the previous chapter, I cited Leo's mention in *Rerum novarum* of the abolishment of the "ancient guilds," noting that the underlying concern is not that the guilds were abolished but rather that "no other protective organization took their place." These concerns about a lack of protection—about the refusal of societies to shield those upon whom they depend from misery—are not unrelated.[46]

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[45] Romero, "La dimensión política de la fe desde la opción por los pobres," 177–178.

At the end of *Rerum novarum*, when Leo turns to the topic of associations and organizations of employers and workers, the issue of protection is front and center. In introducing the topic of workers' corporations, Leo explicitly names mutual aid societies; organizations of private benevolence that provide for workers and their families in the event of injury, sickness, or death; organizations for the welfare of children and the elderly; and insurance societies (§§48-49, 55).[47]

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[46] See John XXIII's opening comments in *Mater et magistra* about the significance of *Rerum novarum,* which focus precisely the defense and restoration of workers §§8, 15-16.

[47] We have already seen some of the ways the family as a society is central to the concerns of *Rerum novarum* in terms of its defense of property, its articulation of access to property through work, its understanding of justice in wages, and so on. The discussion of associations and organizations is a continuation of this. Hittinger reads the whole encyclical as "chiefly about the natural right to form voluntary societies, especially those which constitute a kind of social membrane around the family." Russell Hittinger, "Divisible Goods and Common Good: Reflections on *Caritas in Veritate*," *Faith and Economics* 58 (2011): 33. It is important to point out that the term 'society' as Leo uses it embraces social memberships within polities, as well as diverse kinds of human community: families (cf. §§12-14), organizations and associations of employers and workers (§§48-57), and even the Church (§§16, 19, 29, 38, 53). The Church is not only

According to Leo, the most important of these corporations, however, are workers' unions, "for these virtually include all the rest" (§49). He explicitly compares unions to guilds (§49), and in so doing, integrates the discussion of associations and organizations into his concerns over the lack of protection for workers. "The richer class have many ways of shielding themselves," Leo writes, "whereas the mass of the poor have no resources of their own to fall back upon" (§37). Without property and without organizations and associations, workers are without protection. They are exposed. Throughout his discussion of such corporations, Leo repeatedly underscores their role in affording protection to workers and their dependents.

In *The Labor Problem and Christianity*, Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler, an important influence on Leo XIII and *Rerum novarum*, explains the matter this way:

> Guild rules were designed to offer protection to the workers—as a kind of contract between the working class and the rest of society. According to

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herself a unique society. She is likewise comprised of societies internal to her, such as confraternities and religions orders. As William Cavanaugh helpfully puts it, "society, for Leo, is not an aggregate of individuals but a society of societies...His vision of social order is based on the proliferation of organisms like the 'artificers' guilds of olden times,' unions, mutual aid societies, confraternities, and a host of other, organically-related forms of social life.'" William Cavanaugh, "Dispersed Political Authority: Subsidiarity and Globalization in Caritas in Veritate," in *Jesus Christ: The New Face of Social Progress* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), 101–102.

> this pact, the working class performed certain necessary services, and society, by placing a restriction on competition, assured the workers a higher wage than would otherwise have been possible so as to provide them with a decent standard of living and to protect them from day to day uncertainty and insecurity. Whoever must earn his daily bread by rendering necessary services to others has a moral right to expect that his subsistence is not placed in jeopardy from one day to the next by competition.…The wealthy capitalist has protection a thousand-fold for his business in his very capital…But the worker for some reason ought to be left without such protection; and to that end one castigates and condemns guild restrictions.

Ketteler does not neglect the many problems with the guilds. He mentions, for instance, abuses of authority, lack of flexibility in adjusting to changing circumstances, the general need for reform, and so on.[48] What he is trying to call attention to is the moral economy undergirding the guilds themselves.[49] "The principle behind guild regulation," he writes, "remained sound, and it should have been preserved."[50] In defending the principle, Ketteler appeals simply to the "moral right" that those who render necessary services to others should not fear for their own basic material support, that there should be some measure of protection from exposure to the uncertainties and insecurities of competition. In other words, there should be a "contract" or "pact" between them and the rest of society, which of course hinges upon some recognition of a shared social membership.

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[48] von Ketteler, "The Labor Problem and Christianity," 329.

[49] The phrase "moral economy" is E.P. Thompson's. It appears in his famous article on eighteenth century English food riots, in which Thompson argues that the way the riots, while triggered by soaring food prices, dealer malpractice, the hunger of the rioters themselves, and so on, should be understood within a wider moral framework of norms and obligations, what he calls "moral economy." In his words, "An outrage to these moral assumptions, quite as much as actual deprivation, was the usual occasion for direct action." E.P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," *Past & Present* 50, no. 1 (1971): 78–79. For an insightful application of Thompson's analysis to Southeast Asian peasant societies, cf. James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).

Leo's treatment of corporations evokes what Christopher Franks calls the human creature's constitutional lack or neediness.[51] Humans not only depend upon land in order to meet their needs. They depend upon the hands of others; they depend upon social bodies of which they are members. What Franks calls lack or neediness, Leo calls "weakness." Leo writes that it is the acknowledgement of weakness that leads human creatures "to call in aid from without," which is the basis of civil society. Weakness is what unites people to one another and leads to the proliferation of forms of organization and association among peoples (§50).

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[50] Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler, "The Labor Problem and Christianity," in *The Social Teachings of Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1981), 329.
[51] Franks, *He Became Poor*, 36.

Weakness is why Ketteler understands what he calls “the cooperative idea” to be in deep tension with liberal sociology and its emphasis on the “proud, self-sufficient individual” left to himself and his own abilities. The liberal emphasis on self-help, he thinks, is inadequate “from the moment of birth to the hour of death.” In contrast, the cooperative idea is founded upon the “humble acknowledgement” of weakness and insufficiency of the individual person, and their need for the support of others to flourish.[52]

Weakness is precisely what is being exposed on a vast scale in the emerging order of industrial capitalism. The human creature’s constitutional lack or neediness has become the site of systematic exploitation and violence. This is not a new problem, to be sure. But widespread dispossession and dissolution of social bonds have greatly exacerbated it, leaving many defenseless against those who would prey upon them. As a consequence, workers have been, “surrendered, isolated and helpless, to the hardheartedness of employers and the greed of unchecked competition” (§3). They have been forced to accept wages that are insufficient for support them and working conditions that are criminal.

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[52] For this reason, Ketteler also discerns a contradiction within liberal self-help organizations in that they “must afford some kind of protection against conditions that emanate from the situation where everyone is helping himself.” The very existence of worker associations and organizations imply limits on free competition. Thus, as Ketteler sees it, liberals, to remain consistent, ought to oppose rather than support such societies, standing, as they do, “in open defiance of the purity of modern economics.” von Ketteler, “The Labor Problem and Christianity,” 348–349.

Leo makes a telling comment at the outset of his treatment of the topic of workers' corporations when he states that he wants to discuss why these corporations are necessary, as well as how they should be organized. He also wants to show "that they exist of their own right" (§49). That he sees the need to show that these corporations exist is suggestive. It indicates an important feature of the problem as Leo understands it, which is not simply the neglect of them but their outright suppression. According to Leo, the problem, we might say, is the absence of societies where societies should exist.[53]

In nineteenth-century France, workers' corporations were widely regarded as a threat to public order, and they began to be seen in similar terms in those places influenced by the French Revolution. For instance, William H. Sewell Jr. shows that the attack on the privileges of the old regime morphed into an attack on corporations themselves, implying "not only the reduction of all citizens to an equal submission to the law common to all Frenchmen but the annihilation of any sense of common interest intermediate between the individual and the nation. Loyalties to provinces, estates, orders, communities, corporations, all were to vanish before the interests of individual citizens and the supreme loyalty of every citizen to the nation."[54] In this context, workers corporations were counterrevolutionary, and workers' freedom to assemble in pursuit of common interests was opposed. In a nation of free individual citizens, wages and working conditions had to be contracted on an individual basis.[55] Hence the jurist and politician Isaac René Guy Le Chapelier reproached workers not because they demanded higher wages and better conditions but because, in attempting to reconstitute corporations, they denied their dignity as French citizens.[56]

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[53] Once again, Ketteler is helpful here because his disagreement with how "liberal thought" understands society is also Leo's. Ketteler sees within liberal thought an exclusive emphasis upon what he calls "mere mechanical, external type of organization bringing things together in a superficial, accidental manner." He contrasts this with what he calls "organic unification," which he sees operative throughout the universe, not only in unities of substance but also in "moral organisms" like families, cooperatives, nations, and so on. Ketteler writes, "What they [liberals] propose would be like reducing by some chemical process all plants and trees and animals—all living organisms found in nature—to atomic particles, and then to put them all together again mechanically. That, in truth, is the kind of experiment that the liberals would engage in with the human race." Ibid., 349–350.

According to Leo, the principal way workers' corporations "afford opportune aid to those who are in distress" (§48) is therefore through their very existence—through the protection that comes from the incorporation of isolated individuals into them and through gathering together with others as opposed to standing alone. As Ketteler writes,

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[54] William Hamilton Sewell, *Work and Revolution in France: The Language of Labor from the Old Regime to 1848* (Cambridge University Press, 1980), 88–89.
[55] Ibid., 89.
[56] Ibid., 91.

"When [workers] band together into an organization or a cooperative, they fortify themselves with one of the most effective means to combat and alleviate material needs."[57]

Viewed from this vantage, the reconstitution of social bodies is an attempt to resist the reduction of civil society to, in Leo's words, "one dead level" (§17). They are part of an attempt to stem the tide of what Pius XI in *Quadragesimo anno* describes as "the overthrow and near extinction of that rich social life which was once highly developed through associations of various kinds," leaving behind "virtually only individuals and the state" (§78).[58] Leo and Pius both oppose a conception of work as an aggregate of individual persons—each looking out for himself, with no common bonds or interests between them, before whom the only true societies are the state or the owners of capital.

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[57] von Ketteler, "The Labor Problem and Christianity," 346.

[58] As Sewell writes, in adopting corporate vocabulary and forms of organization, nineteenth-century French workers "were not attempting to restore the corporate system as it existed under the old regime. They were attracted to the corporate idiom because of its inherent opposition to competitive individualism…[A]fter the Revolution, proprietary individualism became the dominant idiom of the state, and the corporate idiom became a language of opposition. Nineteenth-century workers' corporations were organized on the margins of the law and could not exist without the continued voluntary effort of their members. The great problem they faced was maintaining solidarity and ordered trade community against the powerful individualistic tendencies of contemporary society." Sewell, *Work and Revolution in France*, 162.

The establishment and proliferation of workers' corporations, then, affords aid to workers by gathering together those who are presently scattered through the reconstitution of social bodies. But these corporations afford aid in other ways, too—including but not limited to increasing workers' access to property and material support (cf. §57). In other words, workers find protection, not only when they gather together with others, but also when they participate in clearing the path between work and property from the obstacles obstructing it. We see that Leo's discussion in *Rerum novarum* upon the need for the proliferation of property is of a piece with his discussion the need for the proliferation of workers' associations and organizations. What unites them is their integration into the movement of restoration.

The aid that such workers' corporations afford workers is therefore of a very specific kind: it seeks to establish, preserve, and build up the social bodies that receive it. As a consequence of the protection that such corporations provide, Leo thinks that the pressures being put upon workers for the sake of profits will begin to diminish. Their weakness will no longer be as exposed. The support of others, and the stability and security that comes from sharing in property, effectively defend them against those who would prey upon their needs. Thus, as Leo sees it, as workers incorporate into these bodies, and in doing so increasingly come to share in property themselves, their social standing and agency will begin to be restored. They will begin to recover a sociality proper to themselves as workers—a union with others in common activity.

In *Quadragesimo anno*, Pius XI discusses these matters under the heading of what he refers to work's "social aspect" (§69). Work, like property, has a social function. It is a service of the commons. But what Pius XI means by the social aspect of work can be seen in other ways as well, which relates to the problem identified above as the absence of societies where societies should exist. At least in *Quadragesimo anno*, Pius is particularly concerned about the neglect of the inescapably social aspect of the performance of work for wages and salaries. He therefore attends to the social bodies of which workers are member, within which their work is embedded. Workers never work solely as individuals, isolated from all others. Their work is always together with and alongside others, with whom they cooperate and upon whom they must necessarily depend. If work is being increasingly organized like a commodity—to be bought and sold like any other commodity—Pius wants to remind his audience that it is a fictitious one.[59]

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[59] Labor and laborers being regarded as a mere commodity is a continual complaint within this line of thought. For a sampling cf. Pius XI, *Quadragesimo anno*, §§83, 135; Pius XII, "The Basis and Importance of a Healthy Agricultural Class," *Speech delivered by His Holiness to the delegates at the Convention of the Address to the National Farmers' League of Italy in Rome,* 15 November 1946; Pius XII, "Adscriptis Sodalitati Catholicae Ex Operariis Italicis, Ob Commendationem Litterarum Encyclicarum Rerum Novarum Coadunatis," in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, vol. 45, 1953; *Gaudium et spes* §67; *Compendium of the Social*

Pius thinks that workers can and should constitute communities, and that when they do so work can best realize its social function. As Pius writes, "productive effort cannot yield its fruits unless a truly social and organic body exists, unless a social and juridical order watches over the exercise of work, unless the various occupations, being interdependent, cooperate with and mutually complete one another" (§69). The acknowledgement of the existence of social memberships, of the necessity of collaboration, of the bonds of dependency within which all human life and work is implicated—realities that precede and are more fundamental than any conflict between labor and capital—all lie behind Pius's desire to support and protect societies of work

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Doctrine of the Church §271. The phrase "fictitious commodity" is from Polanyi's *The Great Transformation*, in which Polanyi distinguishes between ordinary commodities and fictitious ones. Commodities, of course, are goods that are produced for sale on a market. But the full instantiation of a self-regulating market, Polanyi argues, entails not only that there be markets for all elements of industry, as well as goods and services. It also entails that there be markets for goods like land and labor, and that these goods be treated as commodities just like any other commodities. When markets reduce land to raw material and persons to the bearers of labor power, both land and people are used in ways that degrade them. Yet the liberal economic enterprise begins with the presupposition that goods like land and labor are commodities that behave like other commodities. It draws conclusions and advocates action and policy on the basis of this "crude" commodity fiction. Such a fiction is a vital organizing principle of the idea of a self-regulating economy. Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 68, 72-73, 95, 132, 252.

that are already implicitly there, to facilitate rather than thwart the collective agency of workers.

The social aspect of work is also the reason why, as Calvez and Perrin observe, "Although it is over labor itself that society is split, the popes see in labor the principle of its re-established unity."[60] Pius XII articulates this well in one of his letters: "When it is sought to make of society and of the state nothing more than a mere crowd of workers…labor is robbed of its true meaning and of its power for unity." In such a situation, what is being organized is not a society of societies "but only an enormous total of wages, salaries and profits."[61] Only because conflicts between work and capital are parasitic upon more fundamental social realities can work possess a power for unity and function as a source of renewal.[62]

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[60] Calvez and Perrin, *The Church and Social Justice*, 238.

[61] Quoted in Ibid.

[62] As Calvez and Perrin write: "It is precisely because, beneath the surface, behind open conflict, there already does exist a principle of unity which cannot be denied, that it is possible for society to be saved from decay and civil war. If there were nothing but division, if conflict were indeed the ruling principle of the whole society, there would be no hope of ever rebuilding unity, despite the paradoxical optimism which is professed by Marxism." Ibid., 436.

Once again, there are important resonances here with Polanyi's *The Great Transformation*, in which Polanyi argues that because goods like land and labor are fictitious commodities, to treat them as commodities is tantamount to undermining the social order itself, akin to an acid corroding it from the inside. This is why he calls the attempt to instantiate a market society a utopian endeavor. Polanyi's point is simply that no

Among the other benefits Leo mentions in *Rerum novarum* in relation to the establishment and diffusion of workers' corporations is that they will "draw the two classes more closely together" (§48). We have heard this language before and have noted its limitations as a detailed sociological investigation of class. But as Calvez and Perrin suggest, it is attempting to address a pathology, which is that the widening chasms, the deepening gulfs, and the mounting distances between people undermine forms of life that it is the purpose ofcreated goods to foster.

How do workers' corporations counteract these tendencies? They do so by gathering those who have been scattered and by enabling the propertyless to share in

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social order can tolerate the full consequences of leaving land and labor to the market alone, which would be to tolerate the disintegration of society and the sources of its sustenance. The attempt to do so, Polanyi contends, therefore inevitably encounters resistance.

It is for this reason, he argues, that market societies characteristically consist of two opposing movements between market extension and protective resistance to such extension, what Polanyi calls the "double movement." Thus, while in the nineteenth century markets spread all over the earth and the amount of goods involved increased exponentially, at the same time there arose a network of measures, policies, and institutions designed to check the action of the market with regard to labor, land, and money. As Polanyi writes, "The introduction of free markets, far from doing away with the need for control, regulation, and intervention, enormously increased their range." The state had to be invested with new powers, organs, and instruments for the establishment, maintenance, and enforcement of such markets. Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 3–4, 29–30, 80–87, 130–132, 140–141.

property themselves. The establishment and recognition of such corporations is therefore integral to restoration—restoration understood here not only in terms of the restoration of a sociality proper to workers, who are joined together with others in common activity, but also in terms of their standing as workers in relation to a wider society that places such heavy burdens upon those it depends for its needs. In this and other ways, worker's corporations have a crucial role to play in drawing people more closely together, contributing to the overcoming of the chasms, gulfs, and distances between employers and workers, propertied and propertyless, landed and landless.

3.3 Agriculture and Social Justice

3.3.1 "The huge army of rural wage workers"

During the twentieth century, the problems facing rural communities throughout the world became increasingly acute. In *Quadragesimo anno*, which was written in 1931, Pius XI refers to those who derive their livelihood from agriculture being "crushed with hardships and with difficulties" (§102). At the beginning of the encyclical, he notes the increasing prevalence of organizations and associations of workers since the time Leo wrote, even singling out their spread among farmers and farming communities (§§24, 37).[63] For the most part, however, Pius XI conveys a sense of frustration that Leo's concerns about non-owning workers, urban and rural alike, have often been "consigned to oblivion"—suppressed or simply ignored (§59).

Pius XI writes that at the time Leo wrote, some states "openly opposed" the formation of workers' associations—an opposition Pius XI lays at the feet of what he calls economic liberalism. Of course, these states did not oppose the right of everyone to form associations. They only opposed the right of some to do it, namely, "those who most needed it in order to defend themselves from the ill treatment at the hands of the powerful" (§30). Significantly, Pius XI does not shy away from the complicity of Catholics in this opposition, observing the preference of some of them for economic liberalism over the teaching of the Church herself. They have "looked askance at the efforts of workers to form associations of this type as if they smacked of a socialistic or revolutionary spirit" (§30). In their "greed for gain," they have tried to hide "their unjust exactions" under the cover of the faith (§125).[64]

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[63] Pius XII likewise comments on the significance of the spread of such societies among farmers. Cf. "Discourse of His Holiness Pius XII to Commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Encyclical Rerum Novarum of Pope Leo XIII on the Social Question," 219.

[64] Pius's worry here is that it looks as though the Church is on the side of the rich, and that only socialism cares for workers (§124). But he thinks it obvious that "the whole history of the Church plainly demonstrates that such appearances are unfounded and such charges are unjust" (§125). As far as those Catholics who exploit and are indifferent

Meanwhile, the complex and manifold modern forces of dispossession have "rapidly pervaded and occupied" other parts of the world. The numbers of "non-owning working poor" has "increased enormously," "their groans cry[ing] to God from the earth" (§59).

Pius XI singles out the effects of these developments in the countryside, writing of "the huge army of rural wage workers, pushed to the lowest level of existence and deprived of all hope of ever acquiring 'some property in land,'" who are in the process of being "permanently bound to the status of non-owning workers" (§59, quoting *Rerum novarum* §47). According to Pius XI, the juxtaposition of "the immense multitude of the non-owning workers on the one hand and the enormous riches of certain very wealthy men on the other establish an unanswerable argument that the riches which are so abundantly produced in our age of 'industrialism,' as it is called, are not rightly distributed and equitably made available to the various classes of the people" (§60).

In this regard, Pius XI might have pointed to El Salvador. As we saw in chapter one, the conditions in the Salvadoran countryside were deteriorating rapidly around this time. In 1932, one of the largest *campesino* insurrections in Latin American history took

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to the just demands of workers, Pius sees no need to "repulse" or "disown." Rather, he wants them to be converted and to return to the faith of the Church (§126).

place in the western departments of El Salvador. The insurrection, known as *La Matanza*, or the massacre, is remembered above all for the way it was crushed. Under the leadership of General Martínez, the Salvadoran army marched through the countryside, systematically killing suspected participants, sympathizers, and many others—tens of thousands in all. We will examine this more closely in the following chapter.

3.3.2 Pius XII

As far as the Church's social teaching, most discussions of the topic of agriculture and those communities deriving their livelihood from it tend to focus upon Pope John XXIII's 1961 encyclical *Mater et magistra*. In fact, John's treatment of this topic is so extensive and detailed that the encyclical has been described as the "agricultural encyclical."[65] As I have been trying to show, however, earlier encyclicals like *Rerum*

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[65] Edward O'Rourke, "The Encyclical and Agriculture," in *The Challenge of Mater et Magistra* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963). Barrera reads *Mater et magistra* as, among other things, a moral commentary on the import-substitution strategy being pursued by many nations at the time in their "massive push for industrialization," which generated an inadvertent though pernicious anti-agricultural and anti-rural bias. The import-substitution strategy essentially involves the protection of emergent domestic industries through quotas, tariffs, or other trade barriers that block imports until industries are able to withstand foreign competitors. As Barrera presents it, this strategy, while beneficial to industry, cripples rural areas, not only because of relative declines in farmers' purchasing power, but also because of the incentives and direct support given to industry through price ceilings for agriculture, overvaluation of foreign exchange, investment in urban infrastructure, and preferential credit for industry. The

novarum and *Quadragesimo anno* are also pertinent to the problems facing agriculture and those communities deriving their livelihood from it. In order to understand the emergence of agrarian reform in the Church's social doctrine, we must not neglect the contribution of Pius XII, particularly his numerous addresses to groups of farmers and farmworkers, which gather together many of the themes we have been examining in this chapter and focus them on the problems facing those in the rural world. In one of these

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encyclical's examination of agriculture and its numerous policy proposals, Barrera argues, are an attempt to mitigate this bias. Cf. Barrera, *Modern Catholic Social Documents and Political Economy*, 16–24. As for remedies, John writes at length of the need for, among other things: investments in rural infrastructure to improve rural living standards (§§127, 150); what he repeatedly calls the restoration of "balance" between agriculture and other productive activities (§§128, 150); training for those displaced by developments in agriculture so that they might find work and social integration (§§129, 150). He goes on to discuss, in considerable detail, and always in light of the particular difficulties, risks, and exposures faced by farmers: tax policies that take into account not only that farmers are subject to temporal constraints that others are not—they have to wait for their harvests, for instance—but that their harvests are always exposed to risks beyond their control (§§132-133); credit policy and credit banks geared to the needs of farmers, especially because investors tend to gravitate to industry rather than agriculture (§134); better insurance programs not only for agricultural produce but for farmers and their families, which will help address income disparities between farmers and others (§§135-136); price protection for agricultural produce (§§137-140); the promotion of ancillary industries related to the preservation, processing and transportation of farm products (§141); the promotion of farms that are owned and managed by families and part of "a flourishing system of cooperative undertakings" such that they can contribute to the public life of their respective communities (§§142-143).

address, Pius articulates what perhaps his central purpose in them when he references a passage from Pius X's encyclical *Il Fermo Proposito* (1905) about how "the work of restoring all things in Christ"—a reference to Paul's statement in the letter to the Ephesians about God's plan "to unite all things in Christ" (1:10)—must especially consider "the working and agricultural classes," which involves "endeavoring to dry their tears, to alleviate their sufferings, and to improve their economic condition" (§7).[66] Their particular form of affliction, Pius XII thinks, continues to merit special attention in his own day.[67]

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[66] Pius XII, "Economic and Cultural Self-Help on the Part of the Rural Community," *A Letter to the Organization of Irish Agricultural People*, 14 July 1954. Cf. Pius X's encyclical 1905 encyclical, *Il fermo proposito* (§6).

[67] In *The Church and the Land*, David S. Bovée's examines the Catholic rural life movement in the United States, especially the National Catholic Rural Life Conference (NCRLC). After Monsignor Luigi Ligutti took the helm of the NCRLC in the 1940s, its focus expanded to embrace concerns regarding rural life at an international level. Through his extensive travels, Ligutti organized rural life conferences and helped form and participate actively in international rural organizations, such as the International Catholic Rural Life Conference (ICRLC) and its successor the International Catholic Rural Association (ICRA), as well as the International Federation of Rural Adult Catholic Movements (FIMARC). Bovée also notes the way that Ligutti developed personal friendships with Popes Pius XII, John XXIII and Paul VI. He was particularly close to Pius XII, who appointed Ligutti permanent Vatican observer to the UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO). At least since the late 1930s Ligutti and the NCRLC prepared a brief for presentation to Pius requesting an encyclical on rural life. Ligutti, along with several others, even drafted one. These efforts bore fruit, among other ways, Pius's numerous addresses to groups of farmers and farmworkers over the course of his pontificate, as well as in John XXIII's *Mater et magistra*. David S. Bovée, *The*

We have repeatedly seen how, for the tradition within which Pius XII works, agriculture is of profound importance. In this chapter, I have been focusing upon how land's support of human life hinges upon the work of human hands. What especially comes to the fore in Pius XII's agricultural addresses is how the loss of communities living upon land and sustaining themselves and others by their work imperils the preservation of land and its capacity to support.[68] In these addresses, Pius continually reminds his listeners of the centrality of agriculture to economy and to social life more generally, as well as the importance of farmers and farming communities receiving the support they need to survive. He takes this to be a direct entailment of creation understood as common gift.[69] The crucial issue, then, is how these communities might

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Church and the Land: The National Catholic Rural Life Conference and American Society, 1923-2007 (Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 179–181. Cf. also Raymond W. Miller, *Monsignor Ligutti: The Pope's County Agent* (Washington, D.C: Rowman & Littlefield, 1981), 96–8; Luigi Ligutti, "Pope of Peace," *Catholic Rural Life* 7, no. October (1958): 14–15; Luigi Ligutti, "Policy Statement: Tribute to the Holy Father," *Catholic Rural Life* 7, November (1958): 6.

[68] For more on the significance of agriculture beyond Pius XII, cf. Matthew Philipp Whelan, "The Grammar of Creation: Agriculture in the Thought of Pope Benedict XVI," in *Environmental Justice and Climate Change* (New York: Lexington Books, 2013), 103–23.

[69] Cf. Pope Pius XII, "The Basis and Importance of a Healthy Agricultural Class," Speech delivered by His Holiness to the delegates at the Convention of the Address to the National Farmers' League of Italy in Rome, 15 November 1946; "The Farmer's Status as a Pressing Problem of Social Order," Letter to the Leaders of the Social Week of Canada,

continue their work of supporting themselves and others, which is impossible without supporting the ongoing existence of the communities themselves.[70]

In this regard, what also begins to emerge in Pius XII's agricultural addresses is an attention to and clarification of the ways those communities deriving their living from agriculture are being decimated.[71] The developments associated with this are well known. Pius frequently mentions, for instance, the appropriation and concentration of land by capital, the rural exodus, the vast expansion of modern cities, and so on.[72] As the

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31 August 1947; Pius XII, "Problems in the World of Agriculture," Address Before the First International Congress for the Problems of Agriculture, 2 July 1951; Pius XII, "Farming: Model of Human Effort," Discourse to the Italian Catholic Federation of Farmers, 18 May 1955; Pius XII, "The Problems of Rural Life," An Address to the Social Week of Italy, 18 September 1957.

[70] Pius XII, "Problems in the World of Agriculture," Address Before the First International Congress for the Problems of Agriculture, 2 July 1951.

[71] Pius describes his own day as characterized by a "conflict" between city and country, as industrialism works to make the whole world "an extension of the city." At least for Pius, it is perhaps more accurate, however, to describe the city having emerged victorious and extending its colonization over the countryside. Cf. Pope Pius XII, "The Basis and Importance of a Healthy Agricultural Class," *Speech delivered by His Holiness to the delegates at the Convention of the Address to the National Farmers' League of Italy in Rome,* 15 November 1946; Pius XII, "Problems in the World of Agriculture," Address Before the First International Congress for the Problems of Agriculture, 2 July 1951.

[72] Cf. Pope Pius XII, "The Basis and Importance of a Healthy Agricultural Class," Speech delivered by His Holiness to the delegates at the Convention of the Address to the National Farmers' League of Italy in Rome, 15 November 1946; Pius XII, "Problems in

historian Eric Hobsbawm points out, the general decline in farming populations throughout the world accelerated rapidly during the second half of the twentieth century around the time of Pius's pontificate—what Hobsbawn refers to as "the death of the peasantry."[73] These declines occurred everywhere, even in those nations on the industrial periphery, such as El Salvador. Beginning around the 1950s and 1960s in Latin America, for instance, the percentage of *campesinos* halved in Colombia, Mexico, and Brazil in about twenty years, and it fell by two-thirds or nearly two-thirds in the Dominican Republic, Venezuela, and Jamaica over the same time period.

At least one practical ramification of these declines is that the loss of land by people who have lived stably and securely upon it over time means the loss of their practical wisdom in the use and care of it. As Pius XII sees it, this has had deleterious effects upon the practice of agriculture itself. "After the land has been so abandoned," he says, "capital hastens to make it its own; the land then becomes no longer the object of

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the World of Agriculture," Address Before the First International Congress for the Problems of Agriculture, 2 July 1951.

[73] Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914-1991* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 289–295. Cf. also Michael J. LaRosa and German R. Mejia, *An Atlas and Survey of Latin American History* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2007), 122; Jose Brakarz, Margarita Greene, and Eduardo Rojas, *Cities for All: Recent Experiences with Neighborhood Upgrading Programs* (IDB, 2002), 3–5.

love but of cold exploitation." Land is made to produce for the purpose of "speculation," and profit increasingly becomes the sole measure for the use of land, which amounts to a "perversion of private rural property."[74] Observe that Pius distinguishes here between two conceptions of private property: one that enables the use and care of land by communities over time, and another that has "no love or concern for the plot that so many generations had lovingly tilled, and is heartless towards the families who till it and dwell upon it now."[75] At the same time, he attends to the ecological consequences of these transformations in agricultural practice, and how they have occasioned "too much experimentation with mass production, with the exploitation, to the point of exhaustion, of every resource of the soil and subsoil."[76]

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[74] Pope Pius XII, "The Basis and Importance of a Healthy Agricultural Class," Speech delivered by His Holiness to the delegates at the Convention of the Address to the National Farmers' League of Italy in Rome, 15 November 1946. On this point cf. also Pius XII, "Problems in the World of Agriculture," Address Before the First International Congress for the Problems of Agriculture, 2 July 1951.

[75] Pope Pius XII, "The Basis and Importance of a Healthy Agricultural Class," Speech delivered by His Holiness to the delegates at the Convention of the Address to the National Farmers' League of Italy in Rome, 15 November 1946. In this same address, Pius reflects upon the manifold ways the earth bears the effects of sin. Not only are those who cultivate land wounded by sin. The earth, too, is a "wounded creature," "ill" with sin's effects, which has implications for land care. Cultivators must not only learn to love the land that sustains them and others. They must know it, such that they are able to discern "the temperament of one's own piece of land, sometimes so different from that of the very next plot."

Indeed, transformations of the practice of agriculture itself is a frequent theme of these addresses—especially those transformations associated with productivism or the prioritization of constant increases in productivity above all else.[77] As Paul Thompson has argued, productionism pursues increases in production through the use of whatever technologies are deemed necessary to do so. It has roots in the enclosure movements in Europe and is therefore deeply implicated in an understanding of property that prioritizes the owner's exclusive control of access, use, and disposal.[78] The problem with productionism is not production *per se*, which is obviously indispensable to the practice of agriculture. The problem is the prioritization of production to the exclusion of any other end for agriculture—and more troubling still, the failure to see that agriculture might have an end besides production.

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[76] Pius XII, "Production for Human Needs," Address for the Catholic International Congress of Social Study in Rome, 3 June 1950.

[77] Pius XII, "Farming: Model of Human Effort," *Discourse to the Italian National Federation of Farmers*, 18 May 1955. According to Pius, evaluating agriculture by the criterion of productivity alone involves nothing short of the "sacrifice" of agriculture itself—a sacrifice to ends like "the highest and most rapidly increasing national economy" and "the cheapest possible provisioning of the nation with farm products." It is perpetrated both by a wider society that does not trace its debts to agriculture and by farmers themselves as they succumb to the "temptation of easy gain." Cf. Pope Pius XII, "The Basis and Importance of a Healthy Agricultural Class," *Speech delivered by His Holiness to the delegates at the Convention of the Address to the National Farmers' League of Italy in Rome*, 15 November 1946; Pius XII, "Problems in the World of Agriculture," *Address Before the First International Congress for the Problems of Agriculture*, 2 July 1951.

[78] Paul B. Thompson describes and critiques what he calls "the productionist paradigm" in Thompson, *The Spirit of Soil: Agriculture and Environmental Ethics*, 47–71.

In one address, Pius XII puts the problem with productionism this way: "productivity is not an end in itself, nor does it regulate itself." An emphasis upon production alone, he thinks, obscures the way the end of agriculture is the material support of human life, in relation to which production must constantly be evaluated.[79] In Calvez's and Perrin's words, human creatures and their needs are "the measuring rod, the point of reference, the guide" to which "production ought to be adapted."[80] By itself, the criterion of production is insufficient to guide agricultural practice. Pius XII points out that workers do not always or necessarily share in the gains from increases in production.[81] Moreover, the exclusive priority of production can and often does lead to concentrations of productive property, which can and does lead to the exclusion of many from access to it—a contradiction of property's social function.[82] For this reason, Pius XII supports not just increases in production but a better distribution of the means of production, such as arable land. Production in agriculture must defer to considerations apart from production itself. It must defer, for instance, to the goal of favoring ownership—of helping as many as possible not only enjoy the fruits of production but participate in the process of production itself.[83] As we have seen, in some cases this amounts to having a share in the land, but in others, it amounts to looking for ways to increase involvement in ownership, management, and profit-sharing. In fact, Pius XII assumes that increases in production and better distributions of property are by no means mutually exclusive.[84]

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[79] Pius XII's approach to this topic is therefore in profound tension with an understanding of economy that holds that markets are self-regulating and are best left to themselves, without any intervention or restraint. According to him, "To meet the demands of social life this distribution cannot be let to the free play of blind economic forces." Pope Pius XII, "The Problem of Fair Distribution," *A Letter addressed to Semaine Sociale of Dijon, France*, 7 July 1952. On this point, cf. also Pius XI, *Quadragesimo anno* §§88, 132; John XXIII *Mater et magistra* §§10-14, 71; *Gaudium et spes* §64.

[80] Calvez and Perrin, *The Church and Social Justice*, 179.

[81] Pius XII, "Human Claims on Economic Expansion," *Letter to the President of French Social Week*, 10 July 1956.

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[82] Cf. Pius XII, "The Vocational Tasks and the Cultural Mission of the Farmer," *Address to the Italian Farmers' Association*, 16 April 1958.

[83] Pius XI expresses similar concerns in *Quadragesimo anno*. As he sees it, the solution to the so-called social question is not simply increased production. It involves above all how the fruits of production can be better distributed to those presently excluded from them. The purpose of a more just distribution is not to eliminate the need for work but to support workers in their work, so that they "may increase their property by thrift, that they may bear, by wise management of this increase in property, the burdens of family life with greater ease and security" and emerge "from the insecure lot in life in whose uncertainties non-owning workers are cast" (§§57, 61).

[84] Cf. Pius XII, "The Vocational Tasks and the Cultural Mission of the Farmer," *Address to the Italian Farmers' Association*, 16 April 1958.

3.3.3 Social Injustice

Pius XII regards the decline and disintegration of agricultural communities throughout the world and the complex myriad of factors involved not as the unavoidable cost of progress but as symptomatic of a pathology—what he refers to as "social injustice."[85] John XXIII's *Mater et magistra* (1961)[86] and Paul VI's *Octogesima adveniens* (1971)[87] will largely follow and expand upon this analysis.

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[85] Pius XII, "The Basis and Importance of a Healthy Agricultural Class," Speech delivered by His Holiness to the delegates at the Convention of the Address to the National Farmers' League of Italy in Rome, 15 November 1946.

[86] In *Mater et magistra*, John XXIII observes that it has become increasingly evident that the question of justice pertains not simply to relationships between workers and their employers, but also to relationships between the various kinds of productive activities within the same political community, and even to the relationships between political communities themselves (§122). These relationships in their current form, he thinks, are characterized by injustice. It is within this context that he begins to address what he calls "the depressed state of agriculture" (§§123-124). He acknowledges that there are many reasons for the rural exodus. But one of them is that farming has, in an industrialized world, become a "depressed occupation" (§124), such that a vast group of people reside "in a permanent state of economic and social inferiority," deprived "of the wherewithal for a decent standard of living." This state of affairs is "diametrically opposed to the common good," precisely because the good of some comes at the expense of others (§140). The basic concern orienting John's whole treatment of agriculture in *Mater et magistra* is not just how societies might shield from misery those upon whom they depend for the things they need but how they might discover goods in common with those who supply their needs.

[87] Near the beginning of *Octogesima adveniens*, Paul VI asks, "Is sufficient attention being devoted to the arrangement and improvement of the life of the country people, whose inferior and at times miserable economic situation provokes the flight to the unhappy crowded conditions of the city outskirts, where neither employment nor housing awaits

We will recall from the previous chapter that the phrase "social injustice" as used in this tradition of thought has a specific sense, which differs somewhat from popular usage. Often associated with failures in distributive justice and disparities in the distribution of created goods, social injustice in this case names the exclusion of whole groups of people not just from wealth but from social life more generally, and with this exclusion, the obstruction of the discovery and care of the common good. The charge of social injustice, in other words, has to do not only with the failure of modern societies to protect those upon whom they depend for their needs. It has to do with their failure to regard those upon whom they depend as worthy of protection, as members of a common life. Pius's point is that throughout the world, the inhabitants of rural communities have been systematically excluded from sharing in the benefits of what they produce. The vulnerabilities and dependencies particular to their work in support

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them?" (§8). The answer to the question is clearly 'no.' Paul devotes particular attention to the problems being generated by the "inordinate" and "disordered" growth of cities, including the production of what he calls "new proletariats" (§§9-10). About them Paul writes: "They install themselves in the heart of the cities sometimes abandoned by the rich; they dwell on the outskirts—which become a belt of misery besieging in a still silent protest the luxury which blatantly cries out from centers of consumption and waste. Instead of favoring fraternal encounter and mutual aid, the city fosters discrimination and also indifference. It lends itself to new forms of exploitation and of domination whereby some people in speculating on the needs of others derive inadmissible profits" (§10).

of others have been exploited rather than protected by the societies of which they are member, undermining the very notion of a shared membership. Consequently, rural communities have been excluded from what they need to support themselves. They are being laid waste, and their inhabitants are in flight.[88] Social injustice refers to this ubiquitous structural and institutional exclusion and the massive upheavals in the life of rural communities with which it is closely associated.

In response to the social injustice afflicting rural life, Pius XII focuses upon how help must come from within agricultural communities themselves.[89] He speaks of the possibility that the renewal "of the whole economy may come from the field of agriculture."[90] As we have seen, Pius XII thinks that farmers and those involved in the cultivation of land have legitimate demands upon the societies of which they are members, especially in terms of the assurance of sufficient material support, the ability to gather in associations and organizations of various kinds, and so on. But in these

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[88] This is a persistent theme of the messages. Cf. Pius XII, "The Basis and Importance of a Healthy Agricultural Class," Speech delivered by His Holiness to the delegates at the Convention of the Address to the National Farmers' League of Italy in Rome, 15 November 1946; Pius XII, "The Farmer's Status as a Pressing Problem of Social Order," Letter to the Leaders of the Social Week of Canada, 31 August 1947. Pius XII, "The Problems of Rural Life," An Address to the Social Week of Italy, 18 September 1957.

[89] We find a similar emphasis in *Mater et magistra*. Like Pius XII, John emphasizes the duties that farmers and rural communities have for their own flourishing (§144). John emphasizes the crucial need for the reconstitution of rural societies, for farmers and agricultural workers to join together to form associations and organizations where they are lacking. His concern is not just the protection and promotion of family farms but the formation of cooperatives, professional associations, and workers movements more generally and the support of their legitimate demands for the improvement of agricultural communities (§§145-147). "The lone voice," he writes, "is not likely to command much of a hearing in times such as ours" (§145, cf. §146). John's choice of words here is important, and suggests the continuity of his concerns with those of Leo in *Rerum novarum*, who, we will recall, feared the lack of protective organization for workers, which renders them, whether rural or urban, isolated and helpless. The reconstitution of rural society as a society of societies, along with the cultivation of

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solidarity not only between these societies but also with urban ones, is necessary if farmers and farm workers are to begin to address the problems they face and to shape an economy that is not parasitic on agriculture and on rural areas more generally. The purpose is not for farmers and agricultural workers to turn the tables and to demand everything for themselves but to restore what he calls "balance," so that they can be recognized before the wider world and "show themselves alive to the common good and contribute to its realizations" (§147).

[90] Pius XII, "The Basis and Importance of a Healthy Agricultural Class," Speech delivered by His Holiness to the delegates at the Convention of the Address to the National Farmers' League of Italy in Rome on 15 November 1946. In this same speech, Pius says: "You tillers of the soil form within your families a community of labor. You and your fellow-members and associates also form another community of labor. Finally, you desire to form with all the other occupational groups a great community of labor." Pius's point in reminding his listeners about how agricultural work inescapably finds itself embedded within various and overlapping forms of communal life is to affirm the existence of such communities before the wider world. In other words, Pius, like his predecessors, thinks it is necessary not only to affirm the importance of such communities for the protection of the lives and livelihoods of all those who live from land. He thinks it necessary to affirm that that they exist at all, in order to ensure that the work of farmers can be a "common service" to the needs of all, including their own. Cf. also Pius XII, "The Value of Agricultural Science for the World Economy," Address to the Ninth International Congress of Agricultural Industries, 29 May 1952; Pius XII, "Farming: Model of Human Effort," Discourse to the Italian National Federation of Farmers, 18 May 1955.

agricultural addresses, he insists especially upon their duties.[91] "Your principal help must come from yourselves," he says, "from your cooperative unions, especially from your credit unions."[92] Inhabitants of these communities must learn to lift their sights toward "the wider horizon." Indeed, their survival depends precisely upon the cultivation of new forms of "solidarity."[93] Along these lines, farmers in particular must "make every effort to improve the living standard of those who devote themselves to agriculture," even pursuing much needed agrarian reforms on behalf of the landless and day-laborers. In addition to agriculture itself, their work must also include advocating for the diffusion of property and independent farm ownership.[94]

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[91] In the previous chapter, I noted how the Church's social teaching draws on the language of *munus*, which implies both rights and duties. This is readily apparent here, where Pius does not assert abstract, free-floating entitlements but instead tries to articulate a vision of sociality that involves reciprocal rights and duties. The notion of the *munus* unifies what a person claims as her own and what she has to give as a gift of service. During the Leonine period, persons and societies were often said to bear *iura et officia* or rights and responsibilities. The language of the *munera* enters Catholic social thought with Pius XI. Cf. Hittinger, "Social Roles and Ruling Virtues in Catholic Social Doctrine."

[92] Pius XII, "The Basis and Importance of a Healthy Agricultural Class," Speech delivered by His Holiness to the delegates at the Convention of the Address to the National Farmers' League of Italy in Rome, 15 November 1946. Cf. Pius XII, "Economic and Cultural Self-Help on the Part of the Rural Community," A Letter to the Organization of Irish Agricultural People, 14 July 1954; Pius XII, "The Problems of Rural Life," An Address to the Social Week of Italy, 18 September 1957.

[93] Pius XII, "The Problems of Rural Life," *An Address to the Social Week of Italy*, 18 September 1957.

Elsewhere, in addressing a group of tenant farmers, Pius XII similarly emphasizes not only their rights but their duties as well. With regard to the former, Pius XII goes on to offer a detailed description of needed reforms, which includes among other things, a wider diffusion of agricultural land, as well as stable contracts and salaries for tenants, which he says must be sufficient in order for tenants to become land owners themselves.[95] But the heart of the message has to do with their threefold duty of cultivation: to cultivate themselves as agricultural workers, whose work depends upon and is enabled by God's work in giving of the earth; to cultivate themselves as members of societies that depend upon them even as they isolate and marginalize them; and finally, to cultivate themselves as children of God, in spite of the long hours and difficult conditions under which they must work.[96]

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[94] Pius XII, "The Vocational Tasks and the Cultural Mission of the Farmer," *Address to the Italian Farmers' Association*, 16 April 1958.

[95] He also mentions access to forms of insurance and assistance common to other laborers, as well as technical training; and finally, the need to address the disparities between agricultural and industrial income. Pius XII, "A Farmer's Three Duties," *Address to the Confederations of Italian Tenant Farmers*, 11 April 1956.

[96] Pius XII, "A Farmer's Three Duties," *Address to the Confederations of Italian Tenant Farmers*, 11 April 1956.

As we have already begun to see, Pius XII explicitly and repeatedly mentions agrarian reform in these addresses. The call for it enters the Church's social thought with him. Agrarian reform represents one measure among others to support rural communities and their contribution to social life, as well as to pursue a better distribution of productive property more generally.[97]

Nor is his discussion of agrarian reform limited the agricultural addresses that we have been examining. In his 1944 Radio Message, Pius XII turns to *Rerum novarum* to envision the new order that might one day emerge from "the abyss of misery" generated by the Second World War (§1). In seeking the proliferation of property, Pius XII shares his predecessors' concerns about the threats posed to property both by socialism and capitalism. While the former "absolutely denies or makes practically impossible or futile the natural right to property," Pius XII is particularly concerned about the latter and how it misconstrues private property as the Church understands it. He thinks capitalism recognizes the right to property "under a totally false concept," as an "unlimited right, without any subordination to the common good" (§§22-24). In practice, capitalism therefore tends to produce a "continually growing mass of workers" who face "concentrations of economic goods that are hidden under anonymous forms"—a situation that simultaneously makes it possible for property to evade its "social duties" while making it impossible for workers to share in it themselves (§25). In this regard, Pius XII is especially concerned with how to protect and support "small- and medium-sized properties" in agriculture and in social life more generally (§§26, 30).

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[97] Cf. Pius XII, "The Question of Agricultural Reform," *Papal Letter Transmitted by J.B. Montini to the 22nd Social Week at Naples*, 15 September 1947; Pius XII, "Problems in the World of Agriculture," Address Before the First International Congress for the Problems of Agriculture, 2 July 1951; Pius XII, "The Vocational Tasks and the Cultural Mission of the Farmer," *Address to the Italian Farmers' Association*, 16 April 1958.

In this message, the call for the proliferation of property takes a specific shape with respect to agriculture, namely, as support for some kind of agrarian reform.[98] Because excessive concentrations of property detract from its "vital function" in personal and social life, the state, he argues, might at times play a role in expropriating property and indemnifying owners. Pius XII puts it this way: "The state may, in the common interest, intervene to regulate [the use of property], or even, if it is impossible to arrive at another solution, decree expropriation, giving a fair and equitable indemnity."[99] As Pius XII's words indicate, expropriation is not an ordinary course of action on the part of the state, to be employed on a regular basis. Rather, at least as he articulates it here, expropriation is a final expedient to try to attain a better distribution of property when other attempts to do so have failed to achieve their purpose.

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[98] In "The Question of Agricultural Reform," J.B. Montini, on behalf of Pius XII, delivered a speech to a gathering in Naples on the reorganization of agricultural life in the wake of World War II. The speech explicitly draws upon the common gift of creation as elaborated in *Rerum novarum*, *Quadragesimo anno*, and Pius XII's own 1942 Christmas Message in support of agrarian reform. The social function of property, Pius states, is meant to ensure that "the essential needs of all members of the human family" are met, and this social function has special significance with regard to land, "the first source of life and the general welfare." Pius XII, "The Question of Agricultural Reform," *Papal Letter Transmitted by J.B. Montini to the 22nd Social Week at Naples*, 15 September 1947.

3.4 Agrarian Reform

3.4.1 The *Mezzogiorno*

We have been examining how agrarian reform begins to enter Church teaching with Pius XII. Among the reasons it does so at this particular time is that agrarian reform becomes a pressing issue throughout the world in the aftermath of the Second World War—including in southern Italy, in the region known as the Mezzogiorno.[100] Hobsbawn writes, "There has probably never been more of it [agrarian reform] than in the decade after the end of the Second World War, for it was practiced along the entire spectrum of politics." [101] Between 1945 and 1950, nearly half of humankind lived in countries undergoing some kind of agrarian reform.[102]

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[99] Pius XII, "Radiomensaje En El V Aniversario Del Comienzo de La Guerra," September 1, 1944.

[100] On the Italian agrarian reform in general, cf. Russell King, *Land Reform: The Italian Experience* (London: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1973); S. H. Franklin, "Social Structure and Land Reform in Southern Italy," *The Sociological Review* 9, no. 3 (1961): 323–49; Michael Pacione, *Rural Geography* (London: Longman Higher Education, 1984); Franklin, "Social Structure and Land Reform in Southern Italy." Giovanni Cervigni described what transpired in Italy in the 1940s and 1950s this way: "In the post-war period, southern Italian peasant society had one of those uprisings that are chronic in its history, and that derive from a deep-seated aspiration for possession of the land. This time, however, there was a political crisis of proportions unknown to anyone's memory." Quoted in Sidney G. Tarrow, *Peasant Communism in Southern Italy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 286.

During Pius XII's pontificate, southern Italy was in turmoil. Sidney G. Tarrow traces the problem of land pressure in the Mezzogiorno to the region's inclusion in the unified Italian state in 1860, when the land of the peasantry fell into the hands of others.[103] By the 1940s, the Mezzogiorno was characterized by a stark division between many small, intensively cultivated peasant smallholdings and few, insufficiently cultivated large estates or *latifundia*, often in absentee ownership—a situation not completely dissimilar to that of El Salvador. As early as 1943, peasant uprisings began in Calabria. By 1944 peasants were occupying land, and the unrest was spreading.[104]

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[101] Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914-1991*, 354. In his survey of what he calls "Catholic land reform documents," Dovring likewise focuses on the postwar period. Cf. Folke Dovring, *Land and Labor in Europe, 1900-1950: A Comparative Survey of Recent Agrarian History.* (M. Nijhoff, 1965), 274–310.

[102] Hobsbawn, The Age of Extremes, 354.

[103] "In the peasant mind," Tarrow writes, "the identity of the interests between the usurping bourgeoisie and the new, liberal state was clearly established and never forgotten." Tarrow quotes this statement from a national leader's speech in Calabria in 1946: "It is well known that many great Calabrian landowners usurped their land from the common lands following the abolition of feudalism at the beginning of the last century and, above all, obtained the legitimation of these usurpations in the first years of the united Italy." Sidney G. Tarrow, *Peasant Communism in Southern Italy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 275, 283, 291.

The situation worsened as the decade progressed. In response to the killing of a woman in Calabria in 1948, thousands of peasants in sixteen towns in Catanzaro and twelve in Cosenza occupied land and began to cultivate it. In many cases, entire villages did so in the name of the village. That same year, when police killed three men and wounded a dozen others in a demonstration, the event became the object of massive, nationwide protests, and land occupations spread to all regions of the south.[105]

In 1950, the Christian Democracy coalition government of Alcide Amedeo Francesco de Gasperi embarked upon an ambitious agrarian reform program,[106] the goal of which was to redress the imbalance characteristic of the agriculture of this region primarily by stabilizing, supporting and increasing peasant smallholdings.[107] In early 1950, the government immediately conceded 100,000 acres of land to Calabrian families

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[104] The Italian Communist Party began to send representatives to the region in order to take control of the struggle and help organize it. In this regard, the Party especially focused its organizational efforts upon the cooperatives, which emerged from the land occupations between 1943 and 1945. Eventually, beginning in 1947, the Party replaced the peasant cooperatives with a network of "Committees for the Land" as their basic units of organization in the struggle for agrarian reform. Tarrow reports that, in demonstrations, occupations and other peasant actions, the crucifix and the Italian tricolor frequently accompanied the red flag of the Party. Ibid., 278–288.

[105] Ibid.

[106] The first party program of Christian Democracy (La Democrazia Cristiana), which appeared in 1944, called for "bread, work but also access to property" for all, as well as "the modification of laws that had until then favored the concentration of the means of production and wealth in a few hands." At the first Christian Democracy congress in 1946, De Gasperi said: "Now is the time when the great landowners must make sacrifices, because it is not possible to maintain existing privileges either in the field of

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agricultural property or in the field of industry. We must move toward a new equilibrium, toward another system of landed property that is based on social justice." In many ways, however, the efforts of the party on behalf of agrarian reform began much earlier and are especially associated with the figure of Luigi Sturzo and his work in the Mezzogiorno in the 1920s. One of the founders of the Italian Popular Party (*Partito Populare Italiano*), which later changed its name to Christian Democracy after the Second World War, Sturzo was an important figure in the emergence of the Christian democratic movement in Italy. Born in Sicily in 1871, Sturzo was actively involved in the problem of the Mezzogiorno until his exile in 1924. As Aldo Moro writes of him, "he wanted to make Christian Democracy a spiritual force that would inspire the Sicilian peasant world and from there initiate a process of renovation all over the South." Part of this process, for Sturzo and the Italian Popular Party more generally, involved helping to organize cooperatives in the South, as well as presenting detailed program of agrarian reform to parliament as a bill in 1920. Cf. Tarrow, *Peasant Communism in Southern Italy,* 301-302; Rizzo Franco, *Luigi Sturzo E La Questione Meridionale* (Roma: CD editoriale di cultura e di documentazione, 1957), 34.

[107] Generally speaking, the properties belonging to peasants were not only small but marginal. The lands were typically too small, infertile, or high in the mountains to provide for the subsistence needs of families. In order to make ends meet, families therefore depended upon the *latifundia*. They did so, not only as landless farm workers (*braccianti*), but also as renters (*affitti*), share tenants on permanent farmhouse units (*mezzadri*), share tenants on units with no farmhouse or equipment provided (*coloni*), as well as sharecroppers (*compartecipanti*). The *latifundia*, which took up the best agricultural land, sometimes operated as commercial farms. But more often than not, their owners let small plots of land to renters and share tenants on short-term contracts or made arrangements with sharecroppers. Tarrow, *Peasant Communism in Southern Italy*, 30–34, 291–293.

and established the Sila Agency for Agrarian Reform. By the end of that same year, the government had passed a series of measures that invested in rural infrastructure and that broke up the *latifundia*—especially those properties owned by absentee landlords and worked by peasant renters, share tenants, or sharecroppers—redistributing the land among those who worked it. All told, at the end of the decade, approximately 800,000 hectares had been expropriated and distributed to more than 100,000 families.[108]

In an address to the Confederations of Italian Tenant Farmers in 1956, Pius XII expressed his support for what had transpired. The agrarian reform provided, he said, "many families of farm-workers" with land. He praised the assistance of the Italian National Federation of Farmers in "the formation and development of small estates," especially underscoring the Federation's efforts to develop cooperatives among the beneficiaries.[109]

What is important to note about Pius XII's support for agrarian reform, like his support for other measures to address the social injustice affecting rural communities, is that it arises directly and straightforwardly out of Church teaching. It is an extension of it in response to new circumstances. Agrarian reform becomes yet another way to pursue a better distribution of property.[110] Its purpose, like that of Church teaching more generally, is to favor ownership and to enable as many people as possible to become owners—in this case, the landless, renters, and tenants of the Mezzogiorno. The emergence of agrarian reform is an example of how Church teaching develops over time, not only by way of clarification, but also by application to changing circumstances.

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[108] Ibid., 291–299.

[109] Pius XII, "Farming: Model of Human Effort," *Discourse to the Italian National Federation of Farmers*, 18 May 1955.

Needless to say, not everyone would agree with that assessment. In commenting on Pius's 1944 Radio Message—specifically the suggestion that states might at times expropriate and redistribute land—Rupert J. Ederer writes: "At that point the Pope injected the Church's social teaching into what has always represented a controversial position for some."[111] Ederer's comment raises many questions. "Injected" in what sense? Is agrarian reform being envisioned as a new, different, or even alien element to the teaching? Moreover, who are the "some" to whom Ederer refers? Do they have any relationship to those Pius XI mentions in *Quadragesimo anno* who prefer economic liberalism to Church teaching? Why is agrarian reform controversial to them? What reasons do they give for their concerns, and what relation do those reasons have to what the Church teaches? What conceptions of property and sociality do these reasons imply? Ederer does not say.

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[110] His letter to those gathered for the Social Week at Naples in 1947 is a good example of this. In it, Pius expounds upon how the question of agricultural reform emerges directly from the teachings of the Church herself and her attempt to avoid the errors both of "Marxian 'collectivism'" and "agnostic-liberal 'individualism.'" The former he associates with "extravagant promises and deceptive hopes arising from the agitation of demagogues" and the latter with "the blind rejection of any changes at all" by "those who have abundance, so that they identify the *status quo* with what is just and right, thereby opposing the kids of reforms which are actually called for by the common good." Pius XII, "The Question of Agricultural Reform," *Papal Letter Transmitted by J.B. Montini to the 22nd Social Week at Naples*, 15 September 1947.
It should be noted that in his addresses during the 1940s, Pius makes reference to the unrest in southern Italy. While consistently supportive of the need for agrarian reform and a better distribution of property in general, he does at times suggest unease with the way change is taking place. For instance, in a 1946 address, he emphasizes the need to pursue reforms with care and planning rather than an "improvised reform," which he worries will "develop into sheer demagoguery." Presumably these are references to land occupations and the inroads of the Italian Communist Party. Cf. Pius XII, "The Basis and Importance of a Healthy Agricultural Class," *Speech delivered by His Holiness to the delegates at the Convention of the Address to the National Farmers' League of Italy in Rome,* 15 November 1946.

But these questions will be important to bear in mind as we turn in the following chapters to an examination of Romero's El Salvador, in which the question of agrarian reform became an important flash point in a much larger conflict. Many found the idea of advocating for or organizing on behalf of a better distribution of property not just controversial but unequivocally subversive. In their estimation, those who questioned the justice of existing property arrangements—not to mention those who had any concerns over wages of agricultural workers or any relationship to the so-called popular organizations designed to protect and support them—were thought to be a threat to the faith, the nation, and western civilization. Morozzo's observation is worth reiterating here: the ruling classes of Romero's El Salvador—many of whose membes were Catholic themselves—did not bother trying to distinguish between the various social movements of the time. "Each and every one of the *campesino* meetings were, at a minimum, suspect of subversion," Morozzo writes, "each demand for justice was an outstretched hand toward communism."[112] All of it had to be opposed by the forces of order.

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[111] Ederer, *Pope Pius XII on the Economic Order*, 59, 190. Ederer speaks of the pope injecting the teaching *into* a controversial position whereas I think he means the pope injected a controversial position *into* the teaching. Either way, the point is basically the same.

Pace Ederer and the "some" to whom he refers, one of the primary purposes of this chapter and the previous one has been to show that agrarian reform should be seen neither as a controversial nor as an isolated matter in the Church's social teaching. Rather, the call for agrarian reform, like the call for more just distribution of property more generally, derives from an understanding of creation's common destiny. For this reason, we have been exploring the wider moral and theological landscape within which it emerges as a topic of reflection, attending at length to creation as common gift and how it informs the Church's understanding of property and possession, the bond between property and work, living wages, workers' associations and organizations, and the injustices faced by rural communities. The purpose throughout has been to familiarize ourselves with the teaching that is being clarified and applied when it is taken up in support of agrarian reform.

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[112] Morozzo Della Rocca, *Primero Dios*, 32.

3.4.2 Agrarian Reform and the State

As we have seen, Leo argues for property by appeal to natural law. The contention that personal property, including property in land, is natural to the human creature, is not meant to shore up a particular regime of property. Rather, Leo is attempting to articulate what precedes all such regimes and what they exist to foster, which is why he explicitly writes that “there is no need to bring in the state” into such considerations. Human creatures and their work of provisioning for material support exist “prior to the formation of any state” (§7). Personal property as Leo understands is not the creation of the modern state and its laws. Naboth’s vineyard, which he claims not by legal title but by “inheritance” (cf. 1 Kings 21:3), would fall under the purview of Leo’s defense of personal property. On Leo’s terms, then, states only help or hinder the right to property; they do not grant it. In this regard, Leo makes it quite clear that states have an important role to play in favoring ownership and regulating the use of property in support of the common good (cf. §§46-47). However, in *Rerum novarum* he does not elaborate upon how states might do this, much less address the possibility that in certain cases they might expropriate and redistribute agricultural land.[113]

In a series of essays and book chapters, Hittinger has maintained that the Church's social thought developed largely in response to the creed of "liberty, equality, and fraternity" emerging out of the French Revolution before eventually spreading throughout the world. With regard to this creed, Catholic thinkers were especially alarmed by the notion of fraternity, which tended to be equated with citizenship at a time when social memberships other than citizenship were being suppressed or homogenized by the state. Hittinger explains the crux of the problem: "Insofar as the state permitted the existence of other social entities only by the concession and in the pattern of state sovereignty, the state was implicitly claiming to be the exemplary cause of the good. Social entities are, in effect, icons or copies of the state." Catholic thinkers therefore tended to depict the state as "a neo-pagan expression of state sovereignty," "a demonic rival to the divinity."[114]

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[113] As we have already seen, the modern nation-state is deeply implicated the problem Leo is addressing in *Rerum novarum*. Those states that have embraced economic liberalism have not secured property but threatened it through the massive dispossessions and the production of the propertyless. Along similar lines, Leo is concerned with the "rough grasp" of the liberal state, which he thinks tends to regard workers' societies, and indeed all societies other than itself, as a threat (§55). What concerns Leo about socialism is the tendency of the state to "absorb" all property to itself, which he thinks only distorts the state's ability to function as it should (cf. §§4, 14, 35, 47). As Hittinger writes, summarizing Leo's view, "So, if the total state is a demonic rival to the divinity, the liberal state is a demonic rival to the diffusion of the good via social unions which represent, however inchoately, the divine Trinity." Russell Hittinger, "*Imago Dei* in Catholic Theology," in *Imago Dei* (Catholic University of America Press, 2013), 60.

In the wake of these developments, a distinctive response begins to take shape during the pontificate of Leo XIII. Hittinger calls it "a scissors-like approach" to the modern nation-state and its "ambition to exercise a monopoly on fraternity."[115] The Church sets out to limit and contextualize citizenship primarily through a defense of societies other than the state—on Hittinger's account, primarily societies like marriage and family, as well as the Church.[116] Hittinger describes the effects of the scissors-like approach: "In effect, the secular state, which claimed to be desacralized, was pinioned by two facets of a sacramental system…Regarding these social spheres, the church could say to the state, *noli me tangere*, 'don't touch me.'"[117] The Church's concerns about the modern nation-state and its ambition to monopolize fraternity do not go away. They continue to structure her social doctrine.[118]

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[114] Ibid.

[115] Ibid.

[116] Ibid., 41. Cf. Russell Hittinger, "Leo XIII (1810-1903)," in *The Teachings of Modern Roman Catholicism on Law, Politics, and Human Nature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

[117] Hittinger, "Imago Dei in Catholic Theology," 41. For a good introduction to some of the ways Russian thinkers approached the problem represented by the modern nation-state, cf. Artur Mrowczynski-Van Allen, *Between the Icon and the Idol: The Human Person and the Modern State in Russian Literature and Thought—Chaadayev, Soloviev, Grossman*, trans. Matthew Philipp Whelan, Theopolitical Visions (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013).

But this is not the whole story. To restrain the state from interfering in the life of the Church is not to restrain its role in social life as such. As we have seen, Leo thinks that states and their laws have an important role to play in promoting a politics of common use. States can and should favor ownership. Moreover, throughout this chapter we have examined how the defense of societies other than the state also and crucially includes societies of workers and all those especially vulnerable to exploitation under industrial capitalism—a defense that is not at all reducible to the state's lack of interference with them.[119] At least according to Leo, at times this defense even requires that the state offer assistance to these societies where it is needed but not forthcoming:

> [W]hen there is question of defending the rights of individuals, the poor and badly off have a claim to especial consideration. The richer class have many ways of shielding themselves, and stand less in need of help from the State; whereas the mass of the poor have no resources of their own to fall back upon, and must chiefly depend upon the assistance of the State. And it is for this reason that wage-earners, since they mostly belong in

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[118] Hittinger, "Imago Dei in Catholic Theology," 41.

