Óscar Romero's Theological, Hermeneutical, and Pastoral Framework for Preaching to Traumatized Communities

by

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
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Abstract

This dissertation studies Monsignor Óscar Romero's theological, hermeneutical, and pastoral approach to preaching to the suffering and wounded people of El Salvador from 1977 to 1980 while he was the Archbishop of San Salvador. At that time, the marginalization, oppression, persecution, and exploitation of the poor people of El Salvador at the hands of the government, the oligarchy, the armed forces, and paramilitary groups was unbearable. The blood of the poor people and religious leaders who defended the poor, including his friend Rutilio Grande, was running through the mountains, lakes, and beaches of El Salvador, and Archbishop Romero could no longer ignore it. Through his homilies, he gave voice to their trauma and denounced the oppressive systems and structures that were at the root of their suffering. Inspired by the Holy Spirit and guided by his *sentir* with God, the people, and the Magisterium of the Church, Romero became the Spirit-guided and empathetic pastor the people needed. Through his homilies, Romero provided a "sanctuary space" where these suffering and wounded people could find refuge, hope, and possibility. The dissertation examines the ways in which Romero's theological, hermeneutical, and pastoral framework can inform sermons that speak to suffering and traumatized people, such as undocumented Hispanic/Latinx immigrants in the U.S.

Acknowledgments

Whenever my dad meets an amazing human being, whenever someone behaves lovingly, humbly, honestly, and with integrity, he calls them "*chulada de maíz prieto*" (beautiful black corn). In my life and throughout my journey as a Th.D. student, I have been surrounded by *chuladas de maíz prieto,* who have lovingly and patiently accompanied me on this challenging journey. One of them is my fantastic husband, Ismael, whose unconditional love and support encourage me to pursue my God-given dreams. He is joined by my biggest fans, my four sisters, whose example and sacrifices inspire me to be a better person every day. They are joined by my brothers, nephews, and nieces, who cheer me on. I am especially thankful to my sisters, Elvira and Blanca, and my niece Unique, who helped care for my two treasures, my children Alec and Estrella, while I was taking classes and working on my dissertation. My parents-in-law, Angelita and don Ismael, and our heart parents, Diane and Keith, have also been incredible supporters and encouragers. In addition, I am thankful for the support of my cousins Edgar and Kenna, who helped with the kids countless times so I could write. Finally, I am thankful for my exceptional children, Alec and Estrella, whose love and hugs kept me going even in the most exhausting times.

I would also like to thank the members of my committee, Drs. Charles (Chuck) Campbell, Edgardo Colón-Emeric, Jerusha Neal, Jan Holton, and Susan Dunlap, for enriching this project with their helpful insights and contributions. I am incredibly

thankful to my advisor Chuck, who unselfishly shared his wisdom, gifts, and knowledge with me, and my dear friend Edgardo, who has helped me grow as a scholar and minister. Ever since I was an MDiv student, Chuck and Edgardo have helped me identify and put into practice my God-given gifts. The two of them and my husband are to blame for my decision to pursue the Doctor of Theology program, and they have been my biggest encouragers and supporters from beginning to end.

I owe enormous gratitude to my excellent Hispanic Theological Initiative editor, Ulrike (Uli) Guthrie, for the countless times she listened to my disorganized ideas and helped me give them shape and structure. Uli's keen editorial eye significantly improved this dissertation.

I am also profoundly grateful to the Lilly Endowment, A Foundation for Theological Education (AFTE), the Forum for Theological Exploration (FTE), the Women of Color Scholars of The United Methodist Church, the Foundation for Evangelism (FFE), and the Hispanic Theological Initiative (HTI) family for their spiritual, emotional, and financial support.

Furthermore, I would not have been able to finish this dissertation and remain sane without the friendship of Alaina Kleinbeck and Peace Lee, who always made time to eat lunch with me, go hiking, or go for a walk to help me release stress. I am also grateful to my friends Luz Ponce, Ines Freile, Janet Plass Portzer, Crystal DesVignes, Edith Salazar, Cristal Ruiz, Dalila Millan, Regina Graham, Hyemin Na, Jung Choi, Cathy Colón-Emeric, Marilyn Marrero, Sandi Velez, Maria Eugenia Molina, Olga Renovales,

Ruth Cruz, Marta Landaverde, Adela Samayoa, Valerie Helbert, Linda Macias, Adriana Sandoval, Adrienne Davis, Gina Chung, Aminah Bradford, and many others for gifting me with their friendship, presence, love, faith, hope, and wisdom. They have all contributed to this dissertation in different ways.

I am also thankful to Dr. Greg Jones, who gave me the opportunity to work as faculty Director of the Hispanic House of Studies while I was still working on my dissertation. This opportunity allowed me to work with fantastic and supportive people during the last two years: Idia Piacentini, Katherine Guerrero, Yesenia Palomino, Alberto La Rosa Rojas, Andrew Robb-Scott, and Amanda Bolaños. In addition, I am deeply grateful to the Latinx team, Drs. Peter Casarella, Daniel Castelo, Nina Balmaceda, María Teresa Gaston, and Robyn Henderson-Espinoza, for taking responsibilities off my shoulders so that I could finish writing my dissertation.

This dissertation would not have been accomplished without the amazing community of brothers and sisters in Christ who have entrusted their life stories to me and have allowed me to accompany them on their faith journey. I am incredibly grateful to Julia Peréz, Daniel Oliver Peréz, Samuel Oliver Bruno, Jorge Peréz, Mary and Juan Garcia, Ivette Toriz, Camerina Calderon, Yesenia Peréz, Gina Garcia, Don Tomas, Isabel Estrada, my brothers and sisters from the Course of Study in Central America and the Hispanic-Latino/a Pastoral Initiative (HLPI), and many other friends and parishioners whose lives inspired this dissertation.

Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to my *mamá, papá, abuelas, abuelo, tías y tíos* who have gifted me with their incredible wisdom and have been the best example of what being *chuladas de maíz prieto* means.

Gracias Dios por manifestarte en mi vida a través de tantas personas maravillosas (Thank you, God, for manifesting in my life through so many wonderful people). *A ti sea la gloria.*

Contents

Introduction

In 2013, during my second month as an associate pastor of a Hispanic/Latinx congregation in Apex, N.C., I had a conversation with one of the women from my church. She enthusiastically told me about her experience in a non-traditional support group, a group similar to Alcoholics Anonymous. Her support group met three times a week for three to four hours at a time, and once a month they met four times a week, she said. At the time, such groups were growing exponentially within the Hispanic/Latino community, and included several people from my church.

I was impressed. I asked my parishioner, "Why do you think people are willing to spend so many hours a week in these support groups but struggle to come to church once or twice a week for one or two hours?" Without skipping a beat, she answered, "*Estos grupos son espacios seguros donde podemos ser honestas y honestos acerca de nuestros traumas, sufrimientos, y luchas*" (These groups are safe spaces where we can be honest about our traumas, suffering, and struggles)," Then, after a short pause, she looked me in the eyes and said, "*Mire pastora* (Look pastor), *"Me encanta venir a la iglesia y alabar a Dios y escuchar la palabra de Dios, pero la mayoría de los domingos salgo de la iglesia sintiéndome igual que cuando entré, y a veces incluso más frustrada porque los predicadores no reconocen la dolorosa realidad que nosotros enfrentamos todos los días"* (I love coming to church and praising God and listening to the word of God, but most Sundays I leave church feeling the same way I was feeling when I came in, and

sometimes even more frustrated because the preachers do not acknowledge the painful reality that we experience every day).

My parishioner and the other members of my community who were desperately seeking healing of their open wounds made me think about the way we usually respond—or fail to respond—to people's woundedness from the pulpit. Often, sermons about healing, liberation, and transformation include some version of the traditional interpretation of 2 Corinthians 5:17 "*So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; look, new things have come into being!"* This passage is usually translated into messages that promise people that if they accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior, they will be saved (Romans 10:9). They will become a new person here on earth. They will experience new creation—everything old will pass away, and new things will come into being.

Inspired by this biblical verse, many well-known preachers persuade people to repent of their sins in order to be saved from the bondage to sin and evil, with the promise of becoming a "new person"—free of sin and suffering and worthy of eternal life. Indeed, many people do experience a massive transformation in their lives after surrendering their lives to Jesus. However, sometimes, things are not as straightforward as they seem. The reality is that for some people, "old things" do not pass away magically. That is often the case for people who have inherited soul wounds, experienced individual and/or collective traumatic wounds, or who are exposed to continuous traumatic stress.

This was the situation of the majority of the members of my congregation back then, so as comforting as these messages might be for their souls, they do not help them deal with the reality of the pain of their open wounds. For them, messages that overlook their suffering and open wounds do not do much for their healing.

Professor of theology Shelly Rambo challenges the lineal understanding of life and death that most Christian preachers proclaim.[1] She argues that "In the aftermath of trauma, death and life no longer stand in opposition. Instead, death hunts life. The challenge for those who experience trauma is to move in a world in which the boundaries and parameters of life and death no longer seem to provide meaning."[2] Therefore, in the aftermath of trauma, "life and death are inextricably linked."[3] The rush to move beyond the event to a new and safe place is a misconception of trauma survival and a dangerous move that ignores the realities of traumatic suffering.[4] Instead, Rambo claims that trauma returns theologians to our primary claims about death and life, particularly as they are narrated in the events of the cross and resurrection.

Trauma, for Rambo, disrupts the narrative of death and resurrection, turning our attention to a more mixed terrain that she identifies as the "middle."[5] The "middle," she argues, is "the figurative site in which death and life are no longer bounded."[6] The work of theologians who seek to accompany trauma survivors is "to theologize this middle."

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[1] Shelly Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 6.

[2] Rambo, *Spirit and* Trauma, 3.

[3] Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 4.

[4] Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 4.

[5] Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 6.

[6] Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 7.

Furthermore, the good news of Christianity "lies in the ability of Christian theology to witness between death and life, in its ability to forge a new discourse between the two."[7] If it does not witness to what remains, theology cannot provide "a sufficient account of redemption."[8] The challenge to theology then "is to provide a discourse of remaining that can speak to life in the aftermath and to the shattering of familiar frameworks by which persons and communities have oriented themselves in the world."[9] Thus, Rambo argues that the language of theology must take the form of witness and testimony and attend to suffering in its remaining.[10]

Marginalized and oppressed communities, however, are not always "survivors" in any clear sense; they are instead exposed to continuous traumatic stress. They are trapped in this "middle," where they continue experiencing traumatic wounds. In this context, the good news of Christianity lies in its willingness and capacity to enter into this "middle" space with them and to create, within this place, "sanctuary spaces" that provide "relative safety" from the constant threat of trauma.[11]

Some months after I had the conversation with my parishioner, I went to El Salvador to teach in the Duke Course of Study in Central America. There, I learned about Archbishop (now Saint) Oscar Romero's ministry. I was impressed and challenged by

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[7] Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 8.
[8] Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 8.
[9] Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 8.
[10] Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 10 & 16.
[11] At the Academy of Homiletics, on December 5, 2021, Rambo presented a lecture titled "Memory Work and the Task of Preaching." In this lecture, Rambo pointed toward a broader understanding of trauma drawing on the work of Resmaa Menakem, especially the concepts of "clean pain" and "dirty pain" (described in Chapter One of this dissertation). Following Menakem's racial conditioning argument, Rambo challenged theologians to conceive our task "as one of working longstanding toxic memories out of the individual and collective bodies." Yet, she still did not address continuous traumatic stress.

Romero's preaching during the years he was the Archbishop of San Salvador, from 1977 to 1980. I learned that through his homilies and guided by his *sentir* with God, the people, and the Church, Romero responded effectively to the pastoral care needs of the poor, marginalized, and oppressed people of El Salvador. During these years, the poor people of El Salvador were crucified by economic exploitation, social oppression, and state repression.[12] The priests, peasant leaders, union leaders, *campesinas* and *campesinos* who fought for a just society were labeled "subversives" and were arrested, tortured, and "disappeared" by death squads and the military.[13]

Romero effectively listened to the voice of God in both Scripture and the concrete circumstances of the poor, oppressed, and marginalized people and let them illuminate each other. As a result, his homilies are both prophetic and pastoral. He spoke for God and on behalf of the people. In addition, inspired by God's empathy, Romero responded in his homilies and ministry with great empathy for the poor, suffering, and wounded people. This empathy allowed him to *feel* with them, *think* with them, and *act* with them for their healing and liberation.

His homilies provide a "sanctuary space" for suffering and wounded people. Through them, Romero gives voice to their trauma by naming, acknowledging, and validating peoples' painful reality while simultaneously helping them encounter God amid their suffering. Therefore, in his homilies, the people find honesty, support, refuge,

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[12] Vicenzo Paglia, "El Amor Es Más Fuerte Que La Muerte," La Universidad: Órgano científico-sociocultural de la universidad de El Salvador, Número Especial Dedicado a Monseñor Romero, 2018, 21–27.

[13] Lynn Stephen, *Women and Social Movements in Latin America: Power from Below*, Illustrated edition (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), 34.

hope, and possibilities for a better future. He did this by facilitating a space of communal lament, proclaiming a message of hope amid suffering, helping marginalized and oppressed people reclaim their agency, and, consequently, helping them strengthen their resilience. Thus, this dissertation argues that Romero provides a theological, hermeneutical, and pastoral framework for preaching to marginalized and oppressed communities exposed to continuous traumatic stress.

Chapter 1 analyzes some of the important literature on collective trauma. Then, drawing on the wisdom of therapists, psychologists, trauma experts, and theologians, it analyzes collective trauma, focusing on historical trauma and its effects, symptoms, and consequences on individuals and entire communities.

Chapter 2 focuses on the relational aspect of resilience. Putting in conversation resilience researchers, trauma experts, pastoral care theologians, biblical scholars, and biblical wisdom, it analyzes the difference between resilience, denial, and healing as well as human beings' capacity to help each other strengthen their resilience and, potentially, to experience healing.

Chapter 3 explores the generational wounds the people of El Salvador inherited from their ancestors and the collective trauma they continued to experience before and during the time Romero was the Archbishop of San Salvador (1977–1980). By addressing these traumatic wounds, this chapter seeks to help readers understand the larger context of Romero's homilies for the wounded people of El Salvador.

Chapter 4 analyzes Rutilio Grande's influence on Romero's preaching. After Grande's assassination, Romero's ministry and homilies took a turn. Like Grande,

Romero became the pastor of the poor, marginalized, and oppressed people of El Salvador. With the help of the Holy Spirit and the influence of his dear friend Rutilio, Romero became the Spirit-guided pastor the people needed.

Chapter 5 analyses Romero's theological, hermeneutical, and pastoral framework for preaching to suffering and wounded communities. It is structured in three main sections:1) Romero's *sentir* with God; 2) Romero's *sentir* with the people; and 3) Romero's *sentir* with the Magisterium of the Church. It is by far the longest chapter, partly because it includes so many excerpts from Romero's sermons in both Spanish and English, in so doing introducing North American homileticians to the "voice" of Romero in his own words, and partly because those many examples show the depth of Romero's familiarity with his people's suffering and his own growth in understanding of and commitment to them and to the gospel.

Chapter 6 analyses and suggests how preachers preaching to undocumented Hispanic/Latinx communities can care for their community's open traumatic wounds using Romero's theological, hermeneutical, and pastoral framework for preaching to marginalized and oppressed communities exposed to continuous traumatic stress. But first this chapter analyses the soul wounds undocumented Hispanic/Latinx people have inherited, the individual and collective traumatic wounds many of them have experienced in their countries of origin, the traumatic wounds many have experienced on their journey to the U.S., and the continuous traumatic stress to which they are exposed in the U.S.

Pastoral Care and Preaching: Two Classic Models and the Turn to Trauma

Harry Emmerson Fosdick (1960s) was the first homiletician to address the importance of integrating pastoral care and homiletics. However, I suggest that Fosdick went too far by affirming that every preacher could provide "counseling" through his sermons. In his essay "Learning to Preach," Fosdick describes the preaching identity crisis he experienced, which moved him to seek other forms of preaching that would better fit his calling as a preacher. [14] The two most common forms of preaching at that time were expository preaching and topical preaching. Fosdick suggests that these two models of preaching do not accomplish what a sermon is meant to do: to meet the needs of the people, but struggled to come up with a preaching model that *would* meet the needs of the people—until he concluded that this could only be accomplished through a sermon that exemplified "personal counseling on a group scale."[15]

Fosdick explains that because people come to church with all kinds of personal difficulties, the place to start the sermon is with the "real problems of the people." This, he says, is the key difference between a sermon and a lecture. In other words, Fosdick believes that a good sermon should help people solve their real problems. Even when the preacher speaks to a multitude, the preacher speaks to them as individuals and is still a personal counselor. For Fosdick, the central task of the preacher is to give the congregation what they need to overcome their problems. Such preaching is

[14] Harry Emerson Fosdick and Lionel George Crocker, *Harry Emerson Fosdick's Art of Preaching; An Anthology* (Springfield, MA: Thomas, 1971), 13.

[15] Fosdick and Crocker, *Harry Emerson Fosdick's Art of Preaching; An Anthology*.

transformative. He says, “Preaching should never fail to make a transforming difference in some lives.”[16]

Fosdick argues that this preaching model does not diminish the Scripture’s importance. On the contrary, Scripture comes alive through preaching. For Scripture sheds light on all kinds of human problems, and is “incalculably rich in insight and illumination.”[17] However, in his sermons Scripture has a secondary role.

Fosdick did a great job identifying relevant problems that people in his congregation were experiencing. He also did a great job studying texts on psychology and psychiatry to deal with these problems from the pulpit in an informed way. Yet to my mind he neglected an essential part of a sermon: holy Scripture. If there is no Scripture, there is no Christian sermon. Furthermore, this model is problematic because most preachers are not equipped or trained to provide “personal counseling”—individually or on a group scale.

Another homiletician who acknowledged the importance of integrating homiletics and pastoral care is J. Randall Nichols (1980s). Nichols, contrary to Fosdick, does not believe that the role of pastoral preaching is to solve people’s problems but “rather [to help] them discover the means whereby they may wage those conflicts successfully themselves.”[18] Nichols states in his book *The Restoring Word: Preaching as Pastoral Communication* that when preachers help people learn a language through which people

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[16] Fosdick and Crocker, *Harry Emerson Fosdick's Art of Preaching*.
[17] Fosdick and Crocker, *Harry Emerson Fosdick's Art of Preaching*.
[18] J. Randall Nichols, *The Restoring Word: Preaching As Pastoral Communication*, 1st Edition (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1987), 191.

can engage, resolve, and re-engage conflict at a higher level, then preachers have given them the tools for restoration that the people need.[19] Nichols recognizes how conflicting it is to separate ministers' roles as preachers and pastoral care providers, and suggests that such separation of roles leads ministers to become bilingual, "talking sometimes the highly technical language of the human experience as pastors and then switching to God-talk when we can change into our pulpit gowns."[20]

In Nichol's time, because ministers were expected to be trained or at least have some understanding of both theology and psychology, Nichols assumes that all trained ministers "have both an understanding of and a sympathy for the complex workings of human relationships, feeling, and development."[21] He affirms that "ministers are not by enlarged 'therapists,' but increasingly they bring to their work a comprehension of the interplay between theological and psychological dynamics that makes them first-line members of what we loosely (and perhaps too shyly) call 'the helping professions.'"[22] Nevertheless, our twenty-first-century reality is that many trained ministers are not trained to provide pastoral care, and some indeed lack the empathy needed to provide pastoral care.

Unlike Fosdick, Nichols does not believe that the preacher's work as a pastoral care provider is "to respond to the people's needs" or "to solve their problems" but rather to help them experience restoration. Nichols says, "The word we speak on God's or our

[19] Nichols, *The Restoring Word*, 191.
[20] Nichols, *The Restoring Word*, 3.
[21] Nichols, *The Restoring Word*, 1.
[22] Nichols, *The Restoring Word*, 1.

people's behalf may be a restoring one."[23] Similarly, Nichol's question is not how the sermon can solve people's problems but how the sermon can foster restoration.

Yet Nichols acknowledges that only when preachers enter the lives of the members of their community do they "stand a chance of knowing how to speak restoratively."[24] Only then will preachers be able to imagine "what is it like for our listeners to be sitting there with whatever part of the world has been planted on their shoulders, hearing, striving, or maybe, when it comes right to it, just barely breathing."[25] On the other hand, until the listeners "sense that their brokenness is known and valued, until they themselves can perceive and feel what it is they suffer and need,"[26] no connection between scripture and their lives will be made. Nichols believes that a word can indeed restore a person *when the listener feels known*. He enumerates two things that can disrupt the communication between the preacher and the listener: the preacher's incapacity to empathize with the listeners and the preacher's ego. Only when the preacher understands that she works for God and the human beings in her care will she be able to connect people's faith with their lives.[27]

Thus, Nichols defines pastoral sermons as "The homiletical occasion when, whether by its dimension, its strategy, or its subject, a sermon addresses or impacts the personally invested concerns of its hearers."[28] Compared to Fosdick's understanding of

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[23] Nichols, *The Restoring Word*, 5.
[24] Nichols, *The Restoring Word*, 7.
[25] Nichols, *The Restoring Word*, 8.
[26] Nichols, *The Restoring Word*, 9.
[27] Nichols, *The Restoring Word*, 21.
[28] Nichols, *The Restoring Word*, 18.

pastoral preaching as preaching whose main task is to solve people's problems, Nichol's approach is more realistic and comprehensive. However, like Fosdick, Nichols' approach to pastoral preaching often meant he favored topical sermons, for he also favored psychological theories over scriptural teaching. His approach to pastoral preaching is more person-centered.[29]

Until recently, homiletics has not focused on preaching and trauma. Nevertheless, there is now significant interest in this topic. In 1998, theologians John S. McClure and Nancy J. Ramsay edited a book on domestic violence (*Telling the Truth: Preaching About Sexual and Domestic Violence*).[30] In 2019, homiletician Joni S. Sancken published a book that focuses on preaching hope to individuals who have experienced traumatic wounds (*Words that Heal: Preaching Hope to Wounded People*).[31] Pastor and homiletician Sarah Travis' 2021 book looks at the theological implications of trauma and provides a theological framework for preachers as they think about how to respond to the effect of trauma on listeners (*Unspeakable: Preaching and Trauma-Informed Theology*).[32]

Yet homiletical literature that deals with preaching and trauma is limited.[33] These works do not explore collective trauma, and they do not focus on oppressed and marginalized communities, such as the community of undocumented Hispanic/Latinx

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[29] Nichols, *The Restoring Word*, 21–22.

[30] John S. McClure and Nancy J. Ramsay, eds. *Telling the Truth: Preaching About Sexual and Domestic Violence* (Cleveland, OH: United Church Press, 1998).

[31] Joni S. Sancken, *Words That Heal: Preaching Hope to Wounded Souls* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2019).

[32] Sarah Travis, *Unspeakable: Preaching and Trauma-Informed Theology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2021).

[33] Kimberly R. Wagner has written a book focused on preaching and mass trauma entitled *Fractured Ground: Preaching in the Wake of Mass Trauma* (forthcoming, 2023).

immigrants in the U.S. Furthermore, the existing homiletical trauma-informed literature addresses the effects of trauma on survivors who have attained "sufficient stability" and "physical safety." However, for marginalized and oppressed communities, such "sufficient stability" and "physical safety" might be unattainable because they are exposed to continuous traumatic stress.[34] That is why Romero's theological, hermeneutical, and pastoral framework for preaching to marginalized and oppressed communities exposed to continuous traumatic stress is so relevant.

[34] Nayeli Y. Chavez-Dueñas et al., "Healing Ethno-Racial Trauma in Latinx Immigrant Communities: Cultivating Hope, Resistance, and Action," *American Psychologist* 74 (2019): 57, https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000289.

Chapter 1

Trauma and its Effects on the Collective

The most misleading presumption about trauma

is the implication that the traumatic experience is individual.

—Ignacio Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*

Whereas most of us have experienced trauma individually or collectively, many of us understand far less about the effects and consequences of trauma, especially of collective trauma. Since the 1970s, trauma researchers like Ignacio Martín-Baró have paid particular attention to collective trauma, having realized that trauma is never only experienced individually. This chapter engages several key texts in this particular area. While authors differ in their understanding of how the whole being—body, mind, and soul—responds to trauma and its consequences, they all agree that human beings are interconnected and that what affects one person affects that person's family, friends, and community. In addition, most of them agree that when trauma is not treated, its effects, symptoms, and consequences can be passed down to future generations, perpetuating and exacerbating the damage.

To put this into biblical language, we might say that what affects *one member of the body of Christ* affects the whole body. This is true not only for the wounded people but also for the perpetrators, in the case of human-made traumatic events. After all, no one is born a perpetrator. Most perpetrators were hurt first by the sinful (or, as I argue in

this chapter,) traumatic world of which we are all part, and typically themselves did not receive the care, love, and support they needed to live without harming others, and to heal from their wounds. Some consequently act out their woundedness by inflicting their pain on others. Thus, the wounds that trauma inflicts concern all of us as interconnected beings and bodies.

Without denying trauma's personal roots and without replacing individual reductionism with collective reductionism,[1] in this chapter I analyze some of the important literature on collective trauma. Drawing on the wisdom of therapists, psychologists, collective trauma experts, and theologians, it begins by analyzing collective trauma, focusing on historical trauma and its effects, symptoms, and consequences on individuals and entire communities.

I approach my task not as a psychologist or a therapist but as a minister and preacher whose community of faith has taught her that understanding trauma and its effects and consequences is essential to care effectively for people's wounds and to avoid creating new ones.

Understanding Trauma

Professor of psychiatry Richard F. Mollica reminds us that the word "trauma," derived from the Greek *traumatikos,* until recently referred to a physical injury and its

[1] Ignacio Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, ed. Adrianne Aron and Shawn Corne (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 110.

repair. Today, *trauma* also refers to invisible and non-physical social and psychological injuries to the mind and spirit.[2]

Professor of psychiatry Judith Herman says in her iconic book *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* that an event generally becomes traumatic when it involves threats to life or bodily integrity or a close personal encounter with violence and death, confronting people with overwhelming terror, helplessness, loss of control, and fear of annihilation.[3] Thus, traumatic events "overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection, and meaning."[4] Even though Herman states that the severity of traumatic events cannot be measured, she acknowledges that certain experiences increase the likelihood of harm, experiences such as being "taken by surprise, trapped, or exposed to the point of exhaustion."[5] In addition, the likelihood of harm can also increase when the traumatic event includes "physical violation or injury, exposure to extreme violence, or witnessing grotesque death."[6] In any case, the main characteristic of a traumatic event is its power to cause an overwhelming feeling of powerlessness and terror.[7]

Herman explains that traumatic events breach the attachments of family, friendship, love, and community. They affect not only the psychological structures of the self but also the systems of attachment and meaning that link the traumatized person to

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[2] Richard F. Mollica, *Healing Invisible Wounds: Paths to Hope and Recovery in a Violent World*, 1st edition (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2006).

[3] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 33.

[4] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 33.

[5] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 34.

[6] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 34.

[7] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 34.

individuals and communities. Traumatic events "destroy the victim's fundamental assumptions about the safety of the world, the positive value of the self, and the meaningful order of creation,"[8] leading them to lose their trust in themselves, God, others, and the world.[9]

Furthermore, traumatic symptoms have a propensity "to become disconnected from their source and take a life of their own."[10] This fragmentation is central to the historical observations on post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) included in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual in 1980.[11] Herman explains that people experiencing PTSD "feel and act as though their nervous system has been disconnected from the present."[12] Many symptoms of PTSD fall into three main categories: *hyperarousal*, *intrusion*, and *constriction*. *Hyperarousal* refers to the persistent expectation of danger. In this state of hyperarousal, "the traumatized person startles easily, reacts irritably to small provocations, and sleeps poorly."[13] *Intrusion* refers to the indelible imprint of the traumatic moment.[14] Traumatized people "relive the event as though it were continually recurring in the present."[15] Herman notes that Freud named these intrusive vivid sensations and images the 'repetition compulsion.'[16] *Constriction* refers to the numbing

[8] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 51.
[9] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 56.
[10] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 34.
[11] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 34.
[12] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 35.
[13] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 35.
[14] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 35.
[15] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 37.
[16] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 41.

response of surrender.[17] When the traumatized person experiences overwhelming powerlessness, she may go into a state of surrender.[18]

However, Herman notes that although the probability that a person who has experienced a traumatic event will develop post-traumatic stress disorder depends primarily on the nature of the traumatic event, "individual differences play an important part in determining the form that the disorder will take," differences such as a person's resilience.[19]

Furthermore, in 1992, Herman introduced the term *Complex PTSD (C-PTSD)* into the traumatic stress literature to describe the clinical presentation of individuals exposed to prolonged and repeated traumatic stressors in a state of captivity.[20] Because of the prolonged contact with the perpetrator, captivity creates a specifical type of relationship. The victim is forced to subordinate to the coercive control of the perpetrator.[21] Herman notes that the clinical presentation of people exposed to prolonged and repeated traumatic stressors such as sexual trafficking, imprisonment, domestic violence, childhood abuse, and concentration camps, among others, is likely to be quite different from the clinical presentation of people who have experienced single-event traumas. Herman describes three main characteristics of victims of prolonged traumatic stress: 1) their symptoms tend to be more complex, diffused, and tenacious than in simple PTSD; 2) they develop

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[17] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 35.
[18] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 42.
[19] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 58. I will explore the concept of resilience in chapter 2.
[20] Judith Lewis Herman, "Complex PTSD: A Syndrome in Survivors of Prolonged and Repeated Trauma," *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 5, no. 3 (July 1, 1992): 377, https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00977235.
[21] Herman, "Complex PTSD," 378.

characteristic personality changes, such as deformation of relatedness and identity; and 3) they become more vulnerable to harm, either at the hands of others or through self-inflicted harm.[22] Thus, somatization, dissociation, and affective changes are common in people exposed to prolonged and repeated stressors, and can make them passive, withdrawn, or intensely dependent. [23] They or others might experience their identities to be unstable. Furthermore, they might engage in repetitive behaviors or interactions that are harmful to them.[24]

Professors of psychology in South Africa Gillian Eagle and Debra Kaminer identified a substantial overlap between the diagnostic descriptions of C-PTSD and developmental trauma disorder, the latter a description proposed by psychiatrist and researcher Bessel van der Kolk (2005) as a diagnostic category that applies to abused children. Eagle and Kaminer note that both C-PTSD and developmental trauma disorder emphasize "emotional dysregulation, disturbances in identity, instability in attachment relationships, and an increased risk for traumatic reenactments."[25]

On the other hand, Eagle and Kaminer proposed Continuous Traumatic Stress (CTS) as a supplementary construct in the lexicon of traumatic stress. CTS describes the experience and effect of living in contexts of realistic current and ongoing danger, such as protracted political or civil conflict or pervasive community violence.[26] A group of anti-apartheid mental health activists initially generated the idea of CTS to counter the

[22] Herman, "Complex PTSD," 379.
[23] Herman, "Complex PTSD," 380.
[24] Herman, "Complex PTSD," 379.
[25] Eagle and Kaminer, "Continuous Traumatic Stress," 88.
[26] Eagle and Kaminer, "Continuous Traumatic Stress," 85.

post in PTSD and C-PTSD (which center on physiological and psychological responses focused on past traumatic events that continue to intrude into the present).[27] This group originally noticed and described CTS during the political violence and state repression of the 1980s in South Africa.[28] The primary preoccupation in CTS is with individuals' current and future safety.[29] Thus, one of the defining features of CTS is the *realistic* assessment of current and future threats.