[119] Of course, and as Leo's articulation of justice in wages suggests, the defense of societies like marriage and family, on the one hand, and the defense of workers' societies, on the other, are deeply of a piece. Hittinger describes *Rerum novarum* as "chiefly about the natural right to form voluntary societies, especially those which constitute a kind of social membrane around the family." Hittinger, "Divisible Goods and Common Good: Reflections on Caritas in Veritate," 33.

> the mass of the needy, should be specially cared for and protected by the government (§37).

Here Leo articulates what is nothing short of a preferential option on the part of the state for the most vulnerable. As he sees it, the state has a role to play in protecting those who are without protection. But Leo does not call upon the state because it is particularly adept at playing this role. Rather, Leo calls upon the state—and this is crucial—because no one else playing this role on the scale necessary to address the problem.[120]

Leo's and his successors' many concerns about modern states therefore coexist with the belief that there remain important tasks to be done and goods to be promoted by them. The purpose of all social authority is to promote the common good.[121] As John

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[120] This notion of the preferential option on the part of government for the most vulnerable continues far beyond Leo. In *Quadragesimo anno,* Pius XI articulates Leo's exact words (§25). As Pius XII writes in one address, "It also devolves on the state to see to it that the very poor are not unjustly exploited. On this point, the teaching of our predecessors is very explicit: in the protection of private rights the authorities should give special attention to the claims of the weak and the needy." Pius XII, "The Problem of Fair Distribution," *A Letter addressed to Semaine sociale of Dijon, France*, 7 July 1952.

[121] According to them, the form of polity is not fixed—there are various forms of legitimate government. However, the end of polity is fixed, which is to promote the common good. See Leo XIII, *Sapientiae christianae* §28; Leo XIII, *Au milieu* §§14, 28-29. According to Hittinger, Leo was not very much interested in the classic question of the best form of government. "His practical imperative," Hittinger writes, "was to extract the church from the 'regime politics' teaching nations apart in the Catholic world." Hittinger, "Leo XIII (1810-1903)," 64. The notion of an instrumental state begins to

XXIII writes in *Pacem in terris* (1963), “The attainment of the common good is the sole reason for the existence of civil authorities” (§54). Of course, none of this is to imply that states are necessarily amenable to this purpose. Nor is it to imply that states do not need to be constantly and insistently goaded regarding it—oftentimes at great personal cost. As we will see, something like this was the case with Romero. By no means naïve to the pathologies of the modern state—he was, after all, continually threatened before eventually being killed by one—he never ceases to remind the Salvadoran state of its purpose and to engage it as if it were an instrument capable of promoting the common good.[122]

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appear in Catholic social thought during and after World War II. Cf. Pius XII, *Summi Pontificatus,* §59; John XXIII, *Pacem in terris,* §68; Jacques Maritain, *Man and the State* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1951); William T. Cavanaugh, “Killing for the Telephone Company: Why the Nation-State Is Not the Keeper of the Common Good,” *Modern Theology* 20, no. 2 (2004): 243–74.

[122] As Roberto Morozzo della Rocca obseves, Romero did not hesitate to confront the Salvadoran authorities prior to his ascension to archbishop. His relationship to those authorities, however, changed after the death of his friend, the Jesuit Rutilio Grande. Della Rocca describes Romero’s posture this way: “Although Romero decided to abstain from participating in official civil ceremonies…he did not want to, in any way, break the lines of communication with the authorities. …The documentation reveals that Romero continually tried to maintain dialogue with the authorities. With regard to Molina [the President of El Salvador between 1972-1977], even in the moments of maximum indignation and disappointment, Romero continued speaking to him, writing him, sending him documentation, and proposing to him common work. He behaved in the

What all this amounts to is a profound ambivalence about the modern state in the Church's social teaching, which it is beyond the scope of the present chapter to examine in detail.[123] At the moment, I am concerned with a related but more specific

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same way with Molina's successor." While Romero did not appear on the side of the government in public, "in private Romero received everyone—ministers, soldiers, oligarchs, all those who called upon him…—and he made an effort to explain, to ask, to mediate, to direct, or to plead. One has to recognize in Romero a great patience in relation to the authorities." This obviously bears upon the question of Romero's purported "conversion," which Morozzo, like Romero himself, questions. The relevant novelty in Romero's attitude in the aftermath of Grande's death, suggests Morozzo, has to do with his position vis-à-vis the state. Morozzo Della Rocca, *Primero Dios*, 179–180, 185–195.

[123] Among Catholic thinkers, William Cavanaugh has offered perhaps the most the eloquent and sustained criticisms of the modern state. He concludes one of his articles, "Killing for the Telephone Company: Why the Nation-State is not the Keeper of the Common Good," with these words, which largely encapsulate his view: "The nation-state is neither community writ large nor the protector of smaller communal spaces, but rather originates and grows over against truly common forms of life. This is not necessarily to say that the nation-state cannot and does not promote and protect some goods, or that any nation-state is entirely devoid of civic virtue, or that some forms of ad hoc cooperation with the government cannot be useful. It is to suggest that the nation-state is simply not in the common good business. At its most benign, the nation-state is most realistically likened, as in MacIntyre's apt metaphor, to the telephone company, a large bureaucratic provider of goods and services that never quite provides value for money." Cavanaugh, "Killing for the Telephone Company: Why the Nation-State Is Not the Keeper of the Common Good," 266. This passage I think captures the ambivalence I mentioned above. In previous chapters, we have seen some of the ways that the modern state, in Cavanaugh's words, "originates and grows over against truly common forms of life." In the final part of this chapter, however, I am particularly concerned with the way that, as Cavanaugh continues, "this is not necessarily to say that the nation-state cannot

issue, namely, agrarian reform as one tool states might use in order to favor ownership. As I indicated above, Leo himself does not envision the possibility states might be involved in the task of expropriating and redistributing land in order to facilitate property's social function. His successors, however, do.[124]

3.4.2.1 *Quadragesimo anno*

In *Quadragesimo anno*, Pius XI gives complex and not altogether clear guidelines in this regard. At times, his language seems to suggest an opposition to expropriation and redistribution on the part of the state. For instance, he uses the distinction between ownership of property and its use to argue that the former cannot be "destroyed or lost by reason of abuse or non-use" (§47), which he understands to be a requirement of

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and does not promote and protect some goods, or that any nation-state is entirely devoid of civic virtue, or that some forms of ad hoc cooperation with the government cannot be useful." Cf. also William Cavanaugh, "'A Fire Strong Enough To Consume the House': The Wars of Religion and the Rise of the State," *Modern Theology* 11, no. 4 (1995); William T. Cavanaugh, "The City: Beyond Secular Parodies," in *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (New York: Routledge, 1999); William T. Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination* (New York: T&T Clark, 2003); Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ*. For a critical response to Cavanaugh's work for its tendency to call into question the modern state itself and thus for its failure to articulate this ambivalence in a sustained way, see Matthew A. Shadle, "Cavanaugh on the Church and the Modern State: An Appraisal," *Horizons* 37, no. 2 (2010).

[124] For an overview of this, see Calvez and Perrin, *The Church and Social Justice*, 214–217.

commutative justice. It would seem to follow that states must tolerate those who abuse or even destroy property. Such abuse or non-use, while clearly wrong, is ultimately unenforceable on the part of the state. As far as positive law goes, then, ownership of property does not depend upon the use that is made of it. Ownership and use are not "limited by the same boundaries" (§47).[125]

By way of example, consider a group of landowners who, in the midst of rampant landlessness and pervasive hunger, possesses estates so extensive that they decide to leave some of them completely idle or to cultivate crops for export with such intensity that the practice of doing so degrades and exhausts the land. Pius XI thinks these owners clearly misuse their land and neglect property's social function. But what he calls their right to property is not destroyed or lost. On Pius XI's terms, it seems that the state should not compel them to relinquish their lands on behalf of those who need them for subsistence. The situation is clearly a scandal. But it is an unenforceable one—

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[125] Habiger writes: "What Pius XI is saying in *Quadragesimo anno* §47 is that good or bad use made of one's property has little bearing upon one's right to ownership. He is saying that the right of property does not depend upon the good use we make of it, that misuse or even the non-use of ownership does not destroy or forfeit the right of property itself." Habiger, *Papal Teaching on Private Property (1891-1981)*, 79. According to Habiger, this is the position of both Leo and Pius XI. However, as we will see, the position of Pius XII and his successors differs. They share a sense that non-use and even misuse negates the right, and that property can be lawfully taken away from its possessors in certain circumstances.

at least as far as state action is concerned. Human law, after all, cannot uproot all evil in the world.[126] At least this seems to be the implication of Pius XI's position at this point in the encyclical.

Instead of state action, Pius XI seems to favor responding to the scandal by way of the catechetical power and moral suasion of the Church herself. The Church should focus on teaching her members what it means to be the Church. Pius XI therefore praises those who, while preserving "the integrity of the traditional teaching of the Church," take it upon themselves to live into "the inner nature of these duties and their limits whereby either the right of property itself or its use, that is, the exercise of ownership, is circumscribed by the necessities of social living" (§48). In other words, while the state and its laws cannot compel landowners to relinquish their lands, the Church might convince her landowning members to do so willingly.

Presumably someone like Enrique Álvarez Córdova would fit the description. Álvarez, a wealthy Salvadoran landowner from a prominent family, who served in the capacity of vice-minister and minister of agriculture under three different administrations, famously enacted an agrarian reform on his family's own farm—known as "El Jobo"—in the lowlands near Sonsonate. After helping to train the farm's workers,

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[126] Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II.96.2.

Álvarez decided to hand over management and ownership of it to them through a cooperative structure. His efforts to realize a just polity involved his own family and the way it held its lands apart from any compulsion by the state.[127]

Similarly, in response to the brief war between El Salvador and Honduras in 1969, which sent tens of thousands of undocumented Salvadoran immigrants who had occupied Honduran land streaming back into El Salvador, the Salvadoran bishops responded precisely along the lines Pius XI suggests in *Quadragesimo anno*. The bishops did not propose that the state expropriate and redistribute land. They proposed that Church members voluntarily hand over land, capital, and equipment, and that they lay these at the Church's feet to be distributed to *campesino* families as they had need.[128]

But later in *Quadragesimo anno*, Pius XI's position seems to shift subtly regarding the issue of expropriation and redistribution. When he turns to the role of the state in the determination of the common good, his language suggests a much more involved role for the state in the realization of property's social function. After commenting upon the injustice of burdensome taxation schemes, Pius XI goes on to write:

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[127] John W. Lamperti, *Enrique Alvarez Córdova*, 1 edition (Jefferson, N.C: McFarland & Company, 2006), 121–145.

[128] *Llamamiento del episcopado Salvadoreño en nombre de la paz*, 15 agosto 1969. The allusion being drawn to Acts 4:33-35 is my own, though it is consistent with the message of the document itself. Instead of Acts, the bishops frame their appeal in terms of the Beatitudes and the work of being peacemaker (Mt. 5:9). I will have more to say about this document and its proposal for the establishment of the *Populorum progressio* Foundation in the following chapter. For more on the war between El Salvador and Honduras, see Durham, *Scarcity and Survival in Central America*; Ryszard Kapuściński, *The Soccer War*, trans. William Brand (New York: Vintage International, 1992), 157–185.

> Yet when the State brings private ownership into harmony with the needs of the common good, it does not commit a hostile act against private owners but rather does them a friendly service; for it thereby effectively prevents the private possession of goods, which the Author of nature in His most wise providence ordained for the support of human life, from causing intolerable evils and thus rushing to its own destruction; it does not destroy private possessions, but safeguards them; and it does not weaken private property rights, but strengthens them (§49).

Pius XI's description of state action in this passage is crucial. It undermines any construal of property as essentially private, whose social character is an additional or extrinsic feature to it. In taxing, the state does not interfere or impose upon property but "safeguards" and "strengthens" it. Moreover, Pius XI describes the state, not as a threatening, alien presence, committing a "hostile act against private owners." In fact, the contrary is the case. The state does private owners a "friendly service" in helping their property be what it most fundamentally is, which is common—"ordained for the support of human life" as a whole. As Pius XI indicates here, states have an important role to play in safeguarding and strengthening property by facilitating common use.

On Pius XI's terms, we can even say private property as it is typically understood—not state action—is the real hostile act in the face of the common gift of creation and the true obstacle to creation's common destiny. If left to itself, private property causes “intolerable evils” and even leads to its own “destruction.” At least in this passage, Pius XI suggests that states should try to prevent such a situation from occurring.

3.4.2.2 *Gaudium et spes*

At least in *Quadragesimo anno*, questions remain regarding the role of states in facilitating property’s social function, which I do not think that Pius XI himself fully resolves. The passage above begins with a discussion of taxation, though Pius XI’s language throughout suggests a much broader application. Habiger, for instance, thinks it includes, among other considerations, limits on the amount of property owned.[129] Given the freedom Pius XI grants to the state in the determination of the common good, it is not beyond the realm of possibility to imagine cases in which states not only tax in order to support the common good but even expropriate and redistribute land to this end as well. Moreover, the logic of Pius XI’s position even raises the question about how best to describe what the state is doing. For instance, is it truly an act of expropriation—a taking away of someone’s property (from the Latin *ex-* “away from” and *propriare* “to appropriate”)? Or is it helping property be what it is by returning it to those to whom it belongs?

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[129] Habiger, *Papal Teaching on Private Property (1891-1981)*, 83.

Less than ten years after *Quadragesimo anno* was written, Pius XII assumed the papacy, and as we have seen, he came to regard agrarian reform as one tool among others to favor ownership for as many people as possible. But on his and his successors' terms, it is a tool to be employed in very specific circumstances. In the passage above, the purpose of taxation is to prevent private possession from "causing intolerable evils" and from "rushing to its own destruction." In contrast, agrarian reform is an attempt to remedy an evil that has already occurred and ingrained itself into a landscape—an evil that has already become intolerable for a society to bear.

At least this is the understanding of agrarian reform that we encounter in what are perhaps the two most important passages dealing with it in the Church's social teaching. The first occurs in *Gaudium et spes*, right after the passage that we have examined in previous chapters about creation as common gift. In its articulation of common use, we saw that the Pastoral Constitution begins not with state action but with the action of particular persons and households and how these might practice common use. In the ensuing paragraphs, the prime example given of the failure to heed property's social function has to do with those regions of the world where there are:

> large or even extensive rural estates which are only slightly cultivated or lie completely idle for the sake of profit, while the majority of the people either are without land or have only very small fields, and, on the other hand, it is evidently urgent to increase the productivity of the fields. Not infrequently those who are hired to work for the landowners or who till a

> portion of the land as tenants receive a wage or income unworthy of a human being, lack decent housing and are exploited by middlemen. Deprived of all security, they live under such personal servitude that almost every opportunity of acting on their own initiative and responsibility is denied to them and all advancement in human culture and all sharing in social and political life is forbidden to them. According to the different cases, therefore, reforms are necessary: that income may grow, working conditions should be improved, security in employment increased, and an incentive to working on one's own initiative given. Indeed, insufficiently cultivated estates should be distributed to those who can make these lands fruitful; in this case, the necessary things and means, especially educational aids and the right facilities for cooperative organization, must be supplied. Whenever, nevertheless, the common good requires expropriation, compensation must be reckoned in equity after all the circumstances have been weighed (§71).

According to this passage, the main problem with these extensive rural estates is not so much their size but their lack of cultivation. Those who hold these estates possess in excess of their needs and for the sake of private profit. Meanwhile, the majority of inhabitants lack basic material support. They either lack land, or if they have it, they lack sufficient land to meet their needs. Those who work for landowners lack living wages, as well as adequate shelter. Indeed, the passage associates the privation of stable and secure access to basic material support with the privation of protection—they are "deprived of all security"—and so are particularly vulnerable to exploitation.

What is crucial to see is that privation of basic material support is intimate with other, more insidious forms of privation. Privation of material support generates the conditions in which people can be preyed upon. It cripples human agency and produces a people for whom "all sharing in social and political life is forbidden to them." Another way of putting the point is in terms of Romero's observation that in El Salvador, denying the landless goods like land is of a piece with denying them other goods that are part and parcel of human flourishing. All these denials attempt to hoard goods that God has given for the benefit of all.

One conclusion *Gaudium et spes* draws from situations like the one just described is that the productivity of unused or insufficiently used lands should be increased. Note carefully that the path to increased productivity. It is not, as we might expect, through the application of the latest and greatest in agricultural technology. Nor is it through the owners of these estates agreeing to plant them from fencerow to fencerow. Rather, the path to increased productivity is through the proliferation of ownership. It is through more people using land that is presently being left unused: "Indeed, insufficiently cultivated estates should be distributed to those who can make these lands fruitful." There are times when the common good requires expropriation, so that the land can belong to those who are willing to work it.

Gaudium et spes's call for the proliferation of property takes as its point of departure how persons and households might acknowledge and live into common use. But in this passage, the specific tasks enumerated—income growth, improvements in working conditions, increased security in employment, better incentives, educational aids, and the facilitation of cooperative organization, not to mention the concluding statement about the common good at times requiring expropriation and adequate indemnification—indicate that the reform of agriculture and the achievement of a better distribution of land crucially involves state action. But agrarian reform also involves much more than state action, for its aim is not simply to enable the landless or land-poor to access land, but to enable them to access other goods from which they are being excluded. Its aim is to foster fuller "sharing in social and political life."

3.4.2.3 *Populorum progressio*

The other important passage about agrarian reform in the Church's social teaching occurs in Paul VI's 1967 encyclical *Populorum progressio*. Like *Gaudium et spes*, *Populorum progressio* embeds its discussion of agrarian reform within an understanding of the created order as a common gift, one implication of which is that institutions like property and markets be "subordinated to" and "actively facilitate" the ability of all people to access—to "glean"—what they need. The nourishment of all is the "original purpose" (*primigenium finem*) of these institutions—a purpose to which they must continually be reminded and redirected (§22).

In order to concretize the implications of the understanding of property with which he is working, Paul turns to a discussion of almsgiving, writing:

> ‘He who has the goods of this world and sees his brother in need and closes his heart to him, how does the love of God abide in him?’ [1 John 3:17] Everyone knows that the Fathers of the Church laid down the duty of the rich toward the poor in no uncertain terms. As St. Ambrose put it: ‘You are not making a gift of what is yours to the poor man, but you are giving him back what is his. You have been appropriating things that are meant to be for the common use of everyone. The earth belongs to everyone, not to the rich.’ [*On Naboth* §12.53] These words indicate that the right to private property is not absolute and unconditional. No one may appropriate surplus goods solely for his own private use when others lack the bare necessities of life (§23).

The verse Paul quotes from First John states that when those with created goods distance themselves and their goods from those without them, they distance themselves from the love of God. Among other reasons, this is because in distancing themselves from the need of others, they distance themselves from God’s purpose of nourishing all life by means of what God has made, including their own lives and the work of their own hands. As Ambrose puts it here, those who hold the world’s goods appropriate for their exclusive use what God gives for common use. As we have seen, common use includes personal use, but it is not limited to it. The problem therefore resides both in the excess of what they hold as well as in the exclusivity with which they hold it—what Paul calls their “absolute and unconditional” understanding of private property. What he means by this is that they hold what belongs to others, keeping for themselves what God wishes to return to others through them. In this way, they likewise distance themselves from God’s work in gathering what has been scattered by sin, including the divisions arising from the disparities in property holding itself. They fail to acknowledge or cultivate the common good by means of what they have been given.

There will be many situations in which conflicts arise between the private property rights secured by positive law and the needs of communities. In such situations, the encyclical envisions states playing an indispensable role—a role that, if it is to be successful, necessitates "the active involvement of citizens and social groups" (§24). As with *Gaudium et spes*, the single example *Populorum progressio* gives of such a conflict is the following: "If certain landed estates impede the general prosperity because they are extensive, unused or poorly used, or because they bring hardship to peoples or are detrimental to the interests of the country, the common good sometimes demands their expropriation" (§25). These landed estates or *latifundia* once again exemplify how private property can claim for itself an absolute and unconditional right, which attempts to unmoor itself from God's purposes for the created order. Note also the expansion of the criteria according to which expropriation is deemed a legitimate action on the part of states. *Gaudium et spes* poses the problem principally in terms of insufficient cultivation. But *Populorum progressio* cites as additional grounds for expropriation the extensiveness of the estate, poor use of the land, impoverishment of the inhabitants, and even the harm it causes to the country—all of which suppress property's social function.[130]

The contention that there are times when state action is necessary in order to address property conflicts is an outworking of subsidiarity, a principle that in the Church's social thought serves to coordinate a plurality of societies in relation to one another.[131] In its positive formulation, subsidiarity simply means that there are times when some societies must give assistance (*subsidium*) to others.[132] In the case of agrarian reform, assistance comes from the state in the form of an expropriation and redistribution of land on behalf of landless or land-poor families. Such assistance is necessary, even indispensable. In its negative formulation, subsidiarity requires that the assistance given should always seek to preserve and build up the recipient societies and the goods they hold in common, never to undermine or destroy them.[133] To return to the case of agrarian reform, the purpose of the assistance is not to supplant the work of the recipient families but to help them cultivate land successfully in order to make provision for themselves and for others. The purpose is to reestablish the conditions under which property can fulfill its social function within the life of the societies involved—and not just for those who receive the redistributed land but for those whose lands have been expropriated as well. The common good, after all, is theirs too.

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[130] Paul VI writes that *Gaudium et spes* "affirms this emphatically" (§24). Perhaps this is the spirit of the text but it is certainly not its letter. The difference is not lost on the Church's representatives in the National Agrarian Reform Congress in El Salvador in 1970. Cf. Asamblea Legislativa, *Memoria Del Primer Congreso Nacional de Reforma Agraria* (San Salvador: Publicaciones de la Asamblea Legislativa, 1970), 178–179.

[131] The principle of subsidiarity is often articulated in terms of devolution, that judgements, actions, and decisions should be performed at the lowest possible level, which is usually construed as the private initiative of individuals. This is largely due to a misreading of the classic formulation of subsidiarity in *Quadragesimo anno*, in which Pius XI writes: "Just as it is gravely wrong to take from individuals what they can accomplish by their own initiative and industry and give it to the community, so also it is an injustice and at the same time a grave evil and disturbance of right order to assign to a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate organizations can do. For every social activity ought of its very nature to furnish help to the members of the body social, and never destroy and absorb them" (§79, cf. §80). In this passage, the appeal to the individual is to set up an analogy, namely, just as it is wrong to take from individuals what they can do through their own initiative, so too it is wrong to take from social bodies what they can do through their own initiative. Subsidiarity concerns not the lowest level but the proper level, not individuals but societies and how they stand in relation to one another and the state.

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[132] The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* puts the matter this way: "Various circumstances may make it advisable that the State step in to supply certain functions…One may…envision the reality of serious imbalance or injustice where only the intervention of the public authority can create conditions of greater equality, justice and peace" (§188).

[133] Pius XII, "Discourse of His Holiness Pius XII to Commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* of Pope Leo XIII on the Social Question," 223. There are resonances here with the Industrial Areas Foundation's "iron law of organizing": "Never do for others what they can do for themselves." Industrial Areas Foundation, *Industrial Areas Foundation: 50 Years Organizing for Change* (Franklin Square, NY: Industrial Areas Foundation, 1990), 17.

Subsidiary therefore implies a recognition that there are forms of assistance that are not really assistance at all—that might, in fact, do more harm than good.[134] In the case of agrarian reform, not only might the involvement of states in the expropriation and redistribution of land on large scales not resolve the problem that prompts the involvement; it might even exacerbate it.[135] As we will see, in the months immediately preceding his murder, this was among Romero's concerns about the agrarian reform. The reform, he thought, had become a vehicle for the systematic militarization of the countryside, which was leading to the increased surveillance and repression of certain segments of the *campesinado*.[136]

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[134] Barrera makes this point more generally with regard to agricultural policy and the effects of what he calls the "anti-rural bias of the import-substitution strategy" in his insightful analysis of *Mater et magistra*. Cf. Barrera, *Modern Catholic Social Documents and Political Economy*, 26.

[135] Cf. especially Scott, *Seeing Like a State: Why Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*.

[136] Romero, *Homilías*, 383–385. Romero's El Salvador therefore raises additional questions and concerns about agrarian reform as an outworking of subsidiarity. For instance, in the words of *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*: "In light of the principle of subsidiarity, however, this institutional substitution must not continue any longer than is absolutely necessary, since justification for such intervention is found only in the *exceptional nature* of the situation" (§188, emphasis in original). Important in this regard is Giorgio Agamben's analysis of the state of exception as a paradigm of government, wherein the exceptional and the provisional become the rule. Agamben's treatment of exceptionality illumines many aspects of the situation in El Salvador, particularly the way, in his words, a "juridico-political system transforms itself into a killing machine" in which the normativity of law is "obliterated and contradicted with impunity by a

But setting these issues aside for the time being, I want to comment upon another implication of subsidiarity for the Church's teaching on agrarian reform, which we touched upon briefly above. Critics of agrarian reform often articulate their opposition to it on the basis of a defense of absolute property, construing the state as a hostile actor, unjustly depriving private owners of what is rightfully theirs. However, at least on the articulation of agrarian reform we have been examining in this chapter, this formulation has it almost completely backwards: it is not so much that the state infringes upon private property but that so many others have done so. Too many have not learned to regard their possessions as given for common use. They have therefore kept what God wants to grow for the many through them. Their lands hide the food others lack.

It is the ongoing accumulation of these ordinary infringements—the daily dispossessions of the Naboths of the world from their lands, this great "piling of wreckage upon wreckage"[137]—that generates the pressure for which agrarian reform

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governmental violence that…nevertheless still claims to be applying the law." Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2005), 2, 86–87. *State of Exception* is a sequel to Agamben's earlier work *Homo Sacer* and its analysis of "the camp"—whether concentration or refugee—as paradigm of politics. Cf. Agamben Giorgio, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Heller-Roazen Daniel (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1998).

[137] Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 257.

functions as something like a release valve. Because so many have failed to facilitate property's social function, the problem has reached the point that it has—the point at which this particular form of assistance becomes appropriate. The state is effectively being called upon to play this role on behalf of property's social function because so many others—both inside and outside the Church—have failed to play theirs.

Many questions remain unanswered regarding the state's role in the reform of agriculture. But as the whole context of the discussion makes plain, the realization of the common destination of created goods is not exclusively or primarily the state's work. It is the common work of all. From this vantage, the state's involvement is perhaps best understood by Christians as a limited and in itself insufficient response to a widespread and collective failure—to a reality that must first be faced with weeping and mourning, sackcloth and ashes.

3.5 Conclusion

Above I raised questions about the purported "controversy" regarding the place of agrarian reform within the Church's social teaching. In this chapter, as well as the previous one, we have been exploring the moral and theological landscape within which the teaching emerges, among other reasons, in order to defuse the sense of controversy and to suggest that agrarian reform is not an incongruous feature of the landscape.

Along the way, we have seen how the Church's treatment of it is informed by an understanding of creation as common gift and an account of property and possession deriving from it, which likewise has implications for work as a path to property, justice in wages, the role of workers associations and organizations, and the unique vulnerabilities faced by rural workers under industrial capitalism.

In the final section of this chapter, we considered the topic of agrarian reform itself, paying close attention to the role states play in the expropriation and redistribution of land. One important lesson to be drawn from it is that while the politics of common use certainly implicates states, the politics itself is not itself state-centered. The center is common use and what it means for persons, households, and societies more generally to acknowledge it. To focus exclusively upon the state and its action of expropriating and redistributing land is in some sense to miss the point entirely. It gives the mistaken impression that the politics of common use is state-centered when it is not. There is no politics of common use without commoners.[138]

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[138] The Jesuit economist Bernard Dempsey puts it well when he writes that the problem is not with common use but with the notion that "common use is attained only through state action." Bernard W. Dempsey, *The Functional Economy: The Bases of Economic Organization* (Prentice-Hall, 1958), 183. Cf. Stephen Long, "Bernard Dempsey's Theological Economics: Usury, Profit, and Human Fulfilment" *Theological Studies* 57 (1996).

All this is particularly evident in *Gaudium et spes* and *Populorum progressio*, both of which carefully place agrarian reform within a discussion of creation as common gift and a more comprehensive account of property and possession. Both documents underscore the imperative that persons and households regard what they have not only as theirs but also as common. The notion that the support of the common good might at times require expropriation of agricultural land is an entailment of this teaching, worked out on an admittedly much larger scale. Neither document envisions common use exclusively or primarily through state action. My own presentation of agrarian reform in this chapter and the previous one has patterned itself accordingly.

When understood in these terms, agrarian reform represents not simply an exercise in the distribution of land through the mechanisms of the state—though it certainly includes it. Rather, it has most fundamentally to do with the way the Church catechizes—or fails to catechize—the faithful to acknowledge and to use created goods to build up the life of the societies of which they are members. Agrarian reform always opens out into this more expansive politics—into what I have been calling a politics of common use—in which the call for the reform of agriculture is tantamount to a call for the reform of persons and societies more generally.

As we will see in the following two chapters, the society of central concern for Romero is the Church and the reform is her need of continual reformation to be what she is.[139] The call for agrarian reform becomes above all a way to reflect upon, in Kelly Johnson's words, what "the habits of property-holding" have to do with being "better pilgrims."[140]

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[139] The phrase "continual reformation" (*perennem reformationem*) comes from the Second Vatican Council's decree on ecumenism, *Unitatis redintegratio*, §6, cf. §4

[140] Kelly Johnson, *Fear of Beggars: Poverty and Stewardship in Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 7.

CHAPTER 4: LAND OF THE SAVIOR

> Moses brought us out of Egypt; our history begins with an act of liberation…If Moses brought us out of Egypt, split the sea, and fed us manna, do you think, then, that under his leadership we are going to conquer a country the way one conquers a colony? Do you think that our act of conquest can be an imperialistic act? Do you think that we will appropriate a plot of land for ourselves so that we can use and abuse it? We are going…toward this land in order to experience celestial life.
>
> —Emmanuel Lévinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings*

4.1 Introduction

When Romero turns in the final part of his homily on Gaudete Sunday 1979 to comment upon the events of the week, he says that he wants to follow John Paul II's recommendation to the bishops of Ecuador. In John Paul's address to the Ecuadoran bishops during their *Ad limina* visit, he commends their sensitivity as pastors to "the exodus of the rural population to large urban centers," the tendency of the privileged to capture the greater part of "the distribution of national wealth," and the "extreme inequalities" that characterize their country. Before these troubling realities, John Paul II encourages them in their efforts to give "an orientation and a response based upon the

Gospel, following the tradition of the great principles of the social teaching of the Church."[1]

This is Romero's purpose as well when he turns to the topic of the agrarian reform proposed by recently-installed Junta Revolucionaria de Gobierno (Revolutionary Government Junta, JRG). Just months earlier, on 15 October 1979, a coup d'état organized by junior army officers toppled the government of General Carlos Humberto Romero—no relation to Óscar Romero—and brought reformist civilians into the government for the first time in almost five decades. Comprised of military and civilian leadership, the JRG promised agrarian and other reform measures, as well as an end to the violence.[2]

Rodrigo Guerra y Guerra, one of the organizers and intellectual architects of the coup, begins the group's *Proclama* or Proclamation with these words: "The social political situation in El Salvador is extremely critical because of the inadequate structures of national income and land tenancy. These grave circumstances are the true origin of the dissatisfaction of the multitude." The document goes on to cite statistics from the World Bank regarding land concentration and income inequality, which it sees as the main cause of the dissemination of Marxist-Leninist doctrines among the Salvadoran people.[3]

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[1] *Ad limina Apostolorum:* Bishops' Conference of Ecuador, 11 December 1979, in L'*Osservatore Romano,* 23 December 1979.

[2] The JRG's initial members were Colonels Adolfo Arnaldo Majano Ramos and Jaime Abdul Gutiérrez Avendaño, along with three civilians, Guillermo Ungo, Mario Antonio Andino and Román Mayorga Quirós.

Of the numerous reform measures proposed by the JRG, agrarian reform is the first and principal one: "There will be initiated a program of agrarian reform, whose purpose is to give the multitude of *campesinos* access to land." The reform will target lands that are idle or with low productivity, as well as the large estates or *latifundia,* and it will involve, not simply access to land but access to credit and technical assistance, and forms of tenancy like cooperative associations so that land is not just a "factor of production" but also fulfills "a social function."[4]

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[3] Primera Junta Revolucionaria del Gobierno, *Proclama del 15 de Octubre 1979.* Typed copy in possession of author.

[4] Ibid. Given the centrality of coffee to the Salvadoran economy, the *Proclama* states the need for a special program regarding the large coffee-growing estates. The proposals described in the *Proclama* were influenced by scholars from the UCA. The first civilian to join the two colonels in JRG was Román Mayorga Quirós, the Rector of the UCA at the time. In his memoir, Rodrigo Guerra y Guerra also names Óscar Romero himself as an influence upon the *Proclama*. Guerra y Guerra describes the proposed agrarian reform as an attempt to open "access of *campesinos* to idle lands, which at that time were abundant in El Salvador, drawing upon experiences of countries in which successful agrarian reforms had taken place, specifically Japan, Israel, and Taiwan. In no way did I envision the kind of irrational agrarian reform that began on 7 March 1980, two months after the members of the Junta Revolucionaria de Gobierno had resigned [on 5 January 1980 the three civilian members of the Junta resigned]." Rodrigo Guerra y Guerra, *Un Golpe al Amanecer: La Verdadera Historia de la Proclama del 15 de Octubre 1979* (San Salvador: Índole

On 7 December 1979, the JRG passed Decree 43, which froze large land transactions, the preliminary step in the implementation of agrarian reform. The purpose was to prevent what had happened repeatedly in the past: landowners titling their holdings to family and friends to avoid relinquishing them. Enrique Alvarez, the Minister of Agriculture, went on television to sketch the liniments of the proposed reform.[5] A week later the JRG nationalized control of coffee and sugar exports.[6]

"Without a doubt," Romero says in Sunday homily of that week, on 16 December, "the central event this week…has been the announcement of the agrarian reform. This promise has awoken great hope among the majority of the population: those who work the land; but it has also generated fear and even aggression among the powerful but small minority: the great *latifundistas*."[7] As we will see, this small minority regarded the reform as an act of theft. Moreover, they thought it was a particularly

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Editores, 2009), 58–59. On the influence of the UCA on the reform movement, cf. William Stanley, *The Protection Racket State: Elite Politics, Military Extortion, and Civil War in El Salvador* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 4–5.

[5] Cf. *Estudios Centroamericanos* 1979, 34:1116-1118.

[6] Cf. *Estudios Centroamericanos* 1979, 34: 1090; Baloyra, *El Salvador in Transition*, 91.

[7] Oscar Arnulfo Romero, *Homilías,* vol. VI, ed. Miguel Cavada Diez (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 2005), 69. Cf. "Presentación del ministro de agricultura y ganadería, Enrique Álvarez Córdova, en la cadena de radio y televisión, el 11 de diciembre de 1979," *La Prensa Gráfica*, 14 de diciembre de 1979.

dangerous act of theft that had to be resisted at all costs, among other reasons, because the thieves were no longer operating in the shadows but under the cover of government.

Apart from the *latifundistas,* there were others who opposed agrarian reform, but for altogether different reasons. In July 1979, just months before the coup, the revolutionary Sandinistas overthrew the Somoza regime in neighboring Nicaragua. While some Salvadorans, such as those Romero mentions, looked to Nicaragua with fear, others looked to Nicaragua with hope. The radical Salvadoran left saw in Nicaragua an image of what El Salvador might one day become. In contrast, they saw in the JRG's agrarian and other reform measures just that—reform measures—when what was needed was revolution. They regarded agrarian reform as counter-revolutionary and beholden to the interests of the United States. The measures were poorly designed, hastily implemented, and above all, profoundly inadequate in response to the depth of the injustice suffered and the rampant slaughter of the Salvadoran people.[8]

In this chapter, we return to Romero's El Salvador to continue the task initiated in the first chapter, which examined the production of landlessness in the wake of the enclosure legislation of the nineteenth-century. It offered a brief, historical narrative of the consequent concentration of land and wealth. It suggested—without exploring at length—how agrarian became one particularly salient response to the concentration.

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[8] Along these lines, Gersón Martínez, a guerilla commander, described the coup this way: "The 1979 coup, with its purely counterinsurgent tendencies, had a well-defined goal: take away the gurillas' momentum, drain the water away from the fish, take away the water from the guerrilla, diminish social support for the guerrilla." Quoted in Erik Ching, *Authoritarian El Salvador: Politics and the Origins of the Military Regimes, 1880-1940* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014), 350.

One purpose of the present chapter is to fill out this picture by looking at different visions of agrarian reform as they emerged in the military regimes that ruled El Salvador for decades, in U.S. policy toward Latin America, and in the Church's organizing efforts in the Salvadoran countryside. While the focus remains the involvement of Romero and the Church in the agrarian crisis of the late 1970s, we will consider how that involvement occurs within longstanding societal and ecclesial conversations about agrarian reform and its significance.

The central claim of chapter one, however, was that Romero's support for agrarian reform drew upon a particular understanding of creation's grammar—what *Gaudium et spes* calls the common or universal destination of created goods. The previous two chapters therefore turned explicitly to Catholic social doctrine's construal of creation's grammar as common gift and how it shapes Church teaching—not only on property and possession, but also on work, wages, and workers' associations and organizations. My purpose in doing so was to situate the call for agrarian reform within the moral and theological landscape of the Church's social doctrine with an eye to its influence upon Romero.

An important lesson to be drawn from that examination is how the call for agrarian reform is part of a much wider and more integrated set of concerns regarding a more just distribution of created goods. As I have tried to show, agrarian reform appears within the Church's social doctrine as one aspect of a politics of common use, which implicates states, but is not centered upon them. Rather than on states, this politics centers upon how all peoples and societies learn to acknowledge creation as common gift and use created goods to build up the bodies of which they are member. For Christ's ecclesial body on pilgrimage—the society that is the Church—this entails a process of continual reformation as she learns to live into the life of the land for which she is destined: the sharing in God's life made possible in Christ.

As will become apparent over the course of the present chapter, our excursus into the Church's social doctrine has provided us with essential tools for understanding how and why agrarian reform and the defense of workers' associations and organizations became such central preoccupations for Romero during his tenure as archbishop. As we continue to trace the itinerary Romero sets for the pilgrim Church in El Salvador, we will see that it traverses the landscape we have been exploring all along. What I hope to continue to show is the seriousness with which Romero took the Church's teaching, which he wants to help his people faithfully embody.

But what will also become acutely apparent are other striking features of the landscape within which Romero and his people walk. Romero bears witness to the way, as he himself puts it, "by defending this line of the archdiocese, which is the line of the Church, those who have attempted to identify themselves with it have suffered and must continue to suffer."[9] The problem Romero identifies—the problem of persecution on the part of followers of this line of thinking—is seldom reflected upon within Church teaching on the topic of agrarian reform itself or even within the Church's social teaching more generally.[10] In the following chapters, we will therefore continue to explore the relationship between support for agrarian reform, on the one hand, and persecution of the Church and repression of workers' associations and organizations, on the other. It is a persecution that led to Romero's martyrdom.[11]

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[9] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. VI, 72.

[10] For instance, the 2004 *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* has only brief discussions of "martyrdom" and "persecution." The *Compendium* does mention situations in which human authority goes "beyond the limits willed by God," thus making itself a "deity" and demanding "absolute submission," and how, at such times, the peaceful resistance of the martyrs witnesses to the victory of Christ and the defeat of the abuse of human power (§382, cf. §§381, 427, 515, 570). But the frequency of the abuse of human authority, the multitude of the martyrs and their witness in the face of it, and the implications of both for the Church's social doctrine, are not discussed. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*.

[11] The link between the repression and the agrarian reform can be seen in other high-profile assassinations besides Romero's. For instance, Enrique Álvarez Córdova, who served as Minister of Agriculture in the first JRG and who was one of the architects of

The present chapter focuses on the period spanning the announcement of an agrarian reform in December 1979 and its implementation in March the following year, tracking with events in a more or less chronological fashion. Close readings of several of Romero's homilies frame it. The chapter begins with his 16 December 1979 homily, which immediately follows the announcement of the reform. The chapter concludes with an examination Romero's homilies from the first months of 1980, concentrating especially on his 16 March homily, which immediately follows the implementation of the reform. Together these homilies comprise the most sustained discussions of agrarian reform in Romero's homiletical and literary corpus.

Another crucial feature of these homilies is that they are delivered during the Advent and Lenten seasons, respectively. These are seasons in the Church's life during which time she prepares to celebrate the central mysteries of the Christian faith: the nativity of God in Christ, and his crucifixion, death, and resurrection on the third day. In

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the agrarian reform, was killed in November 1980. Michael Hammer and Mark Pearlman, two U.S. agrarian reform officials, were killed, along with José Rodolfo Viera, the president of El Salvador's Institute for Agrarian Transformation (Instituto Salvadoreño de Transformacion Agraria, ISTA) on 3 January 1981. For more about Enrique Álvarez Córdova, cf. Lamperti, *Enrique Alvarez*. For more about Hammer, Pearlman, and Viera, cf. "The Sheraton Murder Case," *The New York Times*, 6 September 1981.

my consideration of these homilies, I attend to how Romero offers a liturgical reading of Salvadoran reality. He tires to disclose a moral and theological landscape, as well as to signal a path along which the people of God must pilgrim. At the center of Romero's concerns in these homilies is how Church members might receive agrarian reform with lament and repentance, how they can come to embrace it as part of their preparation for the liturgical reception of the mysteries of their faith, and finally what the agrarian reform can teach them about the body of which they are members and the land toward which they are traveling.

4.2. "God brings the joy of salvation to all people, let us be converted"

4.2.1 Advent

Romero's 16 December 1979 homily, delivered on the third Sunday of Advent, is not the first time he reflects upon agrarian reform and its theological significance. But it is among the most extensive discussions of it. Romero entitles the homily *God Brings the Joy of Salvation to all People, Let us be Converted*, and it centers upon three main points: that God has come into history in Christ; that the coming of God in Christ is the coming of one who liberates from sin, which gives rise to a distinctive source of joy; and finally, that the liberation Christ brings opens a path upon which all people are invited to walk, a path called conversion.[12]

Gaudete Sunday takes its name from the first words of the introit: "Rejoice in the Lord always. I say it again: rejoice! Your kindness should be known to all. The Lord is near" (Phil. 4:4). In the first reading, the prophet Zephaniah tells the children of Israel to "sing aloud," to "rejoice and exult with all your heart" because "the Lord, your God, is in your midst" (Zeph. 14, 15, 17). We celebrate with joy, Romero says, because of the coming of God into human history in Christ. The nearness of God in Christ is the basis of the joy. "Christians," Romero continues, "who are not joyful about this closeness of God have not understood the essence of their faith."[13]

Advent, then, is the season in which Christians prepare for the presence of Christ, to receive Christ anew liturgically in the feast of the Nativity. Romero does not shy away from the language of liberation to describe this presence. The presence of God in Christ is a presence that liberates.[14] God reveals Godself in the "eloquence" of the created order. But God reveals Godself in an infinitely more "intimate" manner in Christ, the one who is the fullness of God's very self. God in Christ "does not look with indifference upon the cries of those who suffer, but, like in Egypt, sees the slavery, the lashing, the humiliation, the marginalization." God in Christ comes to save, to free creation from sin and its effects, to liberate humankind so that it can more fully share in God's life.[15] This is the import of John the Baptist's proclamation in the wilderness. The joy of which Romero speaks can therefore coexist in the midst of affliction—even bear it with patience—because it is a joy arising from what was already accomplished by Christ and the affliction he endured in his passion and crucifixion. It is the joy of those who "stand beneath the cross."[16]

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[12] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. VI, 52.
[13] Ibid., 53, cf. 51–52.
[14] Ibid., 54–57.

Among Romero's central concerns in this homily is how to incorporate, in his words, "the struggle of our people" into "the great liberation of Christ."[17] The liberation Christ brings must not be conflated with that of the typical Latin American revolutionary. What distinguishes the two is not the struggle against social injustice but the difference in their respective hope and how it shapes the struggle—both the horizon under which they situate the struggle and the patience with which they engage in it. Here, as elsewhere, Romero sees within the revolutionary a posture of practical atheism, which amounts for him to a suffocating immanence. The revolutionary does not share the hope of Mary of Israel, who, likewise belonging to an oppressed people, nevertheless trusts in the God who "has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly," who has "filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty" (Lk. 1:52-53). The problem Romero perceives in the revolutionary is the straightforward identification of hope with certain "concrete projects of the earth," and with it, the loss of adequate "horizons," the inability to recognize the intractability and "prolonged" nature of the struggle.[18]

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[15] Ibid., 53. Romero quotes *Dei verbum*, the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, to describe such liberation: "God is with us to free us from the darkness of sin and death, and to raise us up to life eternal" (§4).
[16] Ibid., 55.
[17] Ibid., 56.

This is important for the way Romero approaches agrarian reform. He understands himself to have no competence with regard to it as a specific policy proposal, nor does he want to enter into a discussion about the details of the proposal. Rather, he thinks the disparities in landholding to which agrarian reform is one response should lead to lament and to repentance. While the path of repentance for the people of El Salvador passes through agrarian reform—or something like it—it does not end there. His purpose as a pastor is to try to show where agrarian reform fits within a wider moral and theological landscape. Among Romero's primary purpose in this homily is therefore to indicate the greater hope and more expansive horizon toward which the path of repentance tends, that makes the path possible.

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[18] Ibid., 55.

The great liberation of Christ makes possible a path, which Romero says is none other than the "conversion toward God" proclaimed by John the Baptist.[19] Conversion names the way those who draw near to Christ must undergo preparation to be in his presence, a preparation which is characteristically a process, a path. It is the path upon which those the prophet Zephaniah describes as the "humble and lowly," "the remnant of Israel" walks (Zeph. 3:12).

The liberation Christ brings also means that the people of which Zephaniah speaks can be gathered from all the nations of the earth—even from the nation of El Salvador.[20] This is an important point for Romero, to which we will return later in the chapter. But it is why he tells his listeners that the prophet is painting a "portrait of what we have to be": a people that places its trust in God, and which preoccupies itself "preferentially with the poor, as if it were our own cause."[21]

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[19] Ibid., 58.

[20] Ibid., 58–9. Romero notes how, in the Gospel passage, John the Baptist addresses himself to not only to the crowds and to the people in general. He also singles out tax collectors and soldiers and describes to them what they must do to "bear fruits worthy of repentance" (Lk. 3:8, cf. 7-14).

[21] Ibid., 57. Romero consistently distinguishes between the people of El Salvador (*el pueblo Salvadoreño*) and the people of God (*el pueblo de Dios*). He worries about the

There are several features of conversion as Romero articulates it to which we must attend. The first is that, as Romero puts it, “conversion is personal, just as sin is personal.” It therefore begins when persons “repent and seek the paths of justice.”[22] Morozzo notes that in the Catholicism of Romero’s time and place, progressives tended to emphasize social sin and conservatives tended to emphasize personal sin.[23] This dichotomy, however, does not help us to understand Romero because it separates what he consistently tries to hold together. On his view, sin is both personal and social. Because of the kind of creatures humans are, for whom sociality and embodiment are

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conflation by many of his contemporaries of *el pueblo* and *el pueblo de Dios*. As Romero at times points out, there is a basis for this conflation in that most Salvadorans are in fact baptized Catholics, and so, as he puts it in one article, “the people of God coincides practically with the people of the nation.” Cf. “¿Un periódico sin opinión?” *Orientación*, 20 agosto 1972.

Especially after becoming archbishop, Romero frequently comments upon the profound deficiencies in the evangelization of the Salvadoran people. He contends that the understanding of “the people of God” found in the documents of the Second Vatican Council like *Gaudium et spes* (cf. §§3, 11, 44, 45, 88, 92) and *Lumen gentium* (cf. §§9-17) has to do with the remnant of Israel of which the prophet Zephaniah speaks (cf. 3:11-13), which troubles any straightforward identification between *el pueblo Salvadoreño* and *el pueblo de Dios*. For an extended discussion of this matter, cf. Morozzo Della Rocca, *Primero Dios*, 322–323.

[22] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. VI, 60.

[23] Morozzo Della Rocca, *Primero Dios*, 324.

constitutive, sin cannot be contained in the sinner alone. It must necessarily ramify outward, beyond the bounds of the sinner, leading all of God's good creation to groan.

The inequality and concentration of landholding in places like El Salvador, then, is an indication that something has gone profoundly awry with God's purposes for what God has made. Acknowledgement of this points primarily to the need for lament and repentance. It should instill a sense of a person's own implication in sin and the violence sin unleashes in the world, which crystalizes in structures, institutions, and landscapes. According to Romero, the first and proper response is to embark on the path Romero calls conversion.

Of course, none of this substitutes for the transformation of structures, institutions, and landscapes. According to Romero, conversion "not only is personal but seeks social renewal." For instance, it seeks "to discover the social mechanisms that make workers or *campesinos* marginal people." It asks questions like "Why do *campesinos* only have income during the harvest of coffee, cotton, and sugar cane? Why does this society need to keep *campesinos* without work, workers without adequate pay, people without just salaries?" These questions are not just for sociologists or economists. All Christians must learn to ask them "in order to avoid being accomplices in this machinery that produces people who are poor, marginalized, destitute."[24] Romero regards conversion, we might say, as the indispensible path toward the true and lasting transformation of structures, institutions, and landscapes. Conversion is how the transformation begins to take hold.

Romero's approach to agrarian reform often follows a similar pattern of thought, in which the call for agrarian reform often leads him to reflect upon how the reform of landscapes and land tenure will not last without the reform of people and societies. He often quotes, as he does here, these words from Medellín to make the point: "We will not have a new continent without new and reformed structures, but, above all, there will be no new continent without new people."[25]

Because inequality and concentration of landholding indicate the failure to live in accordance with God's purpose for creation, another crucial feature of conversion as Romero articulates it in this homily is that the lives of those on its path will be marked by the search for ways to share "the good that God has given for all."[26] Those with the world's goods, Romero thinks, must learn to open themselves to questions like, why do they have wealth while right beside them there are so many in need? Such questions are the work of God's grace, in which those with the world's goods will find "the beginning of conversion."[27]

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[24] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. VI, 63.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid., 61.

Throughout the homily, Romero repeatedly returns to the words Luke places in the mouth of John the Baptist: "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise" (3:11).[28] The Gospel passage as a whole is part John the Baptist's proclamation in the wilderness regarding repentance, and the need, in the words of the prophet Isaiah, to make preparation for the coming of the Lord, to make straight the paths that are crooked, to smooth the rough ways (v. 3-5, cf. Is. 40:3-5). As Romero takes up the passage, the question posed by the crowd to John in the wilderness of Galilee, in the region around the Jordan River—"What then should we do?" (v. 10)—continues to resound. The homily attempts to situate the struggle for agrarian reform in relation to this question and to what it means to prepare a straight and smooth path for the advent of the Lord in the land of El Salvador.

Throughout the present work we have examined how property derives from the common use of all created goods, which helps us to situate the significance Romero sees in John the Baptist's words. As John suggests, sharing is part of the path of conversion. Sharing goods like clothing and food is the response God seeks to foster to the damage sin has done to creation. Conversion entails people learning to regard what they have as common—a commonality they acknowledge precisely by their willingness to share with those in need, to return the goods they hold to those to whom they rightfully belong. In chapter two, we discussed these matters in relation to the formation of people capable of distinguishing between what they need and what they do not, which, as I suggested there, generates a downward and outward pressure upon what they posses. The pressure is downward insofar as they seek to take what is necessary. The pressure is outward insofar as they seek to take what is necessary so that they have something to give. To make the point in the words of John the Baptist, if a person has two coats, she should look to share with a person without one. If she has more than enough food, she should go and do likewise.

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[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid., 60, cf. 58, 75.

The logic of Romero's view is that the lives of those who draw near to Christ—the one in whom "all things were created, in heaven and on earth," the one in whom "all things hold together" (Col. 1:15, 17)—will bear witness to him also by bearing witness to the common character of the created order and the holding together of all things in him. In other words, the commonality of the gift of creation becomes perceptible in it and through their lives, not only in the willingness to share goods—food, clothing, and so on—but also in the willingness to share their lives so that others have access to what belongs to them. They learn to share their lives by learning to share their coats and their food.

Romero understands sharing, not as a substitute for social renewal, but as the indispensible path toward it. The politics of common use embraces the work of mercy—sharing food and drink with the hungry and thirsty, clothes with the naked, shelter with the stranger, and so on—as well as more systematic and structural measures like agrarian reform. These are of a piece. They are all part of a politics of common use. On Romero's view, conversion yearns for social renewal. Sharing seeks to generate new forms of solidarity as it gathers a people "preoccupied about everyone having what they need"—a people who refuse to accept that "some have been born to have everything and to leave the rest with nothing; and a majority that has nothing and that cannot enjoy what God has created for all."[29]

4.2.2 The Doctrine of the Church

The homily as a whole concerns conversion—a conversion whose point of departure and path involves sharing. It is within this context that Romero's commentary upon the announcement of the JRG's agrarian reform should be situated.

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[29] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. VI, 61.

At the outset of his remarks about the proposed reform, Romero states that he has no pretensions to "technical" expertise regarding the specifics of what the JRG is proposing. He has no opinions about the consequences of such a reform on economic life, or the precise measures to be enacted or the best methods with which to enact it. "That is not up to me; I'm not a technician. But it is my duty to speak as a pastor regarding God's plan for the goods of the earth."[30]

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[30] Ibid., 69. In a different context—though not a completely unrelated one—Cavanaugh critiques a similar distinction to the one Romero makes here. Cavanaugh calls it a distinction between moral values and technical solutions, which he regards as correlate to a distinction between the religious and the political planes. Cavanaugh problem with these distinctions relates to one of the central arguments of *Torture and Eucharist*, which is to critique a conception of politics that excludes the body of Christ from it—a conception that assigns to the Church the role of preoccupying herself with souls and leaving bodies to the state. See Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ*, cf. 108, 167. In other words, I imagine Cavanaugh's response to Romero's distinction to be something like: 'technical solutions' cannot be neatly separated from 'moral values,' just as the 'religious' cannot be neatly separated from the 'political.'

While I am sympathetic with Cavanaugh's concerns, and while Romero himself often speaks in ways that would seem to fall prey to Cavanaugh's critique, I think these matters are more complex, and that it is important to consider Romero's position more closely. The distinction Romero makes above—between pastor and technician—is not a distinction between the Church's role and the state's role, nor is it a distinction between souls and bodies. It is an intra-ecclesial distinction, which has to do roles or competencies within the Church. Romero's view is that his role as archbishop is not to lay down requirements regarding how an agrarian reform must proceed. As he says elsewhere, "the language and attitude of the Church does not invade technical and political fields." See Romero, *Homilías,* 501. Romero takes this refusal to "invade" to be a characteristic feature of the Church's social teaching. A refusal to invade, however, is not

He reiterates the “painful and alarming” situation faced by most inhabitants of the Salvadoran countryside—the widespread and systematic lack of access to adequate food, water, housing, health care, education, and so on—citing the statistics of the Ministry of Agriculture throughout. He explains why this situation cannot be adequately understood apart from the “unjust and disproportionate distribution of land that still exists in our country.”[31]

As I have been trying to show throughout the present work, Romero’s constant point of reference regarding such matters is the Church’s teaching on the topic, and the present homily is no exception. Romero is trying to help his people understand that teaching and enact it in their own context. Romero explicitly raises the question, “What is the position of the Church in this moment?” to which he responds with a cascade of

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the same as a refusal to engage or to guide. Romero assumes that the bodies—both individual and social—of baptized and lay Catholics will be involved in the determination of these specifics. Ultimately, the issue is the kind of body the Church is and the various roles within her, specifically how to understand the role of the laity. For more on this, see *Lumen gentium* §§30-38.

[31] Romero is drawing on official statistics supplied by the Ministry of Agriculture, according to which 99% of landholders possess only 51% of the land, while less than 1% of the landholders possess among themselves 40% of the land, which is certainly, Romero adds, the “best quality.” Romero, *Homilías*, vol. VI, 69–70.

quotations, the point of which is to catechize. He begins with this passage from *Gaudium et spes*, which we have already examined at length*:*

> In many underdeveloped regions there are large or even extensive rural estates which are only slightly cultivated or lie completely idle for the sake of profit, while the majority of the people either are without land or have only very small fields, and, on the other hand, it is evidently urgent to increase the productivity of the fields. Not infrequently those who are hired to work for the landowners or who till a portion of the land as tenants receive a wage or income unworthy of a human being, lack decent housing and are exploited by middlemen. Deprived of all security, they live under such personal servitude that almost every opportunity of acting on their own initiative and responsibility is denied to them and all advancement in human culture and all sharing in social and political life is forbidden to them. According to the different cases, therefore, reforms are necessary: that income may grow, working conditions should be improved, security in employment increased, and an incentive to working on one's own initiative given. Indeed, insufficiently cultivated estates should be distributed to those who can make these lands fruitful; in this case, the necessary things and means, especially educational aids and the right facilities for cooperative organization, must be supplied. Whenever, nevertheless, the common good requires expropriation, compensation must be reckoned in equity after all the circumstances have been weighed (§71).

He cites this passage from Pope John Paul II's address to *campesinos* in Oaxaca, Mexico earlier that same year:

> The depressed rural world, the worker who with his sweat waters also his affliction, cannot wait any longer for full and effective recognition of his dignity, which is not inferior to that of any other social sector. He has the right to be respected and not to be deprived, with maneuvers which are sometimes tantamount to real spoliation, of the little that he has. He has the right to be rid of the barriers of exploitation, often made up of intolerable selfishness, against which his best efforts of advancement are

> shattered. He has the right to real help—which is not charity or crumbs of justice—in order that he may have access to the development that his dignity as a man and as a son of God deserves.
>
> Therefore it is necessary to act promptly and in depth. It is necessary to carry out bold changes, which are deeply innovatory. It is necessary to undertake urgent reforms without waiting any longer [*Populorum Progressio,* §32].
>
> It cannot be forgotten that the measures to be taken must be adequate. The Church does indeed defend the legitimate right to private property, but she also teaches no less clearly that there is always a social mortgage on all private property, in order that goods may serve the general purpose that God gave them. And if the common good requires it, there should be no hesitation even at expropriation, carried out in the due form [*Populorum Progressio,* §24].[32]

He cites and discusses other documents as well: John Paul's address at Puebla, Mexico,[33] statements from the Guatemalan Episcopal Conference,[34] the Honduran Episcopal Conference,[35] and the Conference of Latin American Bishops when they gathered at Medellín, Colombia.[36]

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[32] John Paul II, "Meeting with Mexican *Indios*," Cuilapan, Mexico, 29 January 1979.

[33] John Paul II, "Address of His Holiness John Paul II at the Third General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate," Puebla, Mexico, 28 January 1979.

[34] Conferencia Episcopal de Guatemala, *Unidos En La Esperanza: La Presencia de La Iglesia En La Reconstrucción de Guatemala*, 1976.

[35] Conferencia Episcopal de Honduras, *Sobre el desarrollo del campesinado en Honduras*, 8 enero 1970 in Conferencia Episcopal de Honduras, *Documentos oficiales de la Conferencia Episcopal de Honduras: 1968-1978* (Tegucigalpa: Conferencia Episcopal de Honduras, 1970).

[36] Medellín in Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano, *Río de Janeiro, Medellín, Puebla, Santo Domingo, Justicia*, §14.

The effect of this cascade of quotations and Romero's discussion of them is to display what he explicitly says time and again: that these thoughts are not something he has devised himself, nor are they the thoughts of a communist. They are "the doctrine of the Church," and that the "position of the archdiocese" is nothing but an attempt "to apply this general position of the Church."[37] Or as Romero puts it upon his return from Puebla:

> This is the message of Puebla, the message of the popes, the message of John Paul II proclaimed in Santo Domingo, in Oaxaca, in Monterrey, and in Guadalajara: that the Church must serve human beings and guard their rights. And as the Holy Father stated in Santo Domingo, by 'rights' we mean that *campesinos* should have land, and that workers must be able to organize and to be paid just salaries.[38]

The constant reference to and citation of magisterial texts might appear tiresome. But it helps us to understand Romero. Not only does Church teaching shape the archdiocese's support for and approach to agrarian reform. But the repetition is an indication of resistance to the teaching on the part of a powerful group of Salvadoran Catholics who oppose it as a grave threat to property, nation, and even the Church herself.

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[37] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. VI, 69–72.
[38] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. IV, 214-215.

Indeed, Romero anticipates resistance to this reform. As we will see later in this chapter, he is speaking from past experience and the way previous attempts at reform have provoked resistance. But he urges those who support the reform not to fear or to be deterred in the face of such resistance. Above all, he counsels them to join together, to avoid division among themselves.[39]

Romero underscores the way the proposed reform must be seen as a matter of justice. Already, he says, many have given their lives in order to urge the Salvadoran government to do what it is obliged to do in justice. Agrarian reform is no "gift" that the JRG gives to the people in order "to win its support" or to "pacify" them from demanding what is their due. The JRG, Romero says, "has the obligation to do this." He takes John Paul II's words cited above as a motto: rural workers have "the right to be rid of the barriers of exploitation."[40] In chapter three we saw that for the tradition upon which Romero draws, the state has an important role to play in facilitating common use, in this case, helping to ensure that *campesinos* have access to land, that workers are able to organize, and that all are paid just salaries.

The facilitation of common use, however, does not happen exclusively or even primarily through state action. Indeed, as Romero thinks *campesinos*, rural workers, and what at that time were referred to as “popular organizations” (*organizaciones populares*) have not been waiting passively for the Salvadoran state to remove the barriers of exploitation. They have for some time been involved in the attempt to remove the barriers themselves, clamoring for a better distribution of land, and trying to participate more fully in the economic and political life of their country. In announcing the latest agrarian reform proposal, the JRG “did not initiate the process.” It has incorporated itself into a process long since initiated.[41]

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[39] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. VI, 73.
[40] Ibid., 73–74.

According to Romero, these *campesinos*, rural workers, and members of popular organizations have likewise incorporated themselves into a process that precedes them, in relation to which Romero thinks they must learn to locate themselves. Their “just struggle,” Romero tells them, is part of the “long struggle, which you yourselves did not begin but that was begun by the Church twenty centuries ago as she attempted to bring a greater justice into the world.”[42] Romero is referring here to the justice of God as revealed in Christ and Christ’s ecclesial body as the extension of that justice into human history. As Romero puts it in another homily, in commenting on Paul's discussion of the justice or righteousness of God in Romans 3:21-28, "justice…means the merciful intervention of God, which is made manifest in Christ." The justice of God is liberation from the bondage to sin, whose purpose is to enable humankind to share in God's life.[43]

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[41] Ibid. Addressing himself to those *campesinos* and agricultural workers who are not organized and who are “passive before this decisive plan” and have decided to remain “spectators,” Romero tells them that they are complicit in the injustice. Not only must defend what is theirs and what has been historically denied them, but their engagement and participation in the process of agrarian reform is crucial for the viability of the reform itself.
[42] Ibid., 73.

These aspects of God's justice as manifested in Christ—liberation from sin for the purpose of sharing in God's life—are central to what Romero means by liberation. As we have seen, he often contrasts this understanding of liberation with those that are earth-bound and immanent. Regarding these other understandings, the problem for Romero is not the preoccupation with liberation as it is the incompleteness of the preoccupation, and the failure to deal with sin's hold on human life and what God has done in Christ to break it. When Romero speaks about the just struggle of *campesinos*, rural workers, and popular organizations, his purpose is to help his people learn to locate their struggle in relation to what he refers to earlier in the homily as "the great liberation of Christ." As a pastor, he takes it that his task is to reach his people where they are, in all the manifold paths they are on, and help them find their way to Christ.

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[43] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. III, 38. As a consequence of this gift, Romero continues, humans can become members of God's family and "work as God's children." "This is true liberation." Romero contrasts this with certain other understandings of liberation. "There is in our context much preoccupation with liberation—thanks be to God!—but it is a shame that many of these liberations only remain bound to the earth: economic liberation, political liberation, social liberation. This is good, but all this will come in addition."