By proposing the diagnostic category of CTS, mental health providers acknowledge that many individuals and communities globally are exposed daily to violence and trauma in contexts where they do not have access to safe spaces to escape danger or threat.[30] In these contexts, the uncertainty of life is usually the result of both violence and the failures of systems of protection.[31] Therefore, "intervention to ameliorate the impact of CTS requires societal- and community-level change, as well as modification of existing therapeutic approaches for working with trauma-related conditions."[32]

Furthermore, for Eagle and Kaminer, proposing the use of CTS as a complementary "descriptor to existing conceptualizations is a political intervention aimed at highlighting the kind of traumatic stress suffered primarily by systematically

[27] Eagle and Kaminer, "Continuous Traumatic Stress," 85–86.
[28] The term CTS was first formally introduced into the literature by Straker and the Sanctuaries Counselling Team (1987).
[29] Eagle and Kaminer, "Continuous Traumatic Stress," 91.
[30] Eagle and Kaminer, "Continuous Traumatic Stress." 85
[31] Eagle and Kaminer, "Continuous Traumatic Stress," 94.
[32] Eagle and Kaminer, "Continuous Traumatic Stress," 97.

oppressed, deprived, and marginalized populations."[33] This acknowledges that the kinds of stressors to which these communities are exposed "are extreme and involve the kinds of threats to life and bodily integrity that are usually understood to constitute *traumatic* rather than chronic stressors."[34] Moreover, Eagle and Kaminer intend the construct CTS to capture the nature of lived experience within particular kinds of sociopolitical contexts, experience an alternative psychiatric diagnosis might not capture.[35]

What kinds of experience might they have had in mind? Jesuit theologian and psychologist Ignacio Martín-Baró, who together with five other Jesuit priests and two women was killed on November 16, 1989, by the Salvadoran Army, recalls encountering a community experiencing what we would now describe with the term CTS. He shares that the first time he came into contact with *campesinos* and *campesinas* displaced by the war, he felt that most of their behavior showed aspects of paranoid delirium. So, for instance,

> They were constantly alert and hyper-vigilant, and they mistrusted anyone they didn't know. They were suspicious of everyone who approached them, scrutinizing gestures and words, looking for possible danger. And yet, when I learned about what had happened to them and the real dangers still preying on them, as well as their defenselessness and impotence against any type of attack, I quickly began to understand that their hyper-mistrust and vigilance were not signs of a persecution delirium born of their anxiety, but rather the most realistic response to their life situation.[36]

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[33] Eagle and Kaminer, "Continuous Traumatic Stress." 86.
[34] Eagle and Kaminer, "Continuous Traumatic Stress." 86.
[35] Eagle and Kaminer, "Continuous Traumatic Stress," 97.
[36] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 111.

Martín-Baró realized that the *campesinos*' and *campesinas*' behavior was the most normal reaction one could expect, given their abnormal circumstances.[37]

Regardless of the nature of the traumatic event, for van der Kolk, it always leaves such an imprint on the mind, brain, and body,[38] one which has continuing consequences for how the human organism (person) manages to survive in the present.[39] Traumatic experiences "leave traces on our minds and emotions, on our capacity for joy and intimacy, and even on our biology and immune system,"[40] he writes, and that not only at the individual but also at the family, and collective levels.

Psychotherapist and author Resmaa Menakem notes that more than just leaving traces *on* the body, trauma always happens *in* the body, for trauma is a spontaneous protective mechanism the body uses to stop or protect us from additional or future potential damage.[41] Safety and survival is what matters most to the body.[42] Therefore, when the body experiences something that is "too much, too fast, or too soon, it overwhelms the body and can create trauma."[43] Consequently, Menakem suggests that trauma is not an event but "a highly effective tool of safety and survival."[44] Trauma is the

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[37] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 111.

[38] Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*, Illustrated edition (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2015), 21.

[39] van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 21.

[40] van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*,1.

[41] Resmaa Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies*, Illustrated edition (Las Vegas, NV: Central Recovery Press, 2017), 7.

[42] Menakem, *My Grand Mother's Hands*, 7.

[43] Menakem, *My Grand Mother's Hand*, 7.

[44] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*,7.

body's spontaneous protective response to an event or events that the body perceives as dangerous.[45]

How does it do this? Menakem explains that our deepest emotions—love, fear, anger, dread, grief, sorrow, disgust, and hope—involve activating our bodily systems, specifically its complex nervous system, which connect the brainstem, pharynx, heart, lungs, stomach, gut, and spine. While neuroscientists call this parasympathetic system the *wandering nerve* or *vagus nerve* (or *vagal nerves*), Menakem suggests *soul nerve*[46] might be a more apt name because this system connects the body with our deepest emotions.[47] The soul nerve is a "highly complex and extraordinarily sensitive organ that communicates through vibes and sensations. This communication occurs not only between different parts of the body, but also from one person to another."[48] The soul nerve "is not just where we experience our emotions. It is also where we feel a sense of belonging. This is why we can think of it as both a bodily and a communal one."[49] In other words, the soul nerve connects our body with our emotions and allows us to connect with and sense other bodies.[50]

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[45] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 7.

[46] Menaken adopted the soul analogy from Eduardo Duran's work on intergenerational and historical trauma.

[47] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 5.

[48] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 138.

[49] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 147.

[50] Manekam relies on the work of psychiatrist and neuroscientist Stephen Porges, who introduced the Polyvagal Theory. Porges is a professor of Psychiatry at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Director of the Kinsey Institute Traumatic Stress Research Consortium at Indiana University Bloomington.

Stephen W. Porges, *The Polyvagal Theory: Neurophysiological Foundations of Emotions, Attachment, Communication, and Self-Regulation*, 1st edition (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011).

On the one hand, the soul nerve receives fight, flee, or freeze messages from the lizard brain[51] and disseminates them throughout the rest of the body, and on the other, it sends a calming message to the body when danger is no longer imminent. Menakem reminds us that when it comes to safety, our body and our reptilian brain react first, and only then our thinking brain. "Our cortex doesn't get the opportunity to *have* a thought about any piece of sensory input unless our lizard brain lets it through."[52] Our reptilian brain filters information by always asking the same question: "*Is this dangerous or safe*?"[53] However, Menakem clarifies that "dangerous" can refer to anything we perceive as a threat, not only to our body, "but to what we do, say, think, care about, believe in, or yearn for."[54] People might experience traumatic wounds not only when their bodies are wounded, violated, or abused, but also when their family members or community are disrespected, when their ideas or work are ignored or plagiarized, or when their dreams are thwarted.

Or again, we usually think of trauma as the result of an extremely painful or life-threatening one-time or continuous event. However, Menakem suggests that "trauma can also be the body's response to a long sequence of smaller wounds,"[55] for instance, the long history of racial profiling, discrimination, institutional disrespect, over-policing, over-sentencing, micro-aggressions, and, worst of all, ongoing lack of human regard that

[51] A lizard has a very small brain, akin to our limbic system in size.
[52] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 6.
[53] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 6.
[54] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 7.
[55] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 14.

bodies of color have experienced in the U.S.[56] These are not just experiences from the past, but a stressful and painful present reality. When people experience these stressors repeatedly—for months or, in the case of some groups, for centuries—in many different situations and with many different people, this is likely to create traumatic wounds.[57] Thus, many members of minoritized and oppressed communities experience physical and emotional illnesses, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), learning disabilities, depression and anxiety, diabetes, and high blood pressure as a result of the traumatic wounds they have experienced and continue experiencing.[58]

If this trauma is not treated, then the body's strategies of responding to trauma through extreme reactions, compulsions, strange likes and dislikes, seemingly irrational fears, and unusual avoidance strategies "can become embedded in the body as standard ways of surviving and protecting itself."[59] Even though these strategies tend to make little cognitive sense, and the person may be consciously unaware of them, to the body they make perfect sense: they are the only strategy it has to protect itself from repeating the experience that caused or came after the trauma.[60]

Martín-Baró explains that it might be that a psychological disorder is an abnormal reaction to a normal situation, but it could also be a normal reaction to an abnormal situation.[61] In this case, instead of speaking of mental disorders, Martín-Baró suggests it

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[56] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 15.
[57] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 77.
[58] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 15.
[59] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 8.
[60] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 9.
[61] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 111.

might be more useful and accurate to say that people find themselves in a social situation that causes them problems that they are not capable of resolving by themselves and that make them act out in a way that other people may deem to be inappropriate.[62] These reactions, or body strategies, can be passed on to future generations and become the standard responses in families, communities, and cultures.[63]

Trauma affects how we think, what we do, how we relate to God, to others, to the earth, and, ultimately, who we are. In many cases, trauma is an invisible wound that shows up only when the environment somehow prompts the wound's re-emergence. Many people have learned to live with trauma and to disguise the wound and its effects on them as character traits. Other people have decided to leave the wound visible and try hard to heal it. Some people cannot hide the wound anymore because it is so big and deep that it has taken control of their lives. This is why people sometimes react to present events in ways others might consider wildly inappropriate, overly charged, or out of proportion.[64]

Whether the wounds are visible or not and under control or not, traumatic wounds are real. Like any other wound we experience physically, such wounds require attention and care, in some cases even urgent care. Either we care for the wounds voluntarily or, sooner or later, they will demand care. At some point, someone will have to pay attention

[62] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 111.
[63] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 8.
[64] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hand*, 8.

and care for them. Either we do it, or our descendants will have to do it. In this way, traumatic experiences are not only personal but are also cultural and historical.[65]

Collective Trauma

In his book, *Everything in Its Path: Destruction of Community in the Buffalo Creek Flood,* sociologist Kai T. Erikson describes the collective trauma that the community of Buffalo Creek, a narrow mountain valley in West Virginia, experienced when an avalanche of black water and mine waste destroyed everything in its path in the winter of 1972. Some trauma researchers consider this particular study the first in the field of collective trauma studies. Erikson's research is based on his observations and the testimonies of the survivors of this human-made disaster. He shares that most of the survivors developed a "sense of vulnerability, a feeling that one has lost certain natural immunity to misfortune, a growing conviction, even, that the world is no longer a safe place to be."[66]

Erikson explains that most of the survivors' traumatic symptoms are a response to the loss of communality, the network of relationships that make up their general human world, and a reaction to the disaster itself.[67] Therefore, the fear, apathy, and demoralization survivors of the Buffalo Creek flood experience are a consequence of the shock of being ripped out of a meaningful community setting and the shock of

[65] Richard F. Mollica, *Healing Invisible Wounds: Paths to Hope and Recovery in a Violent World* (Harcourt, 2006), 55.

[66] Kai T. Erikson, *Everything in Its Path: Destruction of Community in the Buffalo Creek Flood*, 2th edition (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 1978), 234.

[67] Erikson, *Everything in Its Path*, 187–94.

encountering that cruel black water. However, he notes, "it seems clear that much of the agony experienced on Buffalo Creek is related to the fact that the hollow is quiet, devastated, without much in the way of nourishing community life."[68] The collective trauma that the Buffalo Creek survivors experienced was therefore caused not only by the traumatic event itself but also, and maybe even more so, by the realization that the community has been obliterated and can no longer serve as a source of personal support, notes Erikson.[69] With that loss of communal support they also lost the illusion that they could be safe.[70]

But such trauma is hardly restricted to the few, or to events like Buffalo Creek. Reflecting on war and mental health, Martín-Baró reports that mental illness was long considered a problem that affected only a small segment of the population. As long as persons did not experience paralyzing anxiety attacks, hallucinations, extreme irritable temper or aggressiveness, and/or addictions, they were typically considered healthy or normal. Even though it is now well known that not everyone experiencing mental health issues shows visible signs, he notes that many people continue to believe that mental ill health affects only a few people. People believe this because of their "limited conception of human beings that reduces them to individual organisms whose functioning can be understood in terms of their individual characteristics and features."[71] This individualistic

[68] Erikson, *Everything in Its Path*, 195.
[69] Erikson, *Everything in Its Path*, 199.
[70] Erikson, *Everything in Its Path*, 241.
[71] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 109.

understanding of human beings "denies their existence as historical beings whose life is developed and fulfilled in a complex web of social relations."[72]

Mental health has to do more with the basic character of human relations, which define the possibilities for humanization for the members of each society and group, not so much with individual satisfactory functioning.[73] In other words, "Mental health is a dimension of the relations between persons and groups more than an individual state, even though this dimension may take root differently in the body of each of the individuals involved in these relations, thereby producing a diversity of manifestations ('symptoms') and states ('syndromes)."[74] Understood like this, we realize that far from being a secondary problem that affects only a small number of people, mental illness is a primary and basic problem that affects all of us.[75] Furthermore, Martín-Baró observes that,

> The most misleading presumption about trauma is the implication that the traumatic experience is individual. Traumas are assumed to be individual, not only in the sense that it is individuals who suffer them but in the sense that they are by their very nature individual—as if psychic trauma were like organic trauma, best understood by examining the affected individual and his or her individual wound or injury.

However, this individualistic understanding of trauma abstracts sociohistorical realities and insists on locating disorders in the individual, giving too little or no consideration to humankind's social nature.[76] Nevertheless, mental health is a matter of

[72] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 109.
[73] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 109.
[74] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 109.
[75] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 110.
[76] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 124.

social relationships between people and between groups, "which will provoke crises, depending on the case, within an individual or family, inside an institution, or in a whole society."[77]

Martín-Baró is not saying that we should ignore mental health's personal roots, for, by doing so, we would be trying to simplify a problem as complex as mental health. Instead, he is emphasizing that it would be enlightening if we were to "see mental health or illness not from the inside out but from the outside in; not as the result of an individual's internal functioning but as the manifestation, in a person or group, of the humanizing or alienating character of a framework of historical relationships."[78] After all, as Hungarian-Canadian physician Gabor Maté argues, "It's impossible to separate personal and collective trauma because the very psychology of our nervous system is created in interaction with the nervous system of other people from the moment that we are conceived."[79]

Psychologist Jack Saul, who has worked with populations that have endured genocide, torture, ethnic cleansing, terrorism, civil war, and forced migration, states that collective trauma is an inevitable consequence of natural and human-caused disasters. It is the shared injuries to a population's social, cultural, and physical ecologies.[80] He explains that "collective trauma refers to the impact of adversity on relationships in

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[77] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 110.

[78] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 110–11.

[79] Gabor Maté, "Collective Trauma and Spirituality," in Thomas Hübl, *Healing Collective Trauma: A Process for Integrating Our Intergenerational and Cultural Wounds* (Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 2020), 70.

[80] Jack Saul, *Collective Trauma, Collective Healing: Promoting Community Resilience in the Aftermath of Disaster*, 1st Edition (New York: Routledge, 2013), 1.

families, communities, and societies at large. This includes natural and human-caused disasters as well as the cumulative effects of poverty, oppression, illness, and displacement."[81] Saul notes that the danger of collective trauma is that it has the potential to unravel our social fabric, making us feel a lack of belonging and a lack of communality. People who experience this kind of trauma feel that this large-scale trauma is undermining their social foundations, which causes another type of distress. Those injuries "vary in terms of the severity, duration, and impact of violence and destruction as well as the communities' social and material capacities to recover." [82]

Moreover, the effects of collective trauma could be more disastrous than we usually believe. Van der Kolk notes that,

> Many of our world's wicked problems are the inevitable consequence of unresolved collective trauma and the disembodiment and loss of relation these ills create. Systemic problems such as poverty, famine, crime, disease, and violence are considered intractable or even impossible to resolve. While nearly everyone acknowledges their existence, many remain unable to fully feel into them, which is the core of their irresolvability. To feel the problems of the world is to know its suffering, but this requires compassionate 'response-ability.'[83]

Thus, any social crisis, whether prompted by economic, immigration, or climate factors, is at root a relational crisis and, consequently, a crisis of embodiment. Disembodiment manifests both direct and systemic consequences, and when we are collectively detached, suppressed, and disconnected, we cannot form a coherent and intelligent response to address or resolve systemic problems or existential crises.

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[81] Saul, *Collective Trauma, Collective Healing,* 3.
[82] Saul, *Collective Trauma, Collective Healing,* 2.
[83] van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 181–82.

Even though trauma caused by natural disasters deeply affect human beings collectively, human-made trauma can be even more devastating. According to studies, there are more cases of psychological distress after a human-made traumatic event than after a natural disaster. One possible explanation for this is that human beings tend to accept most natural disasters as inevitable but understand human-made traumatic events as preventable or avoidable. Professor of social work Michal Shamai argues that "In most human-made collective or national traumas, the sense of betrayal by other human beings causes various psychological symptoms, such as anger, depression, and mistrust along with a change of worldview and values."[84]

However, as Shamai reminds us, only part of the collective trauma resulting from a natural disaster is typically created by the natural disaster itself. The collective traumatic wounds experienced after a natural disaster are typically caused by "the behavior and attitude of the government, states, countries and even the entire world toward the victims."[85] Therefore, collective trauma is an outcome that includes both the collective response to the traumatic event and "the way it is constructed and incorporated within the collective set of beliefs, decisions, and behaviors."[86] Thus, one could conclude that "every potential traumatic event leaves its mark on the collective, to some extent, but the method of coping with the damage caused, and the way it is constructed within the collective narrative—whether it emphasizes coping and resiliency vs. emphasizing only

[84] Michal Shamai, *Systemic Interventions for Collective and National Trauma: Theory, Practice, and Evaluation*, 1st edition (New York, NY: Routledge, 2015), 24.
[85] Shamai, *Systemic Interventions for Collective and National Trauma*, 27.
[86] Shamai, *Systemic Interventions for Collective and National Trauma*, 12.

the painful aspects—determines whether the potential traumatic event will develop into collective trauma."[87]

The response of governmental institutions, religious institutions, NGOs, and society at large to the traumatic event and the suffering of the hurting community can determine the extent and seriousness of the wound. For instance, in many cases, religious institutions make the wound deeper and more painful instead of facilitating healing and restoration. In their attempt "to vindicate God" or preserve a particular image of God, religious people often blame the victims for the tragedies they experience. For instance, after hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans, not only did the government fail to provide the support the people needed, but some religious leaders also compounded their trauma by making public statements stating that the hurricane was a punishment for their sinful lifestyle. Therefore, some psychologists, including Shamai, believe that the traumatic wounds the people of New Orleans experienced were primarily caused by the lack of support, acknowledgment, and validation of their suffering. Thus, we can say that most of the traumatic wounds people experience are caused by hurtful behavior and a lack of support and understanding from other human beings and the institutions they trust or are supposed to trust. This also makes healing from trauma even more difficult.

In addition, for Shamai, collective, or national trauma (as he also calls it), can be understood from the perspective of three domains: space, time, and significant others. The *space* and *time* domains include two types. The two types of the space domain are:

[87] Shamai, *Systemic Interventions for Collective and National Trauma*, 12.

physical, measurable, and psychological space.[88] He suggests that the kind of questions we would ask to identify the physical space are: "Where did the traumatic event happen? How far is the location from 'central' places in developed or Western countries? How large is the area in which the event occurred?"[89] The kind of questions we would typically ask to identify the psychological space are related to the nature of the pain, especially the type of damage, loss, and suffering and the nature of the cause of the trauma. Was it a human-made or natural disaster?[90]

The two kinds of time included in the *time* domain are time that can be measured and defined objectively and time that is experienced subjectively. The questions we would ask to define the measurable time domain are related to the time when the event occurred. Was it a singular event, a recurring event, or an ongoing traumatic event? Did additional events, of a different type from the original traumatic event, occur later and resonate with the traumatic event? The psychological time is different. "Issues related to the psychological time are often included in the narrative of people who have experienced the traumatic event and might contradict the objective information regarding the duration and order of events."[91]

The *significant other* domain focuses on the nature of the hurt people and their relation to society. Some things to consider in this domain regarding the hurt community are: marginalized collectives; poor vs. rich collectives; collectives in developing

[88] Shamai, *Systemic Interventions for Collective and National Trauma*, 29.
[89] Shamai, *Systemic Interventions for Collective and National Trauma*, 32.
[90] Shamai, *Systemic Interventions for Collective and National Trauma*, 32.
[91] Shamai, *Systemic Interventions for Collective and National Trauma*, 32.

countries vs. collectives in the developed Western world; and beliefs and prejudices regarding the victimized collective. In the case of human-made traumatic events, the nature of the perpetrators and their relation to society also need to be considered. In the case of natural traumatic events, the involvement of governmental authorities in reducing possible damage prior to the event and in providing help immediately after the event, as well as in the long term, likewise demand our attention.[92] Among other things, understanding the nature of the hurt community, the perpetrators, and the government, can provide some explanations of why some collectives or nations receive more support than others.[93]

The interactions between the *space, time, and significant other* domains and between the different aspects within each domain also warrant our attention when analyzing the traumatic event, says Shamai. "Such analysis can present a picture of the 'voice of the trauma' within human society." [94] It can explain why the traumatic injuries of some collectives are named, validated, and widely acknowledged while the traumatic wounds of other collectives are not.[95]

Nevertheless, I suggest that regardless of the nature of the domains that Shamai identifies, the voice of the trauma of marginalized and oppressed communities can be amplified by a person or a group of people who care enough to name the hurt community's wounds and validate their pain, people who, have "compassionate response-

[92] Shamai, *Systemic Interventions for Collective and National Trauma*, 32.
[93] Shamai, *Systemic Interventions for Collective and National Trauma*, 33.
[94] Shamai, *Systemic Interventions for Collective and National Trauma*, 33.
[95] Shamai, *Systemic Interventions for Collective and National Trauma*, 33.

ability."[96] For instance, if we analyze the interaction of the three domains of space, time, and significant other in relation to the poor, marginalized, and oppressed people of El Salvador during the time that (now Saint) Oscar Romero was the Archbishop of San Salvador (the focus of this study), we would find that their trauma was deliberately suppressed. Though they experienced the constant oppression, killing, torture, rape, and disappearance of members of their communities at the hands of the government and the oligarchy (who, incidentally, had the full support of the powerful United States of America), few outsiders recognized or validated the reports of their killing and persecution because they regarded the poor, marginalized and oppressed people, who were fighting for justice, as communist threats to the freedom and development of Central America. However, one man did amplify the voice of the traumatized, marginalized, and oppressed people of El Salvador. This man chose to use the privilege and reach he had to give voice to their trauma. Oscar Romero is known as the voice of the voiceless precisely because, through his homilies, letters, and public presentations, he gave voice to the trauma of the poor, marginalized, and oppressed people of El Salvador. Thus, even though analyzing the interaction of the domains of *space*, *time*, and *significant* others helps determine the "voice of the trauma" of collectives and nations, it is not the only thing that determines whether that voice is heard.

Furthermore, collective experiences of trauma that have remained unprocessed for many generations do not exist only in the past because the afterlife of these traumatic

[96] van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 181–82.

experiences continues. Unspoken and silenced suffering does not end when a person or a generation dies. It can be passed on from generation to generation, like ghosts whose presence we can feel but refuse to acknowledge. Over time, we become so accustomed to these ghosts' presence that we cannot even imagine a life without them. Their presence is manifested in the form of generational habits that are perpetuated in experiences such as poverty, femicides, prejudices, cultural biases, and oppressive systems. Some people continue damaging their relationships with others and causing suffering to others because of their denial of the past and inability to acknowledge and integrate that past.

Menakem observes how, at the individual level, after months and years, unhealed trauma can appear to become part of a person's personality and be understood as personality flaws. At the family level, prolonged untreated trauma can become a family norm and be seen and understood as dysfunctional family dynamics. At the collective level, when unhealed trauma is transmitted and compounded through multiple families and generations, it can start to look like culture, or better said, "twisted cultural norms."[97] Though this traumatic retention (now disguised as culture) has lost its context, it has not lost its power. It has a profound effect on what individuals and entire communities do, think, feel, believe, experience, and find meaningful.[98] These traumatic retentions may originally have served as strategic responses to trauma to provide protection, support resilience, and inspire hope; generations later, when these strategies or adaptations

[97] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 39.
[98] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 39.

continue to be acted out in situations where they are no longer necessary or helpful, they become defined as "dysfunctional behaviors at the individual, family, or cultural level."[99]

Intergenerational and Historical Trauma

Intergenerational trauma occurs when a person or a group oppresses, victimizes, brutalizes, or marginalizes another. The hurt people may experience trauma, and when their trauma is not treated and healed, they can pass on their trauma response to their children. As Menakem explains, "Children are highly susceptible to this because their young nervous systems are easily overwhelmed by things that older, more experienced nervous systems are able to override."[100] This trauma becomes *historical trauma* when the effects and consequences of the trauma live in the hurt people's descendants for generations.[101]

Social worker and mental health expert Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, who originally conceptualized the model of historical trauma, explains in her article, "The Historical Trauma Response Among Natives and Its Relationship with Substance Abuse: A Lakota Illustration," that "historical trauma (HT) is cumulative emotional and psychological wounding, over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma experiences."[102] According to Brave Heart, the historical trauma

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[99] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 39.
[100] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 38.
[101] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 38–39.
[102] Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, "The Historical Trauma Response Among Natives and Its Relationship with Substance Abuse: A Lakota Illustration," *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs* 35, no. 1 (2003): 7, https://doi.org/10.1080/02791072.2003.10399988.

response may include self-destructive behaviors such as substance abuse, suicidal thoughts and gestures, depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, anger, and difficulty recognizing and expressing emotions.[103] She notes that in some communities, the consequences of historical trauma manifest as a high mortality rate, alcohol abuse, child abuse and domestic violence, poverty, unemployment, and suicide.[104] Furthermore, "Associated with HTR [historical trauma response] is unresolved historical grief that accompanies the trauma; this grief may be considered impaired, delayed, fixated, and/or disenfranchised."[105] This unresolved grief can be manifested collectively in lower socioeconomic conditions, higher stress, and poorer health.

As an example of unhealed intergenerational trauma, Yellow Horse Brave Heart shares the testimony of a forty-three-year-old Lakota man, a recovering alcoholic, who recounts:

> I never bonded with any parental figures in my home. At seven years old, I could be gone for days at a time and no one would look for me ... I've never been in a boarding school. I wished I was [had] because all of the abuse we've talked about happened in my home. If it had happened by strangers, it wouldn't have been so bad—the sexual abuse, the neglect. Then I could blame it all on another race .... And yes, they [my parents] went to boarding school (Brave Heart 1999a).[106]

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[103]Brave Heart, "The Historical Trauma Response Among Natives and Its Relationship with Substance Abuse," 7.

[104] Brave Heart, "The Historical Trauma Response Among Natives and Its Relationship with Substance Abuse," 9.

[105] Brave Heart, "The Historical Trauma Response Among Natives and Its Relationship with Substance Abuse," 7.

[106] Brave Heart, Brave Heart, "The Historical Trauma Response Among Natives and Its Relationship with Substance Abuse," 10.

Descendants of Native Americans who were sent to boarding schools—like this man—are also direct victims of the boarding schools. They inherited a legacy of poor spiritual foundations, weak Native identity, sexual, physical, and psychological abuse, and poor family affiliations.[107] Brave Heart notes that, "The trauma symptoms of the parents, rather than the trauma exposure per se, are the critical risk factors for offspring manifesting their own trauma responses."

In his book *Healing the Soul Wound: Trauma-Informed Counseling for Indigenous Communities,* psychologist and researcher Eduardo Duran reports that Native Americans' idea of historical and intergenerational trauma includes the understanding that the trauma occurred in the soul or spirit. Therefore, Duran refers to historical and intergenerational trauma as *soul wounds.*[108] For Native Americans, historical and intergenerational trauma is not just a wound of the mind and the body but, above all, a wound of the soul. For this reason, addressing the traumatic injuries individuals and communities have experienced is essential for their and their descendants' well-being. If the traumatic wounds were not treated in previous generations, subsequent generations would have to treat them.[109]

Furthermore, "not only is the trauma passed on intergenerationally, but it is cumulative," becoming "more severe each time it is passed on to a subsequent

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[107] Brave Heart, "The Historical Trauma Response Among Natives and Its Relationship with Substance Abuse," 10.