In the previous chapter, we also examined how Church teaching on agrarian reform relates to the principle of subsidiarity, the notion that there are times when a society must give assistance (*subsidium*) in ways that seek to preserve and build up the recipient society. We should therefore not be surprised that this is Romero's concern as well. True agrarian reform, he says, should not impede people "from continuing to organize" and "to increase their participation" in political and economic life. Indeed, the success of the agrarian reform, he insists, hinges on ensuring the active participation of the beneficiaries throughout the entirety of the process. Such reform "should not make *campesinos* dependent upon the state" but leave them "free before it." Reform should support the work of the recipient families by giving them land and all they need to cultivate it well. For what agrarian reform aims at is not only a better distribution of land but a better distribution of social goods more generally, so that there are also "doctors, schools, hospitals, electricity, and water" for *campesinos*.[44]

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[44] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. VI, 74, cf. 76.

4.2.3 “This is not how one defends well-being”

At this point of the homily, Romero directly addresses those he calls the “economically powerful” of El Salvador—those whose lands will be targeted by the agrarian reform. He pleads for their collaboration in the crisis the Salvadoran people face rather than a violent response to the attempt to address the structural violence. Romero references reports that there is an influx of arms into the country, and that groups of mercenaries are forming—an allusion to the death squads linked to security forces and to landowners’ associations.[45] “This is not,” he says, “how one defends well-being.”[46]

Rather than defending violence with violence, Romero again signals that the path of conversion involves sharing even to the point of voluntary renunciation.[47] He returns once more to the words of John the Baptist: “Through the clamoring of the Salvadoran people, through this attempt to enact agrarian reform…God is making a call to you this

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[45] Ibid., 74–75. For more on death squads, cf. Ray Bonner, *Weakness and Deceit: U.S. Policy and El Salvador* (New York: New York Times Books, 1984), 330; Cynthia J. Arnson, “Window on the Past: A Declassified History of Death Squads in El Salvador,” in *Death Squads in Global Perspective: Murder with Deniability* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 88.

[46] Romero, *Homilías*, 74–75.

[47] Ibid.

Sunday through the voice of John the Baptist, 'Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise' [v. 11]."

As a contemporary exemplification of such sharing, Romero recounts what happened upon Mother Teresa's reception of Nobel Peace Prize earlier that same week. She requested that the money that would have been spent on a banquet instead be given to the poor of India.[48] Romero asks his listeners to consider her "mind"—a mind for which it is an "insult" to spend in a single night what could feed so many people for a year.[49] For our purposes, what is significant about such a mind is that it is shaped by the grammar of creation as common gift, by a conception of property and possession whose center is inclusion and gathering, and with a particular predilection for those who are presently excluded and scattered. It is the mind of one who walks within a world in which some possess land that belongs to others, in which the land of some hides the food that others lack.

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[48] When she accepted the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo, Mother Teresa canceled the scheduled celebratory banquet and had money it would have cost sent to her mission in Calcutta. When Nobel officials offered to hold the banquet and also donate the money, she asked that whatever money was available to honor her be donated. In response to her gesture, additional funds were raised by Norwegian citizens. Cf. "Nobel dinner is canceled." *Boca Raton News*, 7 December 1979; Harriet Heyman and Philip B. Kunhardt Jr. "Teresa of the Slums," *Life Magazine*, July 1980.

[49] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. VI, 75.

In effect, Romero is asking those he calls the economically powerful to come to terms with the violence in which their lives are enmeshed. All are implicated in the violence, not just the economically powerful. But it is important to attend to the particular form of violence of the economically powerful, which is a defense of violence with violence. In other words, Romero is trying to help them see that that their wealth and privilege functions as a weapon. Consequently, for them to be involved in the work of peace not only necessitates that they stop arming themselves and forming death squads in order to resist the agrarian and other reform measures. It necessitates that they learn to lay down the weapons of wealth and privilege as well.

For such is God's way as revealed in Christ. It is for their own good, Romero tells them, that the Church proclaims "the generous act of our Lord, Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:9).[50] This is an important verse for Romero, to which we will return later in the chapter. Romero's point in referencing it here is to remind his listeners that the good sought by the agrarian reforms is a common one. The purpose of the reform is to enable the land of El Salvador to fulfill its social function, which is a good in which all Salvadorans can share. By means of the reform, they might learn something of the way

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[50] Ibid., 75.

God gives creation in common to all peoples. But Romero's point is deeper still. He is suggesting that the economically powerful might not only learn how God gives creation in common. They might also learn something of the way that, in Christ, God gives God's own life in common, sharing it with what God has made. The destiny of the members of Christ's body is to be conformed to him. The path toward that conformity is imitation, learning to share all that they have and are, their land and their lives.

4.2.4 The Church

Romero, then, emphasizes sharing as preparation for the advent of the Lord. It is Christ's way as well as the way to Christ. As Romero continues, he articulates the path of preparation in terms of what he calls "the preferential option for the poor." Drawing on Puebla, Romero explicates the preferential option for the poor through the Christology of Matthew 25:31-46. On Puebla's terms, it is the call upon all Christians—rich and poor alike—to learn to follow their Lord by learning to share their goods and their lives with the Christ who continues to come to them in the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and the imprisoned (cf. Matthew 25:31-46).[51] Christ's ongoing appeal for mercy is how he builds up a body of the merciful in the world. It is how he works to repair sin's damage to creation, one of whose consequences is, in the case of El Salvador, land concentration and the inability of so many to access the land and wages they need to survive. Romero therefore insists here, as he does elsewhere, that the preferential option for the poor cannot be understood as an exacerbation of conflict, as his critics contend. It concerns addressing the conflict that already exists, the violence that inheres in an order that excludes some from what God has given for all, precisely in order to restore peace.

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[51] Ibid., 75-76.

Because Christ's ongoing appeal for mercy is how he builds up his body in the world, the preferential option for the poor has important ecclesial implications, to which Romero explicitly turns at the conclusion of the homily. In asking the people of El Salvador to involve themselves in a more just distribution of goods, Romero says, the Church must examine her own life. Her members are members of manifold societies, all of which are complexly implicated in the problems the proposed agrarian reform attempts to address. The need for a better distribution of land is therefore not an issue that is 'outside' or 'apart from' the Church's life and the history of her life in this land.

Drawing on the documents of Medellín, Romero says all her members—not just the laity, but the clergy and the religious as well—must recommit themselves to placing their goods and their lives at the service of others. We must always look to "enable others, especially those most in need, to participate in our property, sharing with them not only the superfluous but the necessary, and to be willing to put our buildings and the instruments of our work at the service of the human community."[52] The Church, in the visibility of her life and her structures before the wider world, needs to be liberated from "the bonds of egotistical possession of temporal goods."[53]

What we are seeing here is the way reflection on the reform of agriculture prompts reflection upon the reform of the Church herself. It serves as an opportunity to reconsider what the Church is and wants to be.[54] Along these same lines, and following Medellín, Romero speaks of "the poverty of the Church and of her members" as a "sign" of the presence of Christ in the world.[55] Romero does not elaborate upon the point here. But, as we will see in the following chapter, the basis of the claim is Christological. Romero's concern is how, by means of the reform of their use of property and possessions, Church members might become a more luminous sign of what they are: the body of the one who, though rich, became poor for the sake of the salvation of all.[56]

Once again, we see that Romero's sense of the significance of agrarian reform cannot be appreciated if it is reduced to the state's expropriation and redistribution of land. Romero sees the societal discussion upon agrarian reform as a sign pointing to the call for conversion at the heart of the Christian life. The reform speaks to Christians about how they must learn to make use of created goods, not for themselves or for their families alone, but for building up the social bodies of which they are members. The central social body of concern is the Church. Agrarian reform raises for her members questions like, what kind of body is the Church? What does it mean to be her member and build up her life? We will return to the question of ecclesiology in the following chapter. But note that Romero highlights the Church's involvement in agrarian reform, not simply in relation to the way the reform can be helpfully illumined by the Gospel and by Church teaching, but also—and crucially—in relation to the way the reform can teach the Church something about her identity.

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[52] Ibid., 79.
[53] Ibid.
[54] This phrase is from Pope John XXIII, "Bringing Christ to the World," *The Pope Speaks: Addresses and Publications of the Holy Father* 8, no. 4 (1963). John Pope John XXIII, "Pope's Address to the World a Month before the Council Opened," in *Council Daybook*, ed. Floyd Anderson (Washington, D.C.: National Catholic Welfare Conference, 1965-1966).
[55] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. VI, 79.
[56] Ibid.

Romero understands the need for agrarian reform to indicate that, as he observes earlier in the homily, "the Church is born of sinners."[57] Her holiness derives solely from God: she is holy because Christ has bound himself to a body of people so completely that he has made it his body, endowing it with the Holy Spirit. Christ does this in order to draw his members more fully into his own life. One implication of this view is that the path into Christ's life is a process of ongoing and oftentimes painful conversion as his members learn to leave behind all that inhibits them from participating in his life—a life that can only be possessed by sharing all that one has and is with others. What this means is that the holiness of the Church on pilgrimage is not perfect. She remains sinful and in need of conversion because her members are sinful and in need of conversion.[58] They have not yet become what they are, which makes the Church, to use Augustine's phrase, a mixed body (*corpus permixtum*). Her life is like a field of wheat and weeds growing together.

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[57] Ibid., 60.

4.2.5 "The Matanza approach"

At several points in the homily, Romero references the violence seizing El Salvador and anticipates resistance to the implementation of the reform. We already saw him allude to the influx of armaments and the formation of death squads. According to Romero, the context of the reform is one of ongoing state repression, in which the *Organización Democratica Nacionalista* (Nationalist Democratic Organization, ORDEN) and those opposed to "the breath of freedom" being given to *campesina* families operate with impunity, perpetrating "official acts of violence."[59] Moreover, the repression is radicalizing the opposition to the regime. Armed groups with links to popular organizations are engaging in military-style operations, and a popular army is forming.[60] Addressing these groups directly, Romero urges them to pursue justice without recourse to violence.[61]

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[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid., 74.

In another homily, from several months earlier, Romero speaks of the "testimony of the blood," which has become "an ordinary voice," and how, from his chair as archbishop, he has simply sought to "interpret the language of so much blood poured out."[62] Among the central purposes of the present work as a whole is to show why Romero interprets it in relation to the line of thought on agrarian reform and property that we have been examining. According to Romero, it is "by defending this line of the archdiocese, which is the line of the Church, that those who have attempted to identify themselves with it have suffered and must continue to suffer."[63]

The period spanning the final months of 1979 and the onset of civil war the following year—a period marking the descent into *la locura*, or 'the madness'[64]—is among the most tragic in Salvadoran history. Morozzo characterizes Romero's entire tenure as archbishop as "constant emergency."[65] But in the months after the 1979 coup, the emergency only grew more acute as the repression continued to escalate. After 1979, protests, strikes, and other forms of civil disobedience declined as the regime's opponents increasingly saw no option other than armed resistance.[66]

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[60] Ibid., 76–77.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. V, 29.
[63] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. VI, 72.
[64] Commission on the Truth for El Salvador, "From Madness to Hope: The 12-Year War in El Salvador" (UN Security Council, 1993).

As implementation of the agrarian and other reform measures continued, then, so did the repression. The JRG was unable to stop the torture and killing being carried out by the security forces, the intelligence units, and the death squads, which functioned autonomously from the government's public face.[67] Senior military officials—including the minister and vice-minister of defense—condoned and even ordered repression in order to undermine the efforts of the JRG. As the JRG proved incapable of stopping the repression, its authority and legitimacy eroded. Those unleashing the repression increasingly acted with impunity.[68]

After the passage of the legislation in December that froze landholdings in preparation for agrarian reform, the military high command informed the JRG's civilian members that the reforms would go no further.[69] At one meeting, the Minister of Agriculture and other government officials presented their plans, Minister of Defense, José Guillermo García, sat in silence until the end of the meeting, only to declare to those present, "All of the shit that you have been discussing is not going to happen. We are not going to permit it."[70] Dermot Keogh reports that during another confrontation, Carlos Eugenio Vides Casanova, who at that time served as the head of the Salvadoran National Guard, told the civilian members of the JRG that the military was prepared to kill two hundred thousand people if necessary to eliminate the opposition.[71]

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[65] Morozzo Della Rocca, *Primero Dios*, 249.
[66] Stanley, *The Protection Racket State*, 179.
[67] Ibid., 164–165.
[68] Ibid., 168–169.

It was becoming increasingly apparent that civilian participation in the government was a façade, and that the military retained a firm grip on power. Beginning in December 1979, the civilian members of the government began to resign en masse. Romero describes the resignations in terms of the civilians' refusal to participate in a project that, in order to resolve the country's crisis, "prioritizes repression of the people over reform."[72] In a statement, Guillermo Ungo, one of the members of the JRG, explains his resignation this way: from its inception the Junta's commitment was to move forward with a process of democratization and structural transformation, which required not only a break with the "political-military framework" that had prevailed since the regime of General Martínez but also the wherewithal to confront entrenched and powerful "minority interests." But the opposite has occurred. Rather than being weakened, "minority interests have been strengthened daily." Ungo and his colleagues perceived a desire to resuscitate the political-military framework of the past.[73] The resignation of the civilian members of the Junta set the stage for the continuing escalation of state violence, and eventually, for civil war.

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[69] Ibid., 135. For an account of the conflicts within the JRG related to the enactment of the agrarian reform, as well as for an account of the collapse of the JRG, cf. Ibid., 155–157, 174–175.

[70] Quoted in Ibid., 156-157.

[71] Dermot Keogh, "The Myth of the Liberal Coup: The United States and the 15 October 1979 Coup in El Salvador," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 13 (1983): 183.

[72] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. VI, 161.

In his book *The Protection Racket State*, based on primary sources and interviews with dozens of Salvadoran military offers, as well as thousands of documents declassified by the Clinton administration, the political scientist William Stanley addresses the crucial question related to the violence after the October 1979 coup: How to understand the mass murder by the Salvadoran state and its affiliates? Stanley argues that, at least in the Salvadoran case, state violence cannot be understood simply as a response to its opposition. Such an explanation, for instance, fails to apprehend the way that the state, largely through its use of repression, generated an armed opposition to itself—an opposition that, in the end, the state could not defeat, and during the decade of 1980s, fought to a stalemate.[74]

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[73] Guillermo Ungo, "Resignation from the Junta," in *The Central American Crisis Reader* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), 372–373. Cf. also Romero, *Homilías*, vol. VI; 160-168; Brockman, *Romero*, 215–216.

The best lens to understand what transpired, Stanley argues, is in terms of internal conflict within military itself, particularly between reformist and hardline factions within it. The challenge the coup and its vision of reform posed led to an alliance between certain senior commanders and those among the civilian elite.[75] Some senior commanders perceived the Junta as a threat to the integrity of the military as an institution and its traditional role in Salvadoran politics.[76]

As we will see in this chapter, the civilian elite considered agrarian reform to be a particularly pernicious proposal. On Stanley's narrative, they felt exposed in the wake of the coup, distrusting the Junta and fearing its plans for reform. For instance, the first Junta, as well as the one that followed upon its disintegration, were willing to cooperate with those the elite deemed dangerous. This only contributed to the sense of anger and betrayal that had begun several years earlier with another conflict over agrarian reform, Colonel Arturo Armando Molina's so-called "agrarian transformation" project, to which we will turn later in the chapter.[77] For the elite, reform was synonymous with communism, and they saw the Junta as a front for the guerillas.[78] Paige's work has traced the roots of this view to the 1932 *campesino* uprising, which we will examine presently. Many of the Salvadoran elite interpreted the uprising as a result of the reform efforts of the 1920s, which, according to them, only strengthened rather than defeated the communist menace.[79]

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[74] Stanley shows how the military high command encouraged the repression, which radicalized the opposition and made it appear more threatening, which, in turn, served to consolidate military unity and bolster its importance as an institution. As Stanley writes, "In effect, the high command operated a protection racket against its own institution, creating security problem for its subordinates in an effort to consolidate its own position. The cost of this strategy was, of course, that the military catalyzed a civil war. From the point of view of the high command, this was not an altogether unwelcome outcome." According to Stanley, by 1983, the Salvadoran state had made so many enemies that it risked military defeat at the hands of the FMLN and likely would have if not for a massive influx of U.S. military aid. Stanley, *The Protection Racket State*, 180, cf. 3–7, 182.

[75] Ibid., 160–161, 164.

[76] Ibid., 168.

One lesson that emerges from Stanley's analysis is that the actions of the Salvadoran state during this period were rife with contradiction, and that among the most determined and capable groups to challenge state violence—the military reformers—emerged from within the state itself.[80] Another way to put the point is that the Salvadoran state was not a singular actor but a constellation of competing ones—a fact that helps us to appreciate both Romero's opposition to the regime as well as his efforts at dialogue and mediation with different figures within it.[81]

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[77] Ibid., 188. As Roberto D'Abuisson put it, "the Christian Democrats [the party that comprised the second JRG] are communists."

[78] Ibid., 160–161, 164.

[79] All this is examined in considerable detail in Paige, *Coffee and Power*, 101–122. Paige 1994 101-122

On Stanley's account, then, the agrarian and other reform measures galvanized the elite to action and led to an alliance with sympathizers in the military, the primary purpose of which was to depose the Junta and end the reforms.[82] One of Stanley's informants, with close ties both to the military and to the civilian elite, explains: "The acceleration of violence after January 1980 was predominantly a response to the prospect of land reform. With the military moving toward carrying out the reform, the right had to find a way to defend itself. So they put the D'Aubuisson group into action. The purpose of the violence was to stop the reforms by erasing the call for them."[83] The name Roberto D'Aubuisson, to whom the informant refers in this passage, is synonymous with the death squads that tortured and killed thousands before and during the Salvadoran civil war. He is also remembered as the organizer of Operación Piña, the plot to kill Romero.

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[80] Stanley, *The Protection Racket State*, 6–7, 176. That the Salvadoran state is not a monolith and that its actions were contradictory is a crucial theme of Stanley's work, which leads him "to disassemble the state analytically," as he puts it, "examining state factions and their relationships with each other and with different components of civil society." Ibid., 6-7. Such an understanding of the state is helpful for understanding Romero.

[81] Ibid., 5, 8. According to Stanley, the rigid adversarial posture of the popular organizations was part of the problem, fueling the polarization and the violence. They failed to apprehend the different factions with the state and to work with sympathizers. Stanley points out that leaders of the FMLN have since expressed regrets about their positions during this time. Ibid., 160.

[82] Ibid., 181, 188-192.

Stanley observes that, over the course of Salvadoran history, state violence often functioned as what he calls a "currency of relations between state and non-state elites," in which military leaders resorted to violence in order to get certain things or to preempt challenges to their grip on power.[84] In this particular exchange of currency, to attack the Salvadoran people—to stop the reforms by erasing the call for them—was to attack the Junta itself. The imperative for reform and for an end to the repression is what led to the coup in the first place, and so the survival of the Junta and the restoration of governability to El Salvador hinged upon the achievement of both. The basic strategy of the alliance between factions in the military and the civilian elite was therefore to isolate, undermine, and destabilize the Junta by attacking its supporters and potential supporters, unleashing unprecedented wave of repressive violence against the

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[83] Quoted in ibid., 190.

[84] Ibid., 7.

Salvadoran people in an attempt to undercut popular tolerance for the Junta.[85] The repression was an attempt to, in Stanley's words, "expand the political space" for the hardline faction of the military and its allies among the civilian elite to pursue their preferred policy.[86]

The politics of repression—the expansion of political space through repression—is what U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Viron Vaky describes as "the *Matanza* approach," namely, "just liquidating the problem."[87] The allusion is to the 1932 *campesino* uprising mentioned earlier, which is known to Salvadorans simply as la *Matanza* or the Massacre. In Romero's El Salvador, Vides Casanova and others like D'Abuisson discussed the *Matanza* approach publically: communism was a menace—a menace that had even infected the Church—and dealing with it meant exterminating hundreds of thousands of Salvadorans. For these figures, among the most evident symptoms of the menace was agrarian reform, which they interpreted as an attack on private property.

We therefore turn to 1932 and its legacy, both in order to understand the *Matanza* approach and the violence that engulfed El Salvador and Romero himself after 1979. In do doing, we see how in Romero's El Salvador, the past was not the mere past but continued to haunt the present.[88]

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[85] Ibid., 136-137, 153-159, 166-167, 177.
[86] Ibid., 168.
[87] Quoted in ibid., 168, cf. 162.

4.3 Legacies of La Matanza

4.3.1 "We were all born half-dead in 1932"

On 22 January 1932, the day was as dark as night. Ash from erupting volcanoes in neighboring Guatemala cloaked the sky throughout western El Salvador. With nightfall came the long moan of conch shells and the crackle of rocket flares announcing the beginning of insurrection. Thousands of peasants assaulted roughly one dozen municipalities throughout central and western El Salvador, in the departments of Sonsonate, Ahuachapán, and La Libertad.[89] The rebels were comprised mostly of descendants of the Nahuatal-Pibil peoples. But there were also *ladinos* or *mestizos* among them as well. Most of the insurrectionists were bound by their experience as workers in the region's coffee *fincas*.[90]

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[88] Since Anderson's seminal study of 1932, *Matanza*, many have seen communism as central to the interpretation of the 1932 rebellion, what Ching calls "communist-causality" thesis. According to this line of thought, the origins of 1932 reside in the organized left, especially the communist party and its associated organizations. Cf. Thomas P. Anderson, *Matanza: El Salvador's Communist Revolt of 1932* (Omaha: University of Nebraska Press, 1971). For an example of this reading cf. Paige, *Coffee and Power*, 114–122. There are now attempts to revise this narrative. Ching, for instance, wants to locate its causes primarily in long-standing local affairs and the organization of *campesino* communities themselves. It is not my purpose to enter into this debate. What is crucial to see for Romero's context is the way that all sides embraced this narrative in the 1970s and beyond. For a detailed account about this debate and some of the issues at stake, cf. Ching, *Authoritarian El Salvador*, 296–304.

[89] Gould and Lauria-Santiago, *To Rise in Darkness*, 170.

The rebels engaged in targeted political assassinations, killing key political figures in several towns, which seems to have been, at least in part, a response to blatant electoral fraud earlier that year and an attempt to delegitimize the regime that had come to power through it. Other targets were landowners and dispensers of credit to smallholders, and so likely connected to the property foreclosures that had affected so many smallholders over the course of the preceding years. The rebels killed about one hundred people in all and damaged various businesses and residences of local elites.[91] They turned the world upside down, compelling the local élite, for instance, to do menial work like grind maize and make tortillas. They gave Emilio Redaeli—a large landowner, former mayor, and supplier of credit—a pauper's burial.[92]

The rebels also engaged in systematic looting and distribution of goods in the places they occupied. In many of the towns, they specifically targeted municipal buildings and their archives, eliminating property records, in effect, wiping the slate clean for a future land distribution. In Nahuizalco, for instance, they burned the municipal archives to the ground. Gould and Lauria-Santiago explain: "A standard target in nineteenth- and early-twentieth century agrarian rebellions and revolutions, the municipal archive typically housed land records, the destruction of which laid the groundwork for 'free land' or 'land without owners.'"[93] In Juayúa, the leader, Francisco Sánchez, went a step further. He requested that all the title deeds be delivered to him, and he began to draw up a program of agrarian reform himself.[94]

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[90] Ibid., 171; Ching, *Authoritarian El Salvador*, 319–321.
[91] Gould and Lauria-Santiago, *To Rise in Darkness*, 149–151, 187–188; Ching, *Authoritarian El Salvador*, 1–2.
[92] Gould and Lauria-Santiago, *To Rise in Darkness*, 197.

In his testimony to Roque Dalton, one of the leaders of the uprising, Miguel Mármol, describes the sources of "the tremendous indignation" among the participants in the insurrection. They were incensed, Marmol recalls, about:

> being treated like slaves by slaveholders on plantations and estates, starvation wages, arbitrary and inconsistent wage reductions, massive unjustified firings, evictions of tenant farmers, systematic refusal to lease land, worsening of working conditions of the tenant farmers, destruction of the crops of unruly peasants by burning the sown fields or letting loose all the livestock on them to graze, the closing of all the pathways across the plantations and estates—even when the pathway was categorized as a local road, direct and fierce repression by the National Guard[95] in the form of imprisonments, expulsions from homes, burning of houses, rapes, tortures and murder against whoever dared to protest.

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[93] Ibid., 193; Ching, *Authoritarian El Salvador*, 290.

[94] Gould and Lauria-Santiago, *To Rise in Darkness*, 180-182.

[95] On the National Guard as an instrument of rural labor control and the close collaboration between the Guard and local landowners, Gould and Lauria-Santiago, *To Rise in Darkness*, 62, 87, 90, 92, 121, 133.

> All this, aggravated by unemployment and hunger and all the rest of the extreme miseries … all this made the rural masses adopt a sharp insurrectional attitude.[96]

Just days after the insurrection, on 24 January, General Maximiliano Martínez, who had come to power less than a month earlier through a coup d'état, responded. Troops under the command of General José Tomás Calderón travelled west by train. In town after town, heavily-armed troops overwhelmed the insurrectionists, who mostly wielded machetes. The rebellion was quickly crushed, but the bloodshed continued.

Over the course of the next month, the military moved through the countryside, systematically killing untold thousands. It remains unclear how many died in the end.[97]

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[96] Dalton, *Miguel Marmol*, 1995, 287–288. For a much more detailed and extensive account of these conditions, cf. Gould and Lauria-Santiago, *To Rise in Darkness*; Paige, *Coffee and Power*, 108–109.

[97] General Calderón claimed that his troops had killed 4800 communists. Others have estimated as high as 25000-30000 deaths. Gould and Lauria Santiago claim that around 10,000 is more reasonable. Gould and Lauria-Santiago, *To Rise in Darkness*, 233–234. Many scholars who have written on this event focus on the targeting of the Nahuatl-speaking peoples of the west, and the accelerated *mestizaje* of the survivors in terms of language and dress. As Thomas Anderson puts it in his classic study of 1932, "All those of strongly Indian cast of features … were considered guilty." Anderson, *Matanza*, 170. Gould and Lauria-Santiago suggest the advance of agrarian capitalism played an important role in this process. Gould and Lauria-Santiago, *To Rise in Darkness*, xv, 240-272. It has now become commonplace to refer about what transpired in 1932 terms of genocide, for what seemed to be at stake was something like, in the words of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, "the intention to destroy 'whole or in part' a race, nationality, religion or ethnicity." Gould and Lauria-Santiago describe the killings as fueled by a deep-seated view of the insurgents as backward, ignorant, lazy, and menacing *indios*. "Those occupations," they

Most of the victims were males, twelve years and above.[98] But various witnesses also recount soldiers indiscriminately opening fire on peoples' huts, killing anyone inside.[99] As Antonio Valiente put it, "They didn't ask for any declarations from anyone. Whoever they saw, they shot."[100] Ramón Esquina recalls the mass graves and the way the soldiers heaved bodies—like "bales of sugar cane"—into them.[101] There were also orchestrated mass executions in town squares, as Roy MacNaught witnessed in Juayúa. "All day long—and this lasted for several days—we could hear the shots in the plaza as the work of execution went on."[102] There are numerous testimonies of priests handing over suspected communists to the authorities to be summarily executed.[103]

La Matanza continues to be remembered as one of the most brutal acts of state-sponsored terror in modern Latin American history.[104] Among its many legacies is not

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write, "burst the dam holding back the accumulated hostility and hatred toward Indians on the part of the élite…Very quickly *Indian*, *barbarian*, and *communist* became interchangeable epithets." Gould and Lauria-Santiago, *To Rise in Darkness*, 226-221, cf. 217-219.

[98] Ibid., 184-186, 212.

[99] Ibid., 215, 240.

[100] Ibid., 240.

[101] Ibid., 184-186, 212.

[102] Ching, *Authoritarian El Salvador*, 290.

[103] Gould and Lauria-Santiago, *To Rise in Darkness*, 230.

[104] Ching, *Authoritarian El Salvador*, 2.

only the effort of government officials to expunge from the historical record what actually happened—here it is important to mention the newspapers and documents of those years that disappeared from national archives.[105] It is also the way official discourse construed events such that perpetrators victims changed roles.

Jeffrey L. Gould's and Aldo Lauria-Santiago's book, *To Rise in Darkness*, is, among other things, a patient and painstaking meditation on the events of 1932 and its remembrance by victims and victors alike, particularly the way it has become, in Gould's and Lauria-Santiago's words, "a reality so powerful that it reshaped the very fabric of memory of the survivors."[106] They encapsulate the narrative emerging from the massacre this way: "At the most general level, officialist discourse elided, distorted, or falsified descriptions of the killings in such a way that either perpetrators and victims were transposed or at the very least the distinction between them was made ambiguous."[107] The violence was perpetrated, not by the dispossessed and degraded, but by "bloodthirsty hordes," "vandals," and "raging savages." It was suffered by the soldiers and the wealthy, who were compelled to respond with courage and justice to the violence and the abuse of property, even if their response meant that—in a resonant phrase that continues to circulate among the survivors—*murieron justos por los pecadores* (the just died for the sinners). The "communism" that inspired the revolt was a virulent "disease"—a "social cancer"—affecting the body politic, which had to be surgically removed so that the contagion would stop spreading and health would be restored. Indeed, there were whole regions of the country where the "infestation" was particularly severe.[108]

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[105] Gould and Lauria-Santiago, *To Rise in Darkness*, 234; Paige, *Coffee and Power*, 343–344.
[106] Gould and Lauria-Santiago, *To Rise in Darkness*, 234.
[107] Ibid., 234-235.

A pattern begins to emerge around this time, which precedes the Cold War, but is later exacerbated by it, in which panic over communism occasions and justifies slaughter—Vaky's "*Matanza* approach."[109] As Ching explains: "The rebellion enflamed elites' passions and made them more reactionary and resistant to change, hallmarks of their actions in subsequent decades."[110]

Official discourse and manipulation of memory emerging in the wake of 1932 also helps us to understand Romero's El Salvador in other ways as well, for instance, the emphasis upon truth-telling that marked the Church's public stance from the outset of Romero's tenure as archbishop. The pursuit of truth, for instance, immediately drew the Church into public confrontation with the regime of General Romero over its dissimulation concerning the death of the Rutilio Grande, as well as its refusal more generally to acknowledge the persecution of the Church or the repression of the Salvadoran people.

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[108] Ibid., 235-236.
[109] Ibid., 237.
[110] Ching, *Authoritarian El Salvador*, 4.

Indeed, given the pervasiveness of the official lie, the archdiocese increasingly assumed the burden of truth-maintenance, which I think is helpfully understood as an application of the principle of subsidiarity, in this case, the effort to offer *subsidium* in telling the truth and counter the disinformation of the regular press, radio, and television. Under Romero's leadership, the archdiocese began publishing a bulletin to be broadcast on the archdiocesan radio, YSAX. An emergency committee was also set up, which met daily to discuss and document new incidents.[111]After Grande's death Romero and others founded the Socorro Jurídico, the legal aid office of the archdiocese, which provided legal assistance to victims and began to document the repression—the killings, the disappearances, the torture, and so on. As Roberto Cuéllar, one of its founding lawyers, states, "The international press implicitly recognized Romero's sources—the communications office of the archdiocese, the Socorro Jurídico—were the best and oftentimes the only way to obtain reliable and trustworthy information about what was happening in the country."[112] The burden of truth-maintenance also helps make sense of the length of Romero's homilies, especially in the months preceding his death, and the extensive commentary upon current events contained in them.[113]

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[111] Brockman, *Romero*, 6..

Commenting on the effects of *la Matanza* and its significance for Salvadoran life, Miguel Mármol said: "After that damned year, all of us are different, and I think that from that point on, El Salvador is a different country. El Salvador is today, before anything else, a creation of that barbarism." In a similar vein, the Salvadoran poet Roque Dalton offers this reflection on it in his poem, "All," which begins:

> We were all born half-dead in 1932
> we survived, but only half-alive
> each with an account of thirty thousand dead[114]
> an account whose interest grows
> whose revenues grow
> which today suffices to anoint with death those who continue to be born
> half-dead
> half-alive.

According to Dalton, to live as a Salvadoran—to live after this particular massacre of the innocents—is to live weighed-down with death. It is to live with only "half of the life they left us with." Dalton envisions death's effects accumulating over the years, continuing to "anoint" the living. The death clings to all alike, not just to the survivors and all those who remember what happened, and not just to their families and friends. All are affected by it, including the killers and their sympathizers who presume that they are fully "alive"—even "immortal."[115]

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[112] Cf. Roberto Cuéllar, "Un Apóstol de los derechos humanos," Instituto Interamericano de Derechos Humanos (IIDH), 31 March 2005.
[113] Juan Ramón Vega, *Las Comunidades de Base En América Central: Estudio Sociológico* (San Salvador: Publicaciones del Arzobispado, 1994), 127–128.
[114] This is a commony-cited figure for the number of victims of *la Matanza*.

In her book *Life and Words*, the anthropologist Veena Das's descriptions of the violence surrounding the Partition of India in 1947 and the Sikh massacre in 1984 are helpful for approaching Mármol's and Dalton's understanding of *la Matanza*. Das writes of the way violence "attaches itself with its tentacles into everyday life and folds into the recesses of the ordinary," such that ordinary life itself "absorbs" the violence.[116]

To attend to ordinary life in Romero's El Salvador is to find echoes of 1932 and traces of this absorption everywhere. In the National Agrarian Reform Congress of 1970, for instance, the representatives of the Church evoked 1932 to convey "the sense of frustration and of injustice" that the *campesinado* continues to experience. It is not possible to understand 1932, they argued, without taking into account the consequences of the enclosure legislation of the late-nineteenth century and the ensuing land concentration and landlessness.[117] We find similar comparisons and analyses in the Archdiocese's important 1977 report entitled the *Persecution of the Church in El Salvador*.[118]

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[115] Roque Dalton, "Todos" in *Taberna y otros lugares* (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1989), 124.
[116] Veena Das, *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 1, 16.

For good reason, the sociologist Paul Almeida describes the unrest between 1927 and 1932 as a kind of "condensed version"—a "historical dress rehearsal"—for what began to unfold in the late 1970s.[119] On 22 January 1980, the forty-eighth anniversary of *la Matanza*, the opposition to the government united in one of the largest street demonstrations in Salvadoran history.[120] We have already seen the formation of an alliance in the wake of the October 1979 coup that embraced massacre because its members read events through the lens of 1932.

During El Salvador's civil war, the insurgent rebels and paramilitaries derived their names principally from the key figures of the events of 1932. Perhaps most well known, the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional commemorated Agustín Farabundo Martí Rodríguez, who, along with Mármol, was one of the leaders of the uprising.[121] The FMLN named three of their four war fronts in honor of key figures that died in 1932. On the other side, the death squads took names like the Maximiliano Hernández Martínez Anticommunist Brigade, after General Martínez himself.[122]

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[117] Asamblea Legislativa, *Memoria Del Primer Congreso Nacional de Reforma Agraria*, 121, 393.

[118] *Persecución de la Iglesia en El Salvador*, 13.

[119] Almeida, *Waves of Protest: Popular Struggle in El Salvador, 1925-2005*, 35.

[120] Brockman, *Romero*, 221.

[121] Dalton, *Miguel Marmol*, 160, 186.

Neither were the ongoing effects of 1932 lost on U.S. policy makers. We have already seen U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Vaky refer to "the *matanza* approach." In a 1980 essay entitled "The Hobbes Problem: Order, Authority, and Legitimacy in Central America," which provides an important window into President Regan's Central American policy, Jeane J. Kirkpatrick[123] criticized how the Carter administration tied military aid to the implementation of initiatives like agrarian reform and reduction of human rights abuses. Such conditions were wrongheaded, she argued, not only because they neglected the competition for power at the base for all politics, but also because Salvadoran political culture admired sovereigns like General Martínez, who were prepared to use violence to secure order—"the highest value in such political systems." General Martínez's willingness to embrace slaughter to restore order is why he is "viewed as such a hero by many."[124]

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[122] Almeida, *Waves of Protest: Popular Struggle in El Salvador, 1925-2005*, 35.

[123] Kirkpatrick was one of Regan's foreign policy advisors during his 1980 campaign and later served as U.S. ambassador to the United Nations.

[124] Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, *Dictatorships and Double Standards: Rationalism and Reason in Politics* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1982), 82.

4.3.2 Reform and Repression

General Martínez's rise to power was a watershed in Salvadoran history. His regime inaugurated five decades of continuous military rule, the longest in Latin American history, and it included many of the officers who involved in *la Matanza.*[125] State control by the military would only formally end with the October 1979 coup and civil war. Martínez's reliance upon state power to monitor and crush dissent would become a characteristic feature of the regimes to follow.

In addition to massacring thousands, Martínez cracked down upon any independent labor organization in the countryside in an effort "to monopolize the voice of rural labor,"[126] and to "dismember" workers associations and organizations.[127] He declared such associations and organizations illegal, halting the tremendous proliferation that had taken place between 1927-1931.[128] Those targeted were not only the more radical organizations like the *Federación Regional de Trabajadores Salvadoreños* (Regional Federation of Salvadoran Workers, FRTS) and the *Partido Comunista Salvadoreño* (Communist Party of El Salvador, PCS). Even mutual aid-societies and workers cooperatives were suspended. Any association or organization that wanted to reopen required a government license.[129]

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[125] Ching, *Authoritarian El Salvador*, 1.
[126] Ibid., 310.
[127] Almeida, *Waves of Protest: Popular Struggle in El Salvador, 1925-2005*, 51.
[128] Ibid., 37–44.

In the wake of *la Matanza,* the military also established a paramilitary force, the Guardia Cívica (Civic Guard), whose members were local citizen volunteers. Its first task was to bury the bodies. But afterwards, it patrolled the villages and reported signs of rebel activity.[130] Martínez soon developed a national spy network within the security forces—the "backbone" of his regime.[131] With the help of civilian informants known as *orejas* or "ears," this network engaged in surveillance of all those considered subversive, and it functioned by cultivating mutual suspicion among the citizenry.[132] As Ching states, "virtually every identifiable organization or social group fell under some form of surveillance."[133] Those considered a threat were typically accused of communism.[134]

Another important legacy of *la Matanza* can be seen in the actions of Martínez in its immediate aftermath of the killing. He initiated a program of social reform in the countryside. Among the areas targeted were the locations of the 1932 uprising. Many of the reforms Martínez enacted sought to benefit the survivors themselves—the same people his regime just months prior had targeted with indiscriminate fury.[135]

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[129] Ching, *Authoritarian El Salvador*, 310, 345.
[130] Ibid., 292–293; cf. Philip J. Williams and Knut Walter, *Militarization and Demilitarization in El Salvador's Transition to Democracy* (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997).
[131] Ching, *Authoritarian El Salvador*, 259, 275–279; Almeida, *Waves of Protest: Popular Struggle in El Salvador, 1925-2005*, 53; Lindo-Fuentes and Ching, *Modernizing Minds in El Salvador*, 40.
[132] Ching, *Authoritarian El Salvador*, 259.
[133] Ibid., 275, 259, 276.
[134] Ibid., 276.

As Ching details in *Authoritarian El Salvador*, military leaders, in trying to understand what led to the uprising, tended to look first not to explanations of communist conspiracies and infiltrations but to the internal conditions of El Salvador itself. Acknowledging the extreme impoverishment and desperation of the *campesinos* involved in the uprising, military leaders often read the rebellion as a sign of deteriorating conditions in the countryside. They thought that, to use Pope Leo XIII's language, people were being surrendered to the hardheartedness and greed of unscrupulous landlords, and that they needed protection. If this impoverishment could be ameliorated, they reasoned, communism could be defeated. They feared that if conditions did not improve, 1932 would be an omen of the country's future.[136]

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[135] Gould and Lauria-Santiago show that the official narrative was that previous regimes had failed to meet the needs of the people, so communism infiltrated the region and peoples' minds. It was the communists that fooled the poor and ignorant *indios* into fighting for something hopeless. An important part of the memory of 1932 had to do with the figure of the *indio engañado*—the tricked or fooled Indian—and the trope of "indigenous innocence," which, Gould and Lauria-Santiago argue, enabled the Martínez regime to establish a relationship with the survivors of its own brutality. A recurrent refrain for those who remember 1932 was that *murieron justos por pecadores* (the just died for the sinners). This refrain absolves (at least some) of the dead from guilt. It also suppresses their and the survivors' agency in the revolt (they were pawns of the communists rather than protagonists). Gould and Lauria-Santiago argue that this narrative effectively prepared and nourished the ground for Martínez's reform policies, all of which permitted him to forge a base among the indigenous communities themselves in the aftermath of *la Matanza*. Gould and Lauria-Santiago, *To Rise in Darkness*, 236–239, 241–247, 283–284; Ching, *Authoritarian El Salvador*, 319–330.

In a February speech before the National Assembly in the months immediately after the massacre, Martínez therefore publically lamented what had happened. "It was painful for my Government," he said, "to have had to use such severe measures of military repression…but they were indispensable to protect society, property, and family." He then went on to call on all Salvadorans—but especially the government and "the leading classes of society"—to unite in order to "improve the condition of the working classes" and their "standards of living and subsistence."[137]

Martínez declared a retroactive moratorium on debts, preventing foreclosure and land loss among *campesinos*.[138] He abolished *fichas*, the coupons with which many landowners compensated their workers instead of legal currency, and which could only be used in stores owned and operated by the landowners themselves.[139] Martínez also attacked the *terraje*, or rent, paid by tenant farmers to landlords. A typical arrangement would involve a *campesino* giving one or two weeks of labor a month in exchange for access to land to plant maize and beans—an arrangement often abused by landowners, who arbitrarily adjusted the contract one crops were in the ground. Military leaders instead proposed that *campesinos* have access to land free of charge.[140]

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[136] Ching, *Authoritarian El Salvador*, 4–5, 288–295, 305–309.
[137] Martínez's speech was reprinted in *Diario la Prensa*, 15 February 1937. Martínez repeatedly emphasized his commitment to private property: "the private economy is the base…upon which rests the prosperity of our nation." Quoted in Ching, *Authoritarian El Salvador*, 305–307.
[138] Gould and Lauria-Santiago, *To Rise in Darkness*, 241.
[139] Ching, *Authoritarian El Salvador*, 311.

Martínez's primary initiative in the aftermath of *la Matanza* was a program called *Mejoramiento Social* (Social Betterment), through which his regime provided land for the landless and land-poor, either from land the government already owned or from buying estates at market value.[141] The land was not to be expropriated. The program was based upon an understanding of private property for which any expropriation was seen as a threat. The land was to be donated or sold by the landowners, and then it would then be divided into parcels and sold on long-term, low-interest mortgages. Martínez said the following in a 1933 interview about the reform: "The son of the *campesino* will be born under his own roof; his son will not be the tenant of a landowner, but will by the owner of his own garden which the father paid for with the same money that would have been given to cover the rent for that same piece of beloved land."[142] Mejoramiento Social became an important precedent upon which future military regimes would model other agrarian reform initiatives.[143]

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[140] Ibid., 312.
[141] Ibid., 310, 313.

Here we see yet another crucial legacy of *la Matanza*. As Ching describes it, Martínez insisted that "reform, or at least the idea of reform" would be part of the *modus operandi* of successive military regimes—"an essential counterpart to repression and political authoritarianism."[144] Martínez's regime massacred thousands, and it disbanded workers organizations and associations in the countryside. But it also identified an important source of the problems that beset El Salvador in the landlords themselves and their exploitation of the *campesinado*. Consequently, Martínez's regime also sought to extend protections to them, as well as worked to facilitate their access to land. In doing so, as Ching puts it, “Martínez set a governing precedent to which each of his military successors would adhere for the next fifty years,” establishing “as a cornerstone of his government strategy a complex mixture of reform and repression.”[145]

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[142] Ibid., 313, 311–316; Gould and Lauria-Santiago, *To Rise in Darkness*, 241. In addition to land, there was a similar plan for housing as well.

[143] For a history of how successive military regimes have attempted to reform land use and tenure in El Salvador, beginning with Martínez's Mejoramiento Social, cf. Browning, *El Salvador*, 271–303. Rene Alberto Aguiluz Ventura's illuminating treatment of the topic focuses on the period between 1948-1979. Cf. Rene Alberto Aguiluz Ventura, "El Problema Agrario en El Salvador: De La Modernización a La Reforma Agraria (1948-1979)" (Licenciado, Universidad de El Salvador, 2014). Another treatment of the topic I have found particularly helpful is Adolfo Bonilla Bonilla, *Tenencia de La Tierra y Reforma Agraria en El Salvador: Un Análisis Histórico*, Cuaderos de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades (San Salvador: Centro Nacional de Investigaciones en Ciencias Sociales y humanidades, 2013).

[144] Ching, *Authoritarian El Salvador*, 4.

Both in General Martinez’s day and beyond it, these reform initiatives drew military regimes into open and protracted conflict with landowners and other members of the Salvadoran elite.[146] Ching’s analysis therefore suggests the need to nuance a dominant trope in Salvadoran historiography regarding the relationship between military and Salvadoran elites, which holds that together they formed an alliance and were bound by a pact. According to the terms of this pact— often depicted as first forged in 1932 and sustained in the ensuring decades—the agricultural élite relinquished public office in exchange for the security to run the economy without government interference. For its part, the military left the running of the economy to the landed elites in exchange for the ability to hold office and enjoy its privileges without interference.[147]

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[145] Ibid., 345, 346–356.

[146] The following, for instance, is Ching’s description of the sequence of events surrounding one such conflict, the Martínez regime’s attempt to break growers’ commercial monopoly on *finca*-owned stores: “The government challenged the coffee-growers; the coffee growers resisted; and the government capitulated. In more ways than one, this chain of events is emblematic.” Ibid., 333.

As Ching shows, the problems went deeper than *fichas* alone, because even when workers received wages in cash, the landowners still controlled the only nearby stores where the workers could purchase what they needed. They refused to let other merchants on to the *fincas* and prevented workers from leaving. This led some in the military to accuse the landowners of being communists themselves, comparing the stores to the commissaries of Soviet Russia. When he was a priest in the San Miguel, Romero made a similar accusation in the pages of *El Chaparrastique,* the weekly diocesan publication, in 1963: “What do certain of these estates and coffee farms lack to be called small soviet states?” he asks. “When one criticizes these cruel social injustices [on these estates and coffee farms], one is immediately marked as a communist. But the accusers do not see that it is they who practice communism and a make a U.S.S.R. on their properties.” Ibid., 316–319, 330–335. Cf. Óscar Romero, “Pequeñas URSS,” *El Chaparrastique*, 24 abril de 1965.

There is truth to this.[148] But at least in terms of understanding the problematic surrounding agrarian reform in El Salvador, what makes Ching's work so helpful is his emphasis upon the conflict that characterized whatever alliance and pact existed. General Mauricio Vargas was not speaking for himself alone when he said that the military was not "the guardian of the plantations."[149] Ching himself puts the point this way: "However much elites might have benefited from military rule, many of them became highly suspicious of military leaders' commitment to their priorities of economic libertarianism and the sanctity of private property."[150]

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[147] Ching, *Authoritarian El Salvador*, 356., 5; Almeida, *Waves of Protest: Popular Struggle in El Salvador, 1925-2005*, 60. Along these lines, in *Coffee and Power*, Jeremy Paige refers to the "implicit alliance between the oligarchy and a military dictatorship" in the wake of 1932. Paige, *Coffee and Power*, 22. In *The Protection Racket State*, William Stanley vividly describes this alliance in terms of the way the military functioned as a "protection racket," providing protection to business by way of extra-judicial violence. The military governed in exchange for its willingness to unleash violence against threats to the landed and agro-financial élite. Such violence functioned as, in Stanley's words, "currency of relations between state and non-state elites." Stanley, *The Protection Racket State*, 6–7. Morozzo describes the Salvadoran state as a "Pretorian state," presumably a reference to the Pretorian Guard of ancient Rome, the private force of soldiers that protected the emperor. Morozzo Della Rocca, *Primero Dios*, 15.

[148] Cf. Ching's comment: "The evidence suggests that the prevailing comparative scholarship is correct: a defining feature of El Salvador's modern history is the unity of its elite sector and the durability of the elite-military alliance, however complex and diverse it may have been." Ching, *Authoritarian El Salvador*, 356.

Nowhere was this more evident than with agrarian reform. The repeated attempts to enact it were a perpetual site of conflict between military reformers and the Salvadoran elites, especially by the time Romero became archbishop in 1977. As we will see later in this chapter, a crucial conflict occurred between 1973 and 1976, when the attempt of the Instituto Salvadoreño de Transformación Agraria to enact a limited agrarian reform proposal was scuttled by members of the oligarchy—a process that functioned to consolidate a new and deadly opposition agrarian reform.

As Ching depicts the mixture of reform and repression, successive military regimes consistently presented themselves as modernizing reformers, promoted democracy, and even advanced reformist programs. The young military officers that came to power in a 1948 coup, for instance, wrote a new constitution in 1950, which permitted the government to expropriate property in pursuit of social justice, laying the legal groundwork for later agrarian reforms.[151] The 1950 constitution included, for the first time since Martínez's rise to power, protections regarding unionizing and striking—protections, it is important to point out, that were restricted to urban workers and explicitly denied to those in agriculture and other rural workers.[152] Despite such reforms, the same group passed the *Ley de Defensa del Orden Democrático y Constitucional* (Law for the Defense of a Democratic and Constitutional Order), which authorized repression against those who supported "doctrines contrary to democracy."[153]

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[149] Quoted in Ibid., 355.
[150] Ibid., 5–6.

Similarly, the military leaders that came to power in 1961 and that eventually formed the *Partido de Conciliación Nacional* (National Conciliation Party, PCN) likewise supported moderate agrarian reform. But they also sustained bans on rural organizing.

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[151] Ibid., 347. The young military officers that came to power in the 1948 coup presented themselves as modernizing reformers, calling themselves the *Partido Revolucionario de Unificación Democrática* (Revolutionary Party of Democratic Unification, PRUD), and in general they sought to modernize and diversify the Salvadoran economy. Ching points out that in providing a legal foundation for the state to expropriate property, they infuriated liberal fundamentalists and "framed the battle lines for intra-right debates for decades to come." Even if these reformers did not use their new legal powers, economic elites worried that future regimes would. Lindo-Fuentes and Ching, *Modernizing Minds in El Salvador*, 53, cf. 47-56. The wealthy Salvadoran oligarch, Ricardo Valdivieso Oriani, said of the 1950 Constitution and its facilitation of the expropriation of property that it was "incredible" that "a legislative body in a sovereign and free state would lend itself to something so base and traitorous." Ricardo Orlando Valdivieso Oriani, *Cruzando el Imposible: Una Saga* (Wilbot, 2008), 152.

[152] Almeida, *Waves of Protest: Popular Struggle in El Salvador, 1925-2005*, 58; cf. "Decrétase la ley de sindicatos para laboristas Salvadorenos," *Tribuna Libre*, 12 agosto 1950, 1 y 5.

[153] Lindo-Fuentes and Ching, *Modernizing Minds in El Salvador*, 52.

Moreover, in 1965, they established ORDEN, an extensive rural paramilitary organization headed by José Alberto Medrano,[154] which worked in direct coordination with the military and that targeted groups like ecclesial base communities.[155] ORDEN was an important precursor to the death squads of the late 1970s.[156] The PCN would maintain power until the October 1979 coup, securing the elections of Col. Armando Molina in 1972 and Gen. Carlos Humberto Romero in 1977, both of whom Óscar Romero faced as archbishop.

It must be emphasized that the mixture of reform and repression is complex. It varies from regime to regime, taking shape in different ways. In some cases, it could be called a strategy, understood as a singular plan of action or policy designed to achieve certain objectives. Colonel Jaime Abdul Gutiérrez, a member of the 1979 Junta, suggests as much when he famously referred to *reformas y garrotes* or reforms with beatings.[157]

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[154] José Napoleón Duarte refers to him as "father of the death squads." Allan Nairn, "Behind the Death Squads," *The Progressive*, May 1984, 21.

[155] For more on ORDEN, cf. Rodolfo Cardenal, *Historia de Una Esperanza: La Vida de Rutilio Grande* (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1985); Cabarrús, *Genesis de una revolucion*.

[156] The report of the Commission on the Truth for El Salvador states that the function of ORDEN was "to identify and eliminate alleged communists among the rural population," and describes its work as a precursor to the emergence of the death-squads of the 1970s. Commission on the Truth for El Salvador, "From Madness to Hope: The 12-Year War in El Salvador"; Lamperti, *Enrique Alvarez*, 93.

[157] In Spanish, a 'garrote' is literally a stick or a club. But the meaning here is that it is a stick or a club to beat with, hence my translation. Cf. Morozzo Della Rocca, *Primero Dios*,

Gutiérrez implies that the same entity is doing the reforming and the beating, and has a particular purpose in doing so. In other cases, however, different entities are differently involved in the reforming and the repressing, and in ways that are not always clear. Romero was dealing with something very much like this later case in in the final months of his life as he and others worked to understand the repression—the so-called *Matanza* approach—and to decouple the agrarian reform from it.[158]

4.3.3 U.S. Policy and Agrarian Reform

Another feature of the dialectic of reform and repression involves its articulation with U.S. policy. The previous chapter examined how agrarian reform became a particularly pressing issue throughout the world in the aftermath of the Second World War. In El Salvador, the topic also enters into occasional public discussion then but

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415. Romero addresses this dynamic, for instance, in his Epiphany Sunday homily in 1980. In discussing the disintegration of the 1979 JRG and the resignation of its civilian members in the early months of 1980, Romero explains their actions this way: "they have agreed that they cannot continue to work while a parallel government exists, where there are *reformas y garrotes*, where there has been a deviation from the process initiated [with the coup]." Romero, *Homilías*, vol. VI, 164, cf. 161.

[158] Ching, *Authoritarian El Salvador*, 348, 353.

tends to be construed by all sides in terms of radical politics and revolution.[159] Summarizing the general climate in El Salvador, Héctor Lindo-Fuentes and Erik Ching observe: "Any mention of it in the rural areas, and especially any sign of organized action against private property, resulted in brutal repression by the security forces or by paramilitary organizations."[160]

What happened in neighboring Guatemala was emblematic, serving as an important point of reference. When Coronel Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán assumed the presidency of Guatemala in 1951, the centerpiece of his agenda was an agrarian reform law, known as Decree 900, calling for the elimination of *latifundia*, the redistribution of unused land, and the provision of land, credit and technical assistance to the landless and land-poor.[161]

Among the lands targeted were some held by the United Fruit Company (UFC), the Boston-based corporation involved in the business of banana production on Central and South American plantations. The UFC was the largest landowner and employer in

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[159] Ching puts it this way: "Centrists advocated it as an alternative to revolution; conservatives opposed it as equivalent to revolution; and the left embraced it as part of a coming revolution." Lindo-Fuentes and Ching, *Modernizing Minds in El Salvador*, 194.

[160] Ibid., 195.

[161] Piero Gleijeses has called the reform the most successful in the history of Central America. Piero Gleijeses, "The Agrarian Reform of Jacobo Arbenz," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 21, no. 3 (1989): 453.

Guatemala at the time, but with only a small faction of its extensive landholdings under cultivation.[162] Although Árbenz was not communist himself, his collaborators in the design in implementation of the reforms were members of the Communist Party of Guatemala.[163] The UFC convinced the administration of President Dwight D. Eisenhower that Árbenz's reform was a plot to align Guatemala with the Soviet bloc and to further what Secretary of State John Foster Dulles called "the communist infiltration in Guatemala."[164] In what unfolded in Guatemala, we encounter the logic of Eisenhower's "falling domino principle" being extended to Latin America. As Eisenhower himself explained in a famous 1954 press conference about Indochina: "You have a row of dominoes set up, and what will happen to the last one is the certainty that it will go over very quickly."[165]

In response to the expropriation of UFC lands, the Eisenhower administration tasked the CIA with organizing, arming, and training the opposition to Árbenz in neighboring Honduras, an operation known as PBSUCCESS.[166] In June 1954, forces under the command of Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas crossed into Guatemala, deposed Árbenz, and sent him into exile. In his place, they installed Castillo Armas, the first of a long series of US-backed military regimes that would govern Guatemala for four decades. Among the first tasks of Castillo Armas was to reverse the agrarian reform and annul the expropriations. Less than two years into his time in office, he had successfully evicted almost all the beneficiaries under Árbenz's agrarian reform from their lands.[167]

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[162] Hannah Whittman and Laura Saldivar Tanaka, "The Agrarian Question in Guatemala," in *Promised Land: Competing Visions of Agrarian Reform*, Land Research Action Network (Oakland: Food First Books, 2006), 29. Citing statistics from Carmen Diana Deere and Magdalena de Lean León, *Mujer y Tierra en Guatemala*, Serie Autores Invitados (Guatemala City: AVANCSO, 1999).
[163] Gleijeses, "The Agrarian Reform of Jacobo Arbenz," 453.
[164] On the close ties between UFC and the Eisenhower administration, cf. Lars Schoultz, *Beneath the United States: A History of U.S. Policy toward Latin America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), 337–338.
[165] Ibid., 343.

By the 1960s, the climate was beginning to change, and the U.S. government was attempting to take a somewhat different tack regarding Latin America. Agrarian reform was no longer a sign of communist infiltration. Instead, the U.S. sought to promote it as part of the path to modernization.

At the outset of his presidency, in March 1961, John F. Kennedy announced the Alliance for Progress. The Alliance, it was hoped, would strengthen diplomatic ties and lead to increased cooperation between the U.S. and Latin America, as well as counter the effects of the Cuban Revolution of 1959—an attempt to widen the space between this particular domino and all those teetering dominoes surrounding it. El Salvador was strategically crucial in this regard. It was touted by the Johnson administration as "a model for the other Alliance countries," receiving more funds than other Central American nation.[168]

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[166] For more on Operation PBSUCCESS, cf. Nick Cullather, *Operation PBSUCCESS: The United States and Guatemala, 1952-1954* (Langley, VA: Central Intelligence Agency, 1994); Nick Cullather, *Secret History: The CIA's Classified Account of Its Operations in Guatemala, 1952-1954* (Stanford University Press, 1999); Stephen Schlesinger, Stephen Kinzer, and John H. Coatsworth, *Bitter Fruit: The Story of the American Coup in Guatemala, Revised and Expanded (Series on Latin American Studies)* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

[167] Schlesinger, Kinzer, and Coatsworth, *Bitter Fruit*, 221; cf. Rosalinda Hernández Alarcón, *Problemática de la Tierra Reclama Soluciones Efectivas* (Guatemala City: Inforpress Centroamericana, 2000).

Agrarian reform was at the top of the Alliance's development agenda. At an inter-American conference in Punta del Este, Uruguay in 1961, which established the Alliance, among the first reforms mentioned in the "Declaration to the Peoples of America"—the charter signed by all participant nations with the exception of Cuba—was agrarian reform. The charter states: "The representatives of the American Republics hereby agree to establish an Alliance for Progress…To encourage, in a accordance with the characteristics of each country, programs of comprehensive agrarian reform, leading to the effective transformation, where required, of unjust structures and systems of land tenure and use; with a view to replacing *latifundia* and dwarf holdings by an equitable system of property."[169] After Punta del Este, most of the member nations enacted some form of agrarian reform legislation, but now, with the blessing of the U.S. government[170]

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[168] Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1984), 175, 173–176. According to LaFeber, Salvadoran oligarchs at first reacted angrily to the Alliance, and they protested in media outlets about its "communist inspiration." But on LaFeber's narration, the oligarchs eventually learned how to adjust to the Alliance, migrating into new industrial-mercantile businesses, which further concentrated their wealth and power. Ibid., 175.

The charter depicted the manifest injustice of predominant land tenure arrangements throughout Latin America primarily as a barrier to development, construing comprehensive agrarian reform as a prerequisite for economic growth—a way to bring about greater production and rural employment. It therefore recognized a functional relationship between structural and institutional transformation, on the one hand, and growth and development, on the other.[171]

Agrarian reform, then, was understood by the Alliance to be an essential, precipitating policy for growth and development. The pursuit of it was situated squarely within a vision of modernization. The goal of agrarian reform was, to cite the Declaration once again, "to accelerate economic and social development, thus rapidly bringing about a substantial and steady increase in the average income in order to narrow the gap between the standard of living in Latin American countries and that enjoyed in the industrialized countries."[172]

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[169] Declaration of Punta del Este, 17 August 1961, in "The Inter-American System: Agreements, Conventions, and Other Documents," *The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy*, Yale Law School, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/intam15.asp.

[170] Ernest Feder, "Land Reform under the Alliance for Progress," *Journal of Farm Economics* 47, no. 3 (1965): 656.

[171] On this point, the Alliance changed its tone somewhat in 1963-1964 after the organization of the Inter-American Committee on the Alliance for Progress (CIAP), which softened the emphasis on agrarian reform as a pre-requisite for growth and development. Instead, CIAP began to use language about the need to modernize rural life, which Feder associates with the influence of W.W. Rostow. Cf. Ibid., 664–665.

Modernization theory, which was coming out of the academe in the 1950s and was associated with figures like W.W. Rostow, was central to the whole approach of the Alliance.[173] The geopolitical backdrop to it was concerns about how the nations of Africa, Asia, and Latin America emerging from European colonialism fit into a world divided between Western and Eastern blocs. Were these new nations potential sites for the spread of communism? Or could they more toward capitalist development and defend against communism's advance?

Among other things, modernization theory offered a stadial account of societal development, in which societies move through successive stages and eventually "takeoff" into advanced capitalism. Modernization theory set about to explain why so many societies remained mired in traditionalism and backwardness, and it fashioned policies to remedy their predicament. Agrarian reform was crucial in this regard. The rationale for its promotion was that the forces impeding growth and development included elites who hoarded land and wealth.

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[172] Declaration of Punta del Este, 17 August 1961, in "The Inter-American System: Agreements, Conventions, and Other Documents."

[173] In my account of modernization theory I am drawing heavily upon Lindo-Fuentes and Ching, *Modernizing Minds in El Salvador*, 78–83.

Here we begin to glimpse some of the ways U.S. policy represented a complex articulating with El Salvador's own homegrown efforts at reform, contributing to the conflicts that would continue to beset the country. As we have seen, successive military regimes often presented themselves as modernizers, promoters of democracy, and advocates of reform, which led to conflicts with the Salvadoran oligarchy. Among the central sites of conflict was agrarian reform. One of the main issues at stake was the meaning of modernization and the role of government in moving toward it. Was agrarian reform a prerequisite to economic growth and development? In other words, were current land tenure arrangements impeding growth and development? Or, conversely, did the current configuration of large landholdings and export-agricultural production in fact promote modernization? Was all such growth and development best left to the outworking of natural economic forces without state intervention, which was the true impediment to progress?[174]

According to proponents of modernization theory like Rostow, it was due to economic stagnation and backwardness that places like El Salvador were susceptible to the infiltration and spread of communism. To counter the communist menace, modernization theorists proposed a remedy of foreign aid and technical assistance, along with policy measures like agrarian reform, in order to safely guide nations through the stages of societal development.[175] But because communism in particular was such a grave threat to a country's progression through these stages and its eventual takeoff into advanced capitalism, Rostow and other modernization theorists were willing to tolerate harsh tactics on the part of governments to deal the threat—an approach the historian Bradley Simpson analyzes regarding U.S.-Indonesia relations in his aptly titled book, *Economists with Guns*.[176]

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[174] Feder, "Land Reform under the Alliance for Progress," 652.

With regard to Latin America, Fidel Castro and his 26th of July movement, which overthrew the U.S. backed President Fulgencio Batista of Cuba in 1959, epitomized the communist threat and exacerbated fears of its spread. Cold War tensions affecting Latin America preceded the Cuban Revolution. But they reached a new level of intensity after it as events in Cuba precipitated a dramatic escalation of competition between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. in the region.[177]

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[175] Lindo-Fuentes and Ching, *Modernizing Minds in El Salvador*, 56, 60.
[176] Bradley Robert Simpson, *Economists with Guns: Authoritarian Development and U.S.-Indonesian Relations, 1960-1968* (Stanford University Press, 2008).
[177] Hal Brands, *Latin America's Cold War* (Harvard University Press, 2010), 3.