[108] Eduardo Duran, *Healing the Soul Wound: Trauma-Informed Counseling for Indigenous Communities*, 2nd edition (New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 2019), 10.

[109] Duran, *Healing the Soul Wound*, 17.

generation."[110] For instance, Duran argues that some of the effects, consequences, or symptoms of historical trauma that some Native American communities experience such as poverty, illness, alcoholism, domestic violence, and family separation become compounded from generation to generation. Far from describing these problems as social or pathological problems, as the Western world would, Native Americans describe them as "spiritual injury, soul sickness, soul wounding, and ancestral hurt" caused by the suffering and oppression that their people experienced during the European colonialization and that has been passed down through generations, says Duran.[111] Thus, for example, Duran infers that the astronomical increase in opiate use reflects the loss of collective soul in the U.S., and that opiates are the "shadow expression of soul restoration."[112] Such soul wounding happens in families and entire communities. In other words, as Gabor Maté reminds us, addictions are not a disease but an attempt to solve a problem, in this case a wound from prolonged inter-generational trauma.[113]

However, because trauma affects the whole being—soul, mind, and body—historical trauma is a soul wound that likewise affects the whole being. Duran affirms, "The body knows how to heal itself and does so fairly quickly, but it still remembers. The mind protects itself by forgetting. The spirit gets infected by the spirit of the vampire."[114] Therefore (he continues), "A therapeutic process that includes and validates ancestral

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[110] Duran, *Healing the Soul Wound*, 17.
[111] Duran, *Healing the Soul Wound*, 17.
[112] Duran, *Healing the Soul Wound*, 78.
[113] *Healing Trauma in a Toxic Culture with Dr. Gabor Maté | Being Well Podcast*, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T8fdPA8Tt4I.
[114] Duran, *Healing the Soul Wound*, 94.

trauma should be guided by the idea that therapy/healing involves fourteen generations as part of the strategy."[115] When a person experiences healing, he/she heals seven ancestral generations and seven future generations, breaking the chain of historical and intergenerational trauma in his/her family lineage. This also applies to communities and societies.

Duran, therefore, insists that the treatment of soul wounds must include awareness of the emotional and/or psychological impact of this intergenerational oppression.[116] For,

> [B]y understanding the [nature] of the problems, patients can assume responsibility for their lives and gain an objectivity that has not been available to them until this moment of awareness. For many patients it is the first realization that they are not 'defective' or inferior human beings and that there are sociohistorical/political reasons for their problems.[117]

Duran states that "one impact of the awareness of historical trauma is the notion of internalized oppression, or as it was known previously, identification with the aggressor."[118] Duran explains, "Identification with the aggressor is a phenomenon observed in clinical settings in which the patient presents with physical, psychological, epistemic, and cultural violence, and the victim identifies with the perpetrator in a variety of ways."[119] Duran argues that the perpetrator's abuse works much like a vampire's bite: A person is bitten by a vampire, and he/she becomes a vampire. This vampire bites another person, and this person becomes a vampire too. When the perpetrator abuses a

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[115] Duran, *Healing the Soul Wound*, 50.
[116] Duran, *Healing the Soul Wound*,43.
[117] Duran, *Healing the Soul Wound*,43.
[118] Duran, *Healing the Soul Wound*,19.
[119] van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 19.

person, some of the perpetrator's spirit is also shot into the victim. Duran uses the analogy of the vampire bite to make connections between the historical trauma and the violence, alcoholism, and level of incest present in some Native American communities.

Duran clarifies that he is not saying that before the colonizers came there were no problems among the first inhabitants of this land. However, he acknowledges that the human problems which the people of Turtle Island experienced were greatly magnified by the soul wounding caused by the colonizers. [120] Nevertheless, Duran also acknowledges that the violence the colonizers inflicted on the people of Turtle Island had its roots in the soul wounding that the colonizers had experienced "over the millennia in Europe, where they were also both victims and perpetrators of genocide. The internalized violence of many generations then was brought to Turtle Island, and that energy spread through the souls of the people like a forest fire that is out of control. Wounding was seeking to wound itself." [121]

Menakem expands on Duran's work by directly linking white-body supremacy to the historical trauma white bodies experienced in Europe long before they encountered Native Americans and Black bodies. Menakem states that white bodies traumatized each other for centuries before they colonized the Americans: In the 1500s and 1600s, people were routinely burned at the stake for heresy.[122] This practice began in the twelfth century and continued through 1612. Furthermore, until 1640, torture was an official

[120] Duran, *Healing the Soul Wound*, 94.
[121] Duran, *Healing the Soul Wound*, 94.
[122] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 11.

instrument of the English government. Menakem explains that many of the colonizers had been brutalized or had witnessed great brutality in England. Thus, they fled from England as a survival response.[123] Others were the children or grandchildren of people who had been brutalized in England. In addition, the Great Plague killed an estimated 100,000 people in London between 1665 and 1666. Villages were greatly affected. For instance, in the village of Eyam, the Plague killed four out of five residents over fourteen months, making the Pilgrims and Puritans "refugees fleeing extreme poverty, imprisonment, torture, and mutilation."[124]

Thus, it is likely that many English colonists were traumatized by the time they arrived in America—either by what happened to them directly or by the soul wounds passed down to them through generations. It is highly possible that more than ten centuries of medieval brutality started to coalesce in the culture and that when the English colonists came to America, they continued violently hurting each other but specifically less powerful white bodies and punishing and murdering other Puritans who were disobedient or whom they allegedly found guilty of witchery.[125]

This dehumanization and brutalization created trauma that has yet to be healed among white bodies today.[126] And then this unhealed trauma whites imposed on Native Americans and African Americans, who became the subjects of their brutalization. Thus, Native Americans' and African Americans' soul wounds did not start with their

[123] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 59.
[124] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 60–61.
[125] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 61–62.
[126] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 61–62.

encounter with white bodies; it started in medieval Europe, and presumably since the beginning of humanity, and was passed down from generation to generation. [127]

For Christians, the soul wound began much earlier. The Christian tradition typically interprets a traumatic event as salvific—the torture and sadistic crucifixion of Jesus Christ. This traumatic event was followed by many other traumatic events that resulted from the persecution and brutalization of the followers of The Way, including during the Crusades. This unhealed trauma was passed down from generation to generation. First, Christians were persecuted and brutalized for believing in Jesus Christ, then they persecuted and brutalized non-Christians and other Christians who disagree(d) with their particular doctrines and beliefs. Latin America is a clear example of this brutalization for White Catholic Spaniards violently forced the indigenous people of Latin America to convert to Christianity.

Moreover, new research on trauma has led to the study of inheritable changes in gene expression and the creation of a new field of scientific inquiry now known as *epigenetics.* Psychologist Ann S. Masten points out that epigenetics explains how traumatic experiences can literary "get under the skin" to affect long-term health.[128] According to Masten, studies on children of pregnant women who were exposed to severe trauma suggest that there could also be an intergenerational transmission of trauma effects through epigenetic programming.[129] These studies also suggest that prenatal stress

[127] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 60–61.

[128] Ann S. Masten, *Ordinary Magic: Resilience in Development*, Reprint edition (New York: The Guilford Press, 2015), 130.

[129] Masten, *Ordinary Magic*, 131.

alters fetal development, particularly during the second trimester.[130] During development, the child's key regulatory systems—including functions of the immune system, autonomic system, or hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis—emerge, organize, and change. When the developing human being is exposed to the severe trauma the mother is experiencing, these systems can be altered, and those alterations can have lasting effects on the child's health and well-being.[131]

Thus, as recent research shows, trauma is routinely passed down from person to person through genetics, culture, family structures, and the biochemistry of the egg, sperm, and womb. Recent research has also found evidence that "*memories* connected to painful events also get passed down from parent to child—and to that child's child." This research has revealed that these experiences appear to be held, passed on, and inherited in the body. Thus, our ancestor's experiences of trauma not only belong to them, they also belong to us—biologically, not just in our memories.

In addition, unhealed trauma routinely spreads between people, like a contagious virus. How contagious this virus is depends on the way the hurt person or the community responds to the traumatic wound. Menakem explains that hurt people usually choose between two possible ways to respond to trauma: dirty pain or clean pain.[132] Clean pain refers to pain that repairs and facilitates growth. It is the pain people experience when they step forward into the unknown with honesty

[130] Masten, *Ordinary Magic*, 131.
[131] Masten, *Ordinary Magic*, 130.
[132] I am indebted to Shelly Rambo for pointing to Menakem's work on clean pain and dirty pain in her presentation "Memory Work and the Task of Preaching," at the Academy of Homiletics, on December 5, 2021.

and vulnerability, even when they have no idea what to do or when they are scared or worried about what might happen.[133] Clean pain can be experienced both individually and collectively, the effects can also be experienced individually and collectively. In our contemporary US context, for example, Menakem notes that,

> Accepting clean pain will allow white Americans to confront their longtime collective disassociation and silence. It will enable African Americans to confront their internalization of defectiveness and self-hate. And it will help public safety professionals in many localities to confront the recent metamorphosis of their role from serving the community to serving as soldiers and prison guards.[134]

Choosing clean pain involves recognizing, accepting, and moving through pain. To that end, one has to stop avoiding and ignoring the wounds and give them the care they need to heal. Menakem states, "By walking into that pain, experiencing it fully, and moving through it, you metabolize it and put an end to it."[135]

While clean pain allows people to acknowledge, name, and validate their real circumstances and suffering, *dirty pain* is people's refusal to acknowledge the soul wound and their unwillingness to care for it. "It is the pain of avoidance, blame, and denial. When people respond from their most wounded parts, become cruel or violent, or physically or emotionally run away, they experience dirty pain. They also create more of it for themselves and others."[136] Hurt people who choose dirty pain over clean pain might

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[133] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 19.
[134] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 20.
[135] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 165.
[136] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 20.

try to soothe their trauma by using violence, rage, coercion, deception, betrayal, or emotional abuse. [137] This never heals the person; on the contrary, it makes the wound deeper. Clean pain might be painful at first, but it is the only way we can experience healing. It is like cleaning a wound that is infected. As Judith Herman notes, there is power in speaking the unspeakable, a creative energy is released when the barriers of denial and repression are lifted.[138]

Unhealed trauma causes conflict in the individual, families, and societies because it affects our capacity to be fully present to others and harms our ability to relate and connect with ourselves, others, and the earth. Accumulating traumas leave wounds in our individual and collective bodies.

Furthermore, the scholars I have discussed note that when trauma is not treated, it might be repeated. We might unconsciously repeat the conditions of trauma upon ourselves or others, a process called *retraumatization* or *repetition compulsion.* When societies do not acknowledge the historical trauma affecting their people, or even alter their history to make it "more acceptable" or to justify their actions, they are creating a fertile land for the retraumatization of themselves and others.

In a 1989 article titled "The Compulsion to Repeat the Trauma: Re-enactment, Revictimization, and Masochism," van der Kolk observes,

> Many traumatized people expose themselves, seemingly compulsively, to situations reminiscent of the original trauma. These behavioral reenactments are rarely consciously understood to be related to earlier life experiences. This 'repetition compulsion' has received surprisingly little

[137] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 38.
[138] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 2.

> systematic exploration during the 70 years since its discovery, though it is regularly described in the clinical literature. Freud thought that the aim of repetition was to gain mastery, but clinical experience has shown that this rarely happens; instead, repetition causes further suffering for the victims or for people in their surroundings.[139]

However, van der Kolk notes that, "In behavioral re-enactment of the trauma, the self may play the role of either victim or victimizer."[140] Therefore, *re-enactment* of victimization is a major cause of violence. He argues that "criminals have often been physically or sexually abused as children."[141]

Furthermore, Herman shows that "survivors of childhood abuse are most likely to be victimized or to harm themselves than to victimize other people."[142] Nevertheless, she also acknowledges that a minority of victims of childhood abuse become perpetrators. According to Herman, research shows that men who have experienced childhood abuse are more likely to take out their aggression on others. At the same time, women with histories of childhood abuse are likelier to be victimized by others or to injure themselves.[143] However, Herman reiterates that only a tiny minority of survivors of

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[139] "The Compulsion to Repeat the Trauma," accessed March 9, 2021, http://www.cirp.org/library/psych/vanderkolk/.

[140] "The Compulsion to Repeat the Trauma."

[141] Van der Kolk based his statement on research done in 1987. He says, "In a recent prospective study of 34 sexually abused boys, Burgess et al. found a link with drug abuse, juvenile delinquency, and criminal behavior only a few years later. Lewis has extensively studied the association between childhood abuse and subsequent victimization of others. Recently, she showed that of 14 juveniles condemned to death for murder in the United States in 1987, 12 had been brutally physically abused, and five had been sodomized by relatives. In a study of self-mutilating male criminals, Brach-y-Rita concluded that "the constellation of withdrawal, depressive reaction, hyperreactivity, stimulus-seeking behavior, impaired pain perception, and violent aggressive behavior directed at self or others may be the consequence of having been reared under conditions of maternal social deprivation. This constellation of symptoms is a common phenomenon among a member of environmentally deprived animals."

"The Compulsion to Repeat the Trauma."

[142] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 113.

[143] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 113.

childhood abuse, usually male, become perpetrators and reenact their childhood experiences.[144]

In his book *The Body Keeps the Score* (2014), van der Kolk again notes that "trauma breeds further trauma; hurt people hurt other people."[145] However, this time he is not referring only to people who have been physically or sexually abused as children. He says,

> Your ZIP code, even more than your genetic code, determines whether you will lead a safe and healthy life. People's income, family structure, housing, employment, and educational opportunities affect not only their risk of developing traumatic stress but also their access to effective help to address it. Poverty, unemployment, inferior schools, social isolation, widespread availability of guns, and substandard housing all are breeding grounds for trauma."[146]

It seems that what van der Kolk is naming here is that people living in these circumstances are exposed to continuous traumatic stressors.[147] If they do not receive the support they need to treat, and eventually, heal their wounds, they could pass their traumatic wounds to their children and future generations.

With that in mind, envisage Martín-Baró's concern for the children of El Salvador who were growing up in a violent environment. These children were forming their identities and life's horizon in a violent and dehumanizing society. They were learning that violence is the most important response for solving the problems of existence. [148]

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[144] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 113.
[145] van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 350.
[146] van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 350.
[147] Over three decades earlier, Erikson wrote that those who live on the margins of society, in conditions of chronic poverty and/or violence, are likely to experience the world as a traumatic disaster.
[148] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 118.