By the late 1960s, national security had come to the forefront of the Alliance's concerns, involving increased military aid and training to member governments. As modernization theory's own concerns about communism make clear, the Alliance's increased emphasis on national security, while representing a shift in policy, does not represent a break with it. On the view of much modernization theory, these distinct forms of assistance—technical, financial assistance, and military—were all compatible and mutually reinforcing. They all aimed guiding nations successfully along the path to modernization without veering toward communism along the way.[178]

In El Salvador, U.S. government was therefore intimately involved in the training and funding of ORDEN in the mid-1960s, and then later, the *Agencia Nacional de Seguridad de El Salvador* (National Security Agency of El Salvador, ANSESAL).[179]

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[178] Lindo-Fuentes and Ching, *Modernizing Minds in El Salvador*, 81.

[179] According to Nairn, it was during the Kennedy administration that the U.S. government helped establish set up ORDEN and ANSESAL. Allan Nairn, "Behind the Death Squads," 20–29. According to the Covert Action Information Bulletin, the U.S. government sent ten green berets to El Salvador to help Medrano set up ORDEN, a group that not only gathered intelligence but carried out assassinations in coordination with the military. For the next three decades, the U.S. military and CIA continued to provide funding and support. Salvadoran officers received training either in the School of Americas in the Panama Canal zone or at military bases in the US. Cf. "El Salvador," *Covert Action Quarterly* 12 (1990): 51. Murat Williams, the US ambassador to El Salvador during the Kennedy administration, explained in a 1980 op-ed piece that support for security forces arose out of fear of the Cuban Revolution and "Castroism." Murat Williams, "Still More Arms Won't Aid El Salvador," *New York Times*, 17 April 1980. On

Almeida describes the latter as “a clearinghouse for intelligence information deriving from the National Guard, treasury police, ORDEN, customs police, national police, and the army.” It worked closely not only with these entities but likewise with landowners as well. The increased centralization and bureaucratization of government intelligence under ANSESAL meant a major improvement in the state’s ability to monitor its citizenry and target those involved in what it deemed subversive activity.[180]

Here we can glimpse other convergences between the policies pursued by the Alliance and that of certain segments of the Salvadoran military. Together, they promoted a rather paradoxical approach to modernization. As Lindo-Fuentes and Ching summarize it, “They implemented reforms that were supposed to improve the lives of common citizens, but they built up the machinery of repression that beat down those same citizens when they voiced their opinions or organized.”[181]

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this point cf. Almeida, *Waves of Protest: Popular Struggle in El Salvador, 1925-2005*, 71; Lamperti, *Enrique Alvarez*, 93; Lindo-Fuentes and Ching, *Modernizing Minds in El Salvador*, 78.

[180] Almeida, *Waves of Protest: Popular Struggle in El Salvador, 1925-2005*, 121; Stanley, *The Protection Racket State*, 98.

[181] Lindo-Fuentes and Ching, *Modernizing Minds in El Salvador*, 78.

4.4 Agrarian Reform and the Church in El Salvador

4.4.1 Decree 900

We have been examining visions of agrarian reform arising both out of the military regimes that ruled El Salvador for decades and Kennedy's Alliance for Progress, concluding our consideration by suggesting the convergence of these visions around a complex combination of reform and repression. We now turn to another vision of agrarian reform, which was also beginning to be felt in Salvadoran life at this time: that of the Catholic Church.

As Romero repeatedly insists, his thoughts on agrarian reform are not his own but the Church's. Throughout the present work we have looked at one important aspect of this claim: that Romero is drawing upon the Church's social doctrine. But we must also examine another feature of it: that he inherits a longstanding history of engagement with agrarian reform on the part of the Church in El Salvador. Regarding the history of this engagement, it is helpful to return once again to Guatemala, where what happened with Coronel Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán's agrarian reform—Decree 900—provides an important point of reference for changes that were afoot in the Church's life.

As I mentioned above, Árbenz was not communist but he collaborated with them in the design and implementation of agrarian reform.[182] According to Piero Gleijeses, the Archbishop of Guatemala at the time, Mariano Rossell y Arellano, thought that Árbenz, upon rising to power, would "purge" the communists from his government. But when he did not, Rossell y Arellano became a vocal opponent of the proposed reform, as well as Árbenz more generally.[183]

Rossell y Arellano galvanized opposition to Árbenz, which overwhelmingly rallied behind Rossell y Arellano as a figurehead. Gleijeses's analysis of the conflict turns on the politics of the agrarian reform itself. "Decree 900," Gleijeses writes, "persuaded Rossell y Arellano that he had been betrayed: the government was communist. Immediately, the archbishop lent his support, and the dignity of his office, to Árbenz's most bitter foes."[184] Rossell y Arellano is reported to have claimed that the devil himself "was stalking the countryside" disguised as an agrarian reformer.[185]

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[182] Gleijeses, "The Agrarian Reform of Jacobo Arbenz," 453.

[183] Ibid., 458. On the Church in Guatemala during the Árbenz years, cf. Anita Frankel, *Political Development in Guatemala, 1944-1954: The Impact of Foreign, Military, and Religious Elites* (University of Connecticut, 1969).

[184] Piero Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope: The Guatemalan Revolution and the United States, 1944-1954* (Princeton University Press, 1992), 211. For an in-depth analysis on the Church in Guatemala and its politics during this time, cf. Frankel, *Political Development in Guatemala, 1944-1954*, 169–265. It is important to note that by "the Church" Frankel

The archbishop and the Church's visible leadership articulated concerns about the reform being communist and anti-Christian, not just a threat to the right to private property, but part of the introduction of impiety and licentiousness into the nation.[186] Some of the archbishop's statements read like unqualified defenses of private property, in similar terms to the *Asociación General de Agricultores* (General Association of Agriculturalists, AGA), the main organized opposition to Decree 900.[187] *Verbum*, the

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means the hierarchy and especially the bishops, and by "politics" she means state-centered and regime-focused.

[185] Quoted in Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 212. Of course, Gleijeses notes that not all within the Church opposed Decree 900, for instance, the papal nuncio, Genaro Verolino, who argued that Decree 900 was not an attack on the Church. Rossell y Arellano was not alone in regarding the opposition to Árbenz and the agrarian reform as opposition to the devil. Gleijeses cites the priest, Sebastian Buccellato, who viewed "the whole diabolical scheme with horror" and called Decree 900 "a ruthless political tool that accomplished a bloodless Red revolution." Buccellato seems to conflate the mere offer of land to his parish members as communism, praising those who "remained true" and rejected the offer. Ibid., 212–213. Cf. Sebastian Buccellato, "I Saw the Reds Taking Over!" *This Week Magazine*, 27 June 1954.

[186] Cf. Tulio Benites, *Meditaciones de un católico ante la reforma agraria de Guatemala* (Ministerio de Educación Pública, 1952), 11.

[187] See Rossell y Arellano, *Mensaje a las clases laborante y patronal*, 1 septiebre 1946. Though cf. his pastoral letter on social justice, which he vividly denounces the misery of the majority of his flock. Not only does he call on employers to pay sufficient wages, as well as to provide hospitals, schools and other social goods, but he also defends worker's associations and organizations in the form of unions and cooperatives. He does, however, oppose what he considered aggressive or disruptive social change,

official publication of the Guatemalan Church, ran articles opposing the agrarian reform, for instance, like this one, which professes desire to solve the "agrarian problem," but reads the clamoring for reform as a government ploy, influenced by communists, to gain the support of the illiterate masses. The editorial states, "[I]f the problem really exists, it is neither as crude nor as grave as they have artificially tried to make us believe."[188]

As Frankel shows, the Árbenz administration did not respond by attacking the Church. It responded by arguing for the compatibility between Catholic social doctrine and the agrarian reform being proposed. The highly skewed distribution of property in Guatemala and the attempt to address it through Decree 900 was an attempt to take

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which seems to be the crux of his concerns with much labor organizing in Guatemala. Cf. Mariano Rossell y Arellano, *Carta pastoral sobre la justicia social*, 15 noviembre 1948.

[188] Quoted in Frankel, *Political Development in Guatemala, 1944-1954*, 228. The editorial opposes expropriation as a limitation on private property, and regards the proposed indemnification as unjust, arguing instead for the distribution of state-owned land. On the conditions in Guatemala, which were indeed crude and grave, cf. Mario Monteforte Toledo, *Guatemala-Monografía Sociológica* (Mexico: UNAM, 1959), 415–432; J.L. Paredes Moreira, "Reforma Agraria: Una Experiencia En Guatemala" (Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala, 1963), 23–46. For more on this opposition cf. Benites, *Meditaciones de un católico ante la reforma agraria de Guatemala*.

seriously what the Church herself teaches. Ironically, it was not the government but the most visible representatives of the Church that had misconstrued Church teaching.[189]

4.4.1.1 *Meditaciones de un católico ante la reforma agraria de Guatemala*

Along these lines, a book by Tulio Benites is especially noteworthy. The book, which is entitled *Meditaciones de un católico ante la reforma agraria de Guatemala* (*Meditations)*, was published in 1952 as part of a series put out by the Ministry of Public Education. It was written to address the misunderstandings of those like Rossell y Arellano who are presenting the agrarian reform as "a war against religion," or those like the President of the AGA who thought that, in response to Decree 900, it was necessary to rally in defense of "God, Nation, and Family."[190]

Over the course of the work, Benites argues that, in labeling the reform communist, its opponents demonstrate a profound misunderstanding of communism.[191] But more fundamentally still, the most vocal opponents of Decree 900—among the

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[189] Frankel argues along these lines. Frankel, *Political Development in Guatemala, 1944-1954*, 233–235. Benites does the same in Benites, *Meditaciones de un católico ante la reforma agraria de Guatemala*.

[190] Benites, *Meditaciones de un católico ante la reforma agraria de Guatemala*, 11.

[191] Decree 900 differs in important ways, Benites thinks, from Lenin's understanding of agrarian revolution. For instance, lands in Guatemala are being expropriated with indemnification, not confiscated. According to Lenin, indemnification was contrary to agrarian communist revolution. Decree 900 has been designed to help those that work the land own it. Ibid., 15, 91–101.

Church's most visible representatives in Guatemala—do not base their views upon "the teachings of Holy Mother Catholic Church."[192] They do not defend Catholicism but "the landholders who hold the vast majority of the cultivable lands of Guatemala."[193] Whether they know it or not, they are therefore in the position of those Pope Pius XI criticizes in *Quadragesimo anno.* Although professing to be Catholics, they neglect "that sublime law of justice and charity," which binds Church members not only to give everyone their due but to care for those in need as if they were Christ himself (§125).[194] According to Benites, Catholicism does not mean the defense of the established disorder but above all "compassion for the dispossessed and defenseless, charity for the needy, love of neighbor."[195] As Benites asks, in their attack upon Decree 900—which in his estimation is nothing but an attempt to begin to address the widespread and systemic injustice and misery of the Guatemalan countryside—have the leaders of the Church misunderstood what she is? Have those who are working for reform surpassed the Church in trying to live what she teaches?[196]

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[192] Ibid., 12.
[193] Ibid., 12.
[194] Ibid., 13-14.
[195] Ibid., 101.
[196] Ibid., 103.

Much of *Meditations* is an examination of the Church's social doctrine and its understanding of "access to property for all, a better distribution of land."[197] Benites focuses especially on Leo XIII's *Rerum novarum*, Pius XI's *Quadragesimo anno*, and the work of the Belgian Cardinal Cardinal Désiré-Félicien-François-Joseph Mercier. As Benites sees it, at issue is the Church in Guatemala's inadequate understanding of her own social doctrine. Consequently, rather than seeing the evident resonances between Decree 900 and the teaching entrusted to her to guide her, the leaders of the Church have instead construed agrarian reform as the work of the anti-Christ.[198]

Among the most interesting features of *Meditations* is the way Benites situates the concerns underlying agrarian reform in relation to the Spanish colonization of the Americas. Benites begins and ends the work with an extended reflection upon the sixteenth-century Dominican friar Bartolomé de las Casas and his Dominican confrères—Antonio de Montesinos, Pedro de Cordoba, Bernardo de Santo, and Domingo de Villamayor—and their opposition to the *encomienda* system.[199] Of the original inhabitants of these lands, those who were not decimated were dispossessed and entrusted (*encomendada*) to the Spanish *encomenderos*.[200] Las Casas worked, not only for the abolishment of the *encomienda* system itself, which he viewed as a kind of slavery under the guise of Christian catechesis, but also for the return of the usurped lands to those to whom they belonged. Las Casas, too, was considered an anti-Christ in his own day for relentlessly advocating that the Spaniards "return the lands, goods, mines, and treasures they robed in an unjust war."[201]

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[197] Ibid., 79.
[198] Ibid., 61-91, 104-105.
[199] Ibid., 15-16, 20-61, 101.

According to Benites, Guatemala's contemporary landscape is a palimpsest, bearing the traces of what came before. To read it rightly is to read it in relation to the history of colonialism. For instance, in many estates, Benites observes, the current landowners are the heirs of the Spanish *encomenderos* themselves, and the *campesinos* are the descendants of those who were once entrusted to them. Moreover, the injustices denounced by Las Casas suffuse the Guatemalan countryside. Benites writes of the widespread view that *campesinos* are naturally born to be servants. Because their needs are negligible, they can be paid in kind, or with meager wages, or with rental plots of marginal land—all of which are insufficient to support themselves and their families.[202]

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[200] Ibid., 18, 29-35.
[201] Ibid., 6-7, 101.
[202] Ibid., 62.

On Benites's narration, the story of Las Casas's struggle therefore continues into present-day Guatemala, overshadowing the conflict over Árbenz's Decree 900. Those working for agrarian reform are in fact the true successors to the Lascasian legacy. They continue to ask, as Las Casas himself did, why is death so sovereign among us?[203]

Moreover—and this is pivotal—Benites attempts to display how the Church's social doctrine itself is a contemporary articulation of the Lascasian position. To paraphrase Leo XIII only slightly, those who are concerned about the conditions in the countryside are trying to find some opportune remedy for the misery and wretchedness pressing down so unjustly on the majority of the Guatemalan *campesinado,* who have little protection against the violence of the existing order—and order that pressures them for the sake of gain, and that gathers profit from the perpetuation of their need. In Las Casas's day, as in Benites's own, there are distinct lines of reflection on property, both within the Church and without. Benites thinks that the Lascasian position on property, which has been historically marginal position, has found renewed expression in *Rerum novarum*. Leo's encyclical and the line of thinking it recovers amount to a new beginning for the Church's social doctrine. They stand in opposition to other, more problematic understandings of property within the Church, which continue to have calamitous implications.

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[203] Benites does not quote this question from Las Casas but Gustavo Gutierrez does in his book on Las Casas. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Las Casas: In Search of the Poor of Jesus Christ* (Orbis Books, 1993), 456. 456. Las Casas asks: "And when ever, in another time, was death so sorely, or at any rate so speedily, sovereign?" (*Carta al Consejo*, O.E. 5:47b-48b). Throughout *Las Casas*, Gutiérrez draws a similar connection to that of Benites between Las Casas's criticisms of the *conquistadores* and present injustices: "Our interest in and revulsion for much of what occurred with the various Indian nations and cultures in the sixteenth century must not incline us to ignore the intricate process of later centuries" and the "situation of injustice and dispossession in which the poor of today find themselves on this continent." In our day, too, "we have a destruction of persons and cultures." Ibid., 457-458.

4.4.1.2 Romero & Decree 900

While all this was occurring in Guatemala, Romero was serving as a priest in the diocese of San Miguel, in eastern El Salvador. During this time he was a frequent contributor to *El Chaparrastique*, the newspaper of the diocesan seminary. On 16 July 1954, Romero published a brief article in it entitled "Marxism and Christianity," about a month after the Eisenhower Administration approved Operation PBSUCCESS, the coup that deposed Árbenz and sent him into exile.

The article begins dramatically, noting how "the heart of all Central America is beating," as people have received word of the "glorious deeds" that have recently taken place in Guatemala. Romero goes on to express "firm adherence" to the struggle against communism, praising Archbishop Rossell y Arellano as one of the "heroes" of

Guatemala's "liberation," who, along with so many others behind the iron curtain, are "the living voice of liberty."[204]

The point of the article is the Church's opposition to communism—presumably a reference to Árbenz's and his collaboration with the Communist Party of Guatemala. Romero emphasizes communism's atheism and how it wants "to provoke the desertion of God in the soul," and in this way, "mutilate" the human person. Romero asserts without further qualification or elaboration that "Christianity defends private property and detests class conflict." To be fair, Romero understands communism to be product of a laicism (*laicismo*) that is deeper than communism alone. Moreover, he acknowledges important "points of contact" between Christianity and communism. But what is striking about the article given Church teaching and Romero's later trajectory is the inattention to the injustices to which agrarian reform is a response or the way that, as he will frequently point out later as archbishop, capitalism, too, mutilates people.

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[204] Óscar Romero, "Marxismo y Cristianismo," *El Chaparrastique*, no. 2021 (16 julio 1954). The other figure praised by Romero is the papal nuncio, Verolino. That he does so would seem to support the contention that Romero's understanding of what was transpiring in Guatemala was limited. Gleijeses contends that Genaro Verolino in fact opposed Rossell y Arellano. According to Gleijeses, Verolino resisted Rossell y Arellano's reading of Decree 900 as an attack on the Church. Guatemala had an agrarian problem, Verolino argued, and Decree 900 sought to address it. He urged the Church to support the government in its efforts. Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 212–213.

It is, of course, unclear how much to make of the article, or what Romero really knew about what transpired in Guatemala or Operation PBSUCCESS. Romero's biographer Roberto Morozzo della Rocca points out that during this time Romero himself was often accused of being a communist for his presentation of Church's social doctrine, and how he called attention to the treatment of workers by local coffee barons and appealed for a more just distribution of wealth.[205] To my knowledge, Romero makes no other mention of Árbenz or the Guatemalan agrarian reform elsewhere in his homilies or writings. Nevertheless, the *El Chaparrastique* article offers us one, small glimpse into a process of transformation that Romero himself would undergo.

More generally, the issues arising for the Church with Árbenz and Decree 900 would not disappear. In the ensuing decades, they would increasingly embroil and even fracture her life in Central American and beyond. Guatemala was a harbinger of what was to come.

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[205] Morozzo Della Rocca, *Primero Dios*, 73. Rocca points out that as a consequence Romero was (falsely) accused of embezzling funds designated for the Church and for stealing jewels. In his examination of Romero's *El Chaparrastique* writings, Rocca characterizes Romero as "neither conservative nor progressive, neither nostalgic nor innovative: he followed the Ignatian: *sentire cum Ecclesia*." Ibid., 77.

4.4.2 "The crime was simply being organized"

By the beginning of the 1960s, the climate was changing, not only with regard to U.S. policy in Latin America with the Alliance for Progress and agrarian reform, but with regard to the Church in El Salvador as well. We see this in the formation of the *Partido Democratico Cristiano* (Christian Democratic Party, PDC), which became an active player in Salvadoran political life.[206] The PDC insisted upon the need for profound structural reform—including agrarian reform—to remove the obstacles to economic development. The party's platform emphasized full employment and living wages, but above all, the need to alter existing land use and ownership arrangements.[207]

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[206] Reinaldo Antonio Téfel Vélez describes the Christian Democrats in the following way, which speaks to some of the complexity of locating them politically: "If by left we understand the struggle for social justice, the great battle for the social and economic redemption of the people, the incorporation of workers and peasants into the mainstream of culture and civilization, then undoubtedly we are leftists. If, however, by left is understood historical materialism, communist totalitarianism, and the suppression of liberty, then in no way are we leftists. If by right is understood the conservation of the spiritual values of civilization, the historical legacy of humanity, and the dignity and liberty of man, then there can be no doubt we are rightists. But if by right we understand the conservation of an economic order based on the exploitation of man by man, on social injustice, we energetically refuse the name of rightists." Reinaldo Antonio Téfel Vélez, "Izquierdas y Derechos en Latinoamérica y El Movimiento Socialcristiano," *Revista Conservadora del Pensamiento Centroamericano* IV, agosto (1962): 18.

[207] As Webre describes them, the agrarian reform proposals of the PDC were "geared to the development of markets and infrastructure and to the raising of sufficient capital to compensate the expropriated landholders." Opponents characterized these positions as an attack on private property. But proponents of them, like Roberto Lara Velado,

The Church was also beginning to have a new kind presence in the Salvadoran countryside.[208] Above we saw that one of the legacies of la *Matanza* was Martínez's attack upon independent organizations and associations. The proliferation of such organizations and associations in years prior to the 1932 insurrection was seen as one of its precipitating factors.[209] But despite the general ban on unions and unionizing among rural workers still in vigilance, the 1950 Constitution provided an opening, permitting the formation of cooperatives, which soon afterward began to appear, especially savings

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distinguished the PDC position both from liberalism and from communism in its communitarian understanding of ownership and its call for the widespread diffusion of property. According to Webre, the differences between the ruling PCN and the PDC were not as great as it might seem, especially on agrarian reform. "Both supported a gradual program of compensated redistribution, accompanied by diffusion of technical training and infrastructural improvement." What distinguished their respective positions, according to Webre, was the PDC's insistence that it was more sincere in pursuing its goals. Stephen Webre, *Jose Napoleon Duarte and the Christian Democratic Party in Salvadoran Politics 1960-1972* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 197AD), 61–62, 95.

[208] Vega, *Las Comunidades de Base En América Central: Estudio Sociológico*, 74, 76.

[209] Walter Guerra Calderón, *Asociaciones Comunitarias En El Area Rural de El Salvador En La Década 1960-1970: Análisis de Las Condiciones Que Enmarcan Su Desarrollo* (San José, Costa Rica: CSUCA, Programa Centroamericano de Ciencias Sociales, 1976), 257, 264–265.

and loan, purchasing, and producer cooperatives.[210] The Church was among the groups organizing them. By the 1960s, the cooperative movement was gaining traction.[211]

In 1961, the Church formed the *Secretariado Social Interdiocesano* (Inter-Diocesan Social Secretariat, ISS).[212] Its work, under the auspices of *Fundación Promotora de Cooperativas* (Foundation for the Promotion of Cooperatives, FUNPROCOOP), centered on the formation and support of cooperatives among landless and land poor *campesinos*. FUNPROCOOP acquired legal recognition by the Salvadoran state in 1968.[213] Its work spread rapidly. By 1972, there were sixty-three cooperatives operating in nearly one-fourth of the country's municipalities.[214]

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[210] Ibid., 214-226; "De La Necesidad e Importancia de Las Cooperativas," *Camino* 1, no. 3 (1961): 6–7.

[211] Almeida, *Waves of Protest*, 71, 75–77; Guerra Calderón, *Asociaciones Comunitarias En El Area Rural de El Salvador En La Década 1960-1970*; Emilio Arturo Cuchillo, "El Desarrollo Cultural Del Campesino y La Reforma Agraria" (Ph.D., Universidad de El Salvador, 1970).

[212] Formed in 1961, ISS implemented the Church's social doctrine. At least initially one of its main goals was to support rural cooperatives for landless or land-poor *campesinos.* Almeida, *Waves of Protest*, 76; Vega, *Las Comunidades de Base En América Central: Estudio Sociológico*; Guerra Calderón, *Asociaciones Comunitarias en el Area Rural de El Salvador en la Década 1960-1970*.

[213] Almeida, *Waves of Protest*, 75; Guerra Calderón, *Asociaciones Comunitarias En El Area Rural de El Salvador En La Década 1960-1970*.

[214] Almeida, *Waves of Protest*, 76; Guerra Calderón, *Asociaciones Comunitarias En El Area Rural de El Salvador En La Década 1960-1970*, 224–225.

Newsletters like *Camino* also began to circulate. *Camino* was started in 1961 by Eucharistic adoration society, and its motto was "toward the improvement of workers and *campesinos*." "What is one of the principal causes of this disunion we experience?" an article in one of the first issues asks. The answer: the misery of the majority of the people, which pressures toward isolation and scattering. Cooperatives can contribute to ameliorating this situation by gathering people together and by "decentralizing the possession of goods so that they do not accumulate in the hands of the few and that they are distributed profusely among the people."[215] One immediate and concrete consequence of the formation and spread of savings and loan cooperatives was that people began to be freed from predatory lending schemes—the only credit previously available to them.[216]

Camino is filled with articles about cooperatives, their structure and rationale, as well as the Church's involvement in the process of organizing them in El Salvador.[217] Other major themes include the problem of land access in El Salvador, as well as the "permanent violation" of the freedom to form unions not only in El Salvador but across

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[215] "De la Necesidad e Importancia de las Cooperativas," 6–7.

[216] Vega, *Las Comunidades de Base En América Central: Estudio Sociológico*, 76.

[217] Cf. *Camino*, San Salvador 1961, año 1, nos. 1-4.

Latin America.[218] Articles detail the establishment of the Leo XII Institute, whose stated purpose is to catechize workers and *campesinos* in the Church's social doctrine.[219] There are also articles on agrarian reform, praising the Brazilian bishops for their pioneering efforts in places like Río Grande do Sul,[220] as well as discussing convergences and divergences between the agrarian reform proposals of the Alliance for Progress and the Church's social doctrine.[221]

According to Cáceres Prendes, the legal protections afforded to cooperatives established an important social space, which led to the proliferation of organizations and associations in the countryside more generally, including *campesino* leagues, ecclesial base communities, literacy programs, training centers, and so on.[222] As an outgrowth of these groups, *campesinos* began increasingly to organize around issues of land and unionization.[223]

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[218] "Permanentes Violaciones a La Libertad Syndical En America Latina," *Camino* 1, no. 8 (1961): 6; "¿Por Que Se Teme a Los Sindicatos?," *Camino* 1, no. 11 (1961): 6; "El Campesino Merece Ayuda," *Camino* 1, no. 3 (1961): 6.

[219] "Organizase Curso de Capacitación Para Obreros," *Camino* 1, no. 1 (1961): 3; "Inaugurase Solemnemente Intituto de Capacitación Social Leon XIII," *Camino* 1, no. 3 (1961): 8.

[220] "Apoyan La Reforma Agraria Los Obispos de Río Grande Do Sul," *Camino* 1, no. 1 (1961): 3.

[221] "Un Programa Promisor Para América Latina," *Camino* 1, no. 10 (1961): 2.

[222] Jorge Cáceres Prendes, "Revolutionary Struggle and Church Commitment: The Case of El Salvador," *Social Compass* 30, no. 2–3 (1983): 261–98. Cf. Vega, *Las Comunidades de Base En América Central*, 95–96.

Among the groups formed in the 1960s, which later became a focal organization for protest in the 1970s, was the *Federación Cristiana de Campesinos Salvadoreños* (Christian Federation of Salvadoran Peasants, FECCAS).[224] Beginning in 1965, FECCAS began to hold annual conferences in which agrarian reform, as well as minimum wage increases, improvement of working conditions on *haciendas*, reductions in rental prices for land, and better legal protections for workers were the central concerns.[225] Members spoke of

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[223] This is a central theme of Vega, *Las Comunidades de Base En América Central: Estudio Sociológico*. But cf. Almeida, *Waves of Protest: Popular Struggle in El Salvador, 1925-2005*, 86; Arístedes Augusto Larín, "Historia Del Movimiento Sindical de El Salvador," *Universidad* 96, no. 4 (1971): 135–79.

[224] FECCAS began with the activities of Christian Democratic party in the 1960s. Unión de Trabajadores del Campo (Rural Workers' Union, UTC) was formed in 1974 and federated with FECCAS a year later. Cf. Mario Lungo, *La Lucha de las Masas en El Salvador* (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1987), 64. Archbishop Luis Chávez supported these organizations but had concerns about the clergy participating in them. For more on the relationship between FECCAS and the cooperative movement, cf. Vega, *Las Comunidades de Base En América Central: Estudio Sociológico*, 119.

[225] The archdiocese's Centro de Estudios Sociales y Promoión Popular (CESPROP) worked with FECCAS and began to publish reports supporting agrarian reform and legal protections for rural unions. Almeida, *Waves of Protest: Popular Struggle in El Salvador, 1925-2005*, 85; Guerra Calderón, *Asociaciones Comunitarias en el Area Rural de El Salvador en la Década 1960-1970: Análisis de las Condiciones que Enmarcan su Desarrollo*, 236, 235–247; Vega, *Las Comunidades de Base en América Central: Estudio Sociológico*, 120; "Manifiesto de FECCAS/UTC a Los Cristianos de El Salvador y Centro América," *Estudios Centroamericanos* 359 (1978).

"integral agrarian reform"—not just better distribution of land but better distribution of social life more generally—and of participating in all aspects of the planning and realization of it.[226] They pushed for the legalization of unions among rural workers and tried to use the legal protections afforded to cooperatives as a toehold.[227]

In 1961, the archdiocese of San Salvador also began an education program over the radio, which was known as Escuelas Radiofónicas. Its goal was to provide access to primary school education.[228] Later in the 1960s, ecclesial base communities began appearing in places like Suchitoto, Tecoluca, Aguilares, El Paisnal, among others, finding particularly strong support from Archbishop Chávez y González, Romero's predecessor.[229] Between 1968 and 1972, seven *campesino* training centers were founded, including Los Naranjos, with which Romero worked when he was bishop of the diocese of Santiago de María from 1974-1977.[230]

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[226] Guerra Calderón, *Asociaciones Comunitarias en el Area Rural de El Salvador en la Década 1960-1970*, 243.

[227] Ibid., 244.

[228] The main radio station broadcasting the courses was YSAX-Voz Panamericana, which was the radio station that broadcasted Romero's homilies and that became an important communications network in the 1970s. Vega, *Las Comunidades de Base en América Central: Estudio Sociológico*, 85.

[229] Almeida, *Waves of Protest*, 85. In 1971, a training course was held in San José de la Montana Seminary and Casa San Pablo on the topic of how to establish ecclesial base communities. The leaders of the course were from the Latin American Bishops' Conference. "Éxito de Los Cursos de Comunidades de Base," *Orientación*, September 19, 1971; "Curso de 'Comunidades Eclesiales de Base,'" *Orientación*, August 29, 1971.

The ecclesial base communities (*comunidades eclesiales de base*) merit special mention. These communities arose initially within the marginal places of Salvadoran ecclesial life—in small villages, for instance, with only dozens of households, infrequently visited, if at all, by priests—where people gathered to reflect on their life together in the light of the Gospel.[231] They were mostly comprised of the landless or those with only small parcels of land.[232] Among the problems that prompted them initially was one with which Romero deals repeatedly in his homilies: how best to address a situation in which a whole people have been baptized but lack adequate catechesis in the faith?

The base communities were ecclesial. In El Salvador, for instance, they arose within parishes through the private initiatives of priests and others, attempting to organize an ecclesial presence in places far removed from churches and infrequently visited by priests.[233] As the base community movement grew and became increasingly lively and influential, debates began to arise within the Church about the movement regarding its ecclesial identity, its relation to parish and diocese, the coordination of the communities, and so on.[234]

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[230] Almeida, *Waves of Protest*, 85; Vega, *Las Comunidades de Base en América Central: Estudio Sociológico*; Tommie Sue Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador: From Civil Strife to Civil Peace* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1995), 105.
[231] Vega, *Las Comunidades de Base en América Central: Estudio Sociológico*, 8, 68, 156.
[232] Ibid., 95.

Out of the ecclesial base community movement in El Salvador arose manifold forms of collective action and relationships of solidarity with other communities nationally and even internationally.[235] Through them, activities and training events were organized in relation to illiteracy, formation of cooperatives, the problems of agricultural production on marginal lands, nutrition, methods of community organizing, existing labor codes and wage laws, and so on.[236] Like the cooperative movement, ecclesial base communities functioned as a fulcrum for the formation of manifold other organizations and associations.[237]

The livelihoods of the landless and land-poor *campesino* members of these organizations and associations depended upon seasonal labor in the coffee, cotton, and cane harvests. Year after year, thousands migrated internally—often entire households—following the harvests from *hacienda* to *hacienda*. Housing was always an issue on the *haciendas*, and households usually had to fend for themselves. Moreover, a chronic complaint among the migrant workers was landlords paying below the legal minimum wages.

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[233] Ibid., 9, 16. In contrast to El Salvador, in Honduras base communities existed in all dioceses and were coordinated at the national level.
[234] Ibid., 81-89, 129-133.
[235] Ibid., 18; *Waves of Protest*, 112.
[236] Vega, *Las Comunidades de Base en América Central: Estudio Sociológico*, 95-96.
[237] Ibid., 95-96.

Vega claims that tensions escalated beginning in the early 1970s, when migrants began arriving at *haciendas* organized, pressuring landlords to pay the wage established by law.[238] On Vega's account, it was the mere fact of organizing—the simple gathering of those who had previously been scattered, the rise of widespread social "movement of the marginalized"—that looked like subversion to the oligarchy. "The crime was simply being organized," as he puts it.[239]

Romero often speaks in similar terms. Such organizing led to the accusation that the Church was now 'engaged in politics' where it formerly stayed out of it, and to new forms of repressive organization that targeted, at least initially, the leadership, attempting to decapitate the organizations and scatter the members.[240] One of the main contentions of Vega's work is that we cannot understand the rise of the revolutionary left in El Salvador—many of whom, for instance, were former members of ecclesial base communities and of other organizations and associations the Church helped establish—without taking into account the radicalizing effects of the repression.[241]

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[238] Ibid., 97-98. For a detailed account of this, cf. Melvin Burke, "El Sistema de Plantación y la Proletarización del Trabajo Agrícola en El Salvador" 31, no. 335–36 (1976).
[239] Vega, *Las Comunidades de Base en América Central: Estudio Sociológico*, 96, cf. 128, 156. There are important resonances here
[240] Ibid., 17, 89, 96, 121-128.

It is ubiquitous in the scholarship on El Salvador to associate these developments exclusively with the Second Vatican Council and Medellín. Almeida gives voice to this consensus when he continually reverts to the phrase the "the new social doctrine of Vatican II and Medellín."[242] But one reason Vega's account is so helpful is because it highlights the relationship between the proliferation of organizations and associations and those features of the Church's social teaching that predate the Second Vatican Council and Medellín but were carried through by it.[243]

4.4.3 Fundación *Populorum Progressio*

As we saw in chapter one, the successive waves of export-oriented agriculture produced displacement and landlessness, in addition to coffee, cotton, and sugar cane. Many were left to find work where they could. Those who farmed maize and beans for subsistence often did so on steep and rocky hillsides—marginal land for agriculture and prone to erosion. Others migrated. Some did so within El Salvador, following the seasonal harvests. Others left the country.

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[241] Ibid., 18.
[242] Cf. Almeida, *Waves of Protest: Popular Struggle in El Salvador, 1925-2005*, 71, 75–77, 85. Almeida writes that in 1961 the Church formed Secretariado Social Interdiocesano "to begin implementing the new social doctrine of the Second Vatican Council on a national scale." Of course, the Council opened in 1962 and closed in 1965, so the social doctrine that informed the work must have preceded the Council. Ibid., 76.
[243] Ibid., 76, 86, 91, 110, 138.

Among the places they went was El Salvador's neighbor to the northeast: the expansive and sparsely populated Honduras.[244] Many of those who migrated to Honduras often ended up settling on government land. According to Salvadoran authorities, by 1969 an estimated 200,000 and 300,000 Salvadorans had left to find food and work in Honduras.[245]

In that same year, the Honduran president, Oswaldo López Arellano, initiated an agrarian reform. Honduras's *Instituto Nacional Agrario* (National Agrarian Institute, INA) sent letters to the Salvadoran occupiers, informing them that they were occupying land that would be redistributed by the coming reform, and requiring them to leave the land. Those who did not leave as instructed or who were slow to leave were harassed, threated, and eventually expelled. Thousands of dispossessed Salvadorans were forced to return to their homeland.[246]

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[244] Adela Celarié Flores, "Surgimiento y Desarrollo de Las Organizaciones Populares En El Salvador, 1970-1980" (Master's thesis, Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, 1983).
[245] Lindo-Fuentes and Ching, *Modernizing Minds in El Salvador*, 192.

These events fueled a nationalistic furor and led many Salvadorans to demand retaliation.[247] The situation escalated and a short-lived war broke out—lasting one hundred hours—when El Salvador invaded Honduras on 14 July 1969.[248] El Salvador's brief war with Honduras drew renewed and dramatic attention to the problems surrounding land tenure and distribution in El Salvador. Under the present system there were no restrictions as to who could hold land and how much or for what purpose.[249] The voices calling for agrarian reform grew louder and more numerous.

Among these voices was the Episcopal Conference of El Salvador (Conferencia Episcopal de El Salvador, CEDES), which on 15 August 1969 proposed an agrarian reform initiative of its own in a statement published under the title, "Llamamiento del Episcopado Salvadoreño en Nombre del País."[250] What did the bishops recommend?

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[246] Ibid.; Conferencia Episcopal de El Salvador, "Llamamiento del Episcopado Salvadoreño en Nombre del País," *Estudios Centroamericanos* 254–55 (1969): 531.
[247] Lindo-Fuentes and Ching, *Modernizing Minds in El Salvador*, 192.
[248] Ibid., 193. For more on the so-called "Soccer War," cf. Durham, *Scarcity and Survival in Central America*; Kapuściński, *The Soccer War*, 157–185.
[249] Webre, *Jose Napoleon Duarte and the Christian Democratic Party in Salvadoran Politics 1960-1972*, 123–124.
[250] See Conferencia Episcopal de El Salvador, "Llamamiento del Episcopado Salvadoreño En Nombre Del País."

Recall from the previous chapter that in *Quadragesimo anno*, Pius XI's position in the face of unequal distribution of land and the inability of some to access it seemed to prioritize, not state action, but the catechetical power and moral suasion of the Church herself. In their statement, the Salvadoran bishops make a similar argument.

Citing the Beatitudes, as well as passages from the Church's social teaching, they reflect upon God's gift of peace and the invitation to participate in God's gift of making peace among peoples in Christ. Working for peace in the present situation of conflict, they continue, requires solidarity and sacrifice—"the sacrifice of something of our own"—on the part of those who would be peacemakers.[251] The bishops' try to redirect the nationalistic furor and criticisms of the actions of Honduras on an examination of El Salvador itself and the issue of land tenure and distribution, requesting that the same hospitality and understanding being shown to the dispossessed Salvadorans streaming back across the border be extended and deepened to all those "who live marginalized on Salvadoran soil." The bishops' hope is that the land of El Salvador serve, not only as a "refuge" in this time of crisis but as a "home," which can satisfy "the vital needs" of all who dwell within it.[252]

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[251] Ibid., 530–531.
[252] Ibid.

As an initial response to the crisis, the bishops propose the establishment of what they call the *Populorum Progressio* Foundation (Fundación *Populorum Progressio*)—named, of course, after Paul VI's 1967 encyclical. The bishops explain:

> The purpose of this Foundation would be to receive from landowning families the lands that they voluntarily want to give so that they can be handed over…to *campesino* families upon adequate preparation and capacitation. The Foundation would receive primarily lands, but it would also need capital to buy the material and equipment necessary for the families to work it. It would also take as its responsibility, with the help of national and international institutions, the technical capacitation and the education necessary for the families who would become landowners…[253]

The bishops detail the establishment and implementation of the Foundation's work,[254] the criteria for participation in it,[255] as well as the benefits they hope will come from it.[256] The long-term goal is not just the establishment of family farms but their organization in the form of cooperatives.[257]

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[253] Ibid., 531.

[254] The donated land would be divided into parcels. The bishops propose a rent-to-own scheme, which will take place over a period of five years. They also propose the establishment of regional centers, the purpose of which would be the technical assistance of the participant households both during the rental period and beyond it. Ibid., 531.

[255] For instance, it would favor married households. Ibid.

[256] Ibid., 531–532.

[257] Ibid., 531.

In terms of our present considerations, what is especially important about this proposal is that the bishops looked not to the state but to the Church herself to do the work, requesting that her members—especially her "great landowners"—voluntarily relinquish land, capital, and equipment, which the Foundation would help distribute to those who had need.[258] The bishops cite the example of the Diocese of San Vicente, which has already donated its lands.[259]

After the establishment of it, I have found no mention of the *Populorum Progressio* Foundation in the scholarship. As far as I can tell, nothing came of the bishops' initiative, and the Foundation disbanded soon after it was announced.[260]

4.4.4 Congress on Agrarian Reform

4.4.4.1 "It is no longer a taboo subject"

El Salvador's war with Honduras also led to the convocation of a week-long Congress on Agrarian Reform in January 1970, which was organized by the Legislative Assembly of El Salvador. The Congress brought together representatives from diverse groups, which the Congress organized into four main sectors: government, nongovernment, labor, and private or entrepreneurial.[261] As Webre describes it, "Representing as it did virtually every political position and economic interest, the agrarian congress may well have been the most broadly representative political gathering in Salvadoran history."[262] Several sectors, however, were absent. Among them were not only those groups deemed communist or terrorist but also representatives from rural El Salvador. One delegate spoke of the conspicuous absence of "the Salvadoran *campesino*," without whose participation "true agrarian reform will be impossible."[263]

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[258] Of course, the bishops were well aware that the vast majority of Salvadorans were baptized Catholics, and that participants in the Foundation would come from all professions and walks of life.

[259] Ibid., 532.

[260] Monsignor Ricardo Urioste, personal communication.

In his opening speech for the Congress, the President of El Salvador at the time, General Sánchez Hernández, significantly remarks: "The theme of agrarian reform can and must be discussed and analyzed without fear. It is no longer a taboo subject as it was before…Agrarian reform is an immediate necessity, and we are going to carry it out firmly and gradually."[264] Both in this speech and before it, the fact that Sánchez Hernández would use the phrase "agrarian reform" itself is noteworthy. For, as Sánchez Hernández himself indicates, the phrase itself had been historically taboo, associated with opposition to and subversion of law and order. Mention of agrarian reform often conjured the specter of international communism, as well as 1932 and marauding hordes of *campesinos* with machetes.[265] In raising the issue of agrarian reform in this way, the Sánchez Hernández's administration effectively invited its opposition to begin to discuss publically the need for basic structural transformations to the country.[266]

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[261] In his memoir, José Inocencio Alas describes the backdrop of the Congress in terms of El Salvador's war with Honduras. But he also regards as crucial the "exhaustion" of the agro-export model established by the *Comisión Económica para América Latina* (Economic Comission for Latin America, CEPAL) at the end of the 1950s, which was supported by the Alliance for Progress. These initiatives, contends Alas, was biased toward "agro-industrial, industrial, and commercial" interests. José Inocencio Alas, *Iglesia, Tierra y Lucha Campesina: Suchitoto, El Salvador, 1968-1977* (San Salvador: Asoc. de Frailes Franciscanos OFM de C.A., 2003), 107–109.
[262] Webre, *Jose Napoleon Duarte and the Christian Democratic Party in Salvadoran Politics 1960-1972*, 126.
[263] Asamblea Legislativa, *Memoria Del Primer Congreso Nacional de Reforma Agraria*, 29.

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[264] Ibid., 37; Lamperti, *Enrique Alvarez*, 96. Lamperti quotes *La Universidad*, the newspaper of the University of El Salvador, which highlighted the significance of the event when it editorialized that "merely to talk of agrarian reform had in other times meant political persecution, exile, and prison for many citizens."
When General Sánchez Hernández entered office in 1967, he placed agrarian reform at the top of his agenda. Adolfo Bonilla Bonilla argues that the realization of the Congress is closely related to the Sánchez Hernández's priorities upon assuming office. From the beginning, Sánchez Hernández: advocated a "democratic program of agrarian reform," which proposed a "focus upon the program in its totality" and an orientation "toward a more just distribution of land and greater agricultural productivity." Bonilla Bonilla, *Tenencia de la Tierra y Reforma Agraria En El Salvador: Un Análisis Histórico*, 57–58. Sánchez Hernández's agricultural minister, Enrique Alvarez Córdova, assured that the primary goal of such reform would be increased production rather than distribution. What did this entail? Webre puts it in these terms: "It was possible the government planned to 'reform' marginally productive lands through capitalization, mechanization, and integration into the world market for agricultural exports. A transformation along these lines might please the large agricultural interests, but it would mean more unemployment among subsistence farmers and would not change the basic orientation of Salvadoran agriculture. If the government's intent, on the other hand, was to 'reform' agricultural production by redirecting it from the external market to domestic consumption requirements, then it must necessarily involve a high level of coercion and interference with private property rights." Webre, *Jose Napoleon Duarte and the Christian Democratic Party in Salvadoran Politics 1960-1972*, 123. Álvarez also presented the plan to the Salvadoran elite by saying that they had to make sacrifices to preserve the peace—that agrarian reform would be their "insurance policy" against revolution. Lamperti, *Enrique Alvarez*, 103, 117; Lindo-Fuentes and Ching, *Modernizing Minds in El Salvador*, 194–195; Montes, *El agro salvadoreño*, 152.

The archdiocese sent three delegates to participate in the Congress, among whom was a young priest named José Inocencio Alas from a parish in Suchitoto, who was chosen by Archbishop Chávez y González for his pioneering work with *campesina* organizations and associations.[267] On 8 January 1970, the fourth day of the proceedings, Alas left to meet a friend during a break from one of the sessions. Upon his return, two men requesting an interview immediately approached him in a public park, in broad daylight. The men—soon joined by several others—grabbed him and forced him into a waiting vehicle. He was beaten to the point of nearly losing consciousness. He was thrown into a car, which rapidly sped away with him facedown on the floor, the boots of his captors pressed upon his body.[268]

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[265] Webre, *Jose Napoleon Duarte and the Christian Democratic Party in Salvadoran Politics 1960-1972*, 122.

[266] For this and other reasons, the Congress was of immense historical significance. Not only did it gather, distill, and bring into public discussion longstanding concerns about agrarian reform. It laid the groundwork for future reforms, including Molina's 1976 Agrarian Transformation, as well as the reform enacted by the JRG in the wake of the October 1979 *coup d'état* Bonilla Bonilla, *Tenencia de La Tierra y Reforma Agraria En El Salvador: Un Análisis Histórico*, 2:58–59.

[267] The others were Ricardo Urioste and Juan Ramón Vega.

Archbishop Chávez y González himself, along with Bishop Arturo Rivera y Damas and Monsignor Ricardo Urioste, personally went to the office of the Minister of Defense and refused to leave until Alas was released. Alas's captors eventually did release him high in the mountains south of San Salvador—beaten, drugged, and naked. Once awake, he was able to stumble down the mountain in the dark and eventually found help. Alas's kidnapping, directly tied to his participation in the Agrarian Reform Congress and his work with *campesina* organizations and associations, was the first attack on a priest in modern El Salvador.[269]

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[268] In his memoir, Alas describes how his captors took him to the site of a security detachment. He remembers accepting his own death and the hope of resurrection. St. Paul's question to the Church at Corinth comes to mind: "Where, O death, is your victory?" (1 Cor. 15:55 NRS). He is then taken from the site, and as they drive along, Alas could hear the sound of waves—an ominous sign given that the bodies of the disappeared are often thrown into it. At one point, the drivers stop to get *pupusas*, which they proceed to eat. "For them," Alas writes, "everything is normal, they are clearly accustomed to this kind of work." All the while, his captors were communicating with others on radios. Eventually, they received orders to let him go. In his memoir, he claims that his abductors were paramilitary or undercover soldiers under the command of the head of the National Guard, "Chele" Madrano, who also founded ORDEN. Alas recounts the whole episode in Alas, *Iglesia, tierra y lucha campesina*, 114–117.

[269] For accounts of the kidnapping, cf. Ibid., 114–131; Lamperti, *Enrique Alvarez*, 98; Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador: From Civil Strife to Civil Peace*, 97–98.

4.4.4.2 “The essential thing is not to hinder the activity of free enterprise”

Even before the inauguration of the Agrarian Reform Congress the *Instituto Salvadoreño de Estudios Sociales y Ecónomico* (Salvadoran Institute of Social and Economic Studies, ISESE), which represented important interest groups, charged that agrarian reform itself was “socialist,” that those involved in agriculture were in the best position to know and understand the problems that beset it, and that agricultural interests should therefore have the most votes during the Congress.[270]

Similar concerned marked the opening proceedings, with questions raised by the representatives of the business sector about procedural matters. Should all participating groups have equal votes? Would the resulting resolutions and recommendations be truly representative of all of El Salvador? Given the haste with which the Congress was convoked and the lack of adequate time for preparation, should the Congress produce binding resolutions or simply be a forum for discussion?[271] When these matters were not resolved, the private or entrepreneurial sector withdrew from the Congress after the first day, and their supporters took to the media to criticize the Congress and its work.[272]

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[270] Webre, *Jose Napoleon Duarte and the Christian Democratic Party in Salvadoran Politics 1960-1972*, 127, 166.

[271] Asamblea Legislativa, *Memoria del Primer Congreso Nacional de Reforma Agraria*, 27–28; Lindo-Fuentes and Ching, *Modernizing Minds in El Salvador*, 197; Alas, *Iglesia, Tierra y Lucha Campesina*, 109–110.

But before they withdrew, these representatives offered an important window into their reasoning, specifically their understanding of the common good and how best to secure it. Often, their position is often articulated in terms like those of Roberto Morozzo della Rocca, who describes the tendency among the Salvadoran oligarchy to consider the country as their own private property. "Their nationalism," Morozzo writes, "was not based in the sense of belonging but in the sense of possession."[273] Along similar lines, we have also ecountered Pius XI's criticism in *Quadragesimo anno* of Catholics who "in their greed for gain" attempt to hide their "unjust exactions" under the cover of the faith (§125). Such characterizations are true as far as they go. But they can also distance these representatives and what they stood for from the arguments they themselves tended to make—arguments that have a very contemporary feel to them. At least on their own self-articulation, what differentiates them is not that they seek to possess El Salvador as their property or that they are greedy. What differentiates them is a competing vision of the common good. Representatives of the business sector, for instance, did not dispute the fact that the condition of the *campesinado* needed improvement. They disputed whether agrarian reform would achieve this goal or would simply make matters worse.[274]

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[272] Lindo-Fuentes and Ching, *Modernizing Minds in El Salvador*, 198. In his memoir, Alas says that when he went home to visit his mother during the Congress, she told him that the commentaries she was hearing over the radio made her fear for him. Alas describes the situation this way: "The oligarchy was very preoccupied and as paying thousands and thousands of *colones* to popular media to counter the work of the Congress." Alas, *Iglesia, tierra y lucha campesina*, 113.
[273] Morozzo Della Rocca, *Primero Dios*, 16.

These concerns clearly emerge in the inaugural speech of Antonio Rodríguez Porth, the spokesperson for the business sector. Porth's intervention epitomizes the thinkning embraced by El Salvador's elite, who would continue to resist and work to prevent agrarian reform.[275] In his intervention, Porth articulates a vision of technological development and progress that is a consequence of "the eternal values of liberty." But in contraposition to this vision, there have lately arisen violent and mystical revolutionary movements.[276] Though Porth does not say so explicitly, the insinuation is that supporters and sympathizers with such reform support and sympathize with these movements. Moreover, according to Porth, agrarian reform would be "impossible to achieve without coercive and arbitrary acts by the state, with grave consequences for the national economy and for all Salvadorans."[277] Against the view that the conditions of the *campesinado* can be adequately addressed by way of an agrarian reform, Porth's vision of development and progress opposes all forms of "interventionism."[278] He and the business sector resist intervention not out of concern for their own private good or because they want to enrich themselves at the expense of others. They resist intervention because it contravenes the common good as they understand it. They resist it because they think that the improvement of the conditions of the *campesinado* "can only be achieved through the technification of production, which naturally would increase the productivity and the incomes of individual workers."[279]

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[274] See Asamblea Legislativa, *Memoria Del Primer Congreso Nacional de Reforma Agraria*, 65; Lindo-Fuentes and Ching, *Modernizing Minds in El Salvador*, 197–198.

[275] In this respect, Porth's view is very similar to that of Napoleón Viera Altamirano, which we examined briefly in chapter one. Viera Altamirano greatly feared the spread of communism in El Salvador—a threat he saw everywhere—which he tended to conflate with any attempt at social reform. He thought that only the unfettered operation free markets, which would lead to economic growth, could address El Salvador's problems. Agrarian reform in particular was a lightning rod for his ire. He wrote, for instance, that John F. Kennedy was a decent president until he proposed agrarian reform as part of the Alliance for Progress, at which point he became an ignoramus arguing for the demise of entrepreneurship in El Salvador. Lindo-Fuentes and Ching, *Modernizing Minds in El Salvador*, 68, cf. 53–55, 66–68.

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[276] Ibid., 26-27.

[277] Ibid., 28

[278] A word of clarification on Salvadoran political terminology: In El Salvador, Porth is a liberal. Salvadoran liberals characteristically believe that the economy should be left to itself, appealing to classic *laissez-faire* doctrines. The state's role should be limited to the defense of liberty, which is almost always understood in terms of the defense of absolute property rights. Salvadoran liberals oppose unions and measures like agrarian reform on the grounds that they are artificial and damaging interventions in the smooth functioning of the economy. As Webre points out, Salvadoran liberals tend to be political democrats in that they favor freedom of speech and press, the rule of law, the separation of powers, checks and balances, and so on. Though Salvadoran liberals call themselves liberals, in the U.S. they would be called conservatives. Then, there are those who are called traditionalist, because they look to El Salvador's Hispanic, Catholic heritage. They tend to be less concerned with democracy and more concerned about the role of the Church in Salvadoran society. As Webre points out, liberals and traditionalists, despite their differences, tend to agree on the fragility of Salvadoran society and its susceptibility to the contagion of communism. In contrast, those groups characteristically supportive of social and economic agrarian reform tend to be called progressives. It is important to note that progressives are not always democrats. In El Salvador, for instance, some of the major proponents of progressive ideas, including agrarian reform, have been military officers. Opposition to these ideas most often comes

Porth freely admits that this would "displace the workers from the countryside."[280] But the priority must be placed upon production. Leaving property arrangements as they are and continuing to ensure production is the real act of beneficence to the Salvadoran people. Leaving landowners to cultivate their own lands and pursue their private good will in the end promote the common good—the common good understood as the aggregate of private good. Given the right conditions, production fuels a growing economy, and a growing economy would simply absorb the displaced workers into other activities, ameliorating any harm done in the process.[281] "In

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from Salvadoran liberals. Webre, *Jose Napoleon Duarte and the Christian Democratic Party in Salvadoran Politics 1960-1972*, xi–xii.

[279] Asamblea Legislativa, *Memoria Del Primer Congreso Nacional de Reforma Agraria*, 28.

[280] Ibid.

[281] Ibid.

a well-ordered economic regime," Porth concludes, "the essential thing for combating misery is therefore not to hinder the activity of free enterprise" but to promote its growth and development.[282] In contrast, all interventionism impedes economic growth and so necessarily generates a misery that "harms above all the weaker economic classes."[283]

For those like Porth, agrarian reform represents an attack on the business sector and the stable and orderly property arrangements that make its work possible. The challenge of the position can be posed as a question: what benefit could come from attacking the business sector—those who are the engine of the Salvadoran economy and who generate jobs? Ignacio Ellacuría characterizes this view as the "oligarchic principle." The basic notion is that favoring the most privileged of El Salvador is *ipso facto* to favor everyone; promoting their interests is the best way to promote the common good.[284] The common good is therefore not best served by the communal ownership of land or by trying to, in Leo XIII's words, enable working people to obtain "a share in the land"—giving them the security and stability to build houses and inhabit them, plant seed and reap the harvest. Rather, the common good of the Salvadoran people is promoted when the *hacienda* owners use the nation's land in ways that make it produce, generate growth, and provide employment.

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[282] Ibid.
[283] Ibid.
[284] Ignacio Ellacuría, "A Sus órdenes, Mi Capital," *Estudios Centroamericanos* 337 (1976): 639.

What Ellacuría identifies as the oligarchic principle is simply the logic of economic liberalism, namely, that the diffusion of the good happens without good people, who are themselves involved in the diffusion. It happens indirectly, resulting from self-interested action, such as in Adam Smith's "invisible hand," as an aggregation of the private good. Friedrich Hayek uses the term "catallaxy" to underscore the spontaneous emergence of order in the absence of beneficence to describe how different individual interests, selfish and otherwise, redound to the good of others.[285]

On Porth's view, expropriation is theft. The rationale for opposition to agrarian reform was, as Lindo-Fuentes and Ching write, that that it "takes away wealth from those people who rightfully earned it"—an appeal that "would emerge as the most basic and fundamental line of rhetorical defense for the conservative right. They would use it to oppose land reform and any other policy that they could portray as being redistributive."[286] What is crucial to see, however, is that, on this view, agrarian reform is no ordinary or innocuous act of theft. Its effects are particularly pernicious and so must be resisted, even by violence if necessary. In generating fear, uncertainty, and lack of incentive to work and invest, agrarian reform plunges a knife into the heart of beneficence itself.

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[285] F. A. Hayek, *Law, Legislation and Liberty, Volume 2: The Mirage of Social Justice* (University of Chicago Press, 2012), 109–110, 115. Cf. Hittinger, "Imago Dei in Catholic Theology," 60.

[286] Lindo-Fuentes and Ching, *Modernizing Minds in El Salvador*, 67.

4.4.4.3 "A massive expropriation of land in favor of the common good"

After the departure of the delegates of the business sector, those who remained reached broad consensus concerning the need for agrarian reform. While there were disagreements, especially about the scale of such a reform, most delegates thought the existing structure of land tenure "deprives the great majority from the goods that are indispensable for a dignified human life"—goods to which all have a claim, which is "anterior" to other rights secured by positive law.[287]

Moreover, it is important to point out that agricultural productivity was not the exclusive concern of those like Porth. All delegates appeal to its importance. The issue, then, is not productivity versus unproductivity. It is how to assess the good of productivity in relation to other goods, like a more just distribution of land, along with whether such a distribution will necessarily lead to declines in productivity. "The argument about productivity," as Ellacuría writes elsewhere, "seems to ignore the fact that people who live and die cultivating the soil know how to make it produce."[288]

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[287] Asamblea Legislativa, *Memoria Del Primer Congreso Nacional de Reforma Agraria*, 423.

The general conclusions and recommendations of the Congress cite the statement from *Populorum progressio* that: "If certain landed estates impede the general prosperity because they are extensive, unused or poorly used, or because they bring hardship to peoples or are detrimental to the interests of the country, the common good sometimes demands their expropriation" (§25). They go on to affirm that all of these conditions clearly exist in El Salvador, and nothing short of "a massive expropriation of land on the part of the state in favor of the common good" is required.[289]

These delegates are clearly working with a different conception of the common good than Porth. Their contention is that the failure to expropriate land in order to facilitate access to it only further erodes the common good. For them, unlike for Porth, the common good is not the result from self-interested action, emerging spontaneously in the absence of beneficence. Rather, the common good can only be shared. Moreover, it must be acknowledged, defended, and participated in, which means that the diffusion of the good requires good people and societies that are involved in the diffusion. What differentiates their conception from Porth's is precisely this self-involving character of the diffusion of the good. Moreover, the delegates argue that the state has a unique responsibility in addressing the abuse of property undermining the common good of the Salvadoran people.[290] Their position is similar to that of Pope Leo XIII in *Rerum novarum*, namely, the state "should favor ownership, and its policy should be to induce as many as possible of the people to become owners" (§46).

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[288] Ignacio Ellacuría, *Veinte Años de Historia En El Salvador (1969-1989). Escritos Políticos*, vol. I (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1992), 574, cf. 563–564.
[289] Asamblea Legislativa, *Memoria Del Primer Congreso Nacional de Reforma Agraria*, 423.

The conclusions and recommendations of the Congress are too extensive and detailed to examine at any length here. But one theme that must be underscored is the problems besetting rural workers and the importance of popular participation in any process of agrarian reform. *Campesina* organizations and associations, the delegates state, have been and continue to be "the object of systematic opposition on the part of landowners and other sectors of private business."[291]

Opposition takes various forms, from legal measures that prevent the formation of unions among rural workers, to the outright intimidation that landowners are able to maintain through their ties to the military and paramilitary organizations.[292] *Campesino* leaders and their families are constantly monitored and threatened. Cooperatives are the only organization allowed to exist in the countryside because of the legal protections afforded them. But cooperatives are not enough, as far as the delegates are concerned, maintaining that *campesinos* and rural workers must be able to associate and form "unions, cooperatives, and cooperative organizations of whatever type."[293] Indeed, the ability to do so is "the indispensable condition for the realization and functioning of a program of true agrarian reform."[294] The delegates therefore urge the passage of legislation that promotes "the unrestricted organization of *campesinos* and agricultural workers."[295]

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[290] Ibid. On the influence of the Church's social doctrine on the Congress, cf. Juan Ramón Vega, "Participación de la Iglesia en el Congreso de Reforma Agraria," *Unitas* 7 no. 23 (1970).
[291] Asamblea Legislativa, *Memoria Del Primer Congreso Nacional de Reforma Agraria*, 427.
[292] Ibid.

Generally speaking, the representatives of the Church hold to a similar position I have been trying to articulate in the two previous chapters, so I will only comment briefly upon it here.[296] In their initial intervention, they attempt to convey that the present regime of land tenure does not simply affect *campesinos* alone. All Salvadorans suffer it. The life of El Salvador as a whole is implicated.[297] They also repeatedly note their presence at the Congress as pastors, not as technicians. They do not offer specific plans or proposals. “Instead, we want to lay out before technicians some of the doctrinal principles that, according to the social doctrine of the Church, one must take into consideration in the search for solutions to the agrarian crisis.”[298] In their interventions, they lean heavily upon scripture and many of the other sources we have been examining from the Church’s social doctrine, assuming that the “technicians” and other specialists present at the Congress are lay members of the Church themselves, and that they are amenable to her guidance on these matters.

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[293] Ibid.
[294] Ibid.
[295] Ibid.
[296] Their interventions can be found in Ibid., 121–128, 173–179.
[297] Ibid., 105.

One of their interventions, “On the Injustice of the Present form of Land Tenure” offers a brief catechesis on creation. It contends that the goods of creation are for all people, whose ability to access and make use of these gifts is a reality more fundamental than the property rights secured by positive law. Property rights derive from and exist to promote common use and access where it is being prevented.[299] Expropriation is one tool in this regard—to be employed, admittedly, only in certain and extreme conditions.[300] But, in their judgment, the situation in El Salvador clearly meets them.

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[298] Ibid., 173.

[299] On this point, cf. the intervention of the Jesuit priest Ignacio Ellacuría. Ibid., 394–395.

[300] Ibid., 121–128. Elsewhere, they note the shift between *Gaudium et spes* and *Populorum progressio* in the criteria for expropriation. In *Gaudium et spes* the problem with the *latifundia* is insufficient or lack of cultivation. But what begins to emerge in *Populorum progressio* and beyond is the criteria for expropriation expands to include the

"We categorically affirm," they write, "that in our country there are the necessary conditions that legitimate… massive expropriation in favor of the common good."[301] Their present reality is one in which an "individualistic conception of life and created goods has been able to find shelter in Salvadoran law, in the right to property understood as an absolute right, which has only served to maintain the actual state of things."[302] These laws obstruct the ability of many Salvadorans to make use of and access land, which is why, they think, new laws are needed.[303]

Later, in another intervention, "Toward a Concept of Agrarian Reform," they delve deeper into the social sense or social function of property, trying to show its incompatibility with prevalent understandings of private property in El Salvador. They attend closely to the homology between property and anthropology, noting "the distinct forms of property that have been known throughout the history of humankind have obeyed distinct conceptions of the human person." As an example, they cite the French Revolution and its association with an understanding of the person that prioritizes

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extensiveness of the landholding, the misery of the population, and the damage to the interests of the country. Ibid., 178–179.

[301] Asamblea Legislativa, *Memoria Del Primer Congreso Nacional de Reforma Agraria*, 128, 176–177.

[302] Ibid., 127.

[303] Asamblea Legislativa, *Memoria Del Primer Congreso Nacional de Reforma Agraria*, 125.

rights to the neglect of duties, from which arises a correlative understanding of property that fails to attend to social function.[304]

The authors claim that the Church's social teaching on agrarian reform advocates no particular position on agrarian reform, though they do not elaborate upon this claim.[305] Instead, what they emphasize about Church teaching is the comprehensiveness of its vision, the way in which it regards agrarian reform as one reform among others, the whole purpose of which is to permit the excluded "to participate more fully in economic-social life."[306]

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[304] Ibid., 175.