They were at risk of "constructing an identity that internalizes violence, the institutionalized lie, and dehumanizing social relations."[149]

Martín-Baró notes that good family relations and their support system are essential for these children, for they can filter the impact of the war on children. The harmful and traumatic character of warfare significantly depends on how older relatives and the children's support system react to the events. Although war marks a child, there is no reason for it to stigmatize or traumatize as long as the necessary support is available. The problem is that in warfare, the children are often separated from their loved ones and their support system either because they have been killed or are at the battlefront. In addition, even when they are present, it is generally difficult for adults to maintain the kind of balanced behavior that children need since the dangerous circumstances or the situation of being refugees forces them to live in precarious conditions.[150]

Neither Martín-Baró nor van der Kolk suggest that all victims of trauma will become victimizers, but that many victimizers have inherited or directly experienced traumatic wounds that remain unprocessed and unhealed. Many people who have been wounded do not have access to a support system that can help them process and care for their wounds and, eventually, experience healing. Consequently, some deal with the effects and consequences of their open wounds in ways that hurt others. Thus, in many cases, victimizers were first also victims. This gives us another perspective on prison

[149] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 133.
[150] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 127.

ministry. It is different to see incarcerated people as criminals than as wounded people who did not have the support system to help them process and heal their open wounds.

Menakem agrees with van der Kolk and Martín-Baró in that, without adequate intervention, trauma breeds trauma. He reflects on this from the perspective of the trauma inherited by white bodies, descendants of the perpetrators of the genocide of Native Americans, the enslavement of black bodies, and the abuse against other bodies of color, for many of them continue dehumanizing bodies of color. However, he notes that we should not use our traumatic experiences as an excuse for the wounds we inflict on others. He says,

> Trauma is never a personal failure, nor the result of someone's weakness, nor a limitation, nor a defect. It is a normal reaction to abnormal conditions and circumstances. Nevertheless, 'I had been traumatized' is never a valid excuse for murder, or any other crime. Neither is 'My ancestors were traumatized.' These statements are calls to heal, not to cause harm.[151]

Nevertheless, Menakem acknowledges that the perpetrators and their descendants also carry in their bodies and psyches the consequences of the trauma they have inflicted on others.

Martín-Baró notes that the dominant sectors in El Salvador, the government and the oligarchy, saw the poor, marginalized, and oppressed people's demand for land, just salaries, and better living conditions as a threat to their social position and way of life. Therefore, they ordered and participated in the killing, torture, and imprisonment of the poor, marginalized, and oppressed people of El Salvador. However, the government and

[151] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 205.

the oligarchy aggressively denied their horrendous acts.[152] This "aggressive denial of reality" has been inherited by their children and grandchildren, many of whom continue denying the violent persecution of poor people. Even more, they blame the victims, accusing them of being "rebellious" and communist. Thus, many of the descendants of the perpetrators in El Salvador developed fragmentary and distorted ego boundaries. They continued fomenting dehumanizing social relations and a radical differentiation between "us" and "them."

Martín-Baró details a research project carried out between April and May 1987 in which he interviewed more than two hundred children of various ages and from different social sectors. One of the questions was: "What would have to happen in order for there to be no poor people?" Martin-Baró notes that "several of the children from the higher socioeconomic sector gave this response: 'kill them all.'"[153] Believing that "killing all the subversives," those who demand the satisfaction of the basic needs of the poor, is the solution to the problems of the country is what inspired the mass killing of *campesinos* and *campesinas* that took place in 1932 in El Salvador.[154] Fifty years later, the children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren of the perpetrators continue believing that this is the solution. In fact, this is what they tried to do during the civil war.

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[152] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 116.

[153] This research project was not finished by the time Martín-Baró published this article. Ignacio Martín-Baró, "Political Violence and War as Causes of Psychosocial Trauma in El Salvador," *International Journal of Mental Health* 18, no. 1 (1989): 6, https://www.jstor.org/stable/41344526.

[154] Martín-Baró, "Political Violence and War as Causes of Psychosocial Trauma in El Salvador," 6.

This mentality makes difficult or even impossible the healing of the damaged roots of social coexistence in El Salvador.[155] Martín-Baró explains, "Whether or not it manifests in individual disorders, the deterioration of social interaction is in and of itself a serious social disturbance, an erosion of our collective capacity to work and love, to assert our unique identity, to tell our personal and communal story in the history of peoples."[156]

Therefore, for some of the trauma researchers I have engaged, it is impossible to address collective trauma without also addressing politics, which is, in many cases, the root of trauma. Van der Kolk notes that when we treat only trauma and neglect addressing its origins, we live in denial and "are bound to fail."[157] On the other hand, Martín-Baró explains,

> If the foundation for people's mental health lies in the existence of humanizing relationships, of collective ties within which and through which the personal humanity of each individual is acknowledged and in which no one's reality is denied, then the building of a new society, or at least a better and more just society, is not only an economic and political problem; it is also essentially a mental health problem…we cannot separate mental health from the social order.[158]

In other words, collective trauma is socially produced. Therefore, understanding and resolving it requires treating the trauma's social roots.[159] Martín-Baró explains that

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[155] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 114.
[156] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 115.
[157] van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 350.
[158] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 120–21.
[159] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 125.

"the social relations of individuals are not only the *cause* of trauma; maintaining these social relations is what feeds and multiplies the number of traumatized individuals."[160]

Conclusion

Trauma damages human beings' assumptions about themselves, God, others, and the world. The touch of trauma affects how we live in the world, how we see the world, and how we see and understand one another. It creates incoherence, fracturing us from ourselves and separating us from others. Thus, trauma affects our whole being—soul, mind, and body—and, consequently, trauma interrupts harmony and communication. It breaks relationships between self and self, self and God, self and others, and self and the earth. Thus, the effects and consequences of trauma affect not only the hurt people but also their families and communities. Thus, trauma is never only an individual wound and problem but also a collective one.

Therefore, we need to reconsider our individualistic understanding of humanity and acknowledge that a single person is never entirely culpable for their actions. Often, our hurtful actions are motivated by that part of ourselves that is wounded and hurts. Untreated trauma could become a dominant power that causes us to act even against our own desires.

Furthermore, in a culture marked by soul wounds, multiple generations of hurt people and perpetrators bear down its effects, along with impaired or broken social and

[160] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 125.

cultural relations. If these soul wounds remain in the dark, their healing will be thwarted. Judith Herman notes, "Remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims."[161] Thus, the first step to healing soul wounds is to name them, acknowledge them, and validate the suffering and damage they have caused to individuals and collectives. If the truth is not recognized, wounded people cannot begin their recovery.[162]

However, it is not only the past soul wounds that we must care for, but also the new wounds that people continue experiencing, which worsen the original wound. We need to acknowledge, name, and validate the painful and traumatic experiences people have experienced in the past and those they experience in the present. Only then can we begin the healing process and, eventually, experience what Duran calls balance and harmony. "Healing has to do with harmony and balance of spirit. You could have the worst illness imaginable and still be healed. If you are sitting at the center of the universe, then you are healed. On the other hand, curing has to do with removal of symptoms or disease, sickness, and such."[163] There is a difference between healing and cure. Human beings cannot cure the inevitable. Everyone will experience disease and sickness and eventually die. The only difference is that they may die without healing or out of balance. In Native/Original People's medicine, "it is perfectly okay to die. But is not okay to die out of balance with the force that creates life and death."[164] For Christians who believe in

[161] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 1.
[162] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 1.
[163] Duran, *Healing the Soul Wound*, 179.
[164] Duran, *Healing the Soul Wound*, 179.

the promise of resurrection, dying should likewise not be our worst fear, but living out of balance, without harmony, and, consequently, harming ourselves, others, and God's creation, should be. Thus, healing trauma is the work of restoring balance and harmony with our Creator, ourselves, others, and the earth.

Just as the effects, symptoms, and consequences of trauma are passed down from generation to generation, so too are healing and resilience.[165] Therefore, just as our descendants can continue experiencing the pain of our unhealed wounds, our descendants can reap the benefits of our resilience and healing. Thus, in the next chapter, I will address how we can be each other's support system and help each other strengthen our resilience and access our self-healing force—being each other's medicine.

[165] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 11.

Chapter 2

Resilience: We Are Each Other's Balm in Gilead

Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.
—James Baldwin

Throughout history, humans have survived countless natural and human-made catastrophes: earthquakes, tsunamis, droughts, floods, plagues, wars, genocides, and unspeakable violence. Evidently, we are resilient as a species. To talk about trauma, therefore, also means to talk about resilience and human beings' inner capacity to heal. Mental health professionals and trauma researchers have long been impressed by people's ability to survive the unimaginable and adapt to challenging circumstances.

The concept of resilience, however, was first introduced only in the 1970s by pediatric psychiatrists after evaluating children who seemed to be flourishing after experiencing a traumatic event.[1] In the intervening decades, most of the mental health professionals and resilience researchers I engage in this chapter have come to the same conclusion in their research: that resilience is both something with which we are born and something we build through our relationships with others. They note that human beings' resilience is built and strengthened through our relationships with people who are fully present for us—family, friends, people from our community, religious leaders, and/or

[1] Caroline S. Clauss-Ehlers and Mark D. Weist, eds., *Community Planning to Foster Resilience in Children* (New York: Springer, 2010), 15.

healthcare providers. In other words, people's resilience is strengthened by the presence of "empathetic witnesses" in our lives.[2] "Empathetic witnesses" are human beings who help prevent trauma by embodying kindness and acceptance. [3]

Humans are relational beings with the capacity to help each other build resilience and to access our self-healing force. Interestingly, just as our soul wounds can be passed down from person to person and generation to generation, so too can our resilience.

In this chapter, I focus on the relational aspect of resilience. I analyze: 1) the meaning of resilience; 2) resilience's collective aspect; 3) the difference between resilience and denial; 4) human beings' capacity to help one another build resilience; 5) and human beings' capacity to help each other access our inner self-healing force. Putting in conversation resilience researchers, trauma and pastoral care theologians, biblical scholars, and biblical wisdom, I conclude that just as human beings have the capacity to hurt and wound each other, so too do human beings have the capacity to heal each other, to be the balm for one another's wounds.

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[2] Peter A. Levine, *In an Unspoken Voice: How the Body Releases Trauma and Restores Goodness*, 1st edition (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2010), ix.

In the foreword of *In an Unspoken Voice*, psychologist Gabor Maté uses the term "empathetic witness" to refer to the people who create what Levine identifies as a *relative safety* environment for those who are unsettled or troubled.

I first heard about the empathetic witness concept in Dr. Elaine Heath's presentation to UM missionaries entitled Trauma-Informed Evangelism. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zO3SY3lF92c

[3] Levine, *In an Unspoken Voice*, ix.

Resilience

Psychologists and resilience researchers typically define resilience as the capacity to "bounce back" after a difficult or even traumatic experience. Psychologist R. Fox Vernon observes that at the beginning of resilience research, most researchers agreed with this overarching image of resilience.[4] Nevertheless, the truth is that we cannot simply "go back" to life as it was before we experienced trauma. Trauma can change how we see, feel, and relate to ourselves, God, others, and the earth. Consequently, life after a traumatic event might never be the same.

Author and psychotherapist Resmaa Menakem likewise argues that resilience is misunderstood when viewed as the ability to bounce back from adversity, primarily when it is understood as a heroic, individualized act. According to him, another common error is to understand the ability to "bounce back" as something learned or acquired only in childhood due to supportive parenting, the presence of other caring adults, and others.[5] Resilience is much broader and more organic than that.[6] Indeed, it is both intrinsic and learned, a combination of nature and nurture.[7]

Furthermore, Menakem clarifies that resilience is not just about responding to or getting through a challenging experience, for resilience also manifests in a form that is more about being than doing.[8] He observes that "resilience is built into the very cells of

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[4] Caroline S. Clauss-Ehlers and Mark D. Weist, eds., *Community Planning to Foster Resilience in Children*, 20.

[5] Resmaa Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies*, Illustrated edition (Las Vegas, NV: Central Recovery Press, 2017), 50.

[6] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 50.

[7] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands* 50.

[8] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 51.

our bodies. It is as much a part of our ability to heal."[9] However, he also recognizes that relationship with others can strengthen people's resilience. Thus, resilience is both a quality with which we are born and something we develop in ourselves and others as we grow by interacting with others.

Some psychologists and pastoral theologians have found that people can build resilience once the traumatic event is over, and once they are in a safe space. They observe that resilience helps them thrive in their post-traumatic response. Theologian and therapist Jennifer Baldwin notes that "Resiliency isn't a 'going back' or 'living as if that/those bad things didn't happen.' It's not 'forgive and forget.' [Rather,] resiliency is the courage to face the darkness of traumatic injury, process, and care for the wounds, and come to new ways of living authentically."[10] Similar to Baldwin, Bessel van der Kolk observes that "for real change to take place, the body needs to learn that the danger has passed and to live in the reality of the present."[11] However, in some cases, the reality of the present is no better than the reality of the past, for many people are exposed to continuous traumatic stress. Furthermore, they do not have the luxury of stopping to process and care for their wounds because the traumatic experience/experiences are not over yet.

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[9] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 50.

[10] Jennifer Baldwin, *Trauma-Sensitive Theology: Thinking Theologically in the Era of Trauma* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018), 30.

[11] Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*, Illustrated edition (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2015), 21.

This is the reality of people living in contexts of realistic current and ongoing danger, such as war and pervasive community violence.[12] This is also the reality of systemically oppressed, deprived, and marginalized populations,[13] such as people who continue experiencing the oppression and exploitation of those in a position of power; of undocumented immigrants who live in constant fear of deportation and family separation; of Black people who are exposed daily to racism and the antiblackness sentiment so ingrained in U.S. society; of Asians who are afraid they will be the next victim of anti-Asian racism; of people who experience insidious trauma like LGBTQ+ people, people of color, people living in poverty, and women, who are victims of discrimination and biases because of their social status or identity;[14] of entire communities who are seeing their land rapidly disappear underwater or become barren due to climate change; and of all of us who are in the middle of a pandemic and live in constant fear of falling sick or losing a loved one to this devastating COVID-19 virus. Unfortunately, in the world in which we live right now, very few people do not know such danger intimately.

Indeed, some people are continually exposed to traumatic stressors, and it is essential that we name, acknowledge, validate, and address this reality. As discussed in Chapter One, we need to attend to their *past* and *current* traumatic wounds, for it is only

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[12] Gillian Eagle and Debra Kaminer, "Continuous Traumatic Stress: Expanding the Lexicon of Traumatic Stress," *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 19 (May 1, 2013): 85, https://doi.org/10.1037/a0032485.

[13] Eagle and Kaminer, "Continuous Traumatic Stress." 86.

[14] Maria P. P. Root calls insidious trauma the "trauma that is experienced by people because of bias against them for reasons of their social status or identity, which isn't valued by the dominant culture." Christie Cozad Neuger, *Counseling Women: A Narrative, Pastoral Approach* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 107.

by addressing unresolved *past* and *present* wounds that we can work effectively to prevent potential future suffering—present suffering can become future suffering if left unaddressed.

I suggest that in circumstances of continuous traumatic stress, or recurring traumatic stressors, pastoral theologian Jan Holton's definition of resilience is more appropriate than the one proposed by Baldwin and van der Kolk. She says that "resilience is the ability not only to survive overwhelming threat or injury but also to engage coping strategies that move one toward growth and flourishing."[15] Holton's understanding of resilience is more appropriate for contexts in which people are continually exposed to traumatic events. Under these circumstances, resilience is not just a matter of thriving in their post-traumatic response but of being able to "struggle well" in the midst of trauma.

Human beings can rarely "struggle well" by themselves amidst trauma. We need the support of a community. Holton's ethnographic study of the Lost Boys of Sudan shows that their resilience grew as they experienced each other's support in the most devastating of circumstances.

The Lost Boys were unaccompanied minors, some as young as three years old, who had to flee their villages in South Sudan because the North Sudanese were killing them. In their search for safety, they found each other. Together they started a long journey of a thousand miles to the refugee camp in Ethiopia—and later on to other countries, including the USA. The boys who survived this dreadful journey shared how

[15] M. Jan Holton, *Building the Resilient Community: Lessons from the Lost Boys of Sudan* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 26.

they confronted lions and other wild beasts. When a lion got close to them, the older kids would form a circle around the younger kids, the stronger protecting the weaker with their own lives.[16] Some children were so overcome with fear, however, that they would leave the group and try to outrun the wild beast. Such attempts always ended in tragedy. Consequently, the boys saw some of their dear friends being eaten alive by lions.[17] Those who stayed together increased their chances of surviving. Similarly, once they made it to the refugee camp, the youngest boys would sleep in the center of the tent, surrounded by the elder boys for protection.[18]

The Lost Boys experienced many horrible things. We could say that they experienced hell on earth. Holton says that according to the western diagnosis of PTSD,[19] the Lost Boys should be incapacitated by the trauma they experienced. Nevertheless, she describes them as a very resilient community. Holton discovered in the Lost Boys "a startling concept of community that reflects their sense of deeply ingrained obligation toward the other and a powerful faith narrative that empowers them to participate in God's promise of healing and redemption," which she believes laid the foundation for

[16] Holton, *Building the Resilient Community*, 69.
[17] Holton, *Building the Resilient Community*, 69.
[18] Holton, *Building the Resilient Community*, 70.
[19] According to The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), "The essential feature of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is the development of characteristic symptoms following exposure to one or more traumatic events. Emotional reactions to the traumatic event (e.g., fear, helplessness, horror) are no longer a part of Criterion A. The clinical presentation of PTSD varies. In some individuals, fear-based re-experiencing, emotional, and behavioral symptom may predominate. In others, anhedonic or dysphoric mood states and negative cognitions may be most distressing. In some other individuals, arousal and reactive-externalizing symptoms are prominent, while in others, dissociative symptoms predominate. Finally, some individuals exhibit combinations of these symptom patterns." *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 5th ed. (Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Association, 2013), 274.

resilience in the face of adversity and helped them mitigate the effects of their traumatic experiences.[20] Holton believes that what contributed to the Lost Boys' communal faith narrative is that even in times of great danger, they created among themselves a "*relatively safe* holding place," articulated justice, and voiced a collective trauma story.[21] In this context, Holton describes the "*relatively safe* holding place" not as a place free of violence and threat, for, as she explains, in times of war and prolonged displacement, this is not a reasonable option. Instead, Holton sees this "*relatively safe* holding place" as the psychic space, and possibly a physical space, created between the Lost Boys out of mutual belief and trust, a space in which they lessened the danger through cooperative participation.[22] Similarly, psychologist Peter Levine explains that an environment of "*relative safety"* is an atmosphere that conveys refuge, hope, and possibility.[23] The human circle formed by the Lost Boys to protect the younger kids created this kind of atmosphere.

Holton also suggests that the traditions and healing narratives the Lost Boys inherited from their ancestors fueled their resilience. Holton observes,

> While the collective trauma story frames them as a target of sympathy, the Lost Boys themselves, driven by the traditions of the healing narratives of old, pushed on toward a deeper meaning for themselves and their people. It is the same collective trauma story that the Dinka would come to believe [that] tells of how God works to bring peace to South Sudan.[24]

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[20] Holton, *Building the Resilient Community*, 2.
[21] Holton, *Building the Resilient Community*, 2.
[22] Holton, *Building the Resilient Community*, 124–25.
[23] Peter A. Levine, *In an Unspoken Voice: How the Body Releases Trauma and Restores Goodness*, 1st edition (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2010), 75.
[24] Holton, *Building the Resilient Community:*129.

Thus, their collective trauma narrative incorporates all their attempts to bring meaning to their traumatic experience "by putting it in the context of the greater Dinka narrative."[25] Furthermore, their collective trauma story "honors the Dinka notion that the individual emerges only as a part of the collective and binds individuals in a community of shared experience."[26]

The Lost Boys provided care and relative safety for each other when their biological families could not. Holton explains that *empathy* and care for each other were instilled already in their home communities, where they learned that childrearing is a shared obligation. Thus, the Lost Boys "re-created familial and tribal structures of support" as they were fleeing war, in the refugee camps, and settling in the U.S. (and elsewhere). The older boys supported, protected, disciplined, and provided physical care for the younger boys and, consequently, helped each other thrive.[27] They provided a "relatively safe holding place for one another amid constant threat."[28] This helped them overcome the incapacitating effects of trauma.

Psychologist Ann Masten, one of the leading researchers on resilience in children, notes, "The resilience in children is 'interconnected with the resilience of families, communities, governments, economies, and ecologies.'"[29] In the case of the Lost Boys, their resilience was interconnected with their community's resilience and its tribal

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[25] Holton, *Building the Resilient Community*, 131.
[26] Holton, *Building the Resilient Community*, 129.
[27] Holton, *Building the Resilient Community*, 130.
[28] Holton, *Building the Resilient Community*, 131.
[29] Ann S. Masten, *Ordinary Magic: Resilience in Development*, Reprint edition (New York,: The Guilford Press, 2015), vii.

traditions. Practicing what they learned from their community, the Lost Boys of Sudan protected each other with their own lives, which is very different from what we usually see in most parts of the world, where the stronger and powerful typically take advantage of the smaller and weaker.

A common misunderstanding of resilience is that resilience is rare and results from extraordinary talents or resources.[30] However, as Masten notes, "Resilience is common and typically arises from the operation of basic protections."[31] For instance, most resilient children "have ordinary human resources and protective factors in their lives."[32] Resilience "arises naturally from the interaction of basic adaptive systems that foster and protect human development."[33] Masten understands the power of these basic systems to facilitate adaptation and recovery in development as "ordinary magic."[34] What is required to build resilience is "ordinary magic,"[35] which can facilitate the building up of resilience on individuals and collectives.

Recall Menakem's contention that resilience is not just inside us; it also comes from the words and actions of people who care for us and from our relationship with them. [36] To support his argument, Menakem quotes Masten: "I like to say that the resilience of a child is distributed. It's not just in the child. It's distributed in their

[30] Masten, *Ordinary Magic*, 7.
[31] Masten, *Ordinary Magic*, 7.
[32] Masten, *Ordinary Magic*, 8.
[33] Masten, "Ordinary Magic: Lessons from Research on Resilience in Human Development," accessed August 23, 2021, https://www.edcan.ca/wp-content/uploads/EdCan-2009-v49-n3-Masten.pdf.
[34] Masten, *Ordinary Magic*.
[35] Masten, *Ordinary Magic*, 7–8.
[36] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 51.

relationships with the many other people who make up their world."[37] Menakem provides an illustration to demonstrate how this distribution of resilience might work:

> Suppose you're running a marathon. Halfway through, exhausted, you trip and fall. Your legs ache and you are bleeding from both knees. You pull yourself to your feet and decide it's time to quit the race. Then five of your friends and family members show up beside you. 'You can do it!' they shout. 'You finished last year; you can finish this time. Go for it!' Next thing you know, you're off and running again.[38]

When this person's resilience was not enough to continue running, others stepped in. Their encouraging words and support strengthened the person's resilience and enabled her to continue running. She was still exhausted, her knees were still bleeding, and her legs were still aching, but, with the help of others, she was able to continue with the race.

However, some questions arise with regard to this illustration: What if this runner needed to stop and take care of her exhausted body and her hurt knees? What if her body was hurt more because she continued running? What if the people cheering her on hurt her more than they helped her? After all, she was not running for her life: it was only a race. This example is much too simplistic as a description of many kinds of serious trauma.

Furthermore, it is essential that we listen attentively to people's needs before trying to help them "build resilience" so they can continue "running the race." Many of us like to be heroes and create heroes; thus, we push ourselves and others without analyzing first whether that is what they and we really need. In addition, we often

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[37] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 51.
[38] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 50.

determine what other people need or how they should respond to specific circumstances according to the standards established by the society in which we live rather than the person's or communities' needs.

To determine whether an individual or collective is resilient, one typically judges whether the person or the collective is adapting successfully "to disturbances that threaten system function, viability, or development."[39] Masten observes that, "Whether one focuses on desirable or undesirable outcomes or both, evaluations are made about how a person's life is going in relation to established norms or expectations grounded in developmental, historical, cultural, and/or situational contexts."[40] Nevertheless, the question regarding who should define the criteria for evaluating whether a person or collective is "adapting successfully to disturbances" remains.[41]

Sometimes we harm our bodies because our understanding of resilience is limited. It is delineated by the standards and beliefs of our community, culture, and society. For instance, in mainline U.S. society, "quitting" is seen as characteristic of the weak, those who have not built up sufficient resilience to thrive in challenging situations. However, perhaps being resilient also means having the capacity to challenge society's standards and seek what is best for our well-being, regardless of the criticism or judgment we might receive from others.

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[39] Masten, *Ordinary Magic*, 10.
[40] Masten, *Ordinary Magic*, 16.
[41] Masten, *Ordinary Magic*, 15.

Resilience is about being able to move forward even when experiencing a challenging and painful situation, but resilience is also having the ability to stay connected to our body, others, and the situation we are experiencing and make decisions that will help us thrive—the best decisions for our spirit, mind, and body. For this reason, resilience might sometimes look like quitting. Even so, we might be moving forward, only in directions others were not expecting us to move, but that is the direction towards whatever we need to experience and to find healing at this specific time in life.

Simone Biles' withdrawal from the 2021 Olympics gymnastics team's final competition helps us understand how being resilient and helping others build resilience look different for different people and in different circumstances. Biles, who is considered the greatest gymnast ever, decided to follow Naomi Osaka's decision to withdraw from tennis tournaments to protect her mental health, shining a spotlight on the taboo of athletes talking publicly about their mental health.[42] Biles shared that she felt as if "[s]he was carrying the weight of the world."[43] Though physically she could carry this heavy weight, mentally she could not. It seems that in Biles' case, the people close to her surrounded her to encourage her to stop and take care of her mental health, not to continue competing without regard for her mental health. For Biles, withdrawing from

[42] Daniella Silva is a reporter for NBC News focusing on the economic recovery, its effect on families, and as well as immigration, "'We're Human, Too': Simone Biles Highlights Importance of Mental Health in Olympics Withdrawal," NBC News, accessed July 28, 2021, https://www.nbcnews.com/news/olympics/we-re-human-too-simone-biles-highlights-importance-mental-health-n1275224.

[43] Silva, "We are Human Too."

the Olympics meant “struggling well” with the very stressful circumstances she was experiencing.

The illustration Menakem provides about the runner, whose resilience and capacity to continue running was strengthened by the people who surrounded her, and Biles’ example of stopping for her mental well-being together show that strategies to build resilience are not a one-size-fits-all solution. Being resilient and helping others build resilience might look different for different people in different circumstances.

Sometimes all people need from us is to accompany them quietly when facing a challenging and painful situation. When Jesus was preparing for his imminent crucifixion, he went to a place called Gethsemane. He took three of his beloved disciples with him and asked them to stay awake with him and pray. Jesus was distressed and agitated, and he needed to have close to him those he loved dearly. Jesus told them, “I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake” (Matthew 26:38, NRSV). The biblical passage continues:

> *And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. He said, “Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want.” He came and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, ‘Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour? Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.’ And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. And once more he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to say to him. He came a third time and said to them, ‘Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Enough! The hour has come; the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand*.’ (Matthew 26:36–46, NRSV)

The disciples were aware of Jesus' distress, but they kept falling asleep. They were tired, and they did not know what to say to him. All Jesus needed from them was for them to stay awake and pray with him. Sometimes we do not need to say anything. Sometimes there are no words that can help the person who is suffering. Sometimes all we need to do is to be present for them—in this case, to stay awake and pray with and for them. This also is a way to help people strengthen their resilience, to help them cope with challenging and painful circumstances.

In the foreword of Peter Levine's book *In an Unspoken Voice: How the Body Releases Trauma and Restores Goodness*, psychologist Gabor Maté says,

> Injured in a motor vehicle accident, Peter finds his own healing potential unlocked by his willingness to attend fully to his physical/emotional experience, allowing it to unfold as it needs to. His process is facilitated by a compassionate human presence. The power of goodness—in this case, the organism's innate capacity to restore itself to health and balance—is encouraged by a bystander, an *empathetic witness* who helps to prevent trauma by embodying kindness and acceptance.[44]

Maté highlights that for Peter Levine, "Trauma is not what happens to us, but what we hold inside in the absence of an empathetic witness."[45] In Levine's case, the empathetic witness was a doctor pediatrician who unobtrusively passed through the people surrounding Levine's hurt body lying on the ground and quietly sat by his side. The pediatrician asked Levine, "Can I be of help?" Levine replied, "Please just stay with me." Levine narrates,

> Her simple, kind face seems supportive and calmly concerned. She takes my hand in hers, and I squeeze it. She gently returns the gesture. As

[44] Peter A. Levine, *In an Unspoken Voice*, xi. Emphasis my own.
[45] Peter A. Levine, *In an Unspoken Voice*, xi.

> my eyes reach for hers, I feel a tear form. The delicate and strangely familiar scent of her perfume tells me that I am not alone. I felt emotionally held by her encouraging presence. A trembling wave of release moves through me, and I take my first deep breath. Then a jagged shudder of terror passes through my body. Tears are now streaming from my eyes…My body continues to shudder. Reality sets in…I am afraid of being swallowed up by the sorrow and [I] hold on to the woman's eyes. A slower breath brings me the scent of her perfume. Her continued presence sustains me…
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> A blast of sirens and flashing red lights block everything. My belly tightens, and my eyes again reach to find the woman's kind gaze. We squeeze hands, and the knot in my gut loosens…As I am lifted into the ambulance, I close my eyes for the first time. A vague scent of the woman's perfume and the look of her quiet, kind eyes linger. Again, I have that comforting feeling of being held by her presence.[46]

Levine calls the soothing effect of the woman's calm presence "the power of kindness." This is the kindness we share when we respond to the needs of the hurt person. The pediatrician created an environment of *relative safety* that allowed him to stay present and connected to his own body. Her calm, centered presence gave him a slight glimmer of hope that things might turn out OK. "For traumatized individuals, this can be a very delicate task,"[47] Levine notes. Fortunately, "Given propitious conditions, the human nervous system is designed and attuned both to receive and offer a regulating influence to another person."[48] Thus, human beings have been created with a remarkable capacity to be empathetic and create a "blanket of compassion" for each other. By doing this, we create an environment of *relative safety* in which others can find refuge, hope, and possibility, consequently strengthening their resilience.