[305] Ibid., 178-179. They do differentiate between three dominant approaches to agrarian reform, which they call productionist, redistributionist, and collectivist, respectively. Productionist agrarian reform is characterized by a vision of the family-owned farm, which would stimulate production and provide the basis for a stable democracy. The redistributionist approach centers upon redistributive measures, which aim to transfer land and income from a landowning minority to the *campesino* majority. Such an approach is often inflected by a sense of class conflict and willingly embraces violence in pursuit of its primary end: the destruction of the abusive class. The Mexican (1910-1920) and Bolivian (1952) agrarian reforms are cited as examples. The final approach mentioned is collectivist, which similarly seeks to overthrow a landowning minority. What differentiates it from redistributionist reform is that it resists the redistribution of land to *campesinos* out of opposition to private property as such, preferring centralized production and commercialization. The authors present the redistributionist kind of agrarian reform as potentially compatible either with a vision of agriculture based in family farms or one in which production is collectivized in some manner. According to the authors of the intervention, the social doctrine of the Church does not endorse any of these particular approaches, and her aims in promoting agrarian reform differ from them.

The authors also note, for instance, the way Church teaching emphasizes agricultural production. But Church teaching, they continue, emphasizes goods besides production, which can only be promoted by "the redistribution of land, and above all, by the redistribution of economic, social, and political power."[307] These various redistributions are internally related to one another. Though not a representative of the Church but the UCA, Ignacio Ellacuría articulates this point well when he says that "the argument that we have continued to make on behalf of the distribution of land is that if a few retain great power over land, they retain not only great economic power but great social and political power as well." Meanwhile, "the immense majority of the people of this country, to whom this social and political power belongs, cannot defend it because they lack sufficient resources to do so…because they lack land."[308] Consequently, the representatives of the Church continue, when the Church demands the redistribution of property through tools like agrarian reform, her aim is the redistribution of precisely this power,[309] so that the *campesinado* is no longer crushed and marginalized but lifted up from the dust—so the distances between people can begin to be surmounted.[310]

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[306] Asamblea Legislativa, *Memoria Del Primer Congreso Nacional de Reforma Agraria*, 174.
[307] Ibid.
[308] Ibid., 351.

All of this clearly requires the protection and promotion of *campesina* organizations and associations. Such organizations and associations are necessary for the achievement of true agrarian reform and the improvement of living and working conditions. Without the protection and power these organizations and associations provide, it will be impossible for the *campesinado* to arise from "social prostration and marginality."[311]

4.4.5 Beyond the Agrarian Reform Congress

4.4.5.1 Zapotitán Valley

Despite Sánchez Hernández's desire that agrarian reform be discussed without fear of retaliation, the kidnapping of Alas was an important indication that there would be retaliation—a retaliation that would continue to strengthen as the decade progressed.

Less than a year after the Agrarian Reform Congress, in November 1970, the Legislative Assembly passed agrarian reform legislation that targeted a 4580-hectare area in southwestern El Salvador called the Zapotitán Valley. Decades prior, in the

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[309] Ibid., 176.
[310] Ibid., 178.
[311] Ibid., 179.

1930s, the Salvadoran government under the auspices of Mejoramiento Social had purchased land there, and starting in 1943, began to distribute parcels to *campesina* households. For a variety of reasons, these farms failed, and larger landowners purchased the land. The project became a symbol of the problems with a reform centered solely upon the distribution of land.[312] By 1970, a single person, Miguel Dueñas, possessed more than a third of the land—in many ways a microcosm of the country as a whole.[313]

Though the reform proposed by the Legislative Assembly was modest, it was feared as a harbinger of the future, initiating on a small, regional scale what would later be attempted nation-wide.[314] Landowners were able to defeat the legislation by taking advantage of an important provision in it, which placed limits on the size of landholdings. According to this provision, no person or entity could possess more than 50 hectares of land.[315] Those who held large tracts of the Zapotitán Valley therefore simply proceeded to carve them up into small parcels, distributing them among family and friends.[316]

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[312] Browning, *El Salvador*, 277–280; Lamperti, *Enrique Alvarez*, 106–107; "Ley de Avenamiento Y Riego," *Estudios Centroamericanos* 25, no. 265–66 (1970): 529–531.
[313] Ibid.
[314] Lindo-Fuentes and Ching, *Modernizing Minds in El Salvador*, 200.
[315] Lamperti, *Enrique Alvarez*, 106–107.

4.4.5.2 “*Campesinos* are not Pariahs”

During this time, Romero was attentive to what was transpiring in the countryside, and he drew upon the Church’s social doctrine to address it. The pages of *Orientación*, the diocesan newspaper he edited, reported upon abuses suffered.[317] In a 1971 article entitled “*Campesinos* are not Pariahs,” Romero—who at this point was also auxiliary bishop of the archdiocese of San Salvador—writes critically in reference to that “sector of farmers” and agricultural interest groups who oppose the ability of *campesinos* to associate and organize in order “to defend their interests and fight to improve their living and working conditions.” Romero opposes the argument, frequently made by large landowners and agricultural interest groups, that “agriculture cannot bear the burden” of permitting unions, extending social benefits, and raising “starvation wages” for agricultural workers. There is no reason whatsoever, Romero argues, that agriculture cannot support these changes.[318]

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[316] What transpired is recounted in“La Congelación de Tierras y la Reforma Agraria,” *Estudios Centroamericanos* 34, no. 374 (1979): 1079–1081.
[317] Morozzo Della Rocca, *Primero Dios*, 129.

Elsewhere, Romero draws on the sources we examined in the previous chapter to argue that "workers are not commodities, subject to the fluctuations of the economy like other commodities, but human persons, and it is for the mere fact of being so that they have a claim to a just wage."[319] He frequently defends himself against the charge of communism for defending such positions.[320]

In 1974, Romero was appointed bishop of the diocese of Santiago de María, a poor, rural area in eastern El Salvador. Even though Romero came from a very humble background himself, the impoverishment of the diocese moved him tremendously. The coffee harvest, from November to March, was the coldest time of the year. People from all over El Salvador arrived in Santiago de María to "cut" or harvest coffee. Because workers had nowhere to sleep, they typically gathered next to each other by the sides of the road to stay warm. Romero began opening the buildings of the diocese to offer shelter. He also started setting up afternoon meals, often eating with them.[321] According to Morozzo, Romero became increasingly aware that local landowners, many of them active Church members, systematically violated the wage laws, and he petitioned justice in dealings with their workers.[322]

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[318] Óscar A. Romero, "Los *Campesinos* No Son Parias," *Orientación*, no. 1226 (1971). Morozzo writes that exclusion and exploitation of *campesinos* "became a leitmotif in his statements." Roberto Morozzo della Rocca, *Oscar Romero: Prophet of Hope* (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 2015), 44.

[319] Óscar A. Romero, "Soluciones Humanas."

[320] Cf. Óscar A. Romero, "Defendiendo Intereses," *Orientación*, no. 1247 (1971); Óscar A. Romero, "La Violencia Desatada," *Orientación*, no. 1237 (1971).

In his 1975 pastoral letter, Romero denounces "the social, economic, and political inequality in which our people live" as an obstacle to the communion of which the Church is and seeks to be an even more evident sign. "My words as your pastor would not be complete," Romero continues, "if they made no reference to the alarming situation in which the Church must live and move in this region of the country, a region so rich in natural gifts but groaning, as Saint Paul would say, 'beneath the slavery of corruption and awaiting the glorious liberty of the children of God' (Rom 8:21)."[323]

While Romero supported agrarian reform, he had doubts about certain approaches to it, specifically, about what he referred to as "parcelization"—the process of partitioning land into small parcels. He associates parcelization with the mere distribution of land, which he thinks inadequate for achieving what agrarian reform aims at.

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[321] Morozzo Della Rocca, *Primero Dios*, 146.
[322] Ibid.; Brockman, *Romero*, 59; Óscar A Romero, "'Cortadores' y 'Ayudas,'" *El Apóstol*, no. 62 (1971).
[323] *El Espíritu Santo en la Iglesia*, Carta Pastoral de Monseñor Óscar Arnulfo Romero Galdámez Obispo de Santiago de María, 18 de mayo de 1975, Fiesta de Pentecostés.

We see these concerns surface in his 1974 article aptly titled, "Rural Parcelization, the Great Enemy of Agrarian Reform." Indeed, one of Romero's main problems with parcelization has to do with its abuse by "the powerful that are at work in trying to impede agrarian reform." Romero comments upon how, often through the process of parcelization, those who neither need nor have the skills to cultivate land often acquire it. Parcelization—like what occurred in the Zapotitán Valley—stands for him as a symbol of the "negation of true agrarian reform."

Romero's concerns, however, run deeper than the abuse of the process of parcelization. He worries about, as he puts it, "leaving *latifundia* only to enter into *minifundia*." In the background here is the homology between property and anthropology, and the correlation of different forms of property with different conceptions of the human person. In this case, Romero associates parcelization with individualism, which he thinks is no solution to El Salvador's problems. Instead of parcelization, Romero therefore favors agrarian reform centered upon the organization of producers' cooperatives. Through producers' cooperatives, workers would truly share in the land of El Salvador. Agrarian reform, at least as Romero sees it in this article, “is not a matter of dividing the land but dividing ownership of it”[324]—an important distinction often neglected.[325]

4.4.5.3 Polarization & Repression

As Morozzo points out, over the course of the decade, there were ongoing discussions among the Salvadoran bishops regarding the best measures to resolve the agrarian crisis. Romero’s proposal, which favored cooperatives, was one of the various on the table. As we have seen, the promotion of agricultural cooperatives was a longstanding priority of Archbishop Chávez y González. But by no means was there agreement among the bishops on this matter. According to Morozzo, some preferred that the problem be left to the government. Others favored the Church's active involvement.[326]

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[324] Óscar A Romero, “Parcelaciones Rurales, un Gran Enemigo de Reforma Agraria,” *Orientación*, March 31, 1974; Óscar A Romero, “Reformas Estructurales y Salvación,” *Orientación*, October 28, 1973.

[325] It is rare for Romero to weigh in on policy details in this way. As archbishop, for instance, he consistently refers to himself as a pastor rather than as a technician. But the proposals in this article are modeled upon those of the bishops of Latin America that gathered in Medellín, Colombia in 1968. The bishops write of the need for an agrarian reform that amounts to more than a “mere distribution of land.” In discussing it they speak of “the organization of campesinos in effective intermediate organizations, principally in cooperatives.” See Medellín in Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano, *Río de Janeiro, Medellín, Puebla, Santo Domingo,* “Justicia,” §14.

During the 1970s, El Salvador and Salvadoran politics grew increasingly polarized. On the one side, security forces were stepping up the repression against all those suspected of subversion. Within a year—between November 1974 and December 1975—there were four different massacres by security forces, which targeted *campesinos* and agricultural workers among others.[327] These massacres were a new development, indicating the state's increasing willingness to unleash new levels of violence upon the Salvadoran people.[328]

Consider what happened in La Cayetana in San Vicente. After a group of organized *campesinos* tried through legal channels to solicit land to rent and were ignored by authorities, they began to occupy lands near the small village of La Cayetana when the rains came in May 1974. Their purpose in doing so, as they put it, was to avoid "yet another year of hunger for our families." The occupation became national news. Articles appeared in accusing priests of inciting them and encouraging other similar occupations elsewhere. On the 25 of July, the leader of the group was found dead—shot through the head. On 29 November, dozens of the National Guard entered La Cayetana shooting indiscriminately, killing six *campesinos* and disappearing thirteen others.[329]

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[326] James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: Why Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988). Morozzo is drawing on ACTA CEDES no. 64, 10 septiembre 1969, ADSS. Unfortunately, during my research stint in the archdiocesan archives, the ACTA CEDES were closed to the public, so I could not consult these myself.

[327] Almeida, *Waves of Protest*, 124.

[328] Besides those examined there, there was another massacre on 30 July 1975, the National Guard opened fire upon a peaceful protest of university and high school students in San Salvador, killing thirty-seven of them. And finally, in December 1975, the National Guard once again opened fire on a protest, this time on hundreds of striking farm working demanding minimum wage on a sugar cane estate in Santa Barbara, killing two and injuring many others. Ibid., 124.

One of these massacres occurred in the diocese of Santiago de María, while Romero was serving there as bishop. In June 1975, just a month after he issued his pastoral letter, forty soldiers, along with members of the paramilitary group ORDEN, entered the hamlet Tres Calles in Usulután in the early hours of the morning. They dragged the victims from their houses, and proceed to shoot them with machine guns and hack them with machetes. The perpetrators then proceeded to ransack the houses of the victims in search of weapons. Apparently, the purpose of the raid was to intimidate and terrorize those who had been involved in a protest about the high prices of basic staples and who had blocked the coastal highway.[330]

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[329] For a much more detailed narration of the events, cf. the account of the local priest, Father David Rodríguez, quoted in Vega, *Las Comunidades de Base en América Central: Estudio Sociológico*, 99–101, 124–125.

[330] For Romero's account of what he witnessed, cf. Díez and Macho, *En Santiago de Maria me tope con la Miseria*. Cf. also Morozzo Della Rocca, *Primero Dios*, 147; Brockman,

The Partido de Conciliación Nacional—the party in power—rebuffed attempts to investigate the massacres. It maintained control of the government through fraudulent elections both in 1972 and 1976, which also served to channel the growing discontent in other, non-electoral directions.[331] The Salvadoran state not only closed the electoral system to the voice of opposition. It tried to stamp out those voices altogether.[332]

State repression only served to intensify and radicalize the unrest, conjuring an armed opposition. Already in the early 1970s, a revolutionary movement had begun to take shape.[333] Its actions involved, among other things, bombings, occupying radio stations, and stealing weapons.[334] There were also several high-profile cases of kidnapping and murder of members of the government and the Salvadoran elite.[335] It

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Romero, 54; Almeida, *Waves of Protest: Popular Struggle in El Salvador, 1925-2005*, 124–125. Romero consoled the victims and said mass for the families. He also intervened with the local Guardia commander, who apparently dismissed Romero's concerns, labeling the victims delinquents. Romero likewise contacted then-president Molina. He also wrote a memorandum to his fellow bishops. Thomas Greenan, *El Pensamiento Teológico-Pastoral en las Homilías de Monseñor Romero* (San Salvador: Publicaciones del Arzobispado de San Salvador, 1998), 22–23.

[331] Almeida, *Waves of Protest: Popular Struggle in El Salvador, 1925-2005*, 104, 136.

[332] Ibid.

[333] Ibid., 144–148; Morozzo Della Rocca, *Primero Dios*, 20.

[334] Almeida, *Waves of Protest: Popular Struggle in El Salvador, 1925-2005*, 144.

[335] Lindo-Fuentes and Ching, *Modernizing Minds in El Salvador*, 224; Webre, *Jose Napoleon Duarte and the Christian Democratic Party in Salvadoran Politics 1960-1972*, 198.

was typical for revolutionaries to have at one time been members of groups like FECCAS or of an ecclesial base community.[336] Indeed, the relationship between the so-called popular organizations (*organizaciones populares*) and their popular movement (*movimiento popular*), on the one hand, and the revolutionary movement, on the other, grew increasingly porous. "Osmosis" existed between these groups and their respective leaderships, comprising, in effect, a "two-way opposition," with popular organizations oftentimes having counterparts among the armed (and arming) opposition.[337] Almeida refers to the period between 1972-1981 as one of "mobilization by intimidation."[338] The state's efforts to repress and dismantle organizations and associations deemed suspect galvanized an armed opposition to the state, which increasingly consolidated around the view that the only way forward was a military strategy. Many who in the 1960s and early 1970s were clamoring for reform by the mid-1970s were clamoring for revolution.[339]

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[336] Morozzo Della Rocca, *Primero Dios*, 25–37; Almeida, *Waves of Protest: Popular Struggle in El Salvador, 1925-2005*, 132–134.
[337] Morozzo Della Rocca, *Primero Dios*; Almeida, *Waves of Protest: Popular Struggle in El Salvador, 1925-2005*, 144–148. When the various guerilla groups consolidated into the Frente Farabundo Martí de Liberación Nacional in October 1980, the popular movement and the revolutionary movement became one.
[338] Almeida, *Waves of Protest*, 103, 115–116, 126–127.
[339] Ibid., 126-127.

4.4.6 Agrarian Transformation

It is within this context that Colonel Arturo Armando Molino's PCN initiated its last attempt at reform before being removed from office in the October 1979 coup. Significantly, Molina referred to the project as an "agrarian transformation"—an indication that to speak of agrarian reform had once again become suspect. "We do not use the term agrarian reform," he explained, "because that is communist terminology."[340] The story surrounding Molina's agrarian transformation is pivotal for understanding the conditions Romero inherited as archbishop and why the Church—or at least certain segments of the Church—came under attack.[341]

Molina first enacted a law in 1974 to provide for the forced rental, and in some cases, the expropriation, of idle or insufficiently used lands.[342] Later, in June 1975, his government established the Instituto Salvadoreno de Transformacion Agraria, whose first project targeted 59,000 hectares of costal, cotton land Usulután-San Miguel, in eastern El Salvador.[343] The “agrarian transformation zone” would serve as the initial site for the project, which would gradually scale-up to encompass the whole nation.[344] The targeted land would be divided among 12,000 households, and current owners would be indemnified.[345]

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[340] Teresa Whitfield, *Paying the Price: Ignacio Ellacuría and the Murdered Jesuits of El Salvador* (Temple University Press, 1994), 67.

[341] For analysis of the entire agrarian transformation, cf. "De La Guerra a La Paz," *Estudios Centroamericanos* 31, no. 335–36 (1976).

[342] Webre, *Jose Napoleon Duarte and the Christian Democratic Party in Salvadoran Politics 1960-1972*, 193.

The diocese of Santiago de María, where Romero served as bishop, was one of the areas targeted by the project. In response, Romero began to organize study circles, calling in experts to give presentations. Among them was Rubén Zamora, who recalls Romero “always in the front row, taking notes like a very attentive student.”[346]

In one sense, what happened with the agrarian transformation project epitomized the longstanding conflict between the government and the Salvadoran elite that we have been examining in this chapter. Groups like the *Frente Agrario de la Región Oriental* (Agrarian Front of the Eastern Region, FARO) formed. Together with the *Asociación Nacional de la Empresa Privada* (National Association of Private Enterprise, ANEP) and its twenty-eight member associations, along with other groups from the agricultural, industrial, commercial, and financial sectors, the coalition mounted an organized assault against the project and successfully blocked its implementation.[347]

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[343] Feasibility studies, as well as part of the money to pay for the expropriation came from USAID. Cf. Cardenal, *Historia de una Esperanza: La Vida de Rutilio Grande*, 509; Lindo-Fuentes and Ching, *Modernizing Minds in El Salvador*, 223.

[344] Cardenal, *Historia de una Esperanza: La Vida de Rutilio Grande*, 509–510; Bonilla Bonilla, *Tenencia de La Tierra y Reforma Agraria En El Salvador: Un Análisis Histórico*, 87.

[345] Cardenal, *Historia de Una Esperanza: La Vida de Rutilio Grande*, 509. According to Montes, the intended beneficiaries of the project were excluded from its organization and implementation altogether. Cf. Montes, *El agro salvadoreño*. As we saw in the previous chapter, agrarian reform emerges in the Church’s social doctrine as an outworking of subsidiarity. Assistance comes from the state in the form of an expropriation and redistribution of land on behalf of landless or land-poor families—an assistance given in order to preserve and build up the recipient societies and the goods they hold in common, never to undermine or destroy them. How is this possible, Montes asks, if the intended beneficiaries are not involved in the process? Romero shares similar concerns.

[346] Quoted in Morozzo Della Rocca, *Primero Dios*, 146

But this conflict was different than those that had come before. As the Jesuit sociologist Segundo Montes observes, the fight over the project constituted a new and especially hostile opposition to agrarian reform, which construed any attempt at it as a communist plot against private property. The fight over the project gathered the disparate "factions and sectors of the dominant class" into one, unifying them in their fight to defeat it.[348] As Montes writes, "This is how the dominant class became one—organizing itself, fighting, and eventually defeating the project under the banner of defending unrestricted private property."[349] The defense of absolute private property was the main glue holding the coalition together.[350]

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[347] Montes, *El agro salvadoreño*, 153-155.
[348] Ibid., 153.
[349] Ibid.
[350] Ibid., 173.

The coalition started a massive media campaign—"without precedent in the political history of El Salvador," according to Ellacuría[351]—flooding newspapers, radio, and television with opposition to the project, constantly referring to it as communistic and explicitly alluding to the possibility of an uprising similar to that of 1932.[352] As we will examine below, paid advertisements, articles, and news items identified parts of the Church and certain priests as the source of the subversion.[353] Larger landholders in the project area tied up the courts with litigation and began to transfer capital out of the country. Indeed, capital flight became such a problem that it led to a devaluation of the currency and forced Molina to meet with the opposition. The result was the practical defeat of the legislation: previously targeted lands were exempted, the choice of lands for expropriation were left to the discretion of the landowners, and landowners own proposals for indemnification were accepted.[354]

In a homily several years after the fact, Romero describes what happened as the capacity of the economically powerful of El Salvador "to move heaven and earth to impede a small breath of air to the impoverished."[355] For his part, Ellacuría describes the result this way: "Capital won; the dominant class won; the state lost. The state simply said, 'at your service, my Capital.'"[356] The transformation offered the government the opportunity to be something more than "a pure mechanical reflex of private capital." "It could have stopped being the guardian of oligarchic interests in order to become the promoter of the interests of the oppressed, attempting a real change in the structure of land tenancy. It was only a first step, but it could have been a step in the long process of constituting a state that belonged to all Salvadorans."[357]

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[351] Ellacuría, "A Sus órdenes, Mi Capital," 637.

[352] Lindo-Fuentes and Ching, *Modernizing Minds in El Salvador*, 223.MM 223

[353] Report of the Latin American Bureau, *Violence and Fraud in El Salvador* (London, 1977), 19.

[354] Webre, *Jose Napoleon Duarte and the Christian Democratic Party in Salvadoran Politics 1960-1972*, 194–195; Report of the Latin American Bureau, *Violence and Fraud in El Salvador*, 1–2, 6–7; "Power Structure Blocking Salvador Land Reform," *Latinamerica Press*, January 13, 1977; Montes, *El agro salvadoreño*.

Ellacuría's formulation in this passage is important: the present situation in El Salvador, he implies, only erodes the common good. The Salvadoran state has massively contributed to this erosion in supporting the private benefit of the few rather than the common good of all. Once again, we encounter the idea that the common good must be acknowledged, defended, and participated in order to exist. Molina's agrarian transformation represented movement in that direction: an expropriation of land in support of the common good. But its defeat, Ellacuría thinks, is the defeat of a state capable of contributing to anything but the private benefit of the few.

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[355] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. V, 483.
[356] Ellacuría, "A Sus órdenes, Mi Capital," 642.
[357] Ibid., 639.

In the fight over Molina's agrarian transformation project, then, we see the formation of a coalition in defense of absolute private property, as well as the identification of certain members of the Church as the main threats against it. At the same time, we also see how the repeated failure to achieve a more just distribution of land, combined with the mounting repression, was generating an armed opposition to the state.

Over the decade, agrarian reforms were repeatedly proposed and then defeated, which led many to blame the state for the problem of land access.[358] Indeed, an important development over the course of the 1970s can be seen in the fact that Molina's agrarian transformation faced resistance from all sides of the Salvadoran political spectrum. Those who would have supported it earlier in the decade now regarded the project as a ploy to distract from chronic electoral fraud and corruption.[359] Others saw it as counterrevolutionary.[360] The historian Adolfo Bonilla Bonilla summarizes these developments well: "The attitude of the left, especially the revolutionary left…was interested in revolution; agrarian reform was no longer a priority. The left was no longer supporting partial or temporary solutions."[361]

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[358] Almeida, *Waves of Protest: Popular Struggle in El Salvador, 1925-2005*, 116.

[359] Montes concludes his detailed analysis of the project with the assessment that it was "an eminently political measure," which was, among other things, an attempt "to ease social conflict." But, above all, it was a matter of "electioneering." From the beginning, there was neither involvement of the beneficiaries in the process, nor was there the political will to carry it out." Montes, *El agro salvadoreño*, 173.

[360] Lindo-Fuentes and Ching, *Modernizing Minds in El Salvador*, 224; Knut Walter Franklin, "Ideales Igualitarios y Autodeterminación: 1961-1972," in *El Salvador: La República* (San Salvador: Fomento Cultural, Banco Agrícola, 2000), 546, 563.

The Church was an exception in this regard, publically supporting Molina's agrarian transformation project, as was the Jesuit-run Universidad Centroamerica (UCA).[362] The UCA and its rector Ignacio Ellacuría were longstanding supporters of reform.[363] Ellacuría, we will recall, was one of the UCA's delegates at the Agrarian Reform Congress of 1970. But in the polarized atmosphere of the mid-1970s, support of Molina's agrarian transformation project was a lonely position—and a costly one. Indeed, as Rodolfo Cardenal and others have contended, the fallout over the project led to a "direct confrontation" between the Church and groups like ANEP and FARO, and eventually, the Salvadoran state.[364]

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[361] Bonilla Bonilla, *Tenencia de La Tierra y Reforma Agraria En El Salvador: Un Análisis Histórico*, 88.

[362] As Webre points out, so were the Christian Democrats. Party leaders said that they supported any measure that would move the country even one step closer to true agrarian reform. Webre, *Jose Napoleon Duarte and the Christian Democratic Party in Salvadoran Politics 1960-1972*, 194.

[363] For more on the UCA's support for agrarian reform, cf. Whitfield, *Paying the Price*, 67–69.

[364] Cardenal, *Historia de una Esperanza: La Vida de Rutilio Grande*, 509; Vega, *Las Comunidades de Base En América Central: Estudio Sociológico*, 125; Report of the Latin

As we have been examining, the decades of the 1960s and 1970s brought important changes to the Salvadoran countryside, especially in terms of workers' organizations and associations, for instance, groups like FECCAS. In its founding, membership, and organization, FECCAS had associations with the Church, specifically the Christian Democrats and the Jesuits. The coalition opposing Molina's agrarian transformation opposed the very existence of groups like FECCAS on the grounds that they were illegal under Salvadoran law.[365] While these groups had always been regarded with suspicion and were closely monitored, their existence was tolerated. But after the defeat of the agrarian transformation, the situation began to change, and the toleration ceased.

American Bureau, *Violence and Fraud in El Salvador*, 19; Almeida, *Waves of Protest: Popular Struggle in El Salvador, 1925-2005*, 93, 150–151.

[365] At the time, all federations and confederations, as well as rural unions, were illegal. Almeida, *Waves of protest*, 58. The 1950 Constitution included protections for Salvadoran workers like unionizing and striking. But there were strict limits on them, and they were explicitly denied to rural workers. Cf. "Decrétase la ley de sindicatos para laboristas Salvadoreños," *Tribuna libre*, 12 agosto 1950. In October 1977, the legislative assembly passed a state of emergency called "The Law for the Defense and Guarantee of Public Order," which prohibited public assembly, freedom of association, and public dissent with the government. For an analysis of the law cf. Donald Fox, "The Application of the November 1977 'Law of Defense and Guarantee of Public Order'" (The International Commission of Jurists, September 1978).

An important part of the change was the death of Eduardo Orellana in December 1976. Orellana, an owner of three sugar cane *haciendas* around Aguilares, was shot and killed on his farm during a dispute with members of FECCAS.[366] No arrests were made.[367] Reports indicate that Orellana's brother accidentally killed him.[368] But for many among the Salvadoran elite, Orellana soon rose to the status of a martyr.[369] Articles and advertisements presented it as a corroborated fact that FECCAS was behind the killing.[370] Orellana's death led to frequent denunciations of the "hordes of assassins organized by third-world priests." The Jesuits in particular were singled out as "Marxist leaders protected by official tolerance, bloodying our soil."[371]

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[366] Whitfield points out that, unrelated to Orellana's death, but on the same day of it, Archbishop Chávez y González, forty Jesuits, and about two thousand *campesinos* gathered in Aguilares to celebrate an ordination. According to Whitfield, the coincidence of these events gave the impression that Orellana's death was part of a campaign organized by the Church—or at least, certain elements in the Church. Whitfield, *Paying the Price*, 100.

[367] Brockman, *Romero*, 3.

[368] Cardenal, *Historia de una Esperanza: La Vida de Rutilio Grande*, 538; Enrique D. Dussel, *De Medellin a Puebla: Una Decada de Sangre y Esperanza, 1968-1979*, Colección Religion y Cambio Social (Mexico City: Editorial Edicol, 1979), 391; Brockman, *Romero*, 3.

[369] Cf. Brockman, *Romero*, 3; ANEP, *El Mundo*, 8 diciembre 1976.

[370] Cf. ANEP, *El Mundo*, 8 diciembre 1976.

[371] Cf. *Diario de Hoy* and *Prensa Gráfica*, 7 diciembre 1976; Whitfield, *Paying the Price*, 100.

4.4.7 Persecution of the Church in El Salvador

In June of 1977, the Secretariado Social Interdiocesano of the archdiocese published an important report entitled *Persecution of the Church in El Salvador (Persecution)*. The report was, among other things, an attempt to document the dramatic increase in attacks upon the Church, her membership, and her institutions in the wake of the failed agrarian transformation of 1976 and the death of Orellana.[372]

During 1976, for instance, there were six successive bomb attacks against the UCA, including one against the publishing house of the archbishop, Luis Chávez y González.[373] Between January and February 1977, six priests and seminarians were deported, some of whom were tortured,[374] and a bomb was planted in the car of another priest.[375] Between February and March, there were additional cases of arrests and tortures of priests, break-ins to their residences, and prevention of their re-entry into the country.[376] Many of those targeted had ties to groups like FECCAS.[377] Óscar Romero became archbishop of San Salvador on 22 February 1977, and on 12 March 1977, less than a month after the installation, his friend, the Jesuit Rutilio Grande, was killed.[378] Another priest, the diocesan Alfonso Navarro, was killed in May 1977, with others to follow.[379] According to *Persecution*, attacks on the Church accompanied a precipitous rise in cases of detainment of political prisoners, disappearance, torture, targeted murder, and massacre.[380]

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[372] For a good account of the persecution and repression prior to this time, cf. Almeida, *Waves of Protest: Popular Struggle in El Salvador, 1925-2005*, 103–173.
[373] *Persecución de la Iglesia en El Salvador*, 16; Report of the Latin American Bureau, *Violence and Fraud in El Salvador*, 20.
[374] *Persecución de la Iglesia en El Salvador*, 16; Almeida, *Waves of Protest*, 150–151.
[375] Persecución de la Iglesia en El Salvador, 16.
[376] Ibid.
[377] Brockman, *Romero*, 2–3.

The report locates the principal cause of the persecution and the repression in the attempt to redress the "plunder" (*despojo*) of the land, which is "the maximum expression of the institutionalized injustice that rules in this country." The Church in El Salvador is mostly comprised of *campesinos* and rural workers, yet they are systematically being denied access to land, "the source of life."[381]

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[378] Persecución de la Iglesia en El Salvador, 16.

[379] Ibid., 17.

[380] Ibid., 16-17; Almeida, *Waves of Protest: Popular Struggle in El Salvador, 1925-2005*, 150–153; Webre, *Jose Napoleon Duarte and the Christian Democratic Party in Salvadoran Politics 1960-1972*, 198. In late February 1977, for instance, government troops opened fire on thousands gathered in Plaza Libertad in San Salvador, killing between fifty and one hundred. Those gathered were protesting the electoral fraud that brought General Carlos Humberto Romero to power. General Romero was the PCN's candidate, a former Defense Minister, a specialist in counterinsurgency warfare, and a known opponent of agrarian reform. Cf. Almeida, *Waves of Protest*, 138–139; *Persecución de la Iglesia en El Salvador*, 16; Brockman, *Romero*, 5–6.

[381] *Persecución de la Iglesia en El Salvador,* 9. The scholarship about El Salvador in the 1970s consistently underscores lack of access to land at the heart of *campesino* grievances. The literature is voluminous. But cf. Carlos Rafael Cabarrús, *Génesis de una Revolución: Análisis del Surgimiento y Desarrollo de la Organización Campesina en el Salvador* (Centro de

The Church's efforts to address the situation are seen as materialistic. Her critics contend that, instead of preaching the "elevation of the spirit," as she once did, the Church now only speaks of "filling stomachs."[382] When she supports the organizations and associations of *campesinos* and agricultural workers, these efforts are called "communistic," "vindictive," and "subversive."[383] But according to *Persecution*, these criticisms misunderstand the nature of the Church's work, and they amount to an outright assault upon the "minimum conditions" of fraternity and sorority. They erode the common good of the country—the very possibility of sharing land and life in common with others.[384]

Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social, 1983); Cardenal, *Historia de una Esperanza: La Vida de Rutilio Grande*; Durham, *Scarcity and Survival in Central America*; Douglas Kinkaid, "Peasants into Rebels: Community and Class in Rural El Salvador," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 29, no. 3 (1987): 446–94; Jefferey M. Paige, "Land Reform and Agrarian Revolution in El Salvador," *Latin American Research Review* 31, no. 2 (1996): 127–39; Jenny Pearce, *Promised Land: Peasant Rebellion in Chalatenango, El Salvador* (Latin America Bureau, 1986); David Rodríguez, "Situación de un Sacerdote Trabajando Directamente en Comunidades Cristianas de Base, Afronta la Tensión entre el Laico y la Jerarquía," in *El Laico En El Compromiso Social* (San Salvador: Secretario Regional de Justicia y Paz, 1976); Carlos Samaniego, "¿Movimiento Campesino o Lucha del Proletariado Rural en El Salvador?," *Estudios Sociales Centroamericanos* 25, no. enero-abril (1980): 125–44.

[382] *Persecución de la Iglesia en El Salvador*, 11.

[383] Ibid., 12.

[384] Ibid.

One of the places the conflict between the Church and her accusers becomes particularly perceptible is over those who occupied or squatted on land left unattended. The coalition that defeated Molina's agrarian transformation tended to regard land occupations of any kind as a violation of the laws of private property and nation—the very manifestation of subversion. Especially after 1976, they were, as Morozzo puts it, "systematically suffocated by police and security forces."[385] However, Romero regarded them differently. Rather than a violation of the laws of property and nation, he read them in accordance with the law of necessity. Regarding one occupation in Azacualpa in October 1977, for instance, Romero says this: "I know that those who occupy lands are not usurpers. They do not want to rob the land. They are respecting private property. They only want an arrangement that permits them to have somewhere to plant so as to give food and sustenance to their families."[386] The occupiers respect rather than rob land because they use it in accordance with its most fundamental purpose: to meet need.

The authors of *Persecution* regarded land occupations in similar terms. Though *campesinos* are frequently accused of laziness. But they argue that such an accusation ignores that by being systematically denied access to land, *campesinos* are being denied access to work and the dignity that comes from earning a livelihood through it. "One is dealing here with desperate measures," the authors write, "because if these members of the Salvadoran people—many of whom are also members of the people of God—do not plant in these lands that are left uncultivated, often out of greed for better renters, those who presently occupy these lands are literally doomed to die of hunger."[387] The Church's sympathy for and interventions on behalf of occupiers contributed to the sense among her accusers that communists and communist teaching had infiltrated her.[388]

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[385] Morozzo Della Rocca, *Primero Dios*, 24; Almeida, *Waves of Protest: Popular Struggle in El Salvador, 1925-2005*, 115.
[386] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. I, 408.

Persecution specifies the Church's accusers as groups like ANEP and FARO, as well as certain sectors of the regime, detailing specific charges against her. Foremost among them is: "the Church—and especially the Jesuits—are directing *campesina* organizations, instigating an attack against property, and in general, promoting a revolution."[389] According to *Persecution*, the Church's accusers are either incapable or unwilling to see that the Church preaches "the more just use of property" rather than its "robbery."[390]

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[387] *Persecución de la Iglesia en El Salvador*, 10.

[388] Brockman, *Romero*, 25–26. Especially during 1979-1980, the occupation became a important part of the popular movement's repetoire of action. Members occupied sites like churches, places of employment, haciendas, processing plants, and educational institutions. Almeida, *Waves of Protest*, 166–167.

[389] *Persecución de la Iglesia en El Salvador*, 23, cf. 25-26.

[390] Ibid., 28.

The content of the paid advertisements, articles, and news items published in Salvadoran newspapers frequently mention the violation of the laws of property and nation.[391] The underlying logic fuses the defense of one with the defense of the other.[392] Addressing the problem of land concentration or facilitating land access leads to the charge that the Church is involved in matters pertaining exclusively to the competence of the state[393] or that she supports the robbery of property[394] or that she preaches envy and plunder of others' goods.[395] Her actions in this regard show a "profound disdain for the right to private property," and her purpose is nothing short of justifying "illegal land occupations," which will only result in "blood baths."[396] Members of *campesina* organizations and associations are "communist hordes" and "savage beasts"—labels resonant with the insurrection of 1932.[397] Supporters in the Church are "third world priests,"[398] foreign in origin, and abusive of the hospitality of the Salvadoran people.[399]

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[391] ANEP, *El Mundo*, 8 diciembre 1976; "FARO Siempre Respectará la Religion," *El Diario de Hoy*, 30 mayo 1977; "FARO Contesta el Comunicado de los Curas," *Diario de Hoy*, 21 diciembre 1976.

[392] On this cf. *Persecución de la Iglesia en El Salvador*, 28, 34-35, 45.

[393] Ibid., 27-28.

[394] Ibid., 28.

[395] "Echandole Gas al Fuego," *La Prensa Gráfica*, 29 mayo 1977.

[396] Ibid. Cf. *Persecución de la Iglesia en El Salvador*, 71. With regard to land occupations, the situation had clearly changed since Browning published *Landscape and Society* in 1971. In reporting on the ubiquity of phenomenon of land occupation in El Salvador, Browning makes no mention of violence used to evict the occupiers. Moreover, he suggests that, for landowners, eviction is almost more trouble than it is worth, with appeals against the action often frequently appearing in the media. Browning, *El Salvador*, 262–264.

One advertisement of the *Asociación de Ganaderos de El Salvador* (Livestock Association of El Salvador, AGES) is representative. It begins by making reference to the eviction of *campesino* families who had occupied land on the *Hacienda San Francisco* in El Paisnal, where the families had long been renters. But upon receiving a notice of eviction, they refused to leave because they had nowhere else to go and were eventually removed at gunpoint by security forces. The next day, two thousand soldiers were sent to pacify the area.[400]

"The peaceful eviction," the AGES advertisement reads, "is a clear indication of the decision of the Supreme Government to maintain a State of Law, Constitutional Order, and to submit to the rule of law those subversive elements involved in the destruction of our Homeland." At the same time, the eviction also "constitutes a significant warning to those groups who have occupied other estates." The advertisement goes on to refer to a much larger and more expansive "cleanup operation," which will only continue in the days and months ahead. Therefore, "before all the accusations and the laments, it is preferable for those invaders disguised as Christians…to leave these lands peacefully and voluntarily."[401]

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[397] "Hasta Donde Llegaremos?" *La Prensa Gráfica*, 11 febrero 1977.
[398] The designation comes from an Argentinian known as the Priests for the Third World. For more on this group, cf. Christian Smith, *The Emergence of Liberation Theology: Radical Religion and Social Movement Theory* (University of Chicago Press, 1991), 137–139; Dussel, *De Medellin a Puebla: Una Década de Sangre y Esperanza, 1968-1979*, 197–198.
[399] *Persecución de la Iglesia en El Salvador*, 25; ANEP, *El Mundo*, 8 diciembre 1976; "FARO Siempre Respectará la Religion," *El Diario de Hoy*, 30 mayo 1977; "FARO Contesta el Comunicado de los Curas," *Diario de Hoy*, 21 diciembre 1976.
[400] Brockman, *Romero*, 31.

The advertisement concludes with the AGES's firm commitment "to contribute to the fight against hunger" by producing more of their protein-rich products. But in order for production to proceed, conditions of "security and tranquility" are required. AGES therefore calls on others "to unite with us…and with the government, just as in 1932, to win the battle against subversion, hunger, and underdevelopment."[402]

4.5. The Land of the Savior

4.5.1 "Blood increasingly soaks our soil"

Earlier we examined Romero's response to the agrarian reform proposed by the Junta Revolucionaria de Gobierno (JRG), and how, despite its stated commitment to do so, JRG proved unable to stem the violence. By the end of December 1979, its civilian members began to resign, and the first JRG disintegrated. A new government was formed on 9 January 1980. After the military's solemn and public renewal of its commitment to stop the repression and to continue with the agrarian and other reform measures, the Christian Democrat Party agreed to join them in forming the second Junta Revolucionaria de Gobierno.[403]

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[401] Asociacion de Ganaderos de el Salvador (AGES), *El Diario de Hoy*, 21 mayo 1977.
[402] Ibid.

Needless to say, Romero and many others had concerns about these developments, which proved to be well founded.[404] As Romero states in early March 1980, "Blood increasingly soaks our soil."[405] Killings, disappearances, detentions, and torture attributed to the state and associated paramilitary groups steadily rose between 1979 and 1981. By 1980, approximately one thousand people were dying per month at their hands.[406] People were fleeing the terror in the countryside by the thousands.[407] In March of that same year, Amnesty International released a report documenting the repression, which detailed the way bodies characteristically appeared after having undergone torture and mutilation, often with corrosive liquids applied to the corpses to prevent identification.[408] The repression concentrated upon the Catholic Church, as well as those associated with labor and educational groups and institutions. Among those mentioned in Romero's weekly litanies of the dead and disappeared are usually *campesinos*, agricultural and urban workers, teachers, and students.[409]

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[403] Cf. *La Prensa Gráfica*, 10 de enero de 1980.

[404] Romero observes that conditions the Christian Democrats placed upon the military in constituting the second JRG are basically the same as the first one did. At that point, the military refused, whereas now it accepts. Moreover, Romero wonders, why there was no attempt to reconcile with the previous civilian members of the JRG. Nevertheless, Romero hopes the change on the part of the military is amounts to a sincere "recognition of error." Cf. Romero, *Homilías*, vol. VI, 186-188, 211. For more on the disintegration of the first JRG and the formation of the second one, cf. Stanley, *The Protection Racket State*, 179.

[405] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. VI, 345.

[406] Cf. Socorro Jurídico Cristiano, *El Salvador, la situación de los derechos humanos, octubre 1979-julio 1981* (Mexico City: Socorro Jurídico Cristiano, 1981); Socorro Jurídico Cristiano, *El Salvador: del genocidio de la junta militar a la esperanza de la lucha insurrecional* (San Salvador: Socorro Jurídico, 1981).

[407] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. VI, 448.

We have also examined how the repression sought to undermine the juntas and their reforms. To reiterate the words of one of Stanley's informants, the acceleration of the repression should be understood as an attempt to stop the reform through the erasure of those supporting it—the "*Matanza* approach." The embrace of a politics of massacre—at first in reaction to and later in combination with the agrarian reform—is a legacy of 1932.

Of course, there was violence coming from the Salvadoran left as well, which Romero also opposes.[410] But it paled in comparison to the repression, and the repression cannot be understood solely as a response to it.[411] Rather, the repression appears to be preemptive—part of, in Romero's words, "a general program of annihilation"[412]—an attempt "to decapitate" the organizational efforts of the Salvadoran people[413] and "violently extinguish" them.[414]

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[408] The report and its findings are discussed in ibid., 448.
[409] For an example, cf. Romero, *Homilías*, vol. VI, 379-382. Cf. also Aldo Lauria-Santiago, "The Culture and Politics of State Terror and Repression in El Salvador," in *When States Kill: Latin America, the U.S. and Technologies of Terror* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005); Almeida, *Waves of Protest: Popular Struggle in El Salvador, 1925-2005*, 150–153.
[410] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. VI, 378-379.

Often in his homilies during this time, Romero reads letters from those who write him from the countryside, like this one by a *campesino* from Arcatao. Under the pretext of taking revenge for the disappearance of a national guardsman and of uncovering pockets of subversion, the National Guard and ORDEN began to kill the rural population indiscriminately.[415] The man writes:

> We are very troubled because…they have let loose one of the cruelest persecutions and massacres against *campesinos*—men, women, and children—who have been harassed by authorities and ORDEN, giving rise to a panic unlike any we have seen…Here where we live we are surrounded with refugees, who have come only with what they can carry…Their houses have been plundered

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[411] Ibid., 378-379, 382. Cf. Stanley, *The Protection Racket State*, 135.

[412] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. VI, 383. In his 16 March homily, Romero quotes from a letter he received from the Human Rights Commission for El Salvador describing the main objective of the repression as the "destabilization, neutralization, and the isolation of the popular movements." Ibid., 415.

[413] Ibid., 453, 355, 448.

[414] Ibid., 382. Especially after the second Junta was formed, which included the Christian Democratic Party, the U.S. government became more actively involved in making and implementing Salvadoran policy, including the agrarian reform. Stanley, *The Protection Racket State*, 180.

[415] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. VI, 214-215.

> and burned, their livestock has been robbed and hacked with machetes, their grains have been destroyed.[416]

The only crime of those attacked, the letter concludes, is that they were "poor and organized."[417] In characterizing the repression, similar formulations frequently recur. As Romero says in another homily, they are "massacring the organized sector of our people for the mere fact of gathering in the streets to ask for justice and freedom."[418]

On 17 February 1980, Óscar Romero wrote Carter personally to stop U.S. military aid.[419] Addressing Carter as a professed Christian and protector of human dignity, Romero's letter reads: "Instead of favoring greater justice and peace in El Salvador, the contribution of your government will undoubtedly sharpen the injustice and the repression against those who are organizing, in many cases…so that their fundamental human rights are respected."[420] The Junta, the letter explains, has presided over a repression that has resulted in many more deaths, disappearances, arrests, and cases of torture than the military regimes of the recent past. Romero's judgment is that the Junta is unable to control those in the military and among the elite who are behind the repression.[421]

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[416] Ibid. Similar occurrences are described throughout Romero's homilies, especially those between 1979-1980. For a sampling, cf. the accounts of the sacking the homes of farmworkers on a hacienda in Tamanique; the repression of *campesinos* in Chalatenango; and military operations in Rosario, Ojo de Agua, and El Terreno, cf. ibid., 219-221. Romero observes that in conducting these operations the security forces are often acting only on the basis of rumors. Cf. Ibid., 355-356.

[417] Ibid., 215.

[418] Ibid., 243.

[419] Domestic and international funding for the military and security forces rose throughout the decade of 1970s. Jimmy Carter's campaign for the presidency promised changes in U.S. foreign policy, centering it upon "the abiding respect for individual human rights," as he put it in his inaugural address. Once Carter became president in 1977, his administration's criticisms of abuses in El Salvador generated tensions between the governments, and General Romero's administration renounced all U.S. aid that same year. With the October 1979 coup came the reinstatement of U.S. aid, military and otherwise. Cf. Williams and Walter, *Militarization and Demilitarization in El Salvador's Transition to Democracy*.

Romero's homilies during this period often discuss what he calls the "project of the government." Despite its expressed commitment to continue with the agrarian and other reform measures, certain factions within the Junta are clearly committed to

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[420] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. VI, 293.

[421] Ibid., 293-294. For Carter's response and Romero's reaction to it, see ibid., 418-419. Stanley argues that the stance of the U.S. government during this time is beset by conflicting actions rather than a single, coherent policy. The Carter administration supported the October 1979 coup publically and moved to restore military aid in support of the Salvadoran government. But the administration failed to perceive the factions within the state itself, and its work with the existing high command therefore unwittingly undermined the reformers and instead supported those favoring repression. Among other things, this had a great deal to do with its sense that the left posed an immanent threat, which led the administration not only to pressure the government to maintain order but to remain largely silent about the repression. At the same time, U.S. defense attaches and C.I.A. agents sent conflicting messages, maintaining close relationships with the most extreme elements of the armed forces, which were determined to undermine the goverment through repressive violence against civilians. All in all, according to Stanley the U.S. tended to ignore the repression as long as agrarian and other reform measures were under way. Stanley, *The Protection Racket State*, 8, 136–137, 153–155, 166–167, 176, 181–182, 193–194.

"repressing and massacring indiscriminately and disproportionately *campesinos* and others."[422] These juntas combine the promise of "change and social justice" with "cruel repression," the ongoing "sacrifice of the people itself."[423] Here we can begin to see, not only how those perpetrating the repression are modeling it in many ways upon *la Matanza*. The complex combination of agrarian reform and repression with which Romero wrestles in his final months is yet another legacy of 1932.

Romero also sees the economic elites of El Salvador behind the repression. He characterizes the "project of the oligarchy" as the effort to marshal all the power at its disposal to prevent reform.[424] As we have seen, Romero thinks peace hinges upon the oligarchy learning to share what it possesses.[425] But when faced with the possibility of the loss of its control over economic life, the oligarchy has opted to defend its possessions by purchasing arms, hiring mercenaries, and embracing the politics of massacre.[426] Romero's homilies during this period allude to the consolidation of an alliance between economic elites and certain factions in the military, which enabled economic elites to block the reforms and to deploy the military in defense of their own private interests.[427]

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[422] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. VI, 211, 213.
[423] Ibid., 214.
[424] Ibid., 210-211.
[425] Ibid., 212-213.
[426] Ibid., 319-320.

4.5.2 "A systematic militarization of the entire country"

Despite the repression, planning for the agrarian and other reform measures continued apace, picking up at the end of February 1980. After the disintegration of the first JRG representatives from the American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD) were sent to El Salvador, tasked with helping design and implement the agrarian reform.[428] Advising the work was Roy Prosterman, an expert on agrarian reform as a counterinsurgency strategy, who helped design the 'Land to the Tiller' program in Vietnam from 1970-1973.[429] He predicted that, "If the reforms are carried out successfully here [in El Salvador], the armed movement of the left will be effectively eliminated by the end of 1980."[430] Under intense U.S. pressure, the military high command finally accepted the reforms.[431] Beginning in early March 1980 and in the midst of anarchy, the agrarian reform was implemented.[432]

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[427] Ibid., 322-324, 358. Stanley describes this alliance as a "protection-racket," in which the military governed in exchange for its willingness to protect the elite by way of extra-judicial violence. Though Stanley traces the roots of this alliance to 1932, he regards the period after the October 1979 coup as crucial to its formation. According to Stanley, it was paradoxically the strength of the reform movement led to the formation of an alliance between senior commanders of the armed forces and those of the most repressive agencies—an alliance that was supported by members of the economic elite. Stanley, *The Protection Racket State*, 6–7, 136.

[428] Philip Wheaton, *Agrarian Reform in El Salvador: A Program of Rural Pacification* (Washington, D.C.: EPICA Task Force, 1980), 10.

[429] Roy Prosterman, "Land Reform in South Vietnam A Proposal for Turning the Tables on the Viet Cong," *Cornell Law Review* 53, no. 1 (1967). For more on agrarian reform as a strategy of counterinsurgency, cf. Wheaton, *Agrarian Reform in El Salvador: A Program of Rural Pacification*.

On 6 March the second Junta approved the "Ley Básica de la Reforma Agraria" and the "Decreto para la toma de posesión de tierras." The following day, the Junta declared a state of emergency and censured the media, as the Salvadoran military moved to occupy the lands targeted for Phase I of the reform.[433] The new agrarian reform legislation was the most comprehensive in Salvadoran history. Instead of beginning in a particular locale and scaling up, as previous legislation had attempted to do, the 1980 reform affected the whole country simultaneously. Landholdings in excess of 500 hectares were appropriated and ownership transferred to workers in order to form cooperatives.[434] According to figures later released by the Instituto Salvadoreño de Transformación Agraria, 270 distinct properties were affected, totaling 214,174 hectares, with 386,010 beneficiaries. Most of the targeted lands cultivated cotton, coffee, and sugar cane.[435]

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[430] Quoted in ibid., 12.

[431] William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard: The United States in Central America, 1977-1992* (University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 40–42, 128–129, 166–167, 187–188; Edward F. Lehoucq and Sims, "Reform with Repression: The Land Reform in El Salvador," ISHI Occasional Papers in Social Change (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1982); Stanley, *The Protection Racket State*, 194.

[432] Michael James Eddy, "Confronting a Pattern of Failure: Agrarian Reform and the Political Question of the Land in Contemporary El Salvador" (M.A., The American University, 1993), 37.

[433] Montes, *El agro salvadoreño*, 299–300. Wheaton describes the media campaign developed by the government, whose slogan was, "The Reform is for Everyone." Cf. Wheaton, *Agrarian Reform in El Salvador: A Program of Rural Pacification*, 12–13.

The 1980 agrarian reform was written in blood, with the military was heavily involved in its implementation.[436] The National Guard and military units deployed to the countryside to implement the agrarian reform also intensified the repression, disappearing, torturing, and killing hundreds, especially in areas where there were opposition workers' organizations and associations.[437] At least in one case, cooperative members were told to elect leaders who were then summarily executed.[438] The agrarian reform functioned, among other things, as a tool to draw the opposition out into the open and eliminate them. One representative of a federation of agrarian reform cooperatives described the situation in the following terms: "With the reforms, it made it easier and more legitimate to kill more people. If there is a reform, and people are still politically active, it must mean that they are leftists. Thus the army could kill more freely."[439]

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[434] Montes, *El agro salvadoreño*, 299–300; Paige, *Coffee and Power*, 195–198. Those with landholdings under 500 hectares were not affected by this phrase of the agrarian reform.
[435] Montes, El agro salvadoreño, 299-300.
[436] According to Montes, the rationale for military involvement, along with the state of emergency and the censure of the media, was to ensure the rapid and effective implementation of the reform, and also to prevent what had happened in the past, for instance, with Molina's Agrarian Transformation project in 1976. Ibid. Wheaton quotes language from the State of Emergency Decree—Decree No. 155—that makes vague allusion to countering potential threats by those who might attempt generate "a state of agitation or social unrest." Wheaton, *Agrarian Reform in El Salvador: A Program of Rural Pacification*, 11.
[437] Americas Watch and American Civil Liberties Union, *Report on Human Rights in El Salvador* (New York: Random House, 1982), xliii.
[438] Bonner, *Weakness and Deceit*, 199–200.

In his homilies from February and March 1980, we find Romero continually voicing concerns about moving forward with agrarian reform.[440] "It is too much," he says, "to be speaking of profound structural transformations in the context of this criminal wave of repression."[441] He returns again and again to "the growing repression that security forces have unleashed against organized *campesinos*."[442]

In his 9 March homily, the same week of the passage of the agrarian reform legislation, Romero describes the reform as "political-military action of the Armed

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[439] Quoted in Stanley, *The Protection Racket State*, 195. According to Stanley, "The reforms, and the way they were implemented, included something for everybody. The *Majanistas* [the reformers] got their long-awaited structural reforms, as did the U.S. embassy. The state of siege and the opportunity to occupy the cooperatives and the surrounding countryside satisfied the demands of the hardline elements within the military for decisive action against the mass opposition. Thus the private sector, though deeply disturbed by the reforms, was in a weak position to oppose them because its basis for organizing within the military—a putative commitment to anticommunism—seemed actually to be well served by them." Ibid.

[440] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. VI, 265.

[441] Ibid., 266.

[442] Ibid., 355, 378-379.

Forces." "What is most disconcerting," he says, "is that this action can lead to a systematic militarization of the entire country through a series of militarized estates, which presents the possibility of the control and a systematization of the surveillance and repression directed against the popular forces."[443] The reform does not appear designed to stop the repression but rather to extend and escalate it even further.

Romero's response to the implementation of the 1980 agrarian reform is therefore one of profound ambivalence. How best to respond to the accumulation of so much injustice when the response has become so complexly implicated in further injustice? A recurrent theme of his homilies during this time is the imperative to decouple the reform from the repression and to end the repression before moving forward with the reform. But Romero continues to insist that a more just distribution of land in El Salvador is desperately needed—a need he always articulates in terms of the Church's social doctrine and her understanding of the social function of property. "Let it be very clear," Romero says in his homily the following week about the same legislation, "the social doctrine and the very activity of the Church…supports 'the efforts of those in rural areas for an authentic agrarian reform, that makes it possible for them to access land to cultivate.'"[444]

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[443] Ibid., 385.

We have seen that Romero claims no expertise in the details of agrarian reform or the best policy measures to pursue such reform.[445] He characteristically addresses agrarian reform not in terms of a detailed set of policy prescriptions but in terms of orienting his people within the moral and theological landscape disclosed by the Church's social doctrine. It is because agrarian reform has to do with a more just distribution of land that it as "the foundation of the structural changes El Salvador needs."[446] It is because the new legislation "no longer allows a small minority to possess all the land" and that its beneficiaries of are "those who work the land" that it deserves support.[447] Romero, we must always remember, is not a policy analyst but a pastor.

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[444] Ibid., 396. The quotation is from the pastoral letter released in February 1980 by the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil (Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil, CNBB) entitled "Igreja e Problemas da Terra" or "The Church and Land Problems."

[445] This is of course not to say Romero has no views of these matters. Earlier, for instance, we saw him argue for agrarian reform cooperatives. Regarding the 1980 reform, besides the association of the reform with repression, he has concerns about its moving forward without any consultation of participation of the intended beneficiaries themselves, which he thinks is a violation of the principle of subsidiarity. Cf. Romero, *Homilías*, vol. VI, 384-385. For similar concerns about the design and implementation of the reform, cf. Wheaton, *Agrarian Reform in El Salvador: A Program of Rural Pacification*; Lehoucq and Sims, "Reform with Repression: The Land Reform in El Salvador." For a analysis of agricultural modernization and other large-scale authoritarian projects that have gone tragically awry, cf. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: Why Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*.

[446] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. VI, 358.

The agrarian reform announced by the first JRG at the end of 1979 and designed and implemented by the second one at the beginning of 1980 therefore raises a host of questions for Romero, which he wrestles with during the final months of his life. How to understand what is happening? What does it mean to pursue a more just distribution of land in a context of repression? How to make sense of a government that simultaneously seeks to address injustices that are longstanding and entrenched, while at the same time repressing many of those clamoring against the injustice? Can the agrarian reform be received with anything other than skepticism or as anything other than an attempt to distract or even to cover up the bloodletting?[448]

While Romero supports the Church's teaching on agrarian reform and thinks El Salvador is as clear a case as any in which the teaching applies, what it means to apply it becomes ambiguous. The escalating wave of repression, as well as the use of the reform as its tool, calls into question any simple or straightforward slide from the identification of injustice faced by his people to the advocacy of this or any specific policies aimed at its removal.

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[447] Ibid., 384.

[448] Ibid., 384, cf. 357.

4.5.3 Lent

4.5.3.1 The Liturgical Reading of Salvadoran Reality

Romero delivered his final homilies during Lent. These homilies, which are a window into the way the enactment of agrarian reform was accompanied by a massive escalation of violence, dwell at length upon what it means to celebrate the paschal mystery of Christ in El Salvador. Romero continually situates the pursuit of agrarian reform in relation to that celebration.

Lent is a time when Christians prepare to receive the Easter mystery. It is a season commemorating Jesus's time of solitude in the desert after his baptism by John, which culminates in his temptation by Satan. During Lent, the Church and her members learn to locate themselves in relation to these events, especially by way of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. The Church and her members therefore become, in an important sense, contemporaneous with Jesus's time of solitude in the desert. Romero himself explains: "We, too, live in this time, which trains us for the long pilgrimage…toward Easter and Pentecost…If there is fasting, if there are penances, if there are prayers, it is because there is a positive goal: Easter, resurrection." The Lenten season, Romero says, trains Christ's members in what it means "to be made new" in him.[449]

In these final homilies, we encounter an important characteristic of Romero's homilies as a whole: what we might call the liturgical reading of Salvadoran reality.[450] As he himself explains this approach in one of his early homilies: the liturgical year is the Church's ongoing pilgrimage through salvation history. In Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany, her members prepare for and encounter the God who becomes human, the Creator made creature. In Lent and Easter, they prepare for and encounter Jesus Christ's death on the cross and his resurrection on the third day. In Pentecost, the Church receives anew the gift that founds her life: the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples, which inaugurates the people of God in the time of its pilgrimage. "Year after year," Romero says, "the Church returns to this source, presenting each year the unfolding (*despliegue*) of the redemptive mysteries of Christ."[451]

The liturgy is therefore not simply the memory of a past event. The example Romero uses of the latter is 15 September—Salvadoran Independence Day—in which the people of El Salvador celebrate what happened on that same day in the past, in 1821.

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[449] Ibid., 275.
[450] Cf. Romero, *Homilías*, vol. II, 25-26, 203-205; vol. III, 41.
[451] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. II, 26.

Though remembered, the event remains in the past. The liturgy, in contrast, uniquely makes present the mysteries of Christ. In celebrating the liturgy, the people of God participates in what happened once for all but continues to be given to all places and times over the course of all history. The mysteries celebrated, in other words, transcend and relativize place and time. Wherever they are celebrated, they draw the pilgrim Church near to them. "We are right now present to them," Romero says. The Christ who lived, died, and was raised twenty centuries ago "continues to come to us through the mystery of the Church's liturgy."[452] The celebration of the liturgy gathers the world.

Romero continually reads the history of El Salvador, including the enactment of agrarian reform, in light of the history of the Savior. "The history of our people is very dense," Romero says, but "the history of salvation illumines it."[453] According to Romero, the continual celebration of these mysteries reveals to the Church on pilgrimage in El Salvador the depths of her identity and purpose. It continues to offer her members the opportunity to locate their lives in relation to these mysteries, which culminate in

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[452] Ibid. Along these same lines, Romero quotes the Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum concilium:* "Recalling thus the mysteries of redemption, the Church opens to the faithful the riches of her Lord's powers and merits, so that these are in some way made present for all time, and the faithful are enabled to lay hold upon them and become filled with saving grace" (§102).

[453] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. VI, 327.

Christ's death and resurrection, and continue in Christ's abiding presence to his people "until the close of the age" (Mt. 28:20).

4.5.3.2 Conversion

During these Lenten homilies, Romero's characteristic emphasis upon conversion also reaches a heightened level of intensity. The call to conversion—the life-long movement of a human person toward "reconciliation with God"—is, Romero says, "Lent's unmistakable voice."[454]

Jesus's words, "The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news" (Mark 1:15, cf. Luke 13:3), continue to resound in a special way during the Lenten season.[455] Christ is the Kingdom in person, which is why, Romero says, the path toward the Kingdom is none other than the person of Christ himself. Conversion therefore means learning to cling to Christ and to the way of Christ, which inescapably involves taking up the cross and following him.[456] Romero's presentation of the Gospel call to conversion presumes that people are in need of it, that they habitually wander off the path or even walk the wrong way upon it. Sometimes,

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[454] Ibid., 364-365.
[455] Ibid., 365.
[456] Ibid.

Romero says, they stop walking altogether because they are "on their knees before the idols of the earth."[457] All Christians are in need of conversion.

"For all those who eat well," Romero says, "Lent is a call to austerity, to detach oneself from one's possessions in order to share with those in need."[458] When addressing the wealthy of El Salvador, Romero therefore repeatedly speaks of the need for them to use their wealth and their lives to bring happiness rather than misery to the Salvadoran people. Rather than enclose their lives and their possessions, jealously guarding and defending them with violence, Romero repeatedly tells them: "You must share what you are and what you have."[459] He continues to remind them and all Salvadorans of the Church's teaching on property, the way all property bears, in John Paul II's words, a social mortgage, which might at times justify expropriation for the common good.[460]

Some, like the wealthy minority, might have abundant created goods to give. Others, like the vast majority of Salvadorans—"who perennially suffer hunger and privation" and so have little in the way of created goods—can nonetheless give. They can give their own poverty as a Lenten discipline, joining their own suffering to Christ's ongoing suffering in the world.[461] They, too, can practice mercy, sharing what they have with those whose needs are even greater than their own. They can uproot hatred from their hearts. They can forgive those who are persecuting them. They can comfort all those who are afflicted. They can pray for the living and the dead.[462] All these are ways Romero mentions for Christians to share what they are and what they have so that "social justice prevails."[463] Romero's view is that that the Church does not simply want a more just distribution of created goods, as important as that is. Above all she wants people who desire "to share not only their goods but their lives" with others (cf. 2 Cor. 8:3, 10-11).[464] The point is not the distribution but the people doing the distribution—people who acknowledge their goods and their lives as gifts given by God to support goods that can only be held in common with others.

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[457] Ibid., 365.
[458] Ibid., 338.
[459] Ibid., 323, 420.
[460] Ibid., 213.

As we have seen in previous chapters, according to this tradition of thought, social justice most fundamentally concerns not the distribution but the goal of the distribution. In this passage, Romero turns to Paul's discussion of generosity 2 Corinthians 8 to make the point. In Romero's words, "Social justice is not so much a law that orders the distribution of goods but is an internal attitude, like that of Christ, who, being rich, became poor in order to share with his love with the poor" (2 Cor. 8:9).[465]

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[461] Ibid., 338, 449, 353.
[462] Ibid., 322-333, 338-339.
[463] Ibid., 323, cf. 281, 325, 339.
[464] Ibid., 323.

4.5.3.3 "For your sakes he became poor"

To understand Romero's meaning, it is helpful to turn briefly to this chapter of the second letter to the Corinthians, where Paul writes about a relief-offering on behalf of the Church in Jerusalem, appealing to the Corinthians to supply the want of these others so that there might be equality (vv. 13-14). He cites Exodus 16:18 in support of this appeal: "The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little" (v. 15).

In the manna episode, Moses tells the children of Israel that they are to gather of the manna only what is sufficient for daily sustenance—a rule which holds for all days, with the exception of the Sabbath. Richard Hays observes that Paul is drawing on and deepening the interpretive trajectory articulated in the book of Deuteronomy, which understands the manna episode as a "divine pedagogical device"—a lesson in the nature of Israel's dependence on God (cf. Deut. 8:2-3).

In the eighth chapter of his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul's focus is how those in Corinth hold their possessions. Like Moses with the children of Israel, Paul is trying to school the Corinthians in sharing, to help them see their abundance as given for the relief of others. Paul not only wants those in Corinth to do something but above all to desire to do something (cf. vv. 3-5, 10-12)—to seek a relationship with others marked by what he calls "fair balance" (*isotēs*, v. 14). According to Paul, the pattern for this sharing is simply Christ himself: the one "that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:9).

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[465] Ibid.

Paul envisions a circulation of gifts, as well as the formation of a people, patterned after Christ's own life. The purpose is for goods to be possessed in equal measure, that there be equality—the same lesson God attempts to teach the children of Israel with the manna (vv. 13-14). As Paul draws on this episode, all created goods become manna from heaven, given so that there is enough for all. The circulation of gifts envisioned by Paul seeks to bring givers and receivers alike to the same level, to teach those in Corinth how to live into an equality that already exists but has become difficult for them to perceive.[466]

But at the same time Paul suggests that the ultimate aim of the circulation of gifts is a higher solidarity—a fuller form of common possession. To learn to share material goods helps those at Corinth learn to share in the life for which they are destined. As Paul reminds them, Jesus Christ is both the pattern and the goal. Learning to follow the pattern of Christ orders the Corinthians to their goal. He became poor, *for your sakes*, so that *you might become rich* (v. 9). Christ assumes the poverty of humanity and of material want in order to supply their want and to bring them to his level—to hold open God's life so that they might share in it common with others.

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[466] For this reason, Paul writes of the "abundance" of the Church in Jerusalem—presumably her prayers, the ongoing Christian presence in the land that received, in Gregory of Nyssa's words, "the footprints of Life itself,"—which will likewise attend to the needs of those in Corinth (v. 14).

4.5.4 God's Promise of a Land

As Hays argues, Paul draws on the manna episode to help the Corinthians learn to narrate their lives through scripture. Paul effectively locates them inside Israel's world. Like Israel, they are still on pilgrimage, making their way to the land God will give them. The story of the manna continues to be played out in the Church's life.[467]

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[467] Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (Yale University Press, 1993), 90–91. As Romero understands it, the story continues to play out, not only in the experience of the Church in Corinth but in the experience of the Church in El Salvador, Latin America, and throughout the world. Romero regards Paul's message to the Church in Corinth as, simply put, "the social doctrine of the Church"—the ongoing life of which Romero continues in the Church's tradition of circular letters, otherwise known as encyclicals. Romero goes on to read Paul's exhortation to the Church in Corinth in the light of what the bishops gathered at Puebla called "the growing gap between rich and poor," which widens even in "countries that call themselves Catholic." Framed by Paul's discussion of generosity in 2 Corinthians 8, the problem becomes inescapably ecclesial. How to imagine a fair balance in this context? How might the Church live into the circulation of goods characteristic of grace's economy? These are the kinds of questions

Throughout his homilies—but especially in the Lenten ones under consideration here—Romero does something similar. He often reads the struggles of the Church on pilgrimage in El Salvador into the story of Israel's life with God, on its way to the land God promises.

In part, this simply has to do with the Lenten season itself. As Romero observes, the Church continually returns to the history of Israel during the Lenten season, which is a reminder that the Church has not left Israel's world.[468] The history of Israel is fundamental to the Church's Lenten catechesis. Alexander Schmemann explains: "One can say that the forty days of Lent are, in a way, the return of the Church into the spiritual situation of the Old Testament—the time before Christ, the time of repentance and expectation, the time of the 'history of salvation' moving toward its fulfillment in

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in view as Romero proceeds to narrate Paul's exhortation to solidary in relation to the Church's embrace of the so-called "preferential option for the poor," which we will discuss at length in a later chapter. As Romero sees it, the Church's embrace of poverty has everything to do with learning to perceive and to share in the common gift of creation, to locate her life in relation to the one "who gives all gifts, who gives us our harvests, who makes flower and ripen the coffee in our fields," and who through this giving works for "the flourishing of all God's children." Paul's exhortation that there be fair balance continues to resound in the life of the Church in El Salvador, continues to place the pilgrim Church alongside Israel. Romero, *Homilías*, vol. V, 67.

[468] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. VI, 340.

Christ.”[469] The return into this situation reminds the Church that her members have not yet been conformed to their head. They constantly fall away from the life offered them in Christ. They are still in the midst of a long and difficult pilgrimage toward the land of promise.

Romero locates the pilgrim Church inside Israel’s world for other reasons as well. “The history of Israel,” Romero explains, “also becomes, through the Church, the history of the Salvadoran people.”[470] What does he mean by this? Though most Salvadorans are baptized Catholics, Romero does not conflate the people of God and the people of El Salvador, often distinguishing between the two.[471] Moreover, Romero does not mean that the nation of El Salvador subsumes the history of Israel, such that El Salvador becomes a light for the nations, a city upon a hill. Rather, Romero means that the Church is a gathering from all the peoples of the earth, including, but not limited to, the people of El Salvador.[472] The people of God on pilgrimage in El Salvador include peoples from throughout the world. Christ’s ecclesial body has an essentially transnational character.[473] In and through Christ, the peoples of the world have been grafted into Israel's story. This gathering from all the peoples of the earth can share in Israel's story, which is a gift that, in Christ, goes out to the peoples of all nations, blesses them, becomes common to them (cf. Gen. 12:3, cf. Psalm 72:17).

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[469] Alexander Schmemann, *Great Lent* (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1974), 38–39.
[470] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. VI, 370, 426.
[471] In this homily, for instance, cf. ibid., 374, 426-427.
[472] Ibid., 431-432.

In an early homily, Romero describes how Israel's history becomes the history of all those who cling to Christ. According to Romero, Christ is the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham. He completes what Moses begins in leading the children of Israel from the land of bondage toward the land God gives them. On Romero's presentation, over the course of Israel's history, the land God promises to Abram and his descendants finds its unexpected fulfillment when, from the womb of Mary of Israel, God's promises become flesh and blood. The promise comes in the person of God, "the redeemer of Israel and of all peoples: Christ our Lord."[474]

On this view, it is in Christ that the fullness of God's promise of a land can be fathomed. What governs this approach is the conviction that the advent of Christ changes everything, including the meaning of the promise itself. Over the course of Israel's life with God, and especially in relation to what God has done in Christ, the meaning of the promise of the land undergoes transformation. In Christ, it finds its term.[475]

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[473] Ibid., 226-427.
[474] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. I, 244-245.

In *The Gospel and the Land*, W.D. Davies discerns a process of "Christification" within the pages of the New Testament, in which its authors tend to view the promise of the land through the prism of Christ, finding promised land "wherever Christ is or has been."[476] The process of Christification is what leads Tertullian in *On the Resurrection of*

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[475] Cf. Romero, *Homilías*, vol. VI, 315.

[476] As Davies writes, "The New Testament finds holy space wherever Christ is or has been: it personalizes 'holy space' in Christ, who, as a figure of History, is rooted in the land; he cleansed the Temple and died in Jerusalem, and lends his glory to these and to the places where he was, but, as Living Lord, he is also free to move wherever he wills." "For the holiness of place, Christianity has fundamentally, though not consistently, substituted the holiness of the Person: it has Christified holy space." W.D. Davies, *The Gospel and the Land: Early Christianity and Jewish Territorial Doctrine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 367–368.

What does Davies mean by the Christification of holy space? He tends to describe this process as one of "spiritualization." Davies writes, "Holy space seems to have been 'transubstantiated' into a community of persons, the Body of Christ…It is easy to conclude that there was a deliberate rejection by Paul of the Holy Space in favor of the Holy People—the Church." Ibid., 188, cf. 336, 362. Transubstantiation is not spiritualization but names the grace-filled passage from the substance of bread and wine to the substance of Christ's body and blood. Davies consistently opposes space-place and people in this manner, and in so doing, seems to assume that Christ's ecclesial body does not take up space-place in the world and the orientation toward the land in Judaism evaporates into spirit in Christianity.

Along similar lines, Davies often writes of the "irrelevance" of the land promise to ecclesiology, its "de-territoriality" in these terms: "Because of the logic of Paul's understanding of Abraham and his personalization of the fulfillment of the promise 'in Christ' demanded the deterritorializing of the promise [*sic*.]…In the Christological logic *the Flesh* to criticize those who associate God's promise of a land exclusively with "the special soil of Judea" and not with "the Lord's flesh, which, in all those who put on Christ, are thereafter the holy land." According to Tertullian, such 'land' is made holy by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, "truly flowing with milk and honey."[477] Christ is the land of promise made flesh and blood. Augustine writes in similar terms, for instance: "It is the church 'without blemish or wrinkle' [Eph. 5:27], assembled from all peoples and destined to reign with Christ, which is itself the land of the blessed, the 'land of the living' [Ps. 26:13 (27:13)]."[478] As Christ's ecclesial body, the pilgrim Church, which is not

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of Paul, the land, like the Law, particular and provisional, had become irrelevant." And then later: "What is noteworthy is that the body [of Christ] knew no geographic limitation or even concentration: Pauline ecclesiology is a-territorial." Ibid., 179-182. But for Paul and for the other New Testament writers, is ecclesiology *de-territorial* or *pan-territorial*? For instance, regarding Jesus's exhortation in Matthew 28:19-20, Davies comments: "all geographic bounds become insignificant: the gospel is for all nations. The Risen Lord transcends Galilee and Jerusalem: his audience is universal." Ibid. 241. What warrants the claim that geography has become insignificant and irrelevant? If anything, it seems to have become more significant. All land becomes potentially promised land precisely because Christ can be encountered and the body of Christ can be built up in it.

[477] Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Flesh*, vol. III, Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, N.Y.: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), §26.

[478] Augustine of Hippo, *On Christian Teaching*, trans. R.P.H. Green (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), Book III.

yet 'without blemish or wrinkle,' lives from the fruits of this land even as she remains on her way towards it.

Of course, this view need not deny the significance of the land that received, as Gregory of Nyssa puts it, "the footprints of Life itself." According to Nyssen, the uniqueness of that land derives from the uniqueness of the one who dwelled within it. Nyssen compares the traces Christ leaves there after his death and resurrection to the fragrance of perfume that remains in a jar after its contents have been poured out. [479] Moreover, the intimacy between Christ's body and this land that leads Nyssen and others to describe the latter in ways that evoke the sacraments.[480]

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[479] Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, Epistle 3, in Ann Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Letters*, vol. 83, Vigiliae Christianae (Brill Academic Pub, 2006). For more on the history of this, cf. Robert Louis Wilken, *The Land Called Holy: Palestine in Christian History and Thought* (Yale University Press, 1992).

[480] Moreover, it is the intimacy of relationship between this particular land and Christ's body is why the language Nyssen uses to describe the land evokes the sacraments. In the same letter, Nyssen writes to some who lived in the holy land of the "proofs displayed in your region" of the "great philanthropy of our Lord" and the "salvific signs" of the God who has vivified us in Christ. Along these lines, Davies speaks of a "sacramental process" at work in the New Testament. What he means by this is that materiality has become "suffused" with the divine. "Such 'sacramentalism' could fine holy space everywhere, but especially where Jesus had been." Ibid., 367, 336. John of Damascus articulates this well: "I worship the Creator of matter who became matter for my sake, who willed to take his abode in matter; who worked out my salvation through matter. Never will I cease honoring the matter that wrought my salvation! I honor it, but not as God…but because God has filled it with his grace and power." John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980), I.16. God became

According to Romero, one of the implications of the claim that, with the advent of Christ, the promise of the land finds its term is that all people can now enter into it and be nourished by it wherever they are.[481] The resurrected Christ sends those gathered around him in Jerusalem to all lands. They to witness to "the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8), to make disciples of "all nations" (Mt. 28:20).[482] All lands therefore become potentially

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incarnate in Christ for the salvation of humankind, taking his abode and working out salvation in this land, this material.

Christ received his body from Mary's. But the fruits of the land where he lived nourished him as well. He needed food and drink—bread and wine—for his sustenance. Bread and wine implies plants and vines, wheat and grapes, which, in turn, implies land, water, air, and light. In *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus draws on this understanding of the intimacy of Christ's body and land to describe the recapitulation of all things in Christ. Just as the Adam who had fallen was flesh and blood, so, too, was Christ. He felt hunger and thirst just as any other humans feel hunger and thirst. He depended upon the wider created order to sustain him just as any other humans do. But because Christ is God incarnate, this process of drawing of creation into himself is a sign of the recapitulation all things in himself. He allows creation to "bear him up" just as it is "borne by him" and in him. According to Irenaeus, the Church's celebration of the Eucharist derives from and participates in this process. In these and in other ways, we can appreciate the uniqueness of the land where Christ lived, died, and rose—the indispensible site from which the Gospel goes forth and incorporates other lands, like creation itself, into Christ's body. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, vol. I, Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, N.Y.: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), III.2.2–3. Once again, the logic points not to de-territoriality but pan-territoriality

[481] Cf. Romero, *Homilías*, vol. I, 245.

[482] Ibid., 414.

promised land insofar as those who go forth encounter Christ and work to build up his ecclesial body in them.

At one point, Romero interprets the sending of the disciples in terms of Isaiah's oracle of all nations and tongues streaming to Jerusalem, and then the sending of some of these as messengers to the nations to declare the glory of the Lord. The prophet begins to list the names of places where God's glory will be proclaimed: Tarshish, Put, Lud, Tubal, Javan, and all those other lands "that have not heard my fame or seen my glory" (Is. 66:19). Romero comments: "It is as if one hears the concrete names of the Church that is now on pilgrimage [in El Salvador]…Tenanchingo, San Sebastián de Ciudad Delgado, el Carmen and many other parishes and village communities … which are the names of places being linked together, like pearls in the Kingdom of God."[483]

Even in El Salvador, then, the people of God of pilgrimage can encounter the land of the Savior. They can find, Romero says, "reflections" of it as they make their way through the world.[484] More than a reflection, the mass is "an encounter with the promised land" because it is an encounter with the Christ who nourishes his people with himself as they travel toward him.[485] Christ is both their land and their way to it.

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[483] Ibid., 272.
[484] Ibid., 247.
[485] Ibid., 38, 40.

But travel they must. Romero describes God's call to each human person in terms of God's call to Abraham: "Go, leave your life of sin, live this comfortable situation of your money, your *haciendas*, all the ways in which you want to install yourself on earth, and…come towards the land that I will show you."[486] According to Romero, the land God reveals in Christ will only be arrived at definitively when Christ comes again in glory and when all the nations are arrayed before him.[487] It is inherited by the meek at the end of time (cf. Mt. 5:5).[488]

The gathering of all the peoples of the world in Christ's ecclesial body is therefore a gathering of pilgrims, and the body of which they are members has an essentially eschatological character. As Romero describes it: "This perspective of eternal salvation, of the Kingdom of God consummated in glory, this Church with its arms outstretched, this Church with its gaze fixed on heaven, is eschatology, an eschatological Church."[489] His homilies compares the pilgrim Church to Jesus still on his way toward

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[486] Ibid., 285.
[487] Ibid., 274.
[488] Cf. Romero's comments on Jesus's words from the Beatitudes that "the meek shall inherit the land," which he reads, not only as echoing God's promise of a land to Abraham (Gen. 12:1), but also eschatologically, as "the land of hope, 'the new heaves and the new earth' (cf. Is. 65:17, Rev. 21:1)," the fullness of which is "beyond history and will be our destiny." Romero, *Homilías*, vol. II, 242.
[489] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. I, 274.

Jerusalem, passing through towns and villages, gathering a people to himself as he goes (cf. Lk. 13:22).[490]

In the late 1970s—especially between 1979 and 1980—popular organizations frequently took control of public buildings, embassies, workplaces, and churches as a form of protest.[491] During one such occupation of the Cathedral of San Salvador in September 1979, Romero laments that it is not possible to celebrate the Eucharist at the Cathedral. "We have therefore come," he says, "to ask for hospitality at the basilica of the Sacred Heart."[492] While Romero expresses frustration at the actions of the popular organizations and their lack of respect for the life and the mission of the Church, he reads the dislocation in terms of the Church's deeper identity: "This morning I have the impression that you and I are the image of a pilgrim Church…[W]e are the image of a Church that is similar to the people that, with Moses, and in a desert, picked up its tent and traveled to another site—a sign of something that is sought, of a pilgrimage, of something that is not established: a pilgrim Church, a Church that cannot install herself upon the earth."[493]

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[490] Ibid. 272; *Homilías* vol. VI, 361-388.

[491] Almeida, *Waves of Protest: Popular Struggle in El Salvador, 1925-2005*, 165–167.

[492] The Cathedral, the church of El Rosario, and various other churches were occupied by popular organizations at this time. Romero, *Homilías*, vol. V, 263-264; Brockman, *Romero*, 197.

Because Christ's ecclesial body on earth is comprised of pilgrims who still have a long and difficult distance to travel, her members must take great care not to, as Romero often says, "install themselves,"[494] lose their way as they "fall to their knees" and make idols of "earthly goods."[495] The notion of installing oneself—settling oneself securely into one's possessions or power (*instalándose*) and consequently bowing down before them—is one to which Romero frequently returns. What all the injustice and repressive violence indicate for Romero is that the membership of the Church in El Salvador—lay and clerical alike—has done precisely that: install themselves. They live or condone lives marked by "Sunday masses" but "unjust weeks." Even the membership of the Church, then, must continually be catechized into the Church's deepest identity and the way that "a Church that sets herself up (*que se instalara*) only to be well off, to have much money and comfort, but forgets the injustices of the world, is not the true Church of our Divine Redeemer."[496]

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[493] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. V, 264-265.
[494] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. I, 272.
[495] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. IV, 48-49.
[496] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. II, 58; Romero, *Homilías*, vol. VI 433.

Among other things, installation signifies for Romero the refusal of the communion at the heart of the cosmos—the triune life of God—and the common destiny of humankind to share in God's life. The deepest meaning of created reality is its character as common gift, which God gives to foster a common life—a communion Romero describes as "familial."[497] As Romero sees it, those who install themselves refuse this communion. They refuse to acknowledge that what God creates is "for the happiness of all people" and not for the security and comfort of the few—a refusal that intensifies the groaning of creation under sin's weight (Rom. 8:22).[498] Instead, they "fix their myopic gaze upon their happiness, their desires, their heaven, their lands, their palaces, their money, their earthly goods."[499] But membership in Christ's ecclesial body means a willingness to part with such things, learning to leave them behind. Rather than install themselves, Christ's members must continually learn to "proceed with a pilgrim's walking stick"[500]

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[497] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. II, 516.
[498] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. II 516; cf. ibid., 39; vol. III 268; vol. IV 48-49.
[499] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. I, 275.
[500] Ibid., 272.

4.5.5 “The reconciliation of all peoples in Christ, God’s Plan of True Liberation”

4.5.5.1 Reconciliation

Romero entitles the homily he delivers on 16 March 1980, the fourth Sunday of Lent, *The Reconciliation of All Peoples in Christ, God’s Plan of True Liberation.* It is among Romero’s most sustained engagements on the topic of agrarian reform.

Romero begins the homily by reflecting upon the Church’s Lenten pilgrimage toward the Paschal mystery of Christ. “We are preparing ourselves,” he says, “to celebrate the central mystery of our faith.”[501] At the outset, he reiterates many of the themes we have been examining. The dying and rising of Jesus Christ, Romero says, happened once and for all, but in such a way that it continues to be given across place and time. The death and resurrection of Jesus is therefore something “living,” something that “touches us” in the celebration of the liturgy.[502] As she approaches Holy Week, the Church will encounter anew Christ’s death and resurrection, the mystery of the redemption of all peoples.[503]

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[501] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. VI, 389.
[502] Ibid., 389.
[503] Ibid., 389.

Romero calls the Lenten season the "springtime of the Church."[504] The whole Church not only prepares to celebrate the central mystery of her faith. She also walks alongside her catechumens as they prepare to receive the sacrament of baptism at the Easter Vigil. Romero observes that while the vast majority of people of El Salvador are already baptized, they, too, must likewise undergo preparation to renew their baptism, which configures them "to the death and resurrection of Christ" (cf. Rom. 6:1-14).[505] During the Easter Vigil, they will "stand alongside the empty tomb of Christ" and renew their dying and rising in him.[506]

On Romero's presentation, the call to reconciliation ties together the lectionary readings, which are from Joshua 5:9-12, 2 Corinthians 5:17-21, and Luke 15:1-32. Romero's description of reconciliation draws especially upon the Gospel text for the week, the parable of the Prodigal Son. "Lent is a time to reflect again upon the highest goods (*verdaderos bienes*), towards which we have to be converted anew," Romero says. These highest goods are what "God has given us in redemption." Conversion is not a simple or straightforward process. But God's love is patient. It is "a love that waits," like the father in the parable waits for the conversion of his children. According to Romero,

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[504] Ibid.
[505] Ibid.
[506] Ibid., 390

"When God's longing to save us encounters the misery of the person that repents, there is the great embrace of reconciliation."[507]

In order to understand the great embrace of reconciliation, we must begin, Romero thinks, with the people of Israel as God's "project of reconciliation."[508] Creation is an act of love. God creates humankind to share in God's life, to be God's children. Because of sin, God's children are *desterrados*.[509] Sin sends Adam and Eve forth from Eden and prevents their return (cf. Gen. 3:23). They and their descendants are literally removed (*des*-) from the land (*tierra*). They are landless. According to Romero, the whole history of Israel therefore becomes the path of return of a humanity that has broken with God—a return Romero narrates in terms of the return to land.[510]

The history of Israel and the search for a path toward reconciliation with God finds its fulfillment in Christ. In the words of St. Paul from the second reading: "If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:17-18, cf. 2 Cor. 5:19-21). According to the logic of Romero's exposition, God's project of reconciliation, upon finding its fulfillment in

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[507] Ibid.
[508] Ibid., 391.
[509] Ibid., 392.
[510] Ibid.

Christ, does not dispense with the story of the people of Israel. Rather, constitutive to God's promise to Abraham and his descendants is that, in Christ this people and its story has become a common gift—a blessing for all the peoples of the earth (cf. Gen. 12:3, cf. Psalm 72:17). All those who come to Christ—including the people of God on pilgrimage in El Salvador—find themselves in it. Israel's world has become theirs. They find themselves alongside the people of Israel, as if they were walking together side-by-side.

We have already seen the way landlessness functions for Romero as a central image of sin. Along these same lines, a central image of the repair of sin occurs when God's brings the children of Israel out of Egypt into the land God promises them. It is an image, Romero says, "of a return, of a search for reconciliation."[511]

Over the course of Lent, the Church has revisited the history of salvation and Israel as God's project of reconciliation: God's call to Abram to go to a land God promises, the formation of a people in whom all the peoples of the world will be blessed—a people who "lived from faith in God's promise of a land."[512] The reading from Joshua for this Sunday presents the people of Israel entering the land of God's promise. Having crossed the Jordan River, they are encamped at Gilgal, on the plains of

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[511] Ibid.
[512] Ibid., 392.

Jericho, and they celebrate the Passover, eating "of the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain." Upon entering the land, "the people of Israel had manna no more, but ate of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year" (Josh. 5:11-12).[513]

Israel's entry into the land is the liturgical present of Romero's El Salvador, the fourth Sunday of Lent 1980. When read in relation to the other lectionary texts, as well as to events in El Salvador, the story opens up into new possibilities of meaning and of application. For instance, it draws the people of God on pilgrimage in El Salvador into it, situating them, not only in relation to Israel's own entry into the land and its thanksgiving celebration, but also in relation to what has happened to the promise of the land in Christ, the promised land made flesh.

Or at least that is how Romero proceeds in his homily. He sees Israel's entry into the land—especially Israel's Passover celebration with the fruits of the land—as an important image of God's work of redemption as encountered in salvation history, leading Romero to reflect upon what is happening in El Salvador in relation to it:

> At this moment in which the land of El Salvador is the object of such conflict, let us not forget that land is closely tied to God's blessings and promises. Israel now has its own land. 'All this land I will give you' [cf. Gen. 13:15], God told the patriarchs, and after their enslavement, led by Moses and Joshua, here is the land. For this reason, they celebrate a great liturgy of thanksgiving: Israel's first Passover in the land, which calls to us to celebrate the God who saves us and

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[513] Ibid., 392-393.

> brings us out of bondage with equal gratitude, adoration, and acknowledgement. The God in whom we place our hope of liberation is the God of Israel.[514]

What Romero gleans from this story, then, is an image of redemption. It serves to underscore, as he puts it, the "theological significance" of the relationship "between reconciliation and land."[515]

In order to understand what he means we must return to the notion of landlessness as a consequence of sin. Again, as Romero recounts it, for the people of Israel "not to have land is a consequence of sin. Adam, being barred from paradise, landless, is the fruit of sin."[516] But now, Israel enters into the land God promised. It is a new land, but it recalls an old one: the land lost because of sin. Israel's entry into the land serves as an important image of how God works to repair sin's damage to creation. It is an image of "Israel forgiven by God, returning to a land, eating…the fruits of its own land, the God who blesses by giving land."[517] The children are no longer fed by God's direct provision of the manna from heaven but rather by their own provisioning, by what they can cultivate for themselves and for others.[518]

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[514] Ibid. 393, 311.
[515] Ibid., 393.
[516] Ibid.
[517] Ibid.
[518] Ibid., 393, 397.

Returning to the theological significance of the relationship between reconciliation and land, we can say that, according to Romero, reconciliation can be glimpsed when people can build houses and dwell in them, when people can plant fields and eat the fruit. Just as the inability to do so evidences sin, the ability to do so reveals as it restores God's purpose for creation. Israel's entry into the land is therefore a particularly resonant image of redemption, yet another way the Church on pilgrimage in El Salvador has not left Israel's world. It is as if her members lag behind the children of Israel, not having crossed the Jordan themselves, with so many still awaiting entry into a land that they, too, can call their own, whose fruits they, too, can taste.

It is at this point in the homily that Romero claims "the agrarian reforms are a theological necessity." Romero explains:

> Land has much to do with God, so it groans when the unjust hoard it and do not leave land for others… A country's land cannot stay in the hands of a few people but must be distributed to all, so that all can participate in the blessings of God in their land… We must always remember the theological truth that land is a sign of justice, of reconciliation. There will not be true reconciliation between our people and God while there is no just distribution of land, while the goods of the land of El Salvador do not benefit and bring happiness to all Salvadorans.[519]

Because the earth is a common gift, it groans when it is hoarded and others are barred from access to it, as is so manifestly the case in El Salvador. In claiming that the agrarian reforms are a theological necessity, Romero's concern is not the particular policy details of the agrarian reform being enacted by the Junta, about which, as we have seen, he is ambivalent. His point is not to engage in a policy debate but to articulate a theological truth, namely, that working toward a more just distribution of land shows God's purpose for creation—a purpose sin makes difficult to perceive. In this sense, the restoration of a landless people, their ability to access and to derive benefit from what is theirs but what has been denied them, images God's reconciliation. On Romero's view, any reconciliation that neglects the injustice embedded in the landscape is not reconciliation. It merits the response of the prophet Jeremiah: "They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, 'Peace, peace,' where there is no peace" (Jer. 6:14).

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[519] Ibid., 393, 312.

The path toward what Romero calls the "highest goods"—the goods of God's redemption in Christ—inescapably involves making use of the goods of God's creation. The God who creates the world is the God who redeems it in Christ. Learning to receive created goods as common gifts is the *sine qua non* for learning to receive the highest goods, because they, too, are common gifts. In Romero's words, created goods are gifts given to draw people closer to God and to one another, and to live into the gift of new creation in Christ—the common destiny of all creation.[520] God gives "farms, estates, herds—all things," he says, not to be "instruments of exploitation" or to be used with "selfishness and injustice."[521] They are given to reveal their giver, and to incorporate human life into God's. Israel's celebration of Passover on the plains of Jericho images what such a use of created goods looks like: "They harvested the grain; they praised the God who had given them the land and the harvest; and they shared with one another a true Passover feast."[522]

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[520] Ibid., 394.

The image of Israel celebrating Passover has inescapable Eucharistic resonances for Romero. Israel's meal of thanksgiving points toward the one Jesus celebrates with his disciples on the night he was betrayed—the meal of thanksgiving that is for Romero the source and summit of Christian life. Both meals reveal how the gifts of the old creation are ordered to the gifts of the new one—ordered to the one through whom and for whom everything was created, the one in whom "all things hold together" (Col. 1:16-17).

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[521] In elaborating upon the notion of land as an instrument of exploitation, Romero engages in a detailed analysis of a pastoral letter that was released in February 1980 by the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil (Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil, CNBB) entitled "Igreja e Problemas da Terra" or "The Church and Land Problems." The document analyzes the land problem in Brazil by distinguishing between land for exploitation and land for work. The former prioritizes land as a tool to make money, without regard for the human person. The latter prioritizes the human person by ensuring all have access to land for the purpose of a livelihood and the provisioning food for themselves and others. Cf. Ibid., 395-397.

[522] Ibid., 394-395.

At the same time, both meals reveal how the gift of new creation clarifies the contours of the old one—the 'holding together' of all things in him.

4.5.5.2 "The parable of Christian reconciliation"

Though created goods are gifts given to reveal their giver and to incorporate their recipients into God's life, Romero is of course not blind, as he puts it above, to their ubiquitous deployment in El Salvador and elsewhere as "instruments of exploitation" or to their "selfish and unjust" use. According to Romero, this is only a further indication of the pilgrim Church's contemporaneousness to the children of Israel and of the way they share similar struggles.

In the case of Israel, the entry into the land and the Passover celebration on the plains of Jericho was not the end of the story. Subsequent history is not one of reconciliation with God and neighbor. It is an ongoing and complex process of turning from and struggling to return to the God from whom "they received their land and its fruits."[523] Romero observes how scripture frequently recounts Israel's recurrent tendency to forget that its land, like its life, is from God. It is a tendency, Romero thinks, which the pilgrim Church in El Salvador shares.[524]

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[523] Ibid., 394.
[524] Ibid.

At the same time, scripture also frequently recounts God's recurrent response to Israel's forgetting, which is one of "tenderness" (*ternura*). God, Romero says, is "tireless in forgiving, tireless in loving."[525] As the homily continues, we see that it is precisely God's tireless and forgiving love that becomes the lens through which to see how God deals with the damage sin does and continues to do to what God has made, and how God patiently and mercifully works to recreate it in Christ.

The Gospel passage for this week is from Luke 15:1-32, often known as the parable of the Prodigal Son. Romero refers to it here as "the parable of Christian reconciliation," because for him the story concerns both brothers' need for reconciliation, and above all, the mercy of their father.[526]

The parable begins with the younger son asking for his share of the familial estate and his father complying with the request (vv. 11-13). After collecting the rest of his possessions, the son sets off to a "far country"—a land that is not his own—and promptly squanders his "property," losing his self in "loose living."[527] He falls into such impoverishment that he envies the food fed to the pigs under his care and into such disrepute that “no one gave him anything” (vv. 14-16).

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[525] Ibid.

[526] Ibid., 397.

[527] Though Romero does not comment upon it the Greek word Luke uses for property is *ousia*, meaning substance or being, which implies a close connection between the son's squandering of his possessions and the squandering of his own substance or being.

On Romero’s reading, all people can find themselves in the figure of the younger son. Like him, all people abuse of the gifts they have been given by God, the gifts that they themselves are. “Each one of us can see in him,” Romero says, “our own personal history.”[528] The impoverishment of the younger son is not simply the state in which he eventually finds himself, envious of the pigs. It is the impoverishment of all those who regard their possessions as exclusively their own and who set out upon a path to find life and happiness apart from God.[529] The illusion of such a life can be sustained for a time. As long people have money, health, and friends, Romero says, they can seem to have everything. They seem to be sufficient apart from God. But, in one form or another, this sense of sufficiency comes to an end. When it does, they, too, will discover, like the younger son, “that they have been adoring nothing but idols.”[530]

Eventually, the younger son does decide to return to his homeland, setting out on the path of conversion. He plans to plead for forgiveness and to ask to be reinstated in his father’s house—not as a son but as a servant. But upon his approach, the son finds his father already waiting for him. He does not need to say anything at all. As the passage reads: “While he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.” A celebration immediately ensues. In the father’s words, “my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.” It is therefore “fitting to make merry and be glad” (vv. 17-24, 32).

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[528] Ibid., 397, cf. 390.
[529] Ibid., 397.
[530] Ibid., 398.

Romero reads this moment in the parable as a revelation of God’s inexhaustible mercy. In his homily, Romero’s language conflates the return of the son and the return of the sinner to God: “When the son, touched by misery, by the abandonment of others, remembers that there is no greater love than God’s, he returns; and this God, who the son should find resentful toward him or with the back turned, instead finds God already turned toward him with arms extended, ready to celebrate his return.”[531]

Just as all people can find themselves in the figure younger son, Romero thinks many in El Salvador can likewise find themselves in the figure of the older son as well. Upon hearing the sounds of celebration coming from the house, the father’s eldest son, who was out in the field at the time, refuses to enter and to participate in the festivities. He is angry at the response to the return of his younger brother, receiving it as a violation of justice. He has always been obedient to his father's commands, he says, but he has never been celebrated like this (vv. 25-30).

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[531] Ibid., 398.

The older brother has failed to appreciate the goodness and the mercy in whose presence he resides. He would rather exclude himself from the festivities than share in them with his brother. His father must therefore go out to him, reminding him "all that is mine is yours" (v. 28-32). Though obedient, the brother still has much to learn about how mercy waits for and celebrates the return of the lost. The older brother does not know, for instance, the path his younger brother has traveled to find his way back home. He does not know the distance to the far country or the fall into misery and disgrace. He does not know the wherewithal and humility that leads to the return, the plea for forgiveness, or even the unexpectedness of the father's response. For the older brother, the younger brother's transgressions are unforgivable and his father's house unsharable because of them. The older brother therefore clings to a sense of justice that only partially grasps what has happened, which only generates anger and resentment in him. He, too, Romero observes, is in need of the reconciliation Christ brings.[532]

Romero also discerns pride in the older brother's response, which he reads in terms of the mutual recriminations between left and right in El Salvador, the polarization, the hatred, and the descent into violence. Romero explains: "There is nothing more opposed to reconciliation than pride, than those who think that they are clean and pure, those who think that they have the right to point to others as the cause of the injustice and are unable to look within themselves and to acknowledge that they also have played a part in the disorders of the country."[533] El Salvador is replete with those like the older brother, who imagine themselves free from entanglements in injustice, and who quickly and easily locate the source of it in others. They are characteristically shrill in their call for changes but they see no need to change themselves. According to Romero, such a stance only exacerbates the violence. It builds up and reinforces the barriers that must be broken down for reconciliation to be possible.[534]

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[532] Ibid.

Romero calls attention to the conflict that prompts the series of parables in which the present one is included: the murmuring among the Pharisees and the scribes regarding how Jesus receives and eats with sinners (15:1-2).[535] At least in part, the parable is therefore a justification of Jesus's own actions. The mercy of the father in the parable is a revelation of the mercy of Christ. In welcoming the unworthy, Jesus exposes as he bridges barriers hiding people from one another.[536]

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[533] Ibid.

[534] Ibid., 398-399. Though Romero does not elaborate upon the point here, ultimately his concern has to do with the superficiality of the older brother's sense of injustice. It is superficial because it fails to attend to the deepest, most intractable roots of injustice, which are lodged in every human heart. As we have seen, Romero thinks the greatest injustice afflicting El Salvador is profoundly personal, occurring in the enclosure of the self and its possessions from the claims of others. It is an injustice that ultimately implicates everyone and wounds the capacity for communion. The roots of such injustice necessarily ramify outward, entangling and warping structures, institutions, and landscapes.

"There can be no reconciliation," Romero repeatedly says in this homily, other than "adhering to Christ."[537] Those who do so see that the world is not neatly divided into the worthy and the unworthy, and that all are deeply entangled in injustice. They must pray to be forgiven as they learn to practice forgiveness themselves.[538] The path toward reconciliation therefore begins with the acknowledgement that, as Romero says in his homily the following week, "we are all sinners, and we have all contributed to the crimes and the violence in our country."[539]

The reconciliation Christ brings is continually and abundantly offered. In articulating how this is so, Romero focuses upon Christ's association with those in need of mercy, which is how Christ still works to build up a body of the merciful in the world and to reconcile humankind to himself. As Romero says in the homily:

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[535] Ibid.
[536] Ibid.
[537] Ibid., cf. 400.
[538] Ibid., 399.
[539] Ibid., 428.

> Christ is not any thing, dear brothers and sisters. Christ is the very presence of God's reconciliation in the world…God in Christ dwells very near to us. Christ has given us a guideline: 'I was hungry and you gave me food.' Where there are hungry people, Christ is near. 'I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink.' When someone arrives at your house asking you for water, there is Christ if you look with the eyes of faith. In the sick person who desires a visit, Christ tells you: 'I was sick and you visited me.' Or in prison. How many people today are scared to testify on behalf of the innocent! What terror has been sown among us such that even friends betray friends…! If we could see that Christ is the needy one, the tortured, the imprisoned, the murdered; if we could discover Christ in all those thrown to the roadsides like garbage, then we would go and gather them up with tenderness…and we would not be ashamed.[540]

According to Romero, the mystery of Christ's ongoing association with the hungry, the thirsty, the sick, the imprisoned, the tortured, and the murdered, is tied to the renewal of creation in Christ and the reconciliation of creatures to God. Christ's association with the needy is, as Romero puts it here, "the very presence of God's reconciliation in the world."

The passage also suggests that in Romero's El Salvador, being merciful carried grave risk. As we have already seen, the archdiocese at this time was dealing with a refugee crisis. Many in the countryside were fleeing the violence—the burning of their houses and crops, the killing of their children. They were sleeping in the mountains. They were also coming in droves to the archdiocese to find shelter. But neither those seeking shelter nor those who offered it were assured of their safety. Romero repeatedly has to defend the Church's actions against the charge that the shelters were sites of political indoctrination and even military training.[541] In this case, as in others, the merciful of El Salvador shared in the suffering of those to whom they extended mercy. Comforting the afflicted or welcoming the stranger was dangerous business. In a recent interview, for instance, Captain Álvaro Saravia, one of the men implicated in Romero's death, describes the simple act of sharing tortillas with a stranger this way: "It would have been considered communist … in those days. Take him out, wreck his house and tell him 'sonofabitch, you're with the guerrillas."[542]

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[540] Ibid., 400.

We have been examining how Romero emphasizes Christ's ongoing association with those in need of mercy. But none of this is to neglect other ways Christ continues to be present to his people as well. Christ dwells on earth in his ecclesial body. "Brother and sisters," Romero says, "this morning Christ is here with us, for in the Gospel he tells us: 'I am with you until the end of the age'" (Mt. 28:20).[543] Christ is also present in his sacramental body, where, in the Eucharist, he continues to offer himself as nourishment for his people on pilgrimage.[544]

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[541] Ibid., 405; 444-445.
[542] Carlos Dada, "Así Matamos a Monseñor Romero," *El Faro*, March 22, 2010, http://www.elfaro.net/es/201003/noticias/1403/Así-matamos-a-monseñor-Romero.htm.
[543] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. VI, 400-402.
[544] Ibid., 400.

Christ's ongoing presence in his needy, ecclesial, and sacramental bodies are intimately related to one another—though Romero does not explore this matter here. One of the ways they relate for him has to do with mercy. The Church does not simply deliver a message about mercy to others. The very foundation of her existence as a gathering of peoples is God's mercy in Christ. She subsists only through God's ongoing work of mercy in her members, which is seen, among other ways, in the sacraments. To say that the Church is Christ's body is to say that her membership is the extension into human history of Christ's merciful embrace of suffering humanity. That embrace, which is perfect in Christ, is imperfect in his frail, fallible, and miserable members, who struggle to receive the mercy Christ offers them as they learn to be bearers of it themselves.

The effect of Romero's homily as a whole is that the people of God on pilgrimage in El Salvador are surrounded on all sides by the gift of God's merciful presence in Christ. They live "saturated" with it, as Romero puts it elsewhere.[545] Christ awaits their conversion, like the tireless and forgiving love of the father in the parable of the prodigal son. Christ's ongoing presence to his pilgrim people is the ongoing presence of a love that is always already there, ready to run and to embrace those who, like the younger son, have fallen to their knees before creatures and who are trying to turn away, or those who, like the older son, refuse to forgive sins and share in the celebration of the return of the lost. But in clinging to Christ, they encounter the land toward which they travel and the way to it. The father's celebration of the return of the younger son images it, just as his words to the eldest son describe it: "all that is mine is yours." The land they have in him can only be shared, and the lands through which they pilgrim offer an opportunity to anticipate its life.

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[545] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. III, 432-433.

4.5.6 "All that surrounds us proclaims the cross"

Despite being surrounded on all sides by the gift of God's merciful presence in Christ, the final weeks of Romero's life amount to the rejection of that offer as the bloodletting continued to intensify. At the end of his 16 March 1980 homily, Romero says that the question God poses to Cain is the same one God continues to pose to the Salvadoran people: "Where is Abel your brother?" All the Salvadoran blood being shed joins Abel's in crying out from the ground (Gen. 4:9-10).[546] The cry is that of Christ, who tells us, Romero continues, "whatever is done to the poor and the oppressed he receives it as done to himself" (cf. Mt. 25:40).[547]

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[546] Ibid., 411.
[547] Ibid.

Romero's final Sunday homilies were all preached at the Basilica of the Sacred Heart because protest groups were occupying the Cathedral. As we have already seen, in these homilies Romero frequently speaks about the repression and the need to end it prior to proceeding with the agrarian reform. The archdiocese and others had set up makeshift refugee centers to shelter those fleeing the terror in the countryside.[548] Military operations were continuing, with corpses continuing to pile up.[549] In his final days, working for an end to the repression became Romero's central concern.

Regarding the agrarian reform itself, Romero continues to struggle to articulate his ambivalence and to clarify the archdiocese's own understanding of the situation. He mentions, for instance, the widespread perception that the Church is now against the reforms she previously supported.[550] But Romero continues to emphasize its importance. "We are not against these reforms," he insists, for "the mystery of reconciliation and justice in the distribution of land belong to the revelation of God." He is adamant, however, that "a land so soaked with blood cannot produce fruit" (cf. Gen. 4:12). The Church does not oppose the reform but "the bloodshed that accompanies it."[551] Its enactment is only contributing to the suffering of those it is the whole purpose of the reform to alleviate.[552] Agrarian reform, which is so crucial to reconciliation, is only awakening new hatreds and propelling the country toward civil war.[553] Romero therefore contends that the bloodletting must first cease before anything constructive can come of the reform. "What is most needed today," he says, "is to halt the repression."[554]

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[548] Ibid., 405, 414; 444-445.
[549] Ibid., 413. Cf. Brockman, *Romero*, 239.
[550] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. VI, 411.
[551] Ibid., 411, 453.

Of course, the repression did not halt. Romero's final Sunday homily, which was delivered on 23 March, was the fifth Sunday of Lent. At the outset of the homily, Romero observes that conditions in El Salvador provide their own form of Lenten preparation. They remind the pilgrim Church that, though Easter is a "cry of victory" over death, the victory is difficult to perceive, and death's rule remains palpable. "It is first necessary to accompany Christ through Lent, through a Holy Week that is cross, sacrifice, martyrdom. As Jesus himself says, 'Blessed are those who are not scandalized by the cross'" (Mt. 10:37).[555] Romero continues: "At present, our people are well prepared for this, because all that surrounds us proclaims the cross."[556] We are "meditating on the passion of Christ among a people that likewise carries a cross on its back."[557] But the Christian hope is that this crucifying world does not have the last word, and that "after this Salvadoran cavalry is our Easter."[558]

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[552] Ibid., 411.
[553] Ibid., 412.
[554] Ibid., 412, 419.
[555] Ibid., 425.
[556] Ibid., 425.

At the end of the homily, after discussing logistics surrounding the archdioceses' preparations for Holy Week given the occupation of the Cathedral—the location and times of the blessing of the palms, the route of the Palm Sunday procession, details surrounding the Chrism mass, and so on[559]—Romero turns to the events of the past week, which he calls "a tremendously tragic" one.[560] He recounts what the archdiocese knows about the various military operations conducted in the countryside, the houses looted and burned, the *campesinos* killed, the damage done by a bomb blast at the Ministry of Agriculture, and the armed siege of the University of El Salvador, as well as the various interventions of the archdiocese.[561]

The homily famously concludes with Romero's direct appeal to members of the military, the National Guard, and the police—an appeal that was likely his death sentence. Addressing the armed forces, Romero again evokes God's words to Cain: "You are killing your own *campesino* brothers and sisters, and over an order to kill that comes from a human being, God's law must prevail: You shall not kill [Ex. 20:13]. No soldier is obligated to obey an order that is against God's law. No one has to obey an immoral law. It is time that you recovered your conscience and obeyed it rather the order of sin." Before the blood crying out from the ground, Romero continues, the people of God cannot remain silent. "The reforms are worth nothing if they come stained with so much blood. In the name of God, in the name of this suffering people, whose laments rise to heaven each day more tumultuously, I beg you, I plead with you, I order you in the name of God: Stop the repression!"[562]

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[557] Ibid., 439.
[558] Ibid., 425.
[559] Ibid., 438-440.
[560] Ibid., 446.
[561] Ibid., 446-451.

The next day, Monday the 24 March 1980, Romero was shot dead by a sniper as he celebrated mass at the Chapel of the Hospital of the Divine Providence. He had just finished the homily and was about to begin the Eucharistic liturgy. The sniper fired once from about thirty-five meters away—the distance from the street to the altar of the Chapel. The fragmentation bullet from the rifle entered and scattered inside his chest, causing massive internal hemorrhaging. Romero fell down next to the altar, at the foot of the crucifix behind it.[563]

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[562] Ibid., 453.

[563] For detailed accounts of Romero's death, cf. Morozzo Della Rocca, *Primero Dios*, 448–459; Brockman, *Romero*, 243–245; Jesús Delgado, *Oscar A. Romero* (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1990), 201–205.

PART III: BODY OF CHRIST

CHAPTER 5: ÓSCAR ROMERO'S WITNESS

> Monsignor Romero was like a Salvadoran Jesus Christ.
>
> —Salvadoran *campesino* refugee

> [M]artyrdom is the wealth—a sorrowful wealth—of the Church of yesterday and today on this continent.
>
> —Gustavo Gutierrez, *Las Casas: In Search of the Poor of Jesus Christ*

> Indeed, an hour is coming when those who kill you will think that by doing so they are offering worship to God.
>
> —John 16:2

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter narrated the persecution of the Church and repression of the Salvadoran people, which were closely associated with efforts to implement agrarian reform in the 1970s. I attempted to locate those efforts within a longstanding societal and ecclesial conversation about such reform, as well as to show how the Church's involvement in these efforts took its bearings from the Church's social doctrine. Hence Romero says that by identifying with the teaching of the Church on the common destination of created goods and its implications for property, people have suffered and are continuing to suffer. The suffering, of course, eventually included Romero himself. The chapter ended with Romero's death as he celebrated mass at the Divine Providence Chapel in the evening of 24 March 1980. In Romero and in many others, the story of agrarian reform in El Salvador becomes a story of martyrdom.[1]

Things might have gone differently in El Salvador. The economically and politically powerful might have responded to Romero, moving heaven and earth to help address the agrarian crisis of their country. The Junta Revolucionaria del Gobierno might have been successfully and smoothly implemented its agrarian reform without bloodshed. Romero might have died peacefully in his sleep. But none of this happened, and in large measure because of it, El Salvador descended further into violence and eventually into war. Alternatively, even under the conditions of violence, Romero did not have to die a martyr. He might have succumbed to cancer or suffered a heart attack.

But in relation to the story I have been telling in these pages, it is fitting that Romero would die a martyr. The notion of fittingness and theological arguments based upon it run deep in Christianity.[2] The notion of fittingness speaks to the coherence—even the beauty—of God's dealings with the world, for instance, in becoming incarnate or in suffering and dying on the cross. The present chapter attempts to make a similar sort of claim about the fittingness of Romero's martyrdom. It fittingly illumines the relationship between justice and charity that has been at the heart of this study as a whole. It coheres with God's relationship to the world in Christ.

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[1] As Pope Francis said in a press conference prior to Romero's beatification: "After him [Romero] there is Rutilio Grande, and there are others, too; there are others who were killed." Indeed, there were. Pope Francis, "In-Flight Press Conference of His Holiness Pope Francis from Korea to Rome," Apostolic Journey to the Republic of Korea, 18 August 2014. The beatification process for Rutilio Grande has recently been opened. "Inician Beatificación Del Sacerdote Rutilio Grande," *El Tiempo Latino*, March 12, 2015. Fr. Stanley Rother, who served in Guatemala under similar circumstances, has recently been declared a martyr. Cf. also Junno Arocho Esteves, "Vatican Commission Formally Recognizes Martyrdom of Oklahoma City Priest," *ZENIT*, June 26, 2015; Stanley Rother and David Monahan, *The Shepherd Cannot Run: Letters of Stanley Rother, Missionary and Martyr* (Oklahoma City: Archdiocese of Oklahoma City, 1984).

We have repeatedly encountered how, in the words of *Gaudium et spes*, "God intended the earth with everything contained in it for the use of all human beings and peoples. Thus, under the leadership of justice and in the company of charity, created goods should be in abundance for all in like manner" (§69). The claim that creation is a common gift is above all a claim of justice, which is why justice leads. But under the conditions of sin and violence, the virtue of charity and its act of mercy are crucial companions, helping justice to find its way. In the midst of injustice, what is in excess of justice is often required to meet its demands.

Romero's martyrdom therefore displays the heart of the teaching we have been examining throughout these pages. His insistence that creation is a common gift and that the land of El Salvador belong to all Salvadorans continued to cost him more and more—until it finally cost him his life. Charity accompanied justice not only in Romero's life; it also accompanied justice in Romero's death. His martyrdom throws into stark relief the cost of the claim that creation is a common gift and the cruciform shape of God's work to restore what God has made. This is what I mean when I say that it is fitting that Romero would die a martyr.

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[2] See Athanasius, *On the Incarnation of the Word* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996), §§10, 22, 26, 37, 41, 44; Anselm of Canterbury, *Why God Became Man* in *The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 263, 285-286, 323, 339; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, III.1, 46.4; Julian of Norwich, *Showings*, trans. Edmund Colledge, O.S.A. and James Walsh, S.J. (Mahwah, New Jersey: Pauist Press, 1978), Chs. 1, 13, 40, 50.

Pope Francis himself made a somewhat similar suggestion to a delegation from El Salvador in October 2015 when he spoke of how Romero's martyrdom did not simply occur at the moment of his death. Francis is referring to Romero's experience of suffering and persecution prior to his death, as well as to the defamation and slander he suffered after it. In Francis's words, Romero was repeatedly "scourged with the hardest stone that exists in the world: the tongue." Francis then says this: "It is beautiful to see him like this (*es lindo verlo también así*): a man who continues to be a martyr…after giving his life, he continued to give it."[3] By this comment, Francis suggests that, in light Romero's life, it is possible to discern beauty or fittingness in his death, just as it is possible to discern beauty in his ongoing suffering after his death. Perhaps another way to put the point is that the beauty of a life given in love retains its form despite the suffering it endures. In a mysterious way, it is as if the hatred, the persecution, and the killing only contribute to the splendor of the witness.

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[3] Pope Francis, Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Pilgrimage from El Salvador, 30 October 2015.

The present chapter returns to the question with which this dissertation began: to what does Óscar Romero bear witness? Over the course of this work, I have frequently used notions of 'witness' and 'bearing witness' in an admittedly broad sense. In this chapter, I am principally interested in Romero's witness as it pertains to his martyrdom.[4]

Roberto Casas Andrés has documented in extensive detail that in the wake of Romero's death, popular traditions of recognizing and remembering his martyrdom arose almost immediately, despite the considerable danger involved in doing so.[5] On the tenth anniversary of his death, Arturo Rivera y Damas, the sitting archbishop of San Salvador, opened a cause of beatification and canonization for Romero.[6] Over the ensuing decades, the cause moved forward—though not without encountering obstacles. The cause was delayed and then later stalled because of "prudential reasons"—the phrase frequently used in official statements.[7] It was also temporarily

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[4] The English word 'martyr' derives from the Greek *martus* or 'witness.' For a good overview of the use of Greek terms *martus*, *marturia, marturion*, and so forth, in scripture and early Christianity, cf. Servais Pinckaers, *The Spirituality of Martyrdom...To the Limits of Love*, trans. Patrick Clark and Annie Hounsokou (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, forthcoming), 39–51.

[5] "To speak in public about Romero was extremely dangerous, and one could not trust anyone in this regard; the consequences of showing esteem for Romero could be deadly." Roberto Casas Andrés, *Dios Pasó Por El Salvador. La Relevancia Teológica de Las Tradiciones Narrativas de Los Mártires Salvadoreños IDTP, 2009* (Bilbao: Desclée de Brouwer, 2009), 193, 179–244.

[6] From the website of the Office of the Cause of Canonization: www.romero.es

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Cf. Carlos Colorado, "Cronología de la Causa de Beatificación," *Super Martyrio*, May 9, 2006, polycarpi.blogspot.com. For a good discussion of the delay and the issues surrounding it, cf. Kenneth L. Woodward, *Making Saints: How The Catholic Church Determines Who Becomes A Saint, Who Doesn't, And Why* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 36–49.

[7] The crux of the issue was Romero's posthumous remembrance and adoption as a symbol of the left in El Salvador and beyond. As Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI commented in 2007, "Archbishop Romero was certainly an important witness of the faith, a man of great Christian virtue who worked for peace and against the dictatorship, and was assassinated while celebrating Mass. Consequently, his death was truly 'credible,' a witness of faith. The problem was that a political party wrongly wished to use him as their badge, as an emblematic figure. How can we shed light on his person in the right way and protect it from these attempts to exploit it? This is the problem." Pope Benedict XVI, *Interview of His Holiness Benedict XVI During the Flight to Brazil*, 9 May 2007. Cf. Pope Francis, *In-Flight Press Conference of His Holiness Pope Francis From Korea to Rome*, 18 August 2014. For an in-depth discussion of these matters, cf. Woodward, *Making Saints*. Carlos Colorado, "At Last, a Speedy Approval for Romero," *Super Martyrio*, February 3, 2015, http://polycarpi.blogspot.com. Another issue was whether the case fit the canonical criteria of being killed in hatred of the faith (*in odium fidei)*. As we will examine at greater length below, the reality surrounding Romero's death is a complex and difficult one. The violence involved Catholics killing other Catholics in a culturally Catholic country, who, among the things, were fighting about the meaning and implications of the faith for the life of their country. In what way, then, was Romero's death the result of *hatred of the faith*? Pope Francis himself raised this question at a press conference prior to Romero's beatification: "What I would like is a clarification about martyrdom *in odium fidei*, whether it can occur either for having confessed the Creed or for having done the works that Jesus commands with regard to one's neighbor. And this

‘blocked’ by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith because of questions raised about Romero’s orthodoxy.[8] But once Pope Benedict XVI ‘unblocked’ it in 2012,[9] the cause began to move forward rapidly—especially after the election of Pope Francis in 2013, a longtime devotee.[10]

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is a task for the theologians. They are studying it.” Pope Francis, “In-Flight Press Conference of His Holiness Pope Francis from Korea to Rome,” Apostolic Journey to the Republic of Korea, 18 August 2014.

[8] To this day, one frequently encounters his image emblazoned side-by-side with the likes of Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara. Romero’s cause was studied by the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith beginning in 2000, which eventually concluded that the concerns over Romero’s orthodoxy were unfounded. Cf. “Un Hombre de la Iglesia y del Evangelio,” *El Diario de Hoy*, March 22, 2005; Colorado, “Cronología de La Causa de Beatificación.” According to Carlos Colorado, while Romero’s cause was blocked “on suspicion of doctrinal irregularities and ideological exploitation by the left, the concerns came not from Popes John Paul II or Benedict XVI, who supported Romero’s cause, but from others. Carlos Colorado, “Romero Goes to the Experts,” *Super Martyrio*, September 8, 2014, polycarpi.blogspot.com. For more on the relation between Benedict and Romero, cf. Carlos Colorado, “‘Fue Un Gran Testigo de La Fé’: Benedicto XVI,” *Super Martyrio*, July 15, 2011, polycarpi.blogspot.com.For more on John Paul’s relation to Romero, cf. Carlos Colorado, “A Dialogue about Criteria,” *Super Martyrio*, July 14, 2011, http://polycarpi.blogspot.com.

[9] “Pope Benedict, Not Francis, Unblocked Romero Sainthood Case,” *The Associated Press*, February 4, 2015.

[10] Carlos Colorado, “Pope Francis & Óscar Romero,” *Super Martyrio*, March 29, 2013, polycarpi.blogspot.com; Carlos Colorado, “Romero in the Age of Francis,” *Super Martyrio*, June 29, 2014, www.polycarpi.blogspot.com; Kevin Clarke, *Oscar Romero: Love Must Win Out* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2014), 3–6.

Early in 2015, theologians at the Congregation for the Causes of Saints unanimously affirmed that Romero was murdered in hatred of the Church's faith, and that Romero was a martyr—a witness to the faith the Church professes.[11] In May of that same year—thirty-five years after he was killed—Romero was beatified a martyr in San Salvador, with hundreds of thousands gathered at downtown landmark dedicated to the country's namesake patron: Savior of the World Plaza (*Plaza Salvador del Mundo*).

To what, then, does Romero bear witness? The present chapter reflects theologically upon how Romero bears witness to Christ—how Romero is, in the words cited in one of the epigraphs, "like a Salvadoran Jesus Christ."[12] Similar claims frequently occur in the literature on Romero.[13] In a homily preached days after Romero's death, for instance, Ignacio Ellacuría famously said, "With Monsignor Romero, God passed through El Salvador."[14] I take Ellacuría to mean that God in Christ passed through El Salvador in the person of Romero—that Romero's life and especially his death are saturated with Christ's presence. The present chapter follows these convictions by reflecting upon Romero's martyrdom as a manfiestation Christ's presence in the world, and how the *telos* of the gift of creation is sharing in Christ's life.

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[11] Stefania Falasca, "Riconosciuto Il Martirio Di Romero," *Avenire*, gennalo 2015.

[12] Tomasa (pseudonym), a Salvadoran laywoman Anna L. Peterson interviewed for her study, refers to him as "a living Christ." Anna L. Peterson, *Martyrdom and the Politics of Religion: Progressive Catholicism in El Salvador's Civil War* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 102.

[13] Cf. Martin Maier, *Monseñor Romero: maestro de espiritualidad* (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 2005), 21–22; Scott Wright, *Oscar Romero and the Communion of the Saints: A Biography* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2009), xi–xii; María López Vigil, *Piezas para un Retrato* (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1993). Despite the frequency of the claim that Romero was like a Salvadoran Jesus Christ, its significance does not always seem apparent to those who make it. Maier, who elaborates upon the claim at greatest length, is a good example of this. He describes the history of Romero in reference to the history of Jesus, drawing various parallels between them: they were born in conditions of poverty in an insignificant country; their lives were characterized by a "profound understanding with God"; they were both carpenters (carpentry was the first trade

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Romero learned); the death of a friend in both cases led to a decisive conversion; they preached the goodness and kindness of God; they announced the coming of God's kingdom; and so on. Maier continues for several pages along these lines before concluding: "The history of Óscar Romero is very old. It is the history of Jesus." What is strange is not the comparison between Romero and Jesus Christ. What is strange is the failure to grasp that Jesus Christ is God incarnate. Consequently, in addition to the similarities between Romero and Jesus, there are also differences, and these differences have important implications for the way martyrs like Romero bear witness to Christ. Or at least that is what I hope to display in this chapter

[14] Quoted in Jon Sobrino and Rolando Alvarado, eds., *Ignacio Ellacuría, aquella libertad esclarecida* (Santander: Editorial SAL TERRAE, 1999), 17; cf. also Roberto Casas Andrés, *Dios pasó por El Salvador: la relevancia teológica de las tradiciones narrativas de los mártires salvadoreños* (Bilbao: Desclée de Brouwer, 2009).

5.2 Romero's Martyrdom

5.2.1 *Operación Piña*

The plot to kill Romero was known as *Operación Piña* or Operation Pineapple.[15] Because of the lack of investigation of the Salvadoran police in the immediate aftermath of Romero's death, as well as the killing or disappearance of key witnesses and the general obstructionism by authorities, there is much about the case that still remains unknown.[16] Examining some of what is known, however, offers a window into the world of those who opposed Romero and his work, as well as the way that opposition reached the highest echelons of political and economic power in El Salvador and even the United States.

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[15] For more on the case of Romero's assassination and the findings of the investigation into it and the war sponsored by United Nations, cf. The Commission on the Truth for El Salvador, "From Madness to Hope: The 12-Year War in El Salvador: Report of the Commission on the Truth for El Salvador" (New York: United Nations, 1993). In the wake of the peace accords of 1992 and days after the report of the Truth Commission was released, the Salvadoran Legislative Assembly approved a Law of General Amnesty for the Consolidation of the Peace, which granted amnesty to all participants in "political crimes" during the civil war, and which therefore suspended all activity in Salvadoran courts related to Romero's death. Morozzo Della Rocca, *Primero Dios*, 462–463. The amnesty law remains in effect to this day. Outside of the Salvadoran courts, however, there have been investigations, and the Truth Commission's conclusions have largely been corroborated. Morozzo della Rocca, *Oscar Romero*, 219.

[16] All this is detailed at considerable length in Morozzo Della Rocca, *Primero Dios*, 459–467.

The man who killed Romero was a trained sniper. He fired once from the window of a car, which was parked in front of the chapel Romero was saying mass at the time before fleeing the scene. "Así Matamos a Monseñor Romero" ("How We Killed Monsignor Romero"), a remarkable piece by Carlos Dada published the Salvadoran newspaper *El Faro*, draws extensively on interviews with Captain Álvaro Saravia—the only person to be held accountable by a court of law for the killing of Romero. Saravia has been in hiding for decades, and Dada was able to track him down.[17] Saravia claims that the sniper came from the security detail of Mario Molina, the son of a former president of El Salvador. Saravia describes the sniper as tall, slender, and bearded man, identifying him simply as a Salvadoran and a former national guardsman. His identity and whereabouts remain unknown.[18]

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[17] According to the Center for Justice & Accountability (CJA), CJA filed suit against Saravia in September 2003 for his role in the assassination. A 1980 government raid uncovered documents implicating Major Roberto D'Aubuisson and Saravia in Romero's assassination. The assassination was planned and carried out by officers of the Salvadoran military and leaders of right-wing paramilitaries. After being served in Modesto, California, where he ran a used car dealership at the time, Saravia fled and has since remained in hiding. A federal judge in 2004 issued a default judgment holding Saravia liable for his role in the assassination, ordering Saravia to pay $10 million to the plaintiff, a relative of Monsignor Romero. Saravia remains on the Department of Homeland Security's wanted list.