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[46] Levine, *In an Unspoken Voice,* 5-6.
[47] Levine, *In an Unspoken Voice,* 75.
[48] Levine, *In an Unspoken Voice,* 75.

To better cope with the challenging and painful situation he was experiencing, Jesus needed his disciples to be "empathetic witnesses" by staying awake and praying with him. Jesus needed them to cover him with "the power of kindness" and to create an environment of *relative safety* for him. He needed his disciples' gift of presence to help him strengthen his resilience during that debilitating time.

Through resilience, we find the capacity to stay present and connected even to what challenges us. This capacity to stay present and connected allows people to grow even from traumatic experiences. Menakem explains that resilience "helps us stay grounded and settled, no matter what happens to us."[49] Regardless of the circumstances, resilience allows our body to access possibilities and coherence.[50]

Because of their resilience, most people can either resist the potential damage of traumatic events or cope with them effectively.[51] However, resilience does not mean being able to endure everything. It means dealing effectively with challenges and painful situations. Thus, we cannot describe resilience using a single example. Resilience does not respond to the general preconceptions and standards of people, communities, cultures, and societies; it responds to the needs of the particular hurting person or community.

Even though Biles was facing very stressful circumstances—the whole world expecting her to win the gold medal while her mind was telling her to stop—she was able to access possibilities and coherence. Even though many people sacrifice their well-being

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[49] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 51.
[50] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 51.
[51] Michal Shamai, *Systemic Interventions for Collective and National Trauma: Theory, Practice, and Evaluation*, 1st edition (New York: Routledge, 2015), 98–100.

for the sake of public pressure and their own pride, Biles was able to see withdrawing from the Olympics for the sake of her mental health as a possibility. Biles says, "We also have to focus on ourselves, because at the end of the day we're humans, too. We have to protect our mind and our body, rather than just go out there and do what the world wants us to do."[52] Biles dealt effectively with the situation by making the best decision for her well-being. This, too, is a sign of her resilience. Thus, we cannot describe resilience using a single example. Resilience does not respond to the general preconceptions and standards of people, communities, cultures, and societies; it responds to the needs of the particular hurting person or community.

Just as trauma can be experienced collectively, resilience can also be experienced collectively, with our families, communities, and, as the Lost Boys demonstrated, even with our ancestors.

Collective Resilience

Resilience can be expressed individually or collectively by a group, a family, an organization, and a culture.[53] Resilience is dynamic and contagious. It "moves through the body and between multiple bodies when they are harmonized."[54] It spreads among people, changing the lives of people, families, neighborhoods, and communities in

[52] Silva, "'We're Human, Too.'"
[53] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 50.
[54] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 51.

positive ways, and, like trauma, resilience can be passed down from generation to generation. [55]

Communities' response to collective trauma plays a role in the resilience of families and individuals who are part of the community.[56] "Resilience across the levels of individuals, families, and communities involves interdependent and interactive processes."[57] However, communities are not only material and geographical in their nature. The relationships, traditions, and cultural belief systems people share with and in their communities can also play a sustaining role in the midst of physical destruction.[58] Therefore, resilience experts recommend that communities respond to traumatic experiences by: promoting a sense of safety, promoting tranquility, promoting a sense of self and collective efficacy, promoting connectedness, and promoting hope.[59] Experts also recommend keeping families together whenever possible and making plans to reunite families that have been separated. All this is necessary in order to protect, support, and restore the most fundamental adaptive systems believed to generate the capacity for resilience.[60]

Resilience can be individually and collectively built and strengthened. An example of this is the enslaved African Americans who, under devastating circumstances,

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[55] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 55.
[56] Masten, *Ordinary Magic*, 237.
[57] Masten, *Ordinary Magic*, 127.
[58] Masten, *Ordinary Magic*, 137.
[59] Masten, *Ordinary Magic*, 141.
[60] Masten, *Ordinary Magic*, 141.

were able to build resilience in themselves and their children for many generations. Menakem recounts,

> Many Black bodies have proven very resilient, in part because, over generations, African Americans have developed a variety of body-centered responses to help settle their bodies and blunt the effects of racialized trauma. These include individual and collective humming, rocking, rhythmic clapping, drumming, singing, grounding touch, wailing circles, and call and response, to name just a few.[61]

The resilience with which they were born and the resilience they taught and transmitted to each other helped them to survive slavery and continues to help their descendants survive the damaging and ongoing effects of racism.[62]

However, "resilience and love aren't sufficient to completely heal all trauma. Often, at least some of the trauma continues,"[63] especially when the trauma has been experienced for many generations, as is the case among African Americans and Native Americans. Their ancestors spent centuries in the U.S. under unrelentingly brutal conditions.[64] Actually, most of them continue to live under oppressive circumstances because they experience ongoing racial and systemic trauma. We should not confuse resilience with healing. Resilience can help us struggle well with traumatic circumstances and, consequently, it facilitates the healing process. But being resilient does not necessarily equate with being healed. Resilience also does not protect us from experiencing the pain and suffering caused by traumatic injuries. As Masten notes,

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[61] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 15.
[62] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 51.
[63] Menakem, *My Grandfmother's Hands*, 89.
[64] Menakem, *My Grandfmother's Hands*, 89.

"Resilience does not mean invulnerability or smooth sailing through life."[65] Resilient people and communities might still suffer the pain caused by their open wounds.

As professor of social work Michal Shamai points out, community resilience is described differently in different studies. The descriptions usually take three different directions:

> a) the resistance direction, which refers to the ability of a community to absorb perturbation;
> b) the recovery direction, which focuses on the speed and ability to recover from the stressors; and
> c) the creativity direction, which addresses the ability of a social system to maintain a constant process of creating and recreating so that the community does not only respond to adversity but, in so doing, reaches a higher level of functioning.[66]

There are also various descriptions of the elements that comprise community resilience. Thus, some researchers refer to community resilience in terms of resource dependency—"the quantity and quality of resources on which a community relies and the extent to which these can be modified."[67] Other researchers also focus on the relationship between the community system and its ecology as a resource that defines community resilience. Still others claim that resilience depends on a stock of human and social capital, consisting of people, networks, or local voluntary associations through which community members can be mobilized for action and adequate service infrastructure.[68]

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[65] Masten, *Ordinary Magic*, 28.
[66] Shamai, *Systemic Interventions for Collective and National Trauma*, 63.
[67] Shamai, *Systemic Interventions for Collective and National Trauma*, 63.
[68] Shamai, *Systemic Interventions for Collective and National Trauma*, 63.

On the other hand, some researchers refer to community resilience as culture-dependent. In a study of Latinx and Mexican youth living in the U.S., researchers name three factors as being crucial to community resilience: "the obligation to nuclear and extended family members, the authority of the elder community members, and the character of relationships, which are valued for their own merit and not as means to some other end."[69]

Shamai states that research on communities that have experienced traumatic events—such as exposure to mass violence and natural and/or human-made disasters—has discovered four variables that construct community resilience. These four variables are: 1) economic development, for wealthier communities have more resources to amplify the "voice of the trauma" and bring more resources to the community; 2) social capital, which refers to both the network of community organizations and the link between them and the sense of belonging and commitment to a community, and what some define as "sense of community," including trust and belonging to other members in the community and, in some cases, emotional connection to a place;[70] 3) the existence of reliable information resources and open communication within the community; and 4) community competence, which refers to the ability of community leaders, organizations, and members to create collective efforts in resisting and coping with traumatic events.[71]

[69] Shamai, *Systemic Interventions for Collective and National Trauma,* 63.
[70] Shamai, *Systemic Interventions for Collective and National Trauma,* 63–67.
[71] Shamai, *Systemic Interventions for Collective and National Trauma*, 63–70.

Thus, trust in each other, being able to count on each other, and sharing resources among community members are essential for building community resilience.

Cultural systems, including religion, contribute to the capacity of individuals, families, and larger social groups to adapt in the face of natural or human-made disasters.[72] In addition, resilience research shows that systems of belief, whether individual or communal, can be important for resilience, especially in situations of great suffering with loss of control. For instance, in a study of Ugandan former child soldiers, researchers found that youth with better mental health reported more spiritual support.[73]

On the other hand, Shamai points out that even though national systems are affected by collective or national trauma in most cases, religion is usually not harmed by it. Collective and national trauma scarcely changes or destroys the basic principles of religions, which are often a significant part of human culture. They are usually strong enough to resist traumatic events. Meanings or rituals might be added or modified, and some structures of the religious institutions might be modified, but the religions' core beliefs are usually not affected.[74] "It is well-known that societies, communities, families and individuals experiencing collective or national traumatic events often turn to religion for comfort."[75] Therefore, when working with traumatized systems and individuals, various mental health professionals include religion, or what they refer to as 'spiritual aspects.'[76]

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[72] Masten, *Ordinary Magic*, 241.
[73] Masten, *Ordinary Magic*, 135.
[74] Shamai, *Systemic Interventions for Collective and National Trauma*, 55.
[75] Shamai, *Systemic Interventions for Collective and National Trauma*, 55.
[76] Shamai, *Systemic Interventions for Collective and National Trauma*, 55.

Religion can provide a stable base for people when their world is shaking. It not only connects people who share the same beliefs, it also creates a sense of belonging.[77] Furthermore, "cultures and religions encode and transmit adaptive strategies through their cultural practices, beliefs, and sacred texts."[78] In other words, cultures and religions develop and transmit ideas, traditions, and practices for living and confronting the trials of life. These beliefs and practices provide guidance and comfort to the community members.[79] Thus, communities can be united and sustained by their beliefs, rituals, and traditions during challenging times.

Therefore, it is common to hear people who have been or still are experiencing difficult and painful circumstances say that their faith is what keeps them going. Pastoral care theologian Susan Dunlap found through her ethnographic research on people living without a home that religious beliefs and practices endure because they enable survival under challenging circumstances. Moreover, for people without homes, these religious beliefs and practices "function as a form of resistance to powers that would dehumanize them and deprive them of the means to survive and thrive."[80] Thus, religious beliefs and practices can provide a sense of connection with the divine and a sense of meaning, belonging, and worthiness, making it possible for the community of believers to experience unity and support and, consequently, to cope with difficult circumstances.

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[77] Susan J. Dunlap, *Shelter Theology: The Religious Lives of People without Homes* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2021), 62.

[78] Masten, *Ordinary Magic*, 260.

[79] Masten, *Ordinary Magic*, 252.

[80] Dunlap, *Shelter Theology*, 62.

In summary, we human beings have the capacity to help each other strengthen our resilience individually and collectively. In addition, our culture and faith can also help strengthen our resilience. Many of the beliefs, traditions, and rituals we have inherited from our ancestors have the purpose of helping us struggle well with challenging and traumatic circumstances.

Denial or Resilience?

Resilience should not be confused with denial. Denial is saying, "I am okay" when I am not okay. Denial is also often present in statements like, "God is in control," "God has a purpose," and "Everything happens for a reason," when we, a loved one, or our community have experienced a traumatic injury or are exposed to continuous traumatic stress. Even though denial and suppression might help wounded people survive for a while, denied and suppressed trauma will sooner or later come to the surface.

Christianity bears much responsibility for suppressing trauma. Think of how preachers (or simply lay Christians) attempt to stop the bleeding from traumatic injuries by telling people that if they have faith and trust in God, they should be okay—that if they are in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! (2 Corinthians 5:17)—instead of acknowledging and naming the traumatic injuries people have or are experiencing and providing the support they need to start or continue their healing journey. Our faith can undoubtedly help us to heal trauma, but, in most cases such healing does not occur by faith alone.

Resilience is the ability to move through what Menakem calls "clean pain," walking into the pain, experiencing it fully, and moving through it, allowing oneself to grow in the process, creating more space in one's nervous system for flow and coherence, and building one's capacity for further growth.[81] In other words, clean pain is about choosing integrity over fear, letting go of what is familiar but harmful and finding the best parts of oneself.[82]

Through clean pain, we name, acknowledge, and face our trauma, as painful as this might be. Clean pain allows us to experience our pain, move through it, and metabolize it to experience growth.[83] Clean pain, though it hurts, enables our bodies to grow through our difficulties, develop nuanced skills, and mend our trauma.[84] By experiencing this process, "the body can settle; more room for growth is created in its nervous system; and the self becomes freer and more capable, because it now has access to energy that was previously protected, bound, and constricted. When this happens, people's lives often improve in other ways as well."[85] This can happen both personally and collectively.[86]

Though they do not use the actual term, the Psalms nonetheless teach us the importance of "clean pain." The Psalmists acknowledge the reality they and their people are experiencing, both the painful and the joyful, the ugly and the beautiful. The

[81] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 165.
[82] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hand*, 166.
[83] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hand*, 20.
[84] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hand*, 20.
[85] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hand*, 20.
[86] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hand*, 20.

Psalmists are honest about the trauma they have experienced and are experiencing, and they creatively integrate it into their religious experience, writing prayers and songs that describe it. They cry to the Lord out of the depths (Psalm 130:1). Psalm 88 (NRSV) is an example of someone who is trying to move through the darkness by expressing the fears they are experiencing and feeling its effects:

> *LORD, you are the God who saves me;*
> *day and night I cry out to you.*
> *May my prayer come before you;*
> *turn your ear to my cry.*
>
> *I am overwhelmed with troubles*
> *and my life draws near to death.*
> *I am counted among those who go down to the pit;*
> *I am like one without strength.*
> *I am set apart with the dead,*
> *like the slain who lie in the grave,*
> *whom you remember no more,*
> *who are cut off from your care.*
>
> *You have put me in the lowest pit,*
> *in the darkest depths.*
> *Your wrath lies heavily on me;*
> *you have overwhelmed me with all your waves.*
> *You have taken from me my closest friends*
> *and have made me repulsive to them.*
> *I am confined and cannot escape;*
> *my eyes are dim with grief.*
>
> *I call to you, LORD, every day;*
> *I spread out my hands to you.*
> *Do you show your wonders to the dead?*
> *Do their spirits rise up and praise you?*
> *Is your love declared in the grave,*
> *your faithfulness in Destruction?*
> *Are your wonders known in the place of darkness,*
> *or your righteous deeds in the land of oblivion?*

But I cry to you for help, LORD;
in the morning my prayer comes before you.
Why, LORD, do you reject me
and hide your face from me?

From my youth I have suffered and been close to death;
I have borne your terrors and am in despair.
Your wrath has swept over me;
your terrors have destroyed me.
All day long they surround me like a flood;
they have completely engulfed me.
You have taken from me friend and neighbor—
darkness is my closest friend