[18] Those others directly involved in the crime either remain in hiding or are deceased. The man who drove the sniper, Amado Garay, is in hiding as a protected witness in the United States. According to Dada, apart from Garay, Saravia, and the sniper, the others

The car used to drive the sniper to the chapel was a red, four-door Volkswagen Passat, which was donated to Roberto D'Aubuisson, the mastermind behind the operation. Roberto Mathies Regalado, the man who donated the car, was the owner of the local Volkswagen agency. The donation was in support of D'Abuisson's anti-communist efforts.[19]

Saravia says the sniper was hired for one thousand Salvadoran *colones*, which at the time would have been approximately $400. The money allegedly came from a Salvadoran businessman named Eduardo Lemus O'Byrne, a former president of the Asociación Nacional de la Empresa Privada (ANEP)—a federation of twenty-five associations that represented, in its own words, "the most productive sectors of the nation."[20] We encountered ANEP in the previous chapter when it and the rest of the Salvadoran private or entrepreneurial sector withdrew from the Agrarian Reform Congress of 1970, and when later in the decade it spearheaded the opposition to Molina's agrarian transformation project in 1976. According to Dada, it was O'Byrne's

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have all died. "One was decapitated, one committed suicide, another disappeared, still another was killed at a highway checkpoint, and the fifth ended up torn to pieces." Carlos Dada, "Así Matamos a Monseñor Romero," *El Faro*, March 22, 2010.

[19] Ibid.

[20] ANEP, "Declarations on Land Reform and the Government's Response (July 1976)," in *The Central American Crisis Reader* (New York: Summit Books, 1987), 343.

opposition to agrarian reform that led him to support D'Abuisson's anti-communist efforts.[21]

The figure of D'Aubuisson is a worth dwelling upon for a moment. In him there are also important connections to the story I have been telling about agrarian reform and the opposition to it. In his obituary in *The New York Times*, Richard Severo describes D'Aubuisson as a hero among the powerful of El Salvador, regarded by them as "a relentless crusader" against all those "demanding land redistribution and political reforms."[22] His name is synonymous with the Salvadoran death squads that conducted extrajudicial killings or disappearances in the 1970s and 1980s. A former national guardsmen and major in the Salvadoran army, D'Aubuisson helped found the group known as the Unión de Guerra Blanca.[23] His extensive military experience included various tours in the United States, where he studied intelligence and security operations.[24] In the 1970s, he received anti-communist counterinsurgency training at the School of the Americas (SOA), which at the time was located at U.S. Army base Fort Gulick in the former Panama Canal Zone.[25]

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[21] Dada, "Así Matamos a Monseñor Romero."
[22] Richard Severo, "Roberto D'Aubuisson, 48, Far-Rightist in Salvador," *The New York Times*, February 21, 1992.
[23] Richard Severo, "Roberto D'Aubuisson, 48, Far-Rightist in Salvador," *The New York Times*, February 21, 1992; Lauren Gilbert, "El Salvador's Death Squads: New Evidence from U.S. Documents" (Washington, D.C.: Center for International Policy, March 7, 1994); William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard: The United States in Central America, 1977-1992* (University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 49, 37–38. On the operation of the White Warrior Union in El Salvador, cf. Brockman, *Romero*, 29, 65, 173, 175, 183, 197, 221.

In the 1980s, D'Aubuisson became a successful Salvadoran politician, even founding the *Alianza Republicana Nacionalista* (National Republican Alliance, ARENA) in 1981—the political party that ruled El Salvador from 1989 to 2009, which had ties to the Republican party of the United States and especially its 1980 platform.[26] Throughout his time in public office, D'Aubuisson continued to lead his party's opposition to agrarian reform.[27] He travelled to the United States, visited the U.S. Congress and State Department, held press conferences on Capital Hill, and even appeared on national news programs.[28] One visit was at the invitation of Jesse Helms, who was then serving on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Helms defended D'Aubuisson as "a free enterprise man and deeply religious" before his detractors.[29]

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[24] Severo, "Roberto D'Aubuisson, 48, Far-Rightist in Salvador."

[25] In the 1980s, the SOA moved to Fort Benning, Georgia. As Lesley Gill observes, "fighting 'communists'" was "an enormously elastic category that could accommodate almost any critic of the status quo." Gill, *The School of the Americas: Military Training and Political Violence in the Americas*, 10.

[26] Jefferson Morley, "When Reaganites Backed D'Aubuisson, They Unleashed a Political Assassin: Washington's Right Was so Pleased with the Politician's Anti-Communism It Was Willing to Overlook His Abuse of Human Rights," *Los Angeles Times*, March 1, 1992; LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 159.

[27] Severo, "Roberto D'Aubuisson, 48, Far-Rightist in Salvador."

[28] Jefferson Morley, "When Reaganites Backed D'Aubuisson, They Unleashed a Political Assassin: Washington's Right Was so Pleased with the Politician's Anti-Communism It Was Willing to Overlook His Abuse of Human Rights," *Los Angeles Times*, March 1, 1992;

In El Salvador, D'Aubuisson was known for talking publicly and without fear of the imperative to exterminate hundreds of thousands of people in order to restore peace to the country.[30] "If we had to kill 30,000 in 1932," he is reported to have said at one rally, evoking the legacy of *La Matanza*, "we'll kill 250,000 today."[31] He appeared on television and on the radio, announcing the names of alleged communists or communist sympathizers. Often, those named would end up dead or disappeared not long afterwards. In February of 1980, D'Aubuisson read a list of 200 people who were communist or under the influence of communism. Archbishop Óscar Romero's name was on the list.[32]

Philip Taubman, "Salvadoran Rightist Granted U.S. Visa," *The New York Times*, December 4, 1984; "Salvadoran Rightist Leader Roberto D'Aubuisson Has Arrived in the U.S.," *United Press International*, June 27, 1984.

[29] Eric Bates, "What You Need to Know about Jesse Helms," *Mother Jones*, June 1995, 68.

[30] Loren Jenkins, "El Salvador," *The Washington Post*, 16 August 1981, *Washington Post Magazine*, p. 10

[31] Quoted in Phillip Berryman, *Stubborn Hope: Religion, Politics, and Revolution in Central America* (New York: New Press, 1995), 94.

[32] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. VI, 267-268, 320; Morozzo Della Rocca, *Primero Dios*, 448.

5.2.2 Courage

Romero's was a death foretold. Especially in his final weeks and days, he increasingly sensed death's nearness, struggled with fear, and faced it with courage.

From the beginning of his tenure as archbishop in 1977, there were threats against his life—mainly in the form of anonymous letters from groups like the Unión Guerrera Blanca,[33] as well as phone calls at all hours.[34] The diary Romero began keeping in March 1978 often mentions the calls and the letters, the concerns from friends and acquaintances about his safety, their advice about precautions to take, and so on.[35]

During a visit to Rome in January 1980, Romero told Monsignor Moreira Neves of the Congregation for Bishops that he thought he would be killed, but that he did not know if his killers would be from the Salvadoran right or left.[36] Until late 1979, the threats came mostly from people like D'Aubuisson and groups like the Unión Guerrera Blanca, which viewed Romero as a communist preaching subversion. After the October 1979 coup, however, Romero began to receive them from the Salvadoran left as well—groups like the *Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo* (People's Revolutionary Army, ERP), which regarded Romero and his support of the Junta's agrarian and other reform measures as counter-revolutionary—an attempt to prevent or stall the coming revolution. On their view, Romero's non-violence was insufficiently radical, incompletely committed to the economic and political overhaul El Salvador required.[37]

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[33] Óscar A. Romero, *A Shepherd's Diary*, trans. Irene B. Hodgson (Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1993), 245; Brockman, *Romero*, 197.

[34] Morozzo Della Rocca, *Primero Dios*, 448–449. There is a collection of these cards in the archives of the archdiocese of San Salvador.

[35] Romero, *Archbishop Oscar Romero*, 121, 199, 245, 374–375, 387; Morozzo Della Rocca, *Primero Dios*, 450–451. In early March, a bomb was planted in the basilica of the Sacred Heart in San Salvador, where Romero was preaching at the time, due to the occupation of the cathedral. A suitcase with seventy-two sticks of dynamite was planted next to one of the columns sustaining the cupola of the basilica, a quantity sufficient to do damage well beyond the basilica. The dynamite was apparently programed to detonate during mass but did not. Romero, *Homilías*, vol. VI, 409-410. Cf. Romero, *Archbishop Oscar Romero*, 518. Upon examination of the evidence and given the timing, Morozzo concludes that the bomb was likely planted by those on the right as a response to the agrarian and other reforms. Besides Romero himself, those present at the mass included the civilian members of the second Junta. See Morozzo Della Rocca, *Primero Dios*, 452.

Throughout this whole time, Romero received many offers for shelter and protection—from the Salvadoran government, from the Vatican, and from friends and acquaintances.[38] But he refused them. He explained his rationale to some government officials, who offered him a bulletproof car: He wanted to run the same risks as the

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[36] Morozzo Della Rocca, *Primero Dios*, 449. Cf. Romero, *Homilías*, vol. V, 530, where he attributes the threats against him both to the extreme left and right.

[37] Romero, *Archbishop Oscar Romero*, 374–375; Morozzo Della Rocca, *Primero Dios*, 449. For more on the assassination plots on the Salvadoran left, cf. Carlos Colorado, "Romero and the Extreme Left," *Super Martyrio*, March 25, 2013, http://polycarpi.blogspot.com; Roberto Valencia López, "Monseñor Romero y El Ejército Revolucionario Del Pueblo," *Crónicas Guanacas*, March 24, 2013, http://cronicasguanacas.blogspot.com.es.

[38] Romero, *Archbishop Oscar Romero*, 121, 199, 245, 322, 374–375, 387; Morozzo Della Rocca, *Primero Dios*, 450–451.

Salvadoran people do. It would be a "counter-witness…to ride in such safety while my people are so insecure."[39]

Romero's fear was not always perceptible to others as he went about his business as archbishop. But he was afraid. The small house where he lived on the grounds of the Divine Providence Hospital sat beneath a large avocado tree. Especially in the final months of his life, Romero often woke up in the middle of the night with a start when the falling fruit thudded upon the roof—the sound of which he mistook for a gunshot or a bomb. He began sleeping on a cot in the sacristy of the same chapel where he was later shot.[40]

The last week of February 1980—the first full week of Lent—Romero made his annual retreat in Los Planes de Renderos, on the outskirts of San Salvador. There, too, he found it difficult to sleep, fearing the possibility, he told others, of being shot through the window or the wall of his room. So he opted to spend the night in the common area of the retreat house instead.[41]

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[39] Romero, *Archbishop Oscar Romero*, 322, cf. 326, 375; Morozzo Della Rocca, *Primero Dios*, 452. In one homily, Romero asks for prayers to be faithful to his promise not to abandon the Salvadoran people but to run the risks that they do. Romero, *Homilías*, vol. V, 530.
[40] Morozzo Della Rocca, *Primero Dios*, 450.
[41] Ibid.

At several points in this chapter, we will turn to Thomas Aquinas's treatment of martyrdom in the *Summa theologiae* in order to approach Romero. I mention it here because Thomas underscores the virtue of *fortitudo* or courage throughout. Thomas addresses martyrdom under the heading of the virtue of *fortitudo* or courage, calling martyrdom its principal act.[42] Courage is the virtue that helps a person to withstand difficult or dangerous things in the pursuit of some good rather than to withdraw in fear.[43] Martyrdom for Thomas therefore names the willingness to endure *usque ad sanguinem*—to the blood—out of steadfast adherence to the good of divine justice, which comes through faith in Jesus Christ (cf. Rom. 3:22).[44] Divine justice is the end to which martyrs witnesses, and courage is what safeguards the witness, enabling martyrs to bear the attack upon of their bodies as they cling to the good sought, persevering until the end.[45]

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[42] *ST* II-II 123 prol.

[43] *ST* II-II 123.3 resp.

[44] *ST* II-II 124.2 resp., ad. 1; cf. II-II 124.3 resp.; II-II 124.5 resp.

[45] *ST* II-II 124.2 ad 1. According to Thomas, the courage in view here is infused courage, a gift of the Holy Spirit that protects martyrs in the face of death, helps them to offer their lives like Christ, and gives them the confidence that God will complete God's work by way of it. *ST* II-II 139.1. On this point, cf. Stanley Hauerwas and Charles Robert Pinches, *Christians among the Virtues: Theological Conversations with Ancient and Modern Ethics* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 159–162. For more on the role of the Holy Spirit, cf. Steven A. Long, "The Gifts of the Holy Spirit and Their

In a journal entry from that same retreat in Los Planes de Renderos, Romero frankly admits that he fears the possibility of "violence to my person." "Others have advised me," he continues, "of serious threats precisely for this week. I fear for the weakness of my flesh, but I ask that the Lord give me serenity and perseverance."[46]

Later in the journal, he writes: "I find it difficult to accept a violent death." But he goes on to describe how his confessor, the elderly Jesuit Segundo Azcue, helped allay his fears and instill courage, encouraging him to cultivate a disposition of willingness "to give my life for God whatever might be the end of my life." Romero continues: "The unknown circumstances will be lived through with God's grace. God assisted the martyrs, and if it is necessary, I will feel him very close to me as I offer my last breath."[47]

Indispensability for the Christian Moral Life: Grace as *Motus*," *Nova et Vetera*, no. 11 (2013): 357–73.

[46] Quoted in Delgado, *Oscar A. Romero*, 188, cf. 190.

[47] Quoted in Ibid., 190. Later, Father Azcue would refer to this retreat in Los Planes de Renderos as Romero's Mount of Olives. Cf. Morozzo Della Rocca, *Primero Dios*, 449. At the same retreat, Romero also wrote about this about his impending death in the following manner: "I place under [God's] loving providence all my life and I accept with faith in him my death, however hard it might be. I do not want to express an intention to him, such as that my death be for my country's peace or the flowering of our Church…because Christ's heart will know how to give it the destiny he wants." Quoted in Delgado, *Oscar A. Romero*, 191. Writing about these entries from Romero's retreat journal, Morozzo states, "These are words meditated upon by a person who anticipated his imminent death and had no intention of fleeing from the responsibilities that

5.2.3 "The mystery meaning you"

During the mass at which Romero was shot and killed, the Gospel passage upon which he was preaching was from John's Gospel, where Jesus says:

> The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor (12:23-26).

This passage occurs at a crucial point in John's Gospel, in which the "hour" of Jesus's glorification is imminent (cf. Jn. 2:4; 4:23; 5:25; 7:30). The glory, of course, is the

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inexorably led to it." Morozzo Della Rocca, *Primero Dios*, 450. Cf. also Romero's comments about martyrdom in his 3 May 1979 journal entry, Romero, *Archbishop Oscar Romero*, 210.

There is a clear dissonance between these reflections and a passage attributed to him, which is cited incessantly. I am refering to his alleged claim that "If they kill me, I will be resurrected in the Salvadoran people" (*Se me matan, resucitaré en el pueblo Salvadoreño*). The Guatemalan journalist, José Calderón Salazar, reports that Romero said these words to him in a telephone interview two weeks before he died—an interview that was then published posthumously. For a meticulous discussion why it is extremely dubious that Romero actually said these words—the perplexity of his closest friends regarding them, the factual errors in the Calderón interview, the lack of similar formulations in Romero's homiletical and literary corpus, the abundance of contradictory formulations, the use of similar expressions in previous writings of Calderón himself, and so on—cf. Morozzo Della Rocca, *Primero Dios*, 307–310.

glory of his crucifixion—the glory that that emanates from the cross as he is lifted up upon it (cf. Jn. 12:32; Jn. 3:14; 8:28).

In his homily, Romero focuses upon the significance of these words for Jesus's followers and the courage they require in the present circumstances. "It is necessary not to love ourselves so much that we shelter ourselves from involvement in risks," Romero says. "Those who want to remove themselves from all danger will lose their lives. In contrast, those who offer themselves, for the love of Christ, in the service of others, will live like the grain of wheat does, the grain that dies…If the grain bears fruit, it is because the grain dies, it lets itself be immolated (*inmolar*) into the earth. Only by being immolated does it bear fruit."[48]

In one of his sermons, Augustine speaks in similar terms. In it, he talks about the Eucharist and its relation to Christ's death. It was on "the night he was betrayed" that Jesus institutes the Eucharist (cf. 1 Cor. 11: 23-26; Luke 22:19-20). In the celebration of it, the bread and the wine become Christ's body broken, his blood poured out (Mt. 26:26-29; Mk. 14:22-25; Lk. 22:14-23). Augustine explains the significance of the celebration of the Eucharist: in coming forward to receive Christ's body and blood, "It is the mystery meaning you that has been placed on the Lord's table; what you receive is the mystery that means you. It is to what you are that you reply *Amen*…What you hear, you see, is *The body of Christ*, and you answer, *Amen*. So be a member of the body of Christ, in order to make that *Amen* true… Be what you can see, and receive what you are."[49]

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[48] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. VI, 455.

In his own homily, Romero says to those present that by faith they believe that at the consecration the bread becomes Christ's body and the wine becomes Christ's blood. "So let this body immolated, this flesh sacrificed for all people feed us as well, so that we, too, can give our bodies and blood to the suffering and the pain, like Christ."[50] So that they, too, Romero might have said, become the mystery that means them.

Moments after Romero spoke these words, he was shot.

5.3 Martyrdom

5.3.1 "One suffers for Christ"

To what does Romero bear witness? Throughout the Gospels, we read that Jesus's disciples should expect to share in the fate of their Lord and carry their cross (cf. Mt. 10:24-25, 38-39; Mk. 8:34-38; Lk. 9:23-24; Jn. 15:20). But the notion of being a witness as it emerges in scripture is quite broad. John the Baptist is not himself the Word but bears witness (*martureó*) to it (Jn. 1:6-9). Although he eventually dies at Herod's hands, the witness he bears is not explicitly associated with that death. Similarly, in the Acts of the Apostles, the risen Christ says to his followers that they are to be his "witnesses (*martyres*) in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). In this case, their witness has to do with their encounter with the dying and rising of Christ (cf. Acts 1:22; 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:41; Lk. 24:48). They are being called to give testimony to it, to be messengers of it, to go forth to all the nations to tell the good news about it. Their witness does not primarily or exclusively signify their suffering and death.

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[49] Augustine of Hippo, *Essential Sermons*, trans. Edmund O.P. Hill (Hyde Park, New York: New City Press, 2007), Sermon 272.

[50] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. VI, 458; cf. Romero, *Homilías*, vol. II, 286-287. In another homily, Romero says the Church is only because of her head but she is sinful because of her members. The Church's members need God's grace to learn to offer themselves, together with the bread and the wine, to God, so as to become what they receive. Romero, *Homilías*, vol. II, 81.

But even within scripture, there are instances in which bearing witness becomes associated with the testimony to the dying and rising of Christ given by the suffering and dying of the testifiers themselves. Paul describes the stoning of Stephen, for instance, as the shedding of "the blood of Stephen your witness (*martyros*)" (Acts 22:24). Similarly, the book of Revelation presents Jesus as the prototype of the martyrs (1:5, 3:14), where the witnesses are those "who had been slain for the word of God" (6:9, cf. 17:6).

Over the ensuing centuries, the notions of witness and bearing witness increasingly come to be associated with suffering and death. Eventually, they come to be synonymous with it. Writing in the third century, the theologian Origen in *Exhortation to Martyrdom* speaks to this when he writes: "What was said of Abel, when he was slain by the wicked murderer Cain, is suitable for all whose blood is shed wickedly…the verse 'The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground' (Gen. 4:10) is said, as well, for each of the martyrs, the voice of whose blood cries to God from the ground."[51] According to Origen, those who face death for the faith give a particularly luminous witness to what it means for Christians to follow the path of their crucified Lord.[52]

Suffering and death alone, however, do not make a martyr. Augustine formulated a principle that would become important for subsequent theological reflection upon martyrdom when he wrote in a letter to Festus: "[I]t is not the punishment but the reason for suffering it that makes true martyrs."[53] For his part, Thomas takes up this line of thought when he specifies the reason for the martyrs' suffering in the following way: "One suffers for Christ by suffering not only for the faith of Christ but for any just deed done for the love of Christ."[54] In other words, the suffering cannot be separated from the reason for the suffering, and the reason for the suffering is the love of Christ. What makes martyrs, then, is above all that their lives exhibit this love, which leads to their acceptance of death. Martyrdom is an act of love on behalf of Jesus Christ. Martyrs do not die for abstract principles or causes. They die because of their love of Christ.[55] They witness to a person.

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[51] Origen, *Origen*, trans. Rowan A. Greer (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1979), L. Origen's words here evoke those of Romero and his frequent reliance on these verses from Genesis in his final homilies. In these homilies, the blood crying to God from the ground is the blood of all the ordinary Christians being killed. While not all the victims are martyrs, Romero thinks many of them are. Nevertheless, as we will see, he thinks all this blood bears witness to Christ.

[52] Pinckaers thinks the *Acts of Polycarp*, written in the middle of the second century, is decisive in this regard for its use of *martus* and its derivatives in "the technical Christian sense." Pinckaers continues: "Henceforth the Christian vocabulary will apply the term *martyr* to those who have given testimony to Christ and to faith to the point of death and will reserve it for them alone. We will now properly call martyrs only those who have actually suffered death for Christ, in contrast to the designation 'confessor,' [which refers to those] Christians who have confessed their faith before judges, even under torture, but who have survived." Pinckaers, *The Spirituality of Martyrdom...To the Limits of Love*, 48.

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[53] Saint Augustine, *Letters 1-99*, trans. Roland J. Teske (New City Press, 2001), 89.2. Augustine is writing to Festus against the Donatists. His point is that though the Donatists claim to be suffering martyrdom, they are not because the reason for their suffering is not the faith of the Church. Instead, they are "wrapped in the fog of heretical error."

[54] Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans*, ed. J. Mortensen and E. Alarcón, trans. F. R. Larcher, vol. 37, Latin/English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas (Lander, Wyoming: Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012), 241. For Augustine on martyrdom, cf. Ecclesiastical History Society Summer Martin, "Commemoration, Representation, and Interpretation: Augustine of Hippo's Depictions of the Martyrs," in *Saints and Sanctity* (Ecclesiastical History Society, 2011); Anthony Dupont, "Augustine's Homiletic Definition of Martyrdom: The Centrality of the Martyr's Grace in His Anti-Donatist and Anti-Pelagian *Sermones Ad Populum*," in *Christian Martyrdom in Late Antiquity (300-450 AD): History and Discourse, Tradition and Religious Identity* (Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2012).

[55] Note the personal emphasis in the final Beatitude: "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you

On this view, martyrs bear witness to a way of life that is especially conformed to and intimate with God's love as revealed in Christ. One of the earliest martyrs venerated by the Church, the bishop Ignatius of Antioch, puts it well when he pleads in a letter to a Christian community in Rome: "Allow me to be an imitator of the passion of my Lord."[56] Ignatius wants to imitate the love that is willing to go to the cross because death cannot diminish or defeat it. Indeed, as Candida Moss has extensively argued, theological reflection upon martyrdom in early Christianity centered upon martyrdom as an imitation of Christ's love, with martyrs understood to be "other Christs."[57]

The belief that martyrs become other Christs suggests a distinctive account of imitation. Their imitation of God's love in Christ is so intimate that their bodies become identified with his. In this sense, martyrs do not simply suffer *for* Christ. They suffer *with* Christ. They participate in Christ's passion, which makes them particularly radiant

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when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely *on my account* [*heneken emou*]. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Mt. 5:10-12, emphasis mine). The persecution arises from the relationship.

[56] Ignatius of Antioch, "The Epistle to the Romans," in *Early Christian Writings*, ed. Andrew Louth, trans. Maxwell Staniforth (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), §6.

[57] Cf. Candida R. Moss, *The Other Christs : Imitating Jesus in Ancient Christian Ideologies of Martyrdom: Imitating Jesus in Ancient Christian Ideologies of Martyrdom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

images of their crucified Lord. The love that leads to Christ's suffering and death becomes discernable in their own suffering and death.

We saw something like this above, when Romero says Christ will be with him at the time of his ordeal. "Jesus Christ assisted the martyrs," he writes, "and if it is necessary, I will feel him beside me as I offer him my last breath." Much Christian theological reflection focuses on the way martyrs share personally in Christ's passion—that Christ is with the martyrs in their suffering. Romero is not alone in this regard. In the account of the passion of Perpetua and Felicitas from the early third century, for instance, at one point Felicitas says: "Now it is I that suffer what I suffer; but then there will be another in me, who will suffer for me, because I also am about to suffer for Him."[58]

Echoing in the words of Romero and Felicitas are Paul's descriptions of Christian life as a sharing in Christ's death and resurrection.[59] In the second letter to the Corinthians, for instance, Paul writes that the affliction and persecution of Christ's followers show them to be "always carrying in the body the death of Jesus," in order that "the life of Jesus" may also be manifested in them as well (4:10, cf. vv. 11-12; Rom. 6:1-11; Phil. 1:20, 29, 3:8-11; 1 Pet. 2:21).[60] Or as Paul similarly writes in the letter to the Colossians, "I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church" (Col. 1:24).

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[58] "The Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to AD 325*, vol. 3, *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian*, American Reprint of the Edinburgh edition, ed. Rev. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908), 699-705.

[59] Stephen Fowl, "The Primacy of the Witness of the Body to Martyrdom in Paul," in *Witness of the Body: The Past, Present, and Future of Christian Martyrdom* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2011).

Observe that Paul understands Christ's sufferings to be sharable, which is crucial to what the Christian life is. The sufferings are Christ's. But they are not only Christ's. They are such that others can be incorporated into them as well. According to Paul, Christian life is a common life in the crucified and risen Lord. An important entailment of Christ's sufferings being shareable is that they extend through time and between places. Of course, Christ was crucified in a particular time and place—according to the Gospels, at the ninth hour of the day at a location called Golgotha (Mt. 27:33, 46; Mk. 15:22, 34; Lk. 23:33, 44; Jn. 19:17). It is a time and a place prior to the time and place of Paul's own preaching and writing. But despite the interval between them, Christ's sufferings are accessible to Paul's time and place—and by extension, to other times and places as well.[61]

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[60] Note that, as Paul goes on to write in the same chapter of second Corinthians, the affliction trains those who experience it for the life for which they are destined: "For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure" (2 Cor. 4:17).

In these passages, Paul suggests that sharing Christ's sufferings has an important purpose, which is to witness to Christ's body—to reveal it in the bodies of those who are not Christ. In suffering for Christ and with Christ, Christ's followers manifest his life in their own lives.[62] The passage from Colossians, moreover, points to another, related purpose. The revelation of Christ's body in Paul's reveals as it builds up another body of Christ in the world: Christ's ecclesial body, the Church.

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[61] Including Romero's El Salvador. Romero speaks to this when he says that for St. Paul, "suffering is already a communion with Christ who suffers, and death is a communion with the death that redeemed the world." He is commenting specifically on Philippians 3:8-14, the second reading for that Sunday. Romero, *Homilías*, vol. VI, 437.

[62] In her book, *In Procession Before the World*, Robin Darling Young explicitly draws the connection between the presence of Christ in the Eucharist and the presence of Christ in the martyr, focusing on the public character of martyrdom, by which she means its accessibility to the gaze of those who were not Christians. Robin Darling Young, *In Procession Before the World: Martyrdom as Public Liturgy in Early Christianity* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2001), 12. One of the purposes of the book is consideration of the pedagogy of martyrdom, the role of the martyrs in teaching and spreading the Gospel.

5.3.2 “No one has greater love than this”

We will return to the question of Christ’s ecclesial body at greater length below. But before doing so, more remains to be said about the love of Christ to which martyrs bear witness. Once again, Thomas’s account is helpful in order to understand the significance of Romero’s martyrdom in light of the larger considerations of this work as a whole.

According to Thomas, charity is martyrdom’s “primary impulse,”[63] its “first and most important moving force.”[64] As Thomas puts it, while courage elicits martyrdom (*per modum virtutis elicientis*), charity commands it (*per modum virtutis imperantis*).[65] It is above all love of God and neighbor that leads a person to accept martyrdom, the exemplification of which is Jesus’s words in the Gospel of John: “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends (Jn. 15:13).”[66] Martyrdom is for Thomas

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[63] *ST* II-II 124.3 resp. Because faith is its final cause (*ST* II-II 124.2 ad 1; for more on Thomas’s articulation of charity as the form of faith and of the other virtues, cf. ST II-II 4.3; 23.8.), and because it is an act of infused courage (cf. *ST* I-II 63.2, 3 on the distinction between acquired and infused virtue and *ST* II-II 139 on the distinction between acquired and infused courage), martyrdom for Thomas is always already informed by charity.

[64] *ST* II-II 124.2 ad 2.

[65] *ST* II-II 124.2 ad 2.

[66] *ST* II-II 124.3 resp.; cf. 124.2 obj. 2, ad 2

"the greatest proof of the perfection of charity"[67] precisely because it manifests the 'greater love' to which Jesus refers.

Thomas takes it as axiomatic that of all the goods of the present life people love their lives the most. Just like other animals, human beings flee instinctively from death and pain.[68] Thomas marshals scriptural support to make the point, citing Satan's words to the Lord in the book of Job: "All that people have they will give to save their lives. But stretch out your hand now and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face" (Job 2:4-5).

According to Thomas, the martyrs' endurance of death for the sake of this 'greater love' demonstrates the falsity of Satan's words. What makes martyrdom such a striking manifestation of the perfection of charity is that martyrs willingly relinquish all they possess, including bone and flesh. They offer their lives—their greatest possession—without resistance to those who would unjustly rob them of it.[69] They do so, moreover, while praising rather than cursing God, while forgiving rather than condemning their killers. A characteristic mark of God's love in Christ is that it extends even to enemies (cf. Mt. 5:44, Lk. 6:27), and that it forgives even those who crucify it (Lk. 23:34, Acts 7:60), which is why martyrs are such faithful witnesses to it.

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[67] *ST* II-II 124.3 resp.
[68] *ST* II-II 124.3 resp.
[69] *ST* II-II 124.4 resp.

According to Romero and the traditions upon which he draws, not all of Jesus's followers are called to give their lives in the same way as martyrs do. Martyrdom is not an achievement or an accomplishment but a grace God grants only to some.[70] Nevertheless, martyrdom is a possibility latent in all Christian life, because all Christian life, Romero thinks, is a sharing in the life of the crucified and risen Lord. Romero puts it this way: while not all Christians will give their blood, all Christians "must be ready to die" for the faith. Dying, however, "does not simply mean being killed." Rather, "to give one's life, to have the spirit of a martyr, is to give in one's duty, in silence, in prayer, in the honest fulfillment of one's responsibilities, in the silence of ordinary life, to go on giving one's life, little by little."[71]

On Romero's view, then, all Jesus's followers are not called to be martyrs. But all Jesus's followers are called to give their lives and to learn to locate their sufferings in relation to Christ's. As Jesus says in the Gospel of Luke, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves an take up their cross daily and follow me" (9:23). These words suggest that taking up the cross is an inescapable as it is a daily feature of

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[70] Cf. Lumen gentium §42.

[71] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. I, 89.

Christian discipleship, and that giving one's life little by little can serve as preparation for the possibility of giving one's life for one's friends.[72]

During the homily for Romero's beatification in May 2015, Cardinal Angelo Amato remarked that Romero's martyrdom "was not an improvisation, but came after a long preparation (*tuvo una larga preparación*)."[73] It is an important observation. Of course, anyone who is familiar with the craft of improvisation knows how much preparation it requires, so these terms need not be opposed in the way Amato implies.[74] Nevertheless, the point about the requisite preparation remains. What kind of preparation does martyrdom require?

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[72] Addressing this same point, Erik Peterson underscores the importance of asceticism. Regarding all suffering with Christ, however, Peterson has this to say: "The one who said, 'My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me' (Mt. 26:39) knows our faint-heartedness, our dread of suffering and death. He knows that we shrink from following him, that we are weak and do not want to take the cross upon ourselves, that we are afraid of poverty, scorn, revilement, blows, and death…Everything that happens in the Church happens under the presupposition that Christ not only died but that he rose again. Therefore it is not only the passion and death but also the power of Christ's resurrection that extends over the mystical body. We are thus not only baptized into the death of Christ but at the same time we receive the Holy Spirit in baptism. The ascetical and spiritual life of Christians is not only a mortification but at the same time an overcoming, a living, a walking in the Holy Spirit." Erik Peterson, *Theological Tractates*, ed. Michael J. Hollerich (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 159–160.

[73] Cardinal Angelo Amato, *Homily for the Beatification of Martyr Monsignor Óscar Arnulfo Romero Galdámez*, San Salvador, 23 May 2015.

[74] For an elaboration on this point, and the kind of preparation required to conduct "unscripted dramas without fear"—in which improvisation serves as a trope of Christian life in general—cf. Samuel Wells, *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2004), 11.

One of the central claims of the present work as a whole is that the practice of justice is crucial in this regard.[75] Among justice's most characteristic features is opening others' access to what is theirs but has been closed off to them because of sin. As we have repeatedly seen, such conception of justice is an outworking of what in the Church's social doctrine is called the common or universal destination of created goods—the understanding that creation is a gift given by God to humankind in common.

According to Romero, the practice of justice can therefore function as a kind of training in charity. Romero sees the complex and difficult work of returning to others the land that is theirs as preparation for sharing in the life God offers to all people in Christ. Moreover, in a suffering world, such justice is intimate with mercy. God's love comes to abide in those who habitually see others in need and offer help (cf. 1 Jn. 3:17), who leave their paths in order to provide it (Lk. 10:33-34)—where 'help,' again, means returning to others what is theirs but has been deprived them. The work of justice prepares its practitioners for the life God offers because living as though created goods are common gifts enables the discovery of additional goods held in common with others.[76]

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[75] Cardinal Roger Etchegaray eloquently speaks to another aspect of Romero's preparation for martyrdom, not unrelated to the work of justice, when he asks, "Had [Romero] not interiorly grown throughout his whole life, would he have accepted its sacrifice? Had he not meditated assiduously on Christ's passion, had he not prayed so much and so intensely before the crucified one, would he have remained in his place until the end? In 1956 Romero made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Every evening in Jerusalem, he went to pray in the Garden of Olives long into the night. Had he not believed in the resurrection, as he had always done, would he have resisted the threats that were so frequent in the last period of his life?" Roger Etchegaray, "Introducción," in *Óscar Romero: Un Obispo Entre Guerra Fría y Revolución* (Madrid: San Pablo, 1993), 8–9.

On this basis, Augustine names justice charity's beginning. Tending to this beginning with "the word of God and the hope of future life" is the way to help it grow and flower into "perfection," which for Augustine means the readiness "to lay down your life."[77] Charity, we might say, is like a seed—like a grain of wheat. But in order for the grain to be ready for sowing, it must first undergo a process of preparation. The seed head must develop and then harden. Only then will it be ready when the time comes to fall into the earth and die, and in dying, bear fruit.[78]

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[76] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. I, 394-395; vol. II, 266, 286-287, 330-391; vol. IV, 254; vol. V, 272.

[77] Saint Augustine, *Homilies on the First Epistle of John*, 87, 85. In his 2009 encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate*, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI argues along similar lines when he states that charity names the love that offers what is 'mine' to others—a love that must therefore necessarily include justice within it, which is the gift to others of what is 'theirs.' Justice, Benedict argues, is internal to charity. It is charity's "primary way," its "minimum measure" (§6, the phrase "minimum measure" Benedict takes from Paul VI, cf. Pope Paul VI's "Address for the Day of Development," 23 August 1968).

None of this is to imply the practice of justice, much less charity, is easy or commonplace. On this point, it is important to reiterate the frequent observation running throughout the Church's social doctrine that the concentration of wealth characteristic of contemporary life is a rampant and open violation of justice.[79] Injustice is as ordinary as the order itself, implicating structures, institutions, and landscapes. In *Toward a Better Distribution of Land*, the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace's document on agrarian reform, the authors write of the "scandalous situations of property and land use" on all continents ("Presentation"), the virtual "absence" and "invisibility" of justice in landholding (§61).

In his homily on Jesus's encounter with the rich young man as recounted in Matthew's Gospel, Basil the Great observes an important feature of the way people possess: they do not just possess their possessions but are easily and oftentimes imperceptibly possessed by them. Your possessions, Basil writes, as if addressing the rich young man directly, have become a part of you, "like the members of your own body," such that "separation from them is as painful as the amputation of one of your limbs."[80] We have seen this homology between personhood and possessions crop up repeatedly. People cling to their possessions like they cling to their persons, which is why Basil thinks separation is so painful. It is also why he thinks separation is so important. People learn to let go of their lives by learning to let go of their possessions.

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[78] *Lumen gentium* §42 addresses charity in similar terms. If the seed is to grow and bear fruit in the "highest witness of love," it must be tended.
[79] Cf. Quadragesimo anno, §§3-4

5.3.3 A Good Greater Even Than Their Lives

As we have seen, martyrs display the perfection of charity for Thomas because of the supreme difficulty of learning to accept death for love of God and neighbor. They willingly lay down in love what is most difficult for people to part with: their lives. Learning to part with property like land pales in comparison.

The difficulty of martyrdom is therefore yet another way martyrs witness to a way of life that is especially conformed to and intimate with God's love as revealed in Christ. By enduring death for the sake of this love, martyrs reveal what would otherwise remain concealed: a good that is greater even than their own lives, for the sake of which they are willing to offer all that they have and are.

The difficulty of martyrdom also contributes in other ways to its witness-character. For instance, martyrs often raise questions for onlookers like: What leads people to do this? To suffer without resisting those who would rob them of their lives? Of course, the witness of the martyrs is not always an appealing one. "What?" Nietzsche asks in *The Anti-Christ* regarding Christian martyrs. "Does the value of something change when someone gives up their life for it?" According to Nietzsche, martyrs witness to nothing but necrophilia. "The conclusion reached by all idiots," he continues, is that "there must be something to a cause that someone has died for."[81] Others have registered similar recoil and disgust.[82]

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[80] Basil the Great, "To the Rich," §1.

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[81] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ* in Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols: And Other Writings*, ed. Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), §53.

[82] This is a recurrent theme of Ta-Nehesi Coates *Between the World and Me*. These lines from Sonia Sanchez's poem 'Malcolm'—about Malcolm X—serve as the epigraph to the first part of the book: "Do not speak to me of martyrdom,/of men who die to be remembered/on some parish day." Growing up amid the ordinary violence of Baltimore—not wholly dissimilar from the violence out of which Romero speaks to us—Coates describes how he received the celebration of Black History Month this way: "[I]t seemed that the month could not pass without a series of films dedicated to the glories of being beaten on camera. The black people in these films seemed to love the worst things in life—love the dogs that rent their children apart, the tear gas that clawed at their lungs, the fire hoses that tore off their clothes and tumbled them into the streets. They seemed to love the men who raped them, the women who cursed them, love the children who spat on them, the terrorists that bombed them. *Why are they showing this to us?* Why were only our heroes nonviolent?" Valorization of nonviolence and martyrdom seems to Coates to be just another way to rob people of their lives. Though note carefully that he does goes on to state: "I speak not of the morality of nonviolence, but of the sense that blacks are in especial need of this morality." What draws Coates to Malcolm X and his "don't give up your life, preserve your life" approach is it affirms the sanctity of the

Nevertheless, prompting such questions and responses remains an important part of how martyrs witness to a reality so determinative that they willingly surrender their lives for the sake of it. Paul describes this reality in his Letter to the Romans when he writes that "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all of creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:38-39). According to Paul, God's love is a reality so determinative that it can accept into itself those who die. There are no barriers to it, which means that not even death can separate a person from it.[83]

That love, moreover, was revealed in Christ. In Christ, love incarnate was crucified, died, and buried—and it rose again on the third day (cf. 1 Cor. 15:3-4). It endured death and came forth out of it into life, which makes possible all other coming

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black body. Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (Random House Publishing Group, 2015), 3, 32, 35, 95, emphasis in original.

[83] Pinckaers puts the point this way: "The martyrs testify that Christ opens to them the way of life at [exactly] the point where others see only torment and annihilation." Servais Pinckaers, *The Spirituality of Martyrdom...To the Limits of Love*, trans. Patrick Clark and Annie Hounsokou (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, forthcoming), 57; cf. the similar point made by Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Moment of Christian Witness* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 20; and by Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2000), 31.

forth out of death into life. Christ is the first fruits of a future harvest (cf. 1 Cor. 15:12-23). Herbert McCabe can therefore write: "The resurrection of Christ means that death is not just a matter of destruction, the end of life, but [that death itself] can be a revolution…resurrection is the revolution through death."[84] If death has indeed become a site of revolution, martyrs are its vanguard. Their refusal to be determined by death witnesses to the love that in Christ has liberated all people from death's proprietary grip over human life. Martyrs can lay down their lives because, after what God accomplished in Christ, death has now been, as Paul puts it, "swallowed up." It no longer possesses the "sting" it once did (cf. 1 Cor. 15:26, 54-55).

Faith in the love that has defeated death in Christ—a love that retained its character as love even as it endured death—helps to understand Romero. It helps to understand why, despite his fear, he sought to face death rather than flee from it. He is speaking out of this faith when he tells his listeners in one homily—his "intimidated, fearful, and fleeing" flock, as he describes them—"do not be afraid." The path they are on "does not end in a grave."[85]

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[84] Herbert McCabe, *Love, Law, and Language* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 133–134. McCabe's point about resurrection being a revolution over death is helpful for crystallizing Romero's concerns with the revolutionary currents in his own time and place. While we must always begin by saying that Romero thought revolutionary violence was a response to a deeper, more systemic form of violence, he nevertheless opposed it precisely on McCabe's grounds. As McCabe goes on to write, "If the marxist [sic.] is right and there is no God who raised Jesus from the dead then the christian [sic.] pre-occupation with death as the ultimate revolutionary act is a diversion from the real demands of history; if the christian is right then the marxist is dealing with revolution only at a relatively superficial level, he has not touched the ultimate alienation involved in death itself." McCabe, *Love, Law, and Language*, 135. Romero thinks the revolutionary currents in his El Salvador similarly neglect sin, its death grip upon human life, and the liberation from it in Christ. Everything else Romero says about agrarian reform and the response to structural and institutional violence follows from this point.

5.3.4 A More Comprehensive Account of Martyrdom

Above I mentioned the conflicts in El Salvador that occasioned Romero's death pitted Catholics against other Catholics, which raises the question: How is his death the result of hatred of the faith? Thomas offers an important line of response. Among its most helpful features is the way it forestalls an overly narrow understanding of the faith to which martyrs like Romero testify.

In a seminal 1983 essay, Karl Rahner argues for the need to "broaden" what he calls the "classical concept" of martyrdom.[86] According to Rahner, the heart of the classical concept is the willing acceptance of death for the sake of the faith. Rahner's purpose is to argue for a broadening—not a rejection—of this understanding of martyrdom. The broadening comes by way of the notion of activity. Rahner wants to suggest that martyrdom involves not just passive acceptance of death (the classical concept), but in his words, "active struggle for the Christian faith and its moral demands (including those affecting society as a whole)."[87] The underlying reason Rahner offers for the broadening is Christological. Its basis is the shape of Christ's own life. More precisely, it is the importance of understanding Christ's death in relation to his life—a life that included active struggle within it.[88]

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[85] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. I, 430.

[86] The felt need for such a task is a frequent trope in recent theological literature on martyrdom in the twentieth century and beyond. Cf. Cunningham's discussion of "the new martyrs" in Lawrence S. Cunningham, *A Brief History of Saints* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2005), 115–119; Lawrence S. Cunningham, "On Contemporary Martyrs: Some Recent Literature," *Theological Studies* 63 (2002): 374–81. In his book on Father Giuseppe Puglisi, who was assassinated by a *mafioso* on 15 September 1993, the journalist and parishioner of Puglisi, Francesco Deliziosi draws on the Sicilian theologian Bartolomeo Sorge to argue that while in the past martyrs were killed *in odium fidei* they are today often killed *in odium caritatis*. Francesco Deliziosi, *Don Puglisi: Vita*

One positive yield of such a broadening would be to acknowledge as martyrs those like Romero. As Rahner asks in 1983, seven years before Romero's cause was even opened, "Why should not someone like Bishop Romero, who died while fighting for

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Del Prete Palermitano Ucciso Della Mafia (Milan: Mondadori, 2001), 279–280. Deliziosi's book is discussed in Cunningham, "On Contemporary Martyrs: Some Recent Literature," 379. As I hope to show, the advantage of Thomas's understanding is that hatred of the faith and hatred of charity need not be posed in oppositional terms. Christ is God's *caritas* made flesh, to which faith assents. Hatred of the one would therefore seem to be bound up with hatred of the other.

[87] Karl Rahner, "Dimensions of Martyrdom: A Plea for Broadening a Classical Concept," *Concilium* 3, no. 163 (1983): 9.

[88] Ibid., 10.

justice in a society—a struggle he waged out of the depths of his conviction as a Christian—why should he not be a martyr? Certainly he was prepared for his death."[89] A similar question leads Jon Sobrino and others to embark upon an ambitious project not to *broaden* but to *rethink* the "traditional" concept of martyrdom altogether.[90] In the end, Rahner's plea is for theologians and others to find a new way forward by first tracing their steps backward. He concludes his essay with an appeal to Thomas Aquinas and what Rahner calls Thomas's "more comprehensive concept of martyrdom"—his "enlargement" of it.[91] What is this larger, more comprehensive concept to which Rahner refers? How does it serve his plea for broadening the classical concept of martyrdom?

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[89] Ibid.

[90] Teresa Okure, Jon Sobrino, and Felix Wilfred, eds., *Rethinking Martyrdom*, Concilium (London: SCM Press, 2003). For Sobrino, a figure like Romero represents the way martyrdom has taken a "new form" in places like Latin America, where many have and continue to suffer violent deaths "not on account of their witness to faith but because of the compassion that stems from their faith." On Sobrino's view, dying *in odium fidei* is in a sense obsolete in such places, because Catholics are dying at the hands of other Catholics. Jon Sobrino, "Our World: Cruelty and Compassion," in *Concilium* (London: SCM Press, 2003), 16–17. In the passage just cited, Sobrino claim that these new martyrs die not because of their *faith* but because of their *compassion*. Elsewhere, he insists that they die because of their faith, which is what leads them to take up their cross like Christ and suffer death as a consequence. The phrase he coins for such martyrs is "Jesuanic": martyrs who die like Jesus for justice. Cf. especially Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical Theological Reading of Jesus of Nazareth* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1994); Jon Sobrino, "Los Mártires Jesuánicos en el Tercer Mundo," *Revista Latinoamericana de Teología* 48 (1999); Jon Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator: A View from the Victims* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2001). Rahner suggests that the broadening for which he is pleading is highly relevant to the concerns of liberation theology, concluding his essay with these words: "A legitimate 'political theology,' a theology of liberation, should concern itself with this enlargement of the concept. It has very down-to-earth practical significance for a Christianity and a Church that mean to be aware of their responsibility for justice and peace in the world." Rahner, "Dimensions of Martyrdom: A Plea for Broadening a Classical Concept," 11. Unlike for Sobrino, whose rhetoric evokes only discontinuity with the past, Rahner's broadening or enlarging allows him to argue for continuity between the 'new' and 'old' martyrdoms.

According to Thomas, martyrs bear witness bodily to the truth of the faith made known by Jesus Christ. Faith in Christ is therefore constitutive of martyrdom. In this regard, martyrdom is a unique instance of how all Christians are called to testify to the truth of faith.[92] But faith alone (*sola fides*) is not the sole cause of martyrdom. In the *sed contra* of the relevant article, Thomas cites Jesus's statement from the Beatitudes ("Blessed are they who suffer persecution for justice's sake" [Mt. 5:10]), to indicate that other virtues besides faith can lead to martyrdom.[93]

To this end, Thomas distinguishes between two ways of testifying to the truth made known in Christ: with words and with deeds. He cites scriptural support to suggest both how faith bears fruit in works of mercy ("I will show you my faith by my deeds" [James 2:18]) as well as how the lack of mercy can contradict the faith professed with the lips ("They profess to know God, but they deny him by their deeds" [Titus 1:16]). Though Thomas does not cite it, the context of the verse from James is instructive: "What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,' and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead" (James 2:14-17). Thomas highlights the interconnection between the virtue of faith and other virtues, such that faith is best glimpsed in terms of how it bears fruit in a life. The fruit shows the faith. As Thomas puts it, "All virtuous actions, insofar as they are referred to God, are professions of the faith."[94]

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[91] Rahner, "Dimensions of Martyrdom: A Plea for Broadening a Classical Concept," 11. Thomas L. Schubeck has taken up the task in an essay on Romero and the other Salvadoran martyrs, noting that "Thomas Aquinas…provided insights that contributed to the Church's enlarging the meaning of martyrdom in the twentieth century." Thomas Schubeck, "Salvadoran Martyrs: A Love That Does Justice," *Horizons* 28 (2001): 11.

[92] *ST* II-II 124.5 resp.

[93] *ST* II-II 124.5 sc.

It follows from this is that all virtuous actions can occasion persecution and even martyrdom. The example Thomas provides is that of John the Baptist. Herod has John killed not because John refuses to deny the faith he preached in the Judean wilderness. Herod has John killed, among other reasons, because of his articulation of the demands the faith made upon Herod's life regarding adultery (Mt. 14:1-12; Mk. 6:14-29 cf. Lev. 18:16, 20:21). Herod's hatred of the faith includes a hatred of the implications of faith for his life.[95] John the Baptist therefore stands for Thomas as an example of how Christians can suffer persecution both for testifying to faith with words and also for testifying to it with their deeds. Good works, as well as the avoidance of sin, likewise testify to faith.[96]

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[94] *ST* II-II 124.5 resp.

This is the broadening of martyrdom that Rahner and others find in Thomas.[97] Note what Thomas is *not* claiming. He is not claiming that there are distinct kinds or tracks of martyrdom, for instance, those who are martyred for the pursuit of justice and those who are martyred for the profession of the faith. Rather, he is claiming that the relation between these is internal. Because faith is best seen in the fruit it bears in a life, hatred of the fruits amounts to hatred of the faith. As Reinhard Hütter observes, Thomas's account of martyrdom includes within it "the way of life in word and deed that gives rise to the hatred of virtue and truth."[98] It also shows how hatred of virtue and truth (*in odium virtutis et veritatis*) and hatred of the faith (*in odium fidei*) need not be construed in oppositional terms as Sobrino and others do. Thomas offers a way to integrate them. In Hütter's words, "martyrdom *pro virtute et veritate* does not replace, expand, or develop martyrdom *pro fide*; rather, the former is integral to the latter."[99]

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[95] *ST* II-II 124.5 resp.

[96] *ST* II-II 124.5 ad. 1.

[97] That said, despite Rahner's appeal to Thomas, Thomas approaches martyrdom quite differently than does Rahner. As far as I can discern, Rahner's central polarity between passivity/death and activity/struggle has no place in Thomas's account.

[98] Reinhard Hütter, "Testifying to the Truth 'Usque Ad Sanguinem-pro Veritate Mori': The Contemporary Relevance of Thomas Aquinas's Integral Doctrine of Martyrdom," *The Thomist* 78, no. 4 (2014): 500.

On Thomas's terms, to declare Romero a martyr is to claim that his life stands as a testimony—in word and in deed—to the truth made known in Christ. Ultimately, because of this integral testimony Romero was killed. Thomas's account also suggests descriptions of Romero's killers and persecutors. It suggests, for instance, that although they professed the faith with their lips, they denied it with their deeds. That they said to those in need of basic bodily support, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and then terrorized them when they did not, amounts to hatred of the faith.

Thomas's claim that virtuous actions can be professions of the faith, such that all virtuous actions can occasion martyrdom, has important implications. As he puts it the same article about whether faith alone is the sole cause of martyrdom, divine good (*bonum divinum*) is higher than human good. But human good is not separated from divine good, as if by some impermeable or insuperable barrier. The Christian way of life involves learning to integrate the former into the latter, which can be seen especially in the martyrs: "Yet since a human good can become divine, for instance when directed to God, any human good can become a reason for martyrdom, inasmuch as it is directed to God."[100] The assumption here is that the present world and the one that comes when Christ returns in glory co-inhere. The possibility of integration leads Thomas to remark in the same article: "because every lie is a sin no matter what truth is at stake, the refusal to lie can be a cause of martyrdom."[101]

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[99] Ibid., 512. I am indebted to Hütter's article throughout my discussion of Thomas on martyrdom. Prior to Romero's beatification, this was precisely the issue raised by Pope Francis in a press conference regarding Romero: "What I would like is a clarification about martyrdom *in odium fidei*, whether it can occur either for having confessed the Creed or for having done the works which Jesus commands with regard to one's neighbor. And this is a task for the theologians. They are studying it." Pope Francis, *In-Flight Press Conference of His Holiness Pope Francis From Korea to Rome*, 18 August 2014.

As we have seen, a concerted emphasis upon truth-telling characterized the Church's public stance from the outset of Romero's tenure as archbishop. An official at the airport said it well when he reportedly called out as Romero passed by, "There goes the truth."[102] In many ways, the refusal to permit General Romero's regime and its sympathizers to lie instigated the public confrontation between the archdiocese and those who ruled El Salvador. It also meant that the archdiocese under Romero itself was forced to bear the burden of truth-maintenance[103]—a role Romero's homilies helped fulfill. One indication of the resulting animosity can be seen in the fact that during Romero's tenure as archbishop, Imprenta Criterio, the publishing house of the archdiocese, as well as YSAX, the radio station of the archdiocese that broadcasted Romero's Sunday homilies, were consistently and repeatedly targeted by bomb attacks,[104] which is what leads Timothy Radcliffe to say: "In the end, they had to kill him to stop him preaching."[105] The persecution of the Church in El Salvador, I think, can be helpfully seen as the consequence of the refusal of the lie.[106]

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[100] *ST* II-II 124.5 ad 3.

[101] *ST* II-II 124.5 ad 2.

[102] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. IV, 207.

[103] Romero begins an article in the archdiocesan newspaper *Orientación* with these words: we must "one again assume the difficult duty of telling the truth, even with the full knowledge that there will always be those who prefer the lie and the purposeful

Related to the conflicts surrounding truth-telling, Thomas's understanding of martyrdom also helps shed light upon another matter, which has been at the heart of this work as a whole: how in El Salvador the defense of God's creation as a common gift

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sowing of confusion"—a difficult duty precisely because it occasioned such suffering. Óscar A. Romero, "La Palabra Del Arzobispo," *Orientación*, no. 4062 (24 abril 1978).

[104] *Persecución de la Iglesia en El Salvador*, 16–17; Brockman, *Romero*, 27, 29, 231, 240; Romero, *Archbishop Oscar Romero*, 186–190, 192, 199–201, 494.

[105] Radcliffe continues: "Romero was murdered because every week he told the truth about the violence endured by the poorest: who had been arrested, who had disappeared, who had been assassinated, the threats made. In El Salvador, the violence was omnipresent but concealed. People just disappeared, and then their bodies were found dumped by the roadside. Romero's preaching brought to word the unremitting violence suffered by the poor…That is why he was killed." Timothy Radcliffe, "Vast, Hidden Violence on the Poor Could Destroy Our Society," *The Tablet*, November 5, 2013.

[106] Romero's homilies frequently link truth-telling, on the one hand, and persecution and martyrdom, on the other. Cf. Romero, *Homilías*, vol. I, 117; vol. II, 129, 214, 467, 481For a reflection upon how Romero was killed for telling the truth, cf. Ibid.

tended toward cruciformity, occasioning persecution and martyrdom. Romero defends creation as common gift both in order to foster the work of returning to the landless and land-poor what is theirs. But he also defends it in order to disclose a landscape and to signal a path for the Church on pilgrimage. Traveling this path, Romero thinks, involves receiving measures like agrarian reform as anticipating—in this land, for the good of all within it—the life of the land to which they are traveling.[107] Support of the common good of El Salvador opens out into an infinitely wider and more comprehensive commons that all people have in the life of their crucified and risen Lord.[108]

Throughout the present work we have repeatedly seen that the just use of created goods offers a kind of training for the life for which human creatures are destined because the life for which they are destined is one in which their private good and the common good are one and the same.[109] Not only is the celestial society just that—a society—but the virtues of those admitted to it presuppose love of the good common to the society as a whole: the divine good itself.[110]

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[107] For a different view on this matter, cf. Hauerwas and Pinches, *Christians among the Virtues*, 161. Here "the common good of the nation" and "friendship with God" are articulated in oppositional terms. This is a complex matter, which cannot be examined at length here. In the case of Romero, there is obviously some kind of opposition between nation and God. For instance, Romero claimed that the nation functioned as an idol—an idol that, in the end, demanded his own blood. However, what I am trying to draw attention to here is that Romero was killed by the nation for his work in support of the common good, including of the nation, and that he did not regard such work something separate from the pursuit of friendship with God but rather opening out into it.

[108] On this point, cf. Hütter, "Testifying to the Truth 'Usque Ad Sanguinem-pro Veritate Mori': The Contemporary Relevance of Thomas Aquinas's Integral Doctrine of Martyrdom," 505, 510–511. In footnote 44 Hütter briefly discusses Romero as a martyr *pro virtute et veritate*.

Charles de Koninck observes that it is possible to love the common good of this society, like that of any society, in distinct ways. For instance, it is possible to love it in order to possess it. To love the common good as a private possession, however, is not to love it as a common good. Such is the love of a tyrant, who loves a society in order to control it, which in the end, amounts to love of self. In contrast, it is possible to love the common good of the celestial society as a common good. Such love seeks to preserve the good of the society as common, which means wanting to involve others in sharing in it. It is not possible to love any common good as such without loving this aspect of it. As de Koninck writes, "The fallen angels did not refuse the perfection of the good that was offered them, they refused its community and they scorned that community."[111]

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[109] This point is made in a particularly eloquent way throughout Charles de Koninck, "Primacy of the Common Good Against the Personalists," in *The Writings of Charles de Koninck*, vol. 2 (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), cf. especially 101.

[110] Saint Thomas Aquinas, *On Charity: (De Caritate)* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1960), 29.

[111] For more on how the good to which all temporal good is subordinated is itself a common good, cf. de Koninck, "Primacy of the Common Good Against the Personalists," 79–80, 83.

De Koninck's distinction between how people love the common good of the celestial society helps further illumine shape of the persecution faced by Romero and others in the Church. The conflict was not over their love of divine good. Most of those involved believed in God, self-identified as faithful members of the Church, and so on. The conflict was over the way that they loved it. It was over what it meant to share in the divine good, the kind of community such sharing entailed for those still on pilgrimage, and what if anything sharing in the divine good implied for the sharing of the world's goods.

Viewed in this light, Romero's martyrdom witnesses to the love that recreates in Christ by also witnessing to the love that creates heaven and earth, and all things visible and invisible. The shedding of Romero's blood for Christ's sake follows in the footsteps of the one who brings reconciliation "by the blood of his cross." At the same time, his martyrdom makes perceptible how "all things" created in Christ "hold together" as common gift (cf. Col. 1:16-19), and the risks that accompany testifying to this truth in deed, as well as in word.[112]

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[112] It follows from this that the closer a person is to Christ, the more the commonality of the gift of creation will likewise be perceptible in and through that life, the more there will be a willingness to share not only goods but life itself with others.

5.4 Martyrdom and the Church

5.4.1 The Intermingling of Heaven and Earth

The present chapter has been addressing the significance of Romero a martyr—a witness to God's love in Christ. In one sense, martyrdom is inescapably personal. It is *this* particular person—Óscar Arnulfo Romero y Galdámez—who is a martyr. The love that led to *his* suffering death made him like a Salvadoran Jesus Christ. It is in *him* that so many have recognized God in Christ pass through El Salvador.

As a direct outgrowth of this, popular traditions of recognizing and remembering his martyrdom emerged immediately after his death.[113] Romero's relics and other items were assiduously kept and preserved by the Carmelite nuns running the Divine Providence Hospital, on the grounds of which were Romero's residence and the chapel where he was shot. The hospital was founded as a place to shelter and nurse cancer patients, who came to the *Instituto del Cáncer* (Cancer Institute) from throughout El Salvador. Patients would often sleep in the streets surrounding it because they could not afford to stay elsewhere. Just as the nuns cared for cancer patients in life, they began to care for Romero's relics and memory in death.[114] As Thomas observes in discussing whether veneration is due to saints' relics, those who have affection for a person often cherish what remains of him or her after death.[115]

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[113] Andrés, *Dios pasó por El Salvador*, 179–244.

[114] Two of the sisters, Socorro Iraheta and Luz Isabel Cueva, recounted what happened the evening of Romero's death: "In the Polyclinic [to which the body of Romero was

Many of Romero's possessions are preserved as he left them in the little house where he lived. Visitors to the house find items like his car, furniture, books, typewriter, tape recorder, appointment diary, glasses, and so on. They also find the bloodstained clothing he was wearing the day he died: a purple cotton chasuble, a white alb and cincture, a grey shirt, and a pair of black pants. The alb is saturated with blood, and a large portion of it is missing—cut away in haste by the doctors attending to the wound in the moments before death. While the purple of the chasuble makes it difficult to see

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immediately taken] an autopsy was done, and I don't know exactly how it happened, but they gave us the internal organs of Monseñor in a plastic bag. When we arrived back at our community residence at the Hospitalito, we had no energy left, but we decided to bury his organs in the garden of Archbishop Romero's cottage. We were in such shock that we placed them in nothing more than a cardboard box." Quoted in George M. Anderson, "Touching the Fabric of Life," *America Magazine*, March 19, 2007. In the same testimony, the sisters claim that, in anticipation of the visit of Pope John Paul II in 1983, the organs were disinterred in order to be reburied. While the cardboard box had disintegrated the organs had not. They remained intact, "as if the surgery had been done minutes before."

[115] *ST* III.25.6, resp. Thomas sees the veneration of the relics of saints and martyrs as a unique instance of the ordinary affections characteristic of human life. If we honor those we love this way, Thomas suggest, we should all the more so "show honor to the saints of God, as being members of Christ, the children and friends of God, and our intercessors. Wherefore in memory of them we ought to honor any relics of theirs in a fitting manner."

the blood upon it, what can be seen clearly is a single small bullet hole in it.[116] Above I discussed the fear Romero felt in the face of death. Jan Graffius, one of those in charged with the preservation of the possessions, notes that, upon close inspection of the pants, it is possible to see a white, speckled deposit of salt crystals on them—the residue of a sudden, intense sweat. "According to eyewitnesses at his last Mass," Graffius writes, "Romero suddenly flinched, having seen the gunman at the door of the Church. Whether or not he had time consciously to realize that death was imminent, his body reacted and sweated heavily."[117]

The traditional criterion for martyrdom is that the martyr is killed in hatred of the faith, which means that martyrdom is not only personal but inescapably ecclesial as well. Martyrs are killed because they bear witness to what the Church holds to be true—to the revelation of God in Christ, who was willing to lay down his life in love for the salvation of the many. Christian martyrs are members of a body—Christ's ecclesial body—that is founded upon and continues to subsist only by this very same love. It is a social body whose form is love, and whose ongoing existence depends upon the work of love among its members, which is why it is built up especially by martyrs—those who witness to God's love in Christ by laying down their own lives in imitation of their Lord. It is by this love that the body comprised of his followers is best known (cf. Jn. 13:35).

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[116] After Romero's beatification, some of Romero's relics were exposed to a gathering of thousands of youth, which included prayers for Romero's intercession for an end to the new wave of gang-related violence in El Salvador. "Reliquias Del Beato Arnulfo Romero Para Que Haya Paz," *La Prensa Gráfica*, September 14, 2015. Recently, the relics have begun to travel to parishes throughout El Salvador, and eventually, to Churches throughout Central America. Hermelinda Bolaños, "Inicia Recorrido de Reliquias Del Beato Óscar A. Romero," *La Prensa Gráfica*, July 19, 2015.

[117] Jan Graffius, "Telling Romero's Story," *Thinking Faith: The Online Journal of the Jesuits in Britain*, March 22, 2013, http://www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/20130322_4.htm.

From the first centuries of Christianity, the martyrs have occupied a central place in the life of the Church. As Peter Brown puts it, "We can chart the rise to prominence of the Christian Church most faithfully by listening to the pagan reactions to the cult of the martyrs. For the progress of this cult spelled out for the pagans a slow and horrid crumbling of ancient barriers."[118] From early on, Christians memorialized the *dies natalis* of their martyrs, preserved and venerated their relics, and gathered at their graves.[119]

The second-century account of the martyrdom of Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna, attests to many of these features of the emerging cult of martyrs and its centrality to ecclesial life. After describing the struggle of those present to possess the remains of the martyred bishop of Smyrna and their anxiety "to claim our share in the hallowed relics," the scribe recounts what happened next: "So, after all, we did gather up his bones—more precious to us than jewels, and finer than pure gold—and we laid them to rest in a spot suitable for the purpose. There we shall assemble, as occasion allows, with glad rejoicings; and with the Lord's permission we shall celebrate the birthday of his martyrdom. It will serve both as a commemoration of all who have triumphed before, and as a training and a preparation for any whose crown may be still to come."[120]

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[118] Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (University of Chicago Press, 2014), 6–7.

[119] The *dies natalis* was not the day of their birth into life but the day of birth into life eternal—the day of their death. Cf. Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*; Paolo Prosperi, "The Witness of the Martyrs in the Early Church," *Communio* 41, no. Spring (2014). Of course, the crucial distinction operative here is between the *latria* or worship given to God alone, and the *doulia* or veneration of the saints.

In his narration of the emergence of the cult of the martyrs in Christianity, Brown notes that among the primary pagan reactions to it was the unprecedented—and to the pagans, abhorrent—communal form displayed by the inclusion of the dead within it, and the gathering and worshiping at graves. In attacking the cult of the martyrs, Julian the Apostate famously gives voice to the abhorrence: "You keep adding many corpses newly dead to the corpse [Christ's] of long ago. You have filled the whole world with tombs and sepulchers."[121] As Brown characterizes it, the union of tomb and altar breached "the established map of the universe," "the immemorial boundary between the city of the living and the dead."[122] The cult of martyrs intermingles heaven and earth.[123]

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[120] *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* in Maxwell Staniforth, trans., *Early Christian Writings: The Apostolic Fathers* (New York: Penguin, 1987), §§17–18. As Andrew Louth points out, Polycarp's martyrdom was celebrated throughout Asia Minor and beyond. Ibid., 117.
[121] Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 7.

The intermingling has everything to do with the kind of body the Church is—a body in which the living and the dead share a common life in their crucified and risen Lord. Within this body, the status of the martyrs as imitators of Christ's passion makes them privileged members. But it is a privilege expressed in their ongoing work of love on behalf of others.[124] It is the intimacy of their relationship to Christ that enables them to intercede for the sake of the living. Gregory of Nyssa, for instance, refers to the martyrs as "unseen friends" with whom Christians in this life still have fellowship and in whose grace they share.[125] Although martyrs have arrived at their destination, they are not cut off from those members still on pilgrimage. Their lives continue to be gifts given for the life of the body as a whole, serving the Church and building her up, in anticipation of her final destiny.[126]

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[122] Ibid., 4–5.

[123] As Rowan Greer observes, "[T]heir condition marks the boundary area that includes both its destination in this life and the beginning of its continuation in the age to come. The martyrs, without losing their connection with those journeying behind them, are allied with the angels." Rowan A. Greer, *One Path for All: Gregory of Nyssa on the Christian Life and Human Destiny* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015), 193.

[124] As *Sacrosanctum concilium* states, by celebrating the martyrs "the Church proclaims the paschal mystery achieved in the saints who have suffered and been glorified with Christ; she proposes them to the faithful as examples drawing all to the Father through Christ, and through their merits she pleads for God's favors" (§104). See also *Catechism of the Catholic Church* §§1173, 1195.

[125] Gregory of Nyssa, "In Praise of Theodore, Holy and Great Martyr," in *One Path for All: Gregory of Nyssa on the Christian Life and Human Destiny* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015), 51, cf. 195–198; Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 50–68.

The relationship between martyrs and the Church therefore has been and remains an especially intimate one. Over time, the union of tomb and altar became even more explicit still. The Council of Carthage in 419 declared that local bishops should destroy altars "in which no body nor relics of martyrs can be proved to have been laid up."[127] Later, the Second Council of Nicaea in 787 declared that in order to be consecrated churches must contain the relic of a martyr, and that those already consecrated without one must have a relic placed within them.[128] The current Code of Cannon Law continues to preserve the tradition placing of relics under altars.[129]

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[126] This paragraph draws on Greer, *One Path for All: Gregory of Nyssa on the Christian Life and Human Destiny*, 195–201. Greer discusses the manifold ways that martyrs, according to Gregory, benefit Christians in this life. They are "ambassadors" who carry Christians' prayer to God, they bring God's gifts back to Christians, they perform miracles, they provide striking examples of the imitation of Christ for others to follow, and so on. "The relation of Christians to the saints and martyrs is a reciprocal one," concludes Greer. "They give to Christians their powerful help and their example, but Christians must respond not only by honoring them but also by imitating them.

[127] Council of Carthage, Canon 83 in Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*.

[128] Second Council of Nicaea, Canon 7 in Ibid.

[129] Code of Canon Law, c. 1237, §2 in *The Code of Canon Law: Latin-English Edition* (Washington, D.C.: Canon Law Society of America, 1983).

All of this is simply to show that the Church is not only built upon the succession of the apostles; she is also built upon the witness of the martyrs.[130] Tertullian famously makes a related point when he states in his *Apology*: "The oftener we are mown down by you, the more in number we grow; the blood of Christians is seed."[131] Tertullian uses the seed imagery primarily to suggest the enlargement and expansion of the Church in terms of her membership. "Go on," he writes to the persecuting magistrates, "kill us, torture us, condemn us, [and] grind us to dust."[132] Tertullian's point is that in persecuting the Church the magistrates will not prevail against her. Instead, their persecution will only strengthen the Church and lead to her growth.[133]

Though Tertullian himself does not explicitly say so, the examination of martyrdom in this chapter suggests that the blood of the martyrs is seed first and foremost in the sense of John's Gospel—the seed of wheat that has hardened into maturity, fallen into the ground and died, and in dying, bears fruit.[134] Enlargement and expansion of Church membership might very well be one of these fruits. But it might not. Regardless, the indispensible fruit of the seed of blood is making Christ's body visible in the world, the witness to the love that founds the ecclesia and on whose basis she subsists. This is the love that, as Tertullian himself writes in the same passage, continues to suffer "that we thus suffer"—the love that is prepared to share in the suffering of others.[135]

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[130] For a meditation on the martyrs and the relationship between martyrs and apostles, cf. Erik Peterson, *Theological Tractates*, ed. Michael J. Hollerich (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 151–156.

[131] Tertullian, *Apology*, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, trans. Sydney Thelwall, vol. 3 (Buffalo, N.Y.: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), Chapter 50.

[132] Ibid.

[133] Romero often speaks in similar terms in his homilies. Cf. his commentary on this very passage from Tertullian in Romero, *Homilías*, vol. 1, 411. *Homilías*, vol. 2, 166. Vol. 3, 212

[134] Cf. Pinckaers, *The Spirituality of Martyrdom...To the Limits of Love*, xix–xx, 7.

5.4.2 Hatred of the Faith

Given the intimacy of the relationship between the martyrs and the Church, and given that hatred of the Church's faith is the criterion for determining martyrdom, a difficult problem arises regarding Romero, which I have already touched upon at several points in this chapter. It can be posed as a question: Who hates the faith in this case?

The question is pertinent and unsettling for those looking for easy answers, not only because some of his critics and killers are still alive and prominent members of society, but also because many of them would by no means accept the description that they hate the faith. Quite the opposite in fact. As Vega observes regarding the persecution of the Church and the attack upon organized *campesinos* more generally:

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[135] As Servais Pinckaers similarly links the fecundity of the blood of martyrs to John 12:24. Ibid.

> [O]ne did not hear [Catholic] voices in the dominant social stratum that at least offered themselves as arbitrators. It would seem like economic interests silenced any attempt at justice, or at least a call to sanity when the army was sent to kill defenseless priests and *campesinos*. One neither heard the voice of capitalists who identified themselves as Catholic, nor the intellectuals, nor the medium businesses, nor the members of the military for that matter, despite having among them a bishop and priests as chaplains…[But all these Catholics] without a doubt prayed, baptized their children in the Catholic Church. Many even went to Catholic high schools and still regularly go to mass and receive the Eucharist.[136]

In this passage, Vega is talking about Catholics in El Salvador. But it seems to me that his point applies well beyond the borders of his own country. In the Gospels, Jesus describes his followers as being sent out into the world as sheep among wolves (cf. Matt. 10:16; Lk. 10:3). Given the natural vulnerability of sheep, it is unsurprising that there would be danger, and that the wolves would at times devour the sheep. But the reality to which Vega attends in this passage complicates the imagery considerably. The sheep cannot be straightforwardly identified with Christ's followers and the wolves with the world and the persecution faced by Christ's followers within it.[137] The wolves are within, not just without, the visible precincts of the Church. Although they sound like sheep and wear the trappings of sheep, their behavior reveals them to be wolves (cf. Mt. 7:15; Acts 20:29-30).[138]

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[136] Vega, *Las Comunidades de Base En América Central: Estudio Sociológico*, 161.
[137] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. I, 282; vol. II, 56.

The difficulty of the reality to which Vega attends runs deep, and it cannot be easily dismissed. In the previous chapter, we saw that, in the backlash against Molina's agrarian transformation, various groups took to the press to denounce the Church's support of it. What we did not examine is that these groups had names like the Association of Followers of Christ the King, the Association of Catholic Religious Women, and the Salvadoran Catholic Association.[139] Another group, the White Warriors Union, spoke for all of them when it claimed: "Our fight is not against the Church but against Jesuit terrorism."[140]

What is crucial to see is that this is not simply a case of Catholics killing other Catholics in a culturally Catholic country. It was a fight over the very identity of the

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[138] Though we likewise encounter complications in scripture, too, for instance, in Matthew's Gospel, where Jesus warns of those "who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves (7:15); and in Acts, where Paul says: "I know that after I have gone, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Some even from your own group will come distorting the truth in order to entice the disciples to follow them" (20:29-30).

[139] Cf., for instance, *El Mundo*, 25, 27, and 30 May 1977; *El Diario de Hoy*, 26, 28, 29, 30, and 31 May 1977. For an analysis of some of these attacks in the press, cf. Report of the Latin American Bureau, *Violence and Fraud in El Salvador*, 25; *Persecución de la Iglesia en El Salvador*, 14, 23–30.

[140] Report of the Latin American Bureau, *Violence and Fraud in El Salvador*, 26.

Church. As Romero writes in his second pastoral letter, *The Church, the Body of Christ in History*, "In our country, there are an abundance of voices, on the radio and in newspapers, claiming to judge what the Church is, distorting her true reality and mission."[141] The groups just mentioned explicitly spoke in defense of the Church and her faith. Their defense closely associated the faith—arguably even fused it—with the defense of the Salvadoran nation and even western civilization itself against the threat of communism.[142]

Such a view, moreover, found sympathetic hearing among many Salvadoran priests and bishops. In the last chapter we briefly encountered the figure of José Alberto Medrano, the so-called "father of the death squads."[143] A Salvadoran general, Medrano who worked closely with counterinsurgency specialists from the U.S. to helped found ORDEN and ANSESAL, both of which coordinated with the military to terrorize government opponents.[144] He also met regularly with a group of priests, many of whom were army chaplains. The group regularly discussed what to do about the communist infiltration of the archdiocese of San Salvador.[145] The emblem of ORDEN, it should be noted, consisted of, in addition to the volcanoes representing the land of El Salvador, a light symbolizing the presence lamp next to the tabernacle, where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved. The colors of the emblem combined those of the flags of El Salvador and the Vatican.[146]

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[141] Óscar A. Romero, "La Iglesia, Cuerpo de Cristo en la Historia," in *La Voz de Los Sin Voz: La Palabra Viva de Monseñor Oscar Arnulfo Romero*, ed. Rodolfo Cardenal, Ignacio Martín-Baró, and Jon Sobrino (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1986).

[142] For instance, this is the analysis of the document *Persecución de la Iglesia en El Salvador*, 14.

[143] José Napoleón Duarte refers to him as "father of the death squads." Nairn, "Behind the Death Squads," 21.

[144] For more on ORDEN, cf. Cardenal, *Historia de Una Esperanza: La Vida de Rutilio Grande*; Cabarrús, *Genesis de una revolucion*.

During this time, the Conferencia Episcopal de El Salvador was famously and publicly beset by divisions.[147] At one point, the Salvadoran bishops even issued conflicting pastoral letters.[148] In a fascinating missive sent by various parishes in San Salvador to the CEDES, the authors argue that it is precisely as a result of the disunity of the bishops—their failure to stand together against the mounting violence—that so many members of the Church were being labeled as communists and left exposed to attack.[149] Unity is one of the distinctive marks of the Church, Romero observes in his fourth pastoral letter, and so the division that clearly characterizes her life in El Salvador not only generates confusion among the people of God on pilgrimage but also imperils the Church's very identity.[150]

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[145] Alas, *Iglesia, tierra y lucha campesina*, 131.

[146] Ibid., 133.

[147] The divisions predated Romero's tenure as archbishop but were certainly exacerbated during it. Morozzo Della Rocca, *Primero Dios*, 351–362. Morozzo notes that the attacks upon Romero by his fellow bishops were frequent. They called him heterodox, mentally unstable, a puppet of the Jesuits, and so forth. Ibid, 362. On this topic cf. also Brockman, *Romero*, 132, 146, 168–170, 177–181, 189, 218.; Whitfield, *Paying the Price*, 112. In a famous open letter, the Salvadoran bishop Freddy Delgado argued that Romero was manipulated by a parallel magisterium controlled by liberation theologians and Jesuits, who appealed to Romero's vanity, servile nature, and spinelessness. Cf. "Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero: A Figure Manipulated by the Parallel Magisterium."

[148] Brockman, *Romero*, 135–138.

Regarding the persecution of the Church in El Salvador, we are therefore faced with a situation in which the boundaries of Christ's ecclesial body were anything but obvious to those involved, because the boundaries were themselves the site of contestation. Those that unleashed or condoned repression did so, among other reasons, because they did not regard those they opposed as fellow members of the Church. They were communists and communist sympathizers, and as such, threats to the Church and her faith. Romero, the sitting archbishop of San Salvador, was considered one of them.[151]

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[149] Quoted in Morozzo Della Rocca, *Primero Dios*, 356.

[150] Romero, "Mision de La Iglesia En Medio de La Crisis Del Pais," §23. At least in part, these divisions lie behind Pope Francis's recent remark that "Archbishop Romero's martyrdom did not occur precisely at the moment of his death; it was a martyrdom of witness, of previous suffering, of previous persecution, until his death. But also afterwards because, after he died—I was a young priest and I witnessed this—he was defamed, slandered, soiled, that is, his martyrdom continued even by his brothers in the priesthood and in the episcopate. I am not saying this from hearsay; I heard those things. In other words, it is nice to see him like this: a man who continues to be a martyr. I think that now they would no longer say such things. However, after giving his life, he continued to give it, allowing himself to be scourged by all of that misunderstanding and slander. This gives me strength, God only knows. Only God knows the history of people and how many times people who have already given their life, or who have died, continue to be scourged with the hardest stone that exists in the world: the tongue." Pope Francis, *Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Pilgrimage from El Salvador*, 30 October 2015.

There is a considerable temptation to evade the difficulty of the reality with which the persecution presents us. One way to succumb to it is by narrating the Church's resistance to a brutal regime and its supporters, as if her members were not also among them, and as if the Church herself were not also deeply and complexly implicated in the established disorder those like Romero sought to confront.

Regarding the Church in such terms not only evades the difficulty of the reality with which the persecution and Romero's martyrdom presents us. It also misconstrues the Church and the kind of body she is. It imagines her boundaries to be straightforward, visible, and delimitable—as if the sheep are already separated from the goats (Mt. 25:31-46), as if the wheat is already stored safely in the barn, apart from the weeds bundled for burning (Mt. 13:24-30, 36-43). But there is need for patience. The difficulty of the reality remains until the Son of Man comes in glory, until the coming harvest at the end of the age.

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[151] The persistent accusation of communism is one of the reasons why Romero's homilies are as preoccupied as they are with the work of catechesis. Over and over again, we find him trying to teach his flock why, as he puts it, his concerns are neither his alone nor those of a communist but an attempt to hand over the Church's own teaching.

5.5 To Be the Church

5.5.1 "The communal experience of the cross"

Attending closely to Romero's life and witness unavoidably presses questions like: What is the Church, Christ's ecclesial body? What kind of body is she? What does it mean to be her member? These and similar questions were among Romero's constant preoccupations. His episcopal motto was the Ignatian *sentir con la Iglesia* (from the Latin: *sentire cum Ecclesia*), often translated as "to think" or alternately "to feel with the Church." Romero's understanding of the phrase does not contradict Ignatius's elaboration of his "rules" in the *Spiritual Exercises*.[152] But an important feature of Romero's own understanding of the phrase is a process of ongoing discernment regarding the mystery of Christ's ecclesial body in the world and its deepest identity.[153]

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[152] However, the semantic range of the Spanish *sentir*, like the Latin *sentire* from which it derives, includes, but is broader than, thinking or feeling alone. For Ignatius's own elaboration of the "rules for thinking with the Church," cf. St. Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2010), §352.

[153] Rowan Williams, *Sentir con la Iglesia,* Westminster Abbey, 28 March 2010; Morozzo Della Rocca, *Primero Dios*, 279–349; Margaret Eletta Guider, OSF, "Sentir Con La Iglesia: Archbishop Romero, an Ecclesial Mystic," in *Archbishop Romero: Martyr and Prophet for the New Millennium* (Scranton, PA: University of Scranton Press, 2006).

During his three years as archbishop, Romero wrote four pastoral letters. All of them dealt with ecclesiology.[154] In one form or another, they all elaborate upon a statement Romero makes in the fourth and final one, *The Church's Mission amid the National Crisis:* "This is the fundamental contribution that our Church should to make to the life of the country: to be herself. This is what I call her own identity."[155] The statement is an important one. It implies an identity that still remains to be attained, that in some sense the Church is not yet what she most truly is. How does the Church learn to be herself? What is her own identity, and what does it have to do with the process of learning to be herself?

To begin to address these questions, it is helpful to return to June of 1977. Romero had recently been installed as archbishop. Under his guidance, the Secretariado Social Interdiocesano published a report entitled *Persecution of the Church in El Salvador (Persecution)*, which we encountered in the previous chapter. The report begins with these words: "The people of God in El Salvador, especially in the archdiocese, are living the communal experience of the Cross (*el misterio comunitaria de la Cruz*); they are living the paschal mystery of death and resurrection (*el misterio pascual de muerte y resurrección)*."[156] Above we examined the belief that martyrs do not simply suffer *for* Christ but *with* him, which presumes that Christ's sufferings are shareable, and that others can be incorporated into them. In a mysterious manner, these sufferings extend across times and between places. The claim being made by *Persecution* is similar: Christ's sufferings extend into the time and the place of 1977 El Salvador. They are being manifested in the communal experience of a whole people.[157]

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[154] The pastoral letters were, in order, The Easter Church (10 April 1977); The Church, The Body of Christ in History (6 August 1977); The Church and Popular Political Organizations (6 August 1978); and finally, The Church's Mission amid the National Crisis (6 August 1979). With the exception of the first letter, all are collected in Rodolfo Cardenal, Ignacio Martín-Baró, and Jon Sobrino, eds., La Voz de Los Sin Voz: La Palabra Viva de Monseñor Oscar Arnulfo Romero (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1986).
[155] Romero, "Mision de La Iglesia En Medio de La Crisis Del Pais," II.31.

In May 1977, a month prior to the release of *Persecution*, the National Guard was called into Aguilares to evict *campesina* families that had occupied land on a *hacienda*. The occupiers had been renters. But when they were refused contracts before the rains came in May, they started to farm the land because they had nowhere else to go.[158] The National Guard named the eviction "Operation Rutilio," after Rutilio Grande, the Jesuit priest slain just months before. During the operation, the troops searched and ransacked homes. They beat and they raped, treating with special brutality those with images of Grande. According to witnesses, the troops killed about fifty people and took away hundreds more, including three Jesuit priests, who were subsequently deported. In addition, troops entered the local parish Church, *El Senor de las Misericordias* (The Lord of Mercies), took aim at the tabernacle, and opened fire, strewing the consecrated hosts everywhere.[159] During the subsequent full-scale occupation of Aguilares, troops used the Church as a barracks.

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[156] Publicaciones del Secretariado Social Interdiocesano, *Persecución de la Iglesia en El Salvador*, San Salvador, 1977, 1.

[157] The end of the previous chapter touched upon this same theme as well. It recurs throughout his homilies.

[158] For details about what transpired I draw on Romero, *Homilías*, vol. 1, 96-97, 115, 118, 128, 133, 135, 149-155. Cardenal, *Historia de Una Esperanza: La Vida de Rutilio Grande*, 596–599; Brockman, *Romero*, 31–32; Dean Brackley, S.J., "Rutilio and Romero: Martyrs for Our Time," in *Monsignor Romero: A Bishop for the Third Millennium* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 79–100.

After several attempts, Romero was finally permitted to go to Aguilares to install a new pastor and to rededicate the Church. One of the first things he did was to say mass. "It falls on me," he begins his homily, "to go to gather the bodies trampled upon, the corpses, everything the persecution of the Church is leaving behind." He tells those gathered that he comes not only for the Church that has been profaned, whose tabernacle has been riddled with bullets, "but above all else to gather up this people that has been humiliated and unnecessarily sacrificed." "We are truly with you, and we want to tell you," he continues, "that your suffering is the suffering of the Church."[160]

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[159] Aguilares was not the only instance of this. Cf. Romero, *Homilías*, vol. 1, 115, 133.
[160] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. 1, 149-150.

Drawing on the first reading from the prophet Zechariah, where the Lord speaks about "pour[ing] out a spirit of compassion…on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem," so that they might weep and mourn, looking upon "the one whom they have pierced" (Zech. 12:10-11), Romero says to those gathered: "You are the image of the God who was pierced…This is the image of all peoples who, like those of Aguilares, are pierced through, who are affronted."[161] After Jesus's death, the Gospel of John records that "one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear" (Jn. 19:34), quoting the same verse from Zechariah: "They will look on the one whom they have pierced" (Jn. 19:37, cf. Zech. 12:11). Romero sees the people of Aguilares—and all others like them—as imaging this crucifixion, this piercing. He reads what they have endured in relation to the "mystery of the suffering" in which all Christian life participates.[162]

Romero does not avoid the language of martyrdom to describe the reality of Aguilares and of El Salvador more generally. Romero regards the Church in El Salvador as replete with those who have become images of the act of which their baptism is a sign[163] He is careful to distinguish his own judgment about the existence of martyrs from the process whereby the Church declares someone to be a martyr.[164] Nevertheless, Romero often says that martyrdom is one of the fruits of the persecution of the Church in El Salvador, and that these martyrs are a gift the Church in this land is giving to the Church in all lands.[165] Therefore, in addition to gathering the trampled bodies and corpses, Romero says he comes to Aguilares to gather a witness—"a testimony"—that can be "presented to all parishes."[166] The many Christians in Aguilares who have given

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[161] Ibid., 150.
[162] Ibid., 151.
[163] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. IV, 128; vol. 5., 354-355. Thomas is particularly helpful on this point. He regards the shedding of blood for Christ's sake to be "the most excellent of baptisms" because, while Christ's passion works within the baptism by water by way of

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a "figurative representation" (*per quondam figuralem repraesentationem*), in baptism by blood it works by way of "imitation of the act" (*per imitationem operis*). Both baptisms—baptism of water and of blood, as well as what Thomas calls baptism of the Spirit or of Repentance—are rooted in the reality of Christ's passion and his own enactment of the 'greater love' of laying down his life for his friends (Jn. 15:13). Thomas Aquinas, *ST* III.66.12. In the Gospels, Jesus's own baptism with water is of course linked to and functions as an anticipation of his crucifixion (cf. Lk. 3:21-22, 12:50). Baptism by water into the death of Jesus therefore suggests that the possibility of martyrdom exists for all Christians, that it serves as a horizon for the life of Christ's followers, who are called to take up their cross in imitation of their Lord (cf. Mt. 10:35, 16:24; Mk. 8:34; Lk. 9:23, 14:27). A contemporary theologian who has reflected extensively upon the relationship between baptism and martyrdom, and martyrdom as a kind of fulfillment of baptism, is Rowan Williams OCT 204.

[164] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. 5, 354-355. Recent developments—including the beatification of Romero himself—indicate that Romero's discernment in this matter is beginning to receive confirmation in the Church. Cf. Pope Francis, "In-Flight Press Conference of His Holiness Pope Francis from Korea to Rome," Apostolic Journey to the Republic of Korea, 18 August 2014; "Inician Beatificación Del Sacerdote Rutilio Grande."

[165] Ibid., 152-155; Romero, *Homilías*, vol. 2, 467; Romero, *Homilías*, vol. 3, 204; Romero, *Homilías*, vol. 4 292; Romero, *Archbishop Oscar Romero*, 199, 283–284, 352, 513.

[166] Ibid., 151.

their lives for the love of Christ are an "advanced party (*avanzada*)" of the Church herself, displaying her deepest identity.[167] They are a reminder that following Christ involves nothing short of "handing over (*entregar*) our lives,"[168] and that martyrdom is a latent possibility for all those incorporated into Christ's death by their baptism (cf. Rom. 6:3).[169]

5.5.2 A Martyred People

Romero thinks the violence in El Salvador is producing martyrs, not just victims. But we have already seen, Romero's Aguilares homily also raises a distinct, though related issue. For he not only speaks of the presence of *martyrs*. He speaks of the presence of a *martyred people*—a people that is being humiliated and sacrificed, that is the image of the one who was pierced. Elsewhere, he refers to Aguilares as *aquel pueblo*

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[167] Ibid., 151.

[168] Ibid., 151.

[169] Ibid., 152-155; Cf. Romero, *Homilías*, vol. IV, 392. Romero often attributes the prevalence of martyrdom in El Salvador to exclusive faith in the God revealed in Jesus Christ as opposed to other gods. Because of the refusal to bow down before idols, many Christians in El Salvador, Romero thinks, are dying as martyrs. "We have pages of martyrdom not only in past history but in the present hour," he says in another homily. "There are priests, religious, catechists, men and women in the countryside who have been killed and skinned, whose faces have been crushed, whose bodies have been broken, who are being persecuted for being faithful to this one God and Lord, Jesus Christ." Romero, *Homilías*, vol. IV, 392.

mártir (that martyr people)[170] and as a *población mártir* (a martyr population).[171] The suffering people of Aguilares bear witness to the suffering body of Christ as it continues endure its passion in the world. At least since Romero, the tropes of martyrdom and crucifixion as descriptions of collective suffering have become one of the hallmarks of theological reflection arising out of El Salvador.[172]

The significance of Romero's suggestion about a martyred people is helpfully approached by way of an observation Willie James Jennings makes in *The Christian Imagination*. The context is Jennings's examination of the account of the royal chronicler of Prince Henry the Navigator, Gomes Eanes de Azuara (Zurara), on the occasion of the arrival of African slaves at the port of Lagos in 1444. As Jennings shows, Zurara's narrative attempts to emplot slave holding and suffering within an *ordo salutis*, in which bondage ultimately leads to salvation at the hands of Christian captors. However, Jennings shows something besides the emplotment and its reiteration "by countless theologians and intellectuals of every colonialist nation."[173] He shows how, in its unfolding, Zurara's narrative exposes what Jennings calls "a deeper point of coherence," which is none other than "the suffering Christ image, the paradigmatic image of suffering carried in the body of Jesus of Nazareth."[174] In other words, Zurara unwittingly ends up writing a "passion narrative, one that reads the gestures of slave suffering inside the suffering of the Christ."[175] Though Zurara's narrative itself makes no explicit association between the agony of the slaves and the agony of the Savior, the association is implicitly there; "his language cannot prevent it."[176]

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[170] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. 1, 128-129.

[171] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. 2, 90; Romero, *Homilías,* vol. 4, 264. Jon Sobrino draws on this language in Sobrino, "Los Mártires Jesuánicos En El Tercer Mundo."

[172] The phrase "crucified peoples" is often associated with Ignacio Ellacuría. But it is a frequent theme throughout Romero's homilies. Cf. Romero, *Homilías,* vol. II, 302, 310; vol. IV, 427; vol. VI, 439. Cf. also Ignacio Ellacuría, "Discernir El 'Signo' de Los Tiempos," *Diakonía* 17 (1981). Ignacio Ellacuría, "The Crucified People," in *Systematic Theology: Perspectives from Liberation Theology*, ed. Jon Sobrino and Ignacio Ellacuría (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993). The writings of Jon Sobrino likewise repeatedly return to this theme. Cf. Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 5, 26; Jon Sobrino, *Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2015); Jon Sobrino, "The Crucified Peoples: Yahweh's Suffering Servant Today," in *Concilium - 1492-1992: The Voice of the Victims* (London: SCM Press, 1990). For a good account of the theological significance of the crucified peoples for El Salvador and beyond, cf. John Neafsey, *Crucified People* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2014), 41–62.

Less than one hundred years after Zurara wrote his narrative, Bartolomé de las Casas sought to make the association explicit, drawing the gaze of the wider world to a similar point of coherence regarding what was happening in the Americas.[177] In the

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[173] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 20.

[174] Ibid.

[175] Ibid.

[176] Ibid.

[177] I say similar because there remains the issue, in Jennings's words, of Las Casas's "inability to reckon with black flesh and African suffering in any theological substantial way." Ibid., 100. Jennings, drawing on Todorov notes that while las Casas did come to

History of the Indies, he writes: "For I leave, in the Indies, Jesus Christ, our God, scourged and afflicted and buffeted and crucified, not once but millions of times, on the part of all the Spanish…The Spaniards who traverse that land with their violence and wicked example…make the name of Christ into a blasphemy."[178] The Spaniards have been sent to the Americas to share the Gospel. "The entire [papal] concession to the monarchs of Spain," las Casas writes elsewhere, "its motivation, and the sovereignty they have over these lands and people, was and is for the life of the latter, and for the salvation and

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denounce black slavery and regret his earlier support for it, he nevertheless kept a black slave after he released his Indian ones and makes ambiguous statements about "Africans" in his writings. Ibid., 311–312; Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 170. For a more sympathetic approach to las Casas, which canvases in detail his view of slavery, its evolution, and his eventual repentance, cf. Gutiérrez, *Las Casas,* 319–330. As Gutiérrez writes, las Casas's mature view is that "[b]oth [the Indian and the black] find themselves in the condition of being 'scourged Christs' of the Indies." In both cases, las Casas identifies covetousness at the root of the matter. Ibid., 329.

[178] Fray Bartolomé Las Casas, *Historia de Las Indias*, ed. A. Millares and L. Hanke, vol. 3 (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1951), Bk. 3, ch. 30.

conversion of their souls."[179] It is the rationale for the *encomienda*, one of the central institutions of the Conquista.[180]

Yet, according to las Casas, the vast majority of "those who call themselves Christians"[181] in these lands are not in the position of those charged by the risen Lord with being his witnesses "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). They are his counter-witnesses. They are his contemporary executioners, crucifying him anew, over and over again. Christ's sufferings extend through time and between places, and he continues to suffer in this world the suffering flesh of others. In this case, it is a suffering inflicted by Christians, who in the Americas behave like wolves unleashed among sheep.[182]

One of the most difficult but inescapable features of the horror Las Casas depicts is precisely that it is condoned and perpetrated by those formed in the Christian faith. It is not an aberration, existing on the margins, and so easily dismissed. It occurs squarely within the Christian world. It is a horror that draws power and legitimacy from the Christian faith and traditions even as it betrays them—or as Las Casas would have it, continues to scourge, afflict, buffet, and crucify Christ over and over again.[183]

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[179] Bartolomé de las Casas, *Carta a un personaje de la corte*, 1535, in Bartolomé de las Las Casas, *Obras Escogidas: Opúsculos, cartas y memoriales*, ed. Juan Pérez de Tudela y Bueso (Madrid: BAE, 1958), 62a.

[180] For Las Casas's most extended critique of the *encomienda*, cf. his *Octavo Remedio* in Las Las Casas, *Obras Escogidas*.

[181] This is Las Casas's phrase, which he uses repeatedly. Las Casas, *An Account, Much Abbreviated, of the Destruction of the Indies With Related Texts*, 29, 50, 61.

[182] Las Casas frequently compares the Spaniards to tigers, lions, and wolves, and the inhabitants of the Americas to sheep and lambs. Ibid., 68, 82. 84. The language suggests the brutality of the Spaniards and the innocence of the inhabitants in the face of rampant slaughter. But it also carries scriptural resonances, not just of the passages in which Jesus speaks of the disciples as sheep among wolves, but also of the larger Christological point las Casas makes of Christ's ongoing crucifixion in their flesh.

5.5.3 "In need even unto the end of the world"

Romero's words in Aguilares have deep roots within Christianity. Above we examined Paul's sharing in Christ's sufferings. But before he began to share in those sufferings, he contributed to them. At the outset of the account of Saul's conversion, we are told that Saul was "still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord." But during his journey to Damascus, a light from heaven blinds him. Saul falls to the ground and hears a voice saying to him: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me…I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" (Acts 9:1-5). In persecuting Christ's followers, Saul later learns that he was persecuting Christ himself.

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[183] Cf. Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 22. To its credit, the historiography associated with liberation theology has not looked away from the blood and fire, the conquest and slavery with which Christianity was brought to these lands, and the ongoing effects of that history in the present. In this regard, the work of Gustavo Gutiérrez is exemplary. Cf. especially Gutiérrez, *Las Casas*. Of the many other works that could be mentioned, cf. Enrique D. Dussel, *A History of the Church in Latin America: Colonialism to Liberation (1492-1979)*, trans. Alan Neely (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1981); Leonardo Boff and Virgil Elizondo, eds., *Concilium - 1492-1992: The Voice of the Victims* (London: SCM Press, 1990).

Romero's homilies often return to the great eschatological parable of the sheep and the goats at the end of Matthew's Gospel, in which the nations are gathered and separated on the basis of mercy "to the least of these who are members of my family" (Mt. 25:40, cf. 31-46). Jesus tells those on his right of his ongoing identification with those in need of corporal mercy: "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me" (vv. 35-36). Over the course of their lives, they encountered their Lord in showing mercy—in tending to the suffering flesh of others. Inasmuch as they did it to these others, they did it to their Lord (v. 40). They did not necessarily know that they were doing it (vv. 37-39). But they were doing it nonetheless. Jesus here reveals the suffering flesh of others—paradigmatically, those lacking basic bodily support and care—as an image of his ongoing suffering in the world until he comes again in glory.

An important theme of the present work has been the implications of the virtue of mercy, not only for the care of suffering flesh and the discernment of God's relation to it in Christ, but also for perceiving the grammar of creation itself. The merciful are to inherit the kingdom prepared for them "from the foundation of the world" (v. 34) because they acknowledge that foundation in a world in which it has grown faint. The work of mercy responds to the lack of basic bodily support and care that afflicts humankind as a consequence of sin, showing creation to be what it most fundamentally is: a gift given to humankind in common.[184] The merciful uniquely perceive that God gives the earth to feed, slake, clothe, shelter, and comfort all people. In other words, mercy not only perceives and responds to the suffering flesh of others. It reveals the way the world is, the goodness of God's creation. Mercy is like a salve for the eyes.[185] As Matthew's parable indicates, the merciful are therefore well prepared for life in the land to which they are destined, for that land, too, is a common gift.[186]

Romero's homilies return again and again to this passage from Matthew's Gospel because it points to an important way Christ continues to be present to his people after the ascension, clamoring for mercy from the midst of the world's misery.[187] Augustine often addresses the same issue, elaborating in his homilies and elsewhere upon how the one who will come again to judge the living and the dead remains present in the visage of the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the infirm, and the imprisoned: "Now though, as man, too, he has gone up rich to heaven, seated at the right hand of the Father. But still, as a poor man here, he's hungry, thirsty, in rags."[188] After the ascension, Christ continues to be bodily present in the needy and suffering bodies of others.

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[184] In Gregory of Nyssa's words, "It is God Himself, who in the first instance manifests Himself to us as the author of good and philanthropic deeds…all things…He created not for Himself—for he had no need of such things—but He maintains them continually on our behalf; invisible farmer of all human nourishment, He sows at the opportune moment and waters the earth skillfully…. You see, God is the original designer of good deeds, nourishing the starving, watering the thirsty, clothing those who are naked." Gregory of Nyssa, "On Good Works," §§460-461, in Susan R. Holman, *The Hungry Are Dying: Beggars and Bishops in Roman Cappadocia*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 196.

[185] Cf. Saint Cyprian, "Works and Almsgiving," §14.

[186] In the case of the unmerciful, their exclusion from eternal life with Christ is no arbitrary act. Those who habitually refuse mercy's work, who recoil from the suffering flesh of others, or who even inflict the suffering themselves, fail to acknowledge their Lord during the course of their lives (vv. 41-46). How will they be prepared for what a future life with him entails?

Of course, Christ's ongoing presence in needy and suffering flesh is a strange and mysterious one—analogous to his ecclesial and sacramental presence.[189] Christ has been raised from the dead, and he is now seated in glory at the right hand of the Father. Yet he continues to be present in the world, among other ways, in needy and suffering bodies. He is Lord, the one through whom all things were made and in whom all things hold together. Yet he is also destitute. In Augustine's words, "Though rich, he is in need even unto the end of the world."[190] The one who will one day judge the nations on the basis of mercy remains present until that time in all those in need of mercy. Augustine articulates what this entails for his followers in the form of an exhortation: "Here, then, let the hungry Christ be fed; let the thirsty Christ be given a drink; let the naked Christ

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[187] For a sampling of passages along these lines, cf. Romero, *Homilías*, vol. I, 33, 131, 180, 298, 386, 400, 407, 430; *Homilías*, vol. II., 256, 437; *Homilías*, vol. III., 152, 205, 272, 295, 430-433; *Homilías*, vol. IV., 34, 216, 255, 320; *Homilías*, vol. V, 70, 190, 193, 272, 292, 328, 353, 388, 425; *Homilías*, vol. VI, 107, 115, 400, 411.

[188] Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons (94A-147A) on the Old Testament*, trans. Edmund O.P. Hill, vol. III/4, The Works of Saint Augustine (New Rochelle, NY: New City Press, 1992), 123.4; Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons (148-183) on the New Testament*, trans. Edmund O.P. Hill, vol. III/5, Works of Saint Augustine (New Rochelle, NY: New City Press, 1992), 179.4.

[189] In his 6 December 1962 address in the debates about the first draft of what would become *Lumen gentium*, Cardinal Giacomo Lercaro argued that the idea of the Church of the poor should be at the heart of the Council's ecclesiology—"the synthesizing idea, the point that gives light and coherence to all the subjects thus far discussed, of all the work that we must undertake." Specifically, he urged the Council toward a deeper understanding of the relation between Christ's ecclesial and Eucharistic presence with

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Christ's presence in the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and the imprisoned (Mt 25:31-46). These presences together, he argued, are "truths of the mystery of Christ in the Church." While the relation between the first two has received substantial theological reflection, the relation between the third and the others has not. Yet the poor, as Lercaro put it, are "the great sacrament, I say, in Christ and in the Church (*sacramentum magnum, dico, in Christo et in ecclesia*)." Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak, eds., *History of the Second Vatican Council* (New York, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1997), Vol. 2, 202, 345–346; Bernard Bleyer, "Die Armen als Sakrament Christi Stimmen Der Zeit," *Stimmen Der Zeit* 226, no. 11 (2008): 736. In *Les Pauvres, Jésus et l'Église*, a book the Church of the Poor Group widely distributed among Council participants, Paul Gauthier takes up the relation of these presences, writing that "*ces deux identifications (Jésus=Église, Jésus=pauvres) ne sont pas univoques, chacune étant 'une certaine identité,' comme celle de l'homme et de la femme dans le mariage qui n'absorbe pas la personne de chacun mais l'accomplit*." Paul Gauthier, *Les Pauvres, Jésus et L'Église*, Chrétienté Nouvelle (Paris: Éditions Universitaires, 1963), 63.

[190] Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on the Liturgical Seasons*, trans. Mary Sarah Muldowney, R.S.M., vol. 38, Fathers of the Church (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1958), 239.6.

be clothed; let the stranger Christ be sheltered; let the sick Christ be visited. The exigency of our journey makes this an obligation, for, on our journey though life, we must live where Christ is in need."[191]

Romero often speaks in similar terms. As he says in one homily: "Christ is so profusely present among us, dear brothers and sisters, that it would be a shame to have lived as saturated with that presence as we do—because we are saturated with impoverishment—and not to have known him; [it would be a shame] to have lived so many years…in comfort, in wealth, in political well-being, and never preoccupy ourselves with that Christ who is at our doors or who we encounter in the streets."[192]

Or as he puts it elsewhere: "There is a criteria for knowing if God is near or far from us…all those who preoccupy themselves with the hungry, the naked, the poor, the disappeared, the tortured, the imprisoned—who preoccupy themselves with all this suffering flesh—have God near to them."[193] According to Romero, those so preoccupied have God near because they are near to where Christ remains in need. Their nearness to him is the nearness of mercy. It is the nearness of the Good Samaritan in the Gospel of

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[191] Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons (184-229z) on the Liturgical Seasons*, ed. John E. O.S.A. Rotelle, trans. Edmund O.P. Hill, Works of Saint Augustine (New Rochelle, NY: New City Press, 1993), 236.3.
[192] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. III, 432-433.
[193] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. II, 257; cf. also ibid., 189, 510.

Luke, who leaves his path to tend to the half-dead man who is stripped, beaten, and left half-dead in a ditch. In commenting upon this parable in another homily, Romero says: "We, too, find ourselves today with a whole people lying wounded along many paths in our country."[194]

For Romero and the traditions upon which he draws, the work of mercy is the path by which humankind approaches God because it is the path by which God approaches humankind in Christ. "The one thing which really befits God's nature," Gregory of Nyssa writes, is "to come to the aid of those in need."[195] Augustine puts the same point in the form of a question: "What greater mercy…could there be toward the miserable, than that which pulled the creator down from heaven"?[196]

On this view, God's mercy in Christ attends to a particularly severe kind of misery—the misery of sin. Part of its severity is the difficulty for those who suffer from it to recognize it for what it is, much less the need for help. But like a skillful doctor, God diagnoses the condition and prescribes a remedy adapted to the needs of the patient. But the remedy is no ordinary one, which the doctor administers to the patient apart from his person. For the remedy to this sickness to take hold, the doctor assumes the patients' condition, becoming like them in all things but sin. Christ assumes the suffering and misery so completely that he continues to cry out of it.

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[194] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. II, 381.

[195] Gregory of Nyssa, *Address on Religious Instruction* in Edward R. Hardy, ed., *Christology of the Later Fathers*, Library of Christian Classics (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1954), 266.

[196] Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons (184-229z) on the Liturgical Seasons*, 207.1.

Writing in the third century, Origen elaborates upon God's work of mercy by describing Christ as the Good Samaritan who takes flesh from Mary. Moved by mercy, Christ the Samaritan goes to the aid of a humankind stripped, beaten, and left half-dead by sin, bandaging its wounds, and bringing it to an inn for care—"the Church, which accepts everyone and denies its help to no one" (Lk. 10:25-37).[197] Peter Lombard writes out of this same tradition of reading the parable when he begins the fourth book of the

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[197] Origen, *Homilies on Luke*, ed. and trans. J.T. Lienhard, S.J., vol. 94, Fathers of the Church (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), Homily 34. Origen became one of the founders of a long exegetical tradition that figures the Samaritan as Christ, who, in his mercy, becomes neighbor to a half-dead humankind, healing the wounds sin inflicts, and nursing humankind into fellowship with God. For more on Origen's reading of the parable—a reading Origen does not attribute to himself but to his "elders"—and the favor it found within the Christian tradition as "a full statement of our collective history," "an epitome of the whole mystery of our redemption," cf. de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, 204–205. The most remarkable renderings of it I have encountered can be found in Passus XIX of William Langland, *Piers Plowman: A New Annotated Edition of the C-Text*, ed. Derek Pearsall (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2008).

Sentences with these words: "For the Samaritan, assuming responsibility for the wounded man, applied the bindings of the sacraments to care for him."[198]

For his part, John Chrysostom describes Christ's merciful work by patterning it point by point on Matthew 25:31-46. Christ invites humankind to a table where he nourishes and slakes with himself. He welcomes all those who have been estranged into a lodging that opens to them "the whole of heaven." He clothes those who enter with the garments of salvation. In so doing, he tends to the sick by healing them and raising them to eternal life. His visitation of the imprisoned is liberation from the bondage death itself.[199]

I am trying to attend to the inner logic of Romero's own views. According to him, none of the foregoing is meant to deny or minimize that Church members encounter their Lord in his ecclesial and Eucharistic bodies.[200] It is simply to suggest that they also encounter him in his needy and suffering body as well—under the appearance of needy and suffering flesh.[201] It is also to suggest, moreover, that there is a basic and ineradicable bond between these bodies. These bodies are, we might say, internally ordered to one another. It is the same Christ. Christ's ecclesial body must learn to be with Christ's suffering body because it is the body of her Lord who continues to suffer. Those who mercifully tend to Christ's suffering body can find sustenance in communion with others and in the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, where Christ mercifully tends to the members of his ecclesial body by continuing to offer himself to them.

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[198] Peter Lombard, *The Sentences: On the Doctrine of Signs* (Toronto, Canada: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2010), Dist. 1, ch. 1. The theme of Christ as the Good Samaritan runs throughout the *Sentences*. Lombard even begins the Prologue to Book 1 with reference to it. Peter Lombard, *The Sentences: The Mystery of the Trinity* (Toronto, Canada: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2007), Prologue.

[199] John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, ed. Philip Schaff, vol. 10, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, N.Y.: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1888), Homily 45.3.

[200] In the final months of his life, for instance, Romero increased the time he devoted to prayer and Eucharistic adoration. Morozzo della Rocca, *Oscar Romero*, 212.

To be sure, oftentimes those who stand alongside and tend to Christ's suffering body risk bodily suffering themselves. In Romero's El Salvador, they risked, as he puts it in one homily, being "disappeared, tortured, captured, found dead."[202] Romero himself was of course shot in full public view while saying mass. But in all these cases, bearing witness to Christ's suffering body becomes more than simply speaking or reporting about it to others, as from a distance. It becomes shared bodily suffering. The fullness of the merciful embrace of Christ's suffering body can be seen in the way their own bodies suffer as a consequence of the embrace. But their bodies make Christ visible by showing his ecclesial and sacramental bodies to be the work of mercy that they most fundamentally are. The logic of Romero's view is that to fail to discern the ordering of these bodies to one another is to fail to discern Christ body, the character of his being with his followers until the end of the age (Mt. 28:30), and how God continues to work through mercy to become "all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28).

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[201] In *Corpus Mysticum The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages,* Henri de Lubac traces the emergence of and shifts in discussions about what he refers to as the threefold body of Christ: Christ's historical body (the body of the one born to Mary of Israel, who suffered, died, and was buried, and rose again on the third day), Christ's Eucharistic body, and Christ's ecclesial body. Romero suggests the importance of speaking not just of a threefold but a fourfold body. Henri de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages*, trans. Gemma Simmonds C.J. (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).

[202] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. VI, 284-285.

When Romero writes that the fundamental contribution the Church should to make to the life of the country is to be herself, he means that the Church's members must learn to be the mystery that they are: the ecclesial body of Christ in the world, the extension across time and between places of God's merciful embrace without reserve of human misery, including their own. As Romero puts it, "The Church is a presence of the merciful God in the world."[203] Human misery resonates in the Church's heart because the "Father of mercies" founds her life, consoling human misery by sending the Son, so that the consoled might learn to offer consolation (2 Cor. 1:3-5).[204] God's merciful work in the Church and in the sacraments is the font upon which all Christ's members can continually draw.

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[203] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. IV, 417; cf. also vol. I, 282.

[204] Hence the opening words of *Gaudium et spes*: "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, *especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted*, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ" (§1, emphasis mine).

5.5.4 Church of the Poor

A comment made by Pope John XXIII in a radio address at the cusp of the Second Vatican Council is helpful for understanding Romero's ecclesiology. In it, John speaks of conciliar renewal in terms of the presentation of the Church "as she is and as she wants to be—as the Church of all people and especially the Church of the poor."[205]

In what sense is the Church the Church of the poor? Above all, with regard to the identity of her founder and head. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium,* states:

> Christ carried out the work of redemption in poverty and persecution…'Though he was in the form of God,' Christ Jesus 'emptied himself, taking the form of a servant' (Ph. 2:6-7); and for our sake 'though he was rich, he became

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[205] Pope John XXIII, "Pope's Address to the World a Month before the Council Opened," in *Council Daybook*, ed. Floyd Anderson (Washington, D.C.: National Catholic Welfare Conference, 1965). John's address provoked a powerful response. The phrase 'Church of the poor' became the banner of a group known as "The Group of the Church of the Poor," which met over the years of the Council. For more about the group and its influence upon the Council, cf. Alberigo and Komonchak, *History of the Second Vatican Council*, Vol. 2, 200–203; Vol. 3, 164–166; Vol. 4, 382–386. In this regard, before the close of the Council, a group of bishops made public an important declaration acknowledging deficiencies in their living in accordance with the Gospel and articulated a series of commitments that would shape their lives going forward. Group of Bishops, "Thirteen Commitments," *Concilium* 104 (1977): 109–11.

> poor…Christ was sent by the Father 'to preach good news to the poor…to restore the broken-hearted' (Lk. 4:18), 'to seek and save the lost' (Lk. 19:10)…[I]n the poor and the suffering [the Church] recognizes the face of its poor and suffering founder (§8).

Though *Lumen gentium* does not use the phrase 'the Church of the poor,' it does affirm the meaning of the phrase as Romero understands it, as do the conciliar documents more generally.[206] The Church is the Church of the poor first and foremost because she is the body of the one who empties himself, becomes poor, preaches good news to them, restores the broken, searches for and saves the lost—an identity and work that continues into the present, paradigmatically in the way he associates his body with the needy and suffering bodies of others. In the words of *Lumen gentium*, the countenance of the Church's poor and suffering founder and head can still be seen in the poverty and suffering of others.[207]

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[206] For a sampling of this, which is by no means comprehensive, cf. *Gaudium et spes* §§1, 27, 88; *Ad gentes* §§5, 12; *Presbyterorum ordinis* §6; *Optatam totius* §8; *Christus dominus* §13; *Perfectae caritatis* §13; *Apostolicam actuositatem* §8. For a more extended treatment, which focuses upon *Lumen gentium* §8, cf. Marie-Dominique Chenu, "Vatican II and the Church of the Poor," *Concilium* 104 (1977): 56–61.

[207] Gregory of Nyssa's famine sermon, "On Good Works," which draws heavily on Matthew 25:31-46, is, among other things, an extensive meditation upon how the poor bear the face (*prosopon*: person, representation, mask, character, countenance) of Christ. The sermon can be found in Holman, *The Hungry Are Dying: Beggars and Bishops in Roman Cappadocia*, 193–198. For an extensive and brilliant reflection upon it, cf. Natalie Carnes, *Beauty: A Theological Engagement with Gregory of Nyssa* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), 152–162.

What this means is that poverty pertains to the Church's deepest identity—"a constant in the history of salvation," in the words of the Latin American bishops that gathered in Medellín in 1968.[208] "[W]e will never be ashamed of saying 'the Church of the poor,'" claims Romero, "because Christ wanted to put his seat (*cátedra*) of redemption among them."[209] Observe that the ground of these claims is Christological. The Church is the Church of the poor because she is the body of Christ, who became and remains poor.

Romero elaborates upon the point in his address at the University of Louvain in February 1980, a little over a month before he was shot: "The poor are those who tell us what the world is and what the service of the Church is to the world. They tell us what the *polis*—the city—is and what it means for the Church to live in the world."[210] In the faces of those without land or stable work, without water or adequate shelter, without access to basic medical care or education, in the faces of those who have been disappeared or imprisoned, the Church encounters, he says, the "sacrament" of Christ.[211]

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[208] "*La pobreza de la Iglesia es, en efecto, una constante de la Historia de la Salvación.*" Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano, *Río de Janeiro, Medellín, Puebla, Santo Domingo*, "Pobreza de la Iglesia," §5.

[209] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. IV, 110.

[210] Romero, "La dimensión política de la fe desde la opción por los pobres," 185.

[211] Cardenal, Martín-Baró, and Sobrino, *La Voz de Los Sin Voz: La Palabra Viva de Monseñor Oscar Arnulfo Romero*, 186. Cf. Romero, *Homilías*, vol. 2, 258. Pope Paul VI speaks in

They bear the face of the Lord. Because of it, they help the Church discern what it means to be herself, her own identity. Among them, "we are near the mystery of Christ, who became incarnate and poor for us."[212]

Above I noted that Romero's sense that Church's contribution to Salvadoran life is to be herself implies an identity remaining to be achieved. It implies that the Church is not yet what she truly is. The statement from Pope John XXIII has similar implications. We have been examining how the Church is of the poor because she is of Christ, who became and remains poor. But as John states, the Church not only *is* the Church of the poor. She also *wants to be* the Church of the poor. It is a formulation that suggests some gap or interval between the 'is' and the 'wants to be,' between identity and its realization or fulfillment.

In what sense does the Church want to be of the poor? In the sense that her members are manifestly not yet what they are. The Church is not only the body of the one who became and remains poor. She is also and at the same time a body of members

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similar terms in when he said mass for the *campesinos* of San José de Mosquera during his visit to South America. Cf. Pope Paul VI, "Santa Misa para los Campesinos Colombianos," 23 agosto 1968. For more on the significance of the homily, cf. Bleyer, "Die Armen als Sakrament Christi Stimmen Der Zeit."

[212] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. VI, 278.

who suffer from the misery of sin themselves. The suffering, moreover, is acute. As her members confess every time they gather, they suffer in their thoughts and in their words, in what they have done and in what they have failed to do. Such misery is why they plead that God look not on their sins but on the faith of the Church as a whole. It is why, when they approach the altar to receive Christ, they do so with the words of the Roman centurion on their lips: they are unworthy to receive the body of their Lord under their roof (cf. Mt. 8:8; Lk. 7:6).

While some of the Church's members—and the martyrs are paradigmatic in this regard—show the rest of the body what she is, not all do.[213] As the Latin American bishops write in the Puebla document: "Not all of us in the Church in Latin America are sufficiently committed to the poor; we are not always concerned about them or in solidarity with them. Their service demands, in effect, a constant conversion and purification among all Christians in order to achieve an identification, each day more complete, with the poor Christ and with all who are poor" (§1140). In other words, the presence of so many in need of basic bodily support in Latin America and beyond implicates the Church and her membership. It should occasion lament and repentance, as well as an ongoing evaluation of how members live their lives and hold what they have in relation to that need. According to Romero and the traditions upon which he is drawing, the path of "constant conversion and purification," as Puebla puts it, is no addendum to the Church's life. The Church's members must again and again learn to encounter Christ where he says he is in order to be who they are.[214] Christ's comes to his people—comes to build up a people—by binding himself to all those in need of mercy. His being in need until the end of the world is how he feeds, slakes, welcomes, clothes, and lifts up a people into the life he shares.

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[213] Romero characteristically reads the presence of priests and religious among the victims of the violence as an indication of the Church's being herself. It would be "sad," Romero says, if they were not also among the victims in a country in which teachers, workers, *campesinos*, and so many others "are being killed so hideously." Romero, *Homilías*, vol. 5, 56, 45. Cf. Romero, *Homilías*, vol. 1, 31-36; vol. IV, 264-265.

5.5.5 Liberation

We have repeatedly seen that Romero's critics frequently attacked him for being a communist. That he spoke about the Church of the poor is one of the main reasons why. His critics took this ecclesiology to be exclusionary, and they understood Romero to a demagogue engaged in 'politics.' They accused him of failing to proclaim the Good

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[214] Romero comments on this passage: "This [commitment and concern] is what not only what we bishops, priests, and religious communities lack, but what all Christians lack. The path that the Church signals for the crisis [in El Salvador] is to be converted and to encounter Christ where he says that he is." He then quotes Mt. 25:40. Romero, *Homilías,* vol. V, 190; cf. 69.

News to all people by excluding the wealthy. His preaching, writing, and ministry, they said, was dividing the Church.

Of course, Romero did not abide this characterization, and he continually sought to dispel it. According to him, the ecclesiology of the Church of the poor is not primarily about demographics or constituency.[215] Nor is the purpose of speaking about the Church of the poor to enact or to perpetuate division. There is only one Church, whose life already suffers from profound division. In preaching and teaching about the Church of the poor, Romero is therefore trying to attend to divisions that already exist, which are deeply lodged in the Church's life, like invasive weeds that have infested a field.

Romero attributes an important source of the divisions to the propensity of Church members to worship creatures rather than the Creator, to bow down before gods other than the God revealed in Jesus Christ. The idols, of course, are many and various.[216] But the crucial one for our present purposes is what Romero refers to as the idol of "wealth and private property," which, he thinks not only atomizes social bodies and generates individuals, but also impedes others from enjoying what God has created for all people.[217] Moreover, the idol of wealth and property is insatiable in its demand for blood sacrifice—in this case, for the blood of fellow members of Christ's body. Romero calls worship of this idol the root of his country's structural and repressive violence.[218] He thinks many are dying as martyrs because of their refusal to bow down before it. "We have pages of martyrdom not only in past history but in the present hour," Romero says. "There are priests, religious, catechists, men and women in the countryside who have been killed and skinned, whose faces have been crushed, whose bodies have been broken, who are being persecuted for being faithful to this one God and Lord, Jesus Christ."[219]

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[215] It is not the valorization of a Church of people who are poor, over and against a Church of people who are rich. Romero explicitly criticizes the view that there are two Churches—the Church of the poor and the Church of the rich—and that only the latter is the true one. He associates it with those who "preach liberation in a political sense." Cf., for instance, Romero, *Homilías*, vol. V, 523. For a very sophisticated articulation of the Church of the poor which seems to construe it in terms of a membership of people who are poor, cf. Bell, *Liberation Theology after the End of History*, 5, though cf. 59, 162, 165, 169, 171, 173.

What this means is that Romero regards all those in thrall to this idol as imprisoned and in need of the liberation Christ brings. In preaching and teaching about the Church of the poor, Romero is therefore trying to attend to the divisions that already characterize the Church. He is trying to mark the path of liberation, which is the path toward the discovery and restoration of a deeper unity within ecclesial life.[220] The Church of the poor is Gospel—good news—for the whole Church, including those with the world's goods.[221] As Romero sees it, learning to share themselves and their possessions with others is liberation.[222] It is how they lose their lives in order to find them.

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[216] Wealth and private property, the Salvadoran nation and its security, and revolutionary organization are the three main forms of idolatry discussed in Romero, "Mision de La Iglesia En Medio de La Crisis Del Pais," §§42–51.
[217] Ibid., §§43.
[218] Ibid., §§45.
[219] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. IV, 392.

Romero never tires of saying that followers of Christ must open their lives to suffering and needy flesh wherever they find it, especially those in need of food, drink, shelter, clothing, and care. Such suffering and need is sin's consequence. It is mercy's work to repair what damage it can. You must learn to feel, Romero says throughout his homilies, "the need, the anguish" of others.[223] You must learn to preoccupy yourselves about their flesh as if it were *suya* (your own),[224] *un asunto propio* (your own issue),[225] *su propia causa* (your own cause),[226] as if those suffering and in need were *su propia familia*

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[220] Romero, "Mision de La Iglesia En Medio de La Crisis Del Pais," §§24–25.
[221] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. V, 272.
[222] Few have understood Romero on these matters better than Rowan Williams. Rowan Williams, *A Saint for the Whole People of God: Oscar Romero and the Ecumenical Future*, St. Chad's Cathedral, Birmingham, United Kingdom, 12 December 2014.
[223] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. III, 336.
[224] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. VI, 283
[225] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. IV, 255
[226] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. V, 272; cf. ibid., 70.

(your own family),[227] as if you shared their suffering in common with them, as if they were members of the same body as you.[228] Learning to share it is how you discover it to be Christ's.[229]

5.5.6 Continual Reformation

It must be emphasized that, according to Romero, the failure of the Church to be herself is no inconsequential feature of the Church as a social body. She is, after all, a body founded on God's merciful work on behalf of the miserable. The presence of sin within the Church, like weeds that have taken root and are sprouting up everywhere, cannot therefore be evaded or dismissed. Learning to be herself is a task that is always before the Church. She is in need of continual reformation to be what she is.[230]

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[227] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. V, 110.
[228] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. II, 266.
[229] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. IV 255; vol. V, 272.
[230] Romero, *Homilías,* vol. II, 227; vol. V, 360; Romero, "Mision de La Iglesia En Medio de La Crisis Del Pais," §22. The phrase "continual reformation" (*perennem reformationem*) comes from the Second Vatican Council's decree on ecumenism, *Unitatis redintegratio,* §6, cf. §4. On renewal and reform, cf. also *Lumen gentium* §7, on the need for the Church to be "continually renewed" (*incessanter renovemur*) in Christ, and *Gaudium et spes* §21, on the Church's need for "continually renewing and cleansing itself (*indesinenter renovando et purificando*) under the guidance of the holy Spirit."

"The Church is not a field of wheat," as Romero says in a homily on the parable of the wheat and the tares.[231] Rather, he continues, she is like field in which weeds are among the wheat God has sown. Both grow together, side by side (cf. Mt. 13:24-30).[232]

In the parable, against the suggestion that the weeds be gathered up to be burned, the landowner counsels patience, lest the wheat be uprooted along with the weeds (v. 29). Romero's treatment of the parable suggests additional reasons for patience. Not only do wheat and weeds grow together. Oftentimes, in the midst of the field, it is difficult to distinguish between them. Who is fully wheat and who is fully weed? In what human life can both not be found growing together, to greater or lesser degree?[233]

Moreover, as Romero observes, the land being cultivated by God is no ordinary land. In this land, weeds need not necessarily remain weeds forever. How many there are in El Salvador, he observes, "whose hands are stained with blood and with abuse, how many there are who are weeds." Nevertheless, he continues: "God is waiting for them. Do not uproot them, Christ says, wait for them. So we wait." God "calls to them, wants to forgive them, and wants to save them."[234] For in the field that is the Church on pilgrimage, even "weeds can become wheat."[235]

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[231] Romero, *Homilías*, vol. III, 118.
[232] The presence of sin within the Church does not mean that God is not at work within her. As Romero puts it, "If there is a Church that wants to boast that all her members are saints, she will not be the true Church." The proliferation of weeds should come as no surprise. Ibid., 119.
[233] Ibid., 117-119.

Needless to say, such a stance, which follows God in waiting and refusing to uproot, and which hopes for the conversion of enemies and even prays for and forgives persecutors, places those who embrace it in a position of extreme vulnerability. It leaves them with little in the way of protection against the wolves of the world. But for those with eyes to see, it is a stance that witnesses to the love that causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good; that sends the rain on the just and the unjust; and that establishes the land in which wheat can grow, harden into maturity, and bear much fruit.

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[234] Ibid., 118.

[235] Ibid., 119. I am reminded of the interview Captain Álvaro Saravia conducted with the journalist Carlos Dada about *Operación Piña* discussed at the outset of the chapter, and the regret that courses through Saravia's recollections of his past actions. In many ways, it is as if Saravia is in the position of the prodigal son of the parable of the same name, in the midst of the process of coming to himself (cf. Lk. 15:17). His empathy for those he once killed without hesitation is among the interview's most remarkable features. In the present, his life apparently depends upon his *campesino* neighbors. The house where he lives has been loaned to him. Another family, across the way, provides him tortillas. "And if that's being a communist," he says, "it's communist. It would have been communist to them in those days." Dada, "Así Matamos a Monseñor Romero."
I am also reminded of the story told by Maria Luisa D'Aubuisson de Martinez, the extraordinary sister of Roberto D'Aubuisson, the mastermind of *Operación Piña*. Maria Luisa took a very different path from her brother and her family. She became involved as a young woman with Catholic Worker Youth (Juventud Obrera Católica, JOC), a group associated with Catholic Action that sought to promote the Church's social doctrine, which led to a very tumultuous relationship with her brother. Her husband, Edin Martinez, is now the executive director of the *Fundación Monseñor Romero* (Monsignor Romero Foundation). But it was Maria Luisa who visited D'Aubuisson every day in the final months of his life as he succumbed to throat cancer in 1991. She sat at his bedside and reading the bible with him as he lay dying. In interviews, she recounts pleading with him to ask forgiveness for what he had done. At one point he opened his eyes, drew her close to him, and wept. The cancer left him unable to speak. Mike Lanchin, "Romero Remembered," *National Catholic Reporter*, March 17, 2000; Christian Guevara, "De La Guerra a La Paz: María Luisa D'Aubuisson Arrieta," *El Faro*, February 5, 2016. Personal communication with Edin Martinez.

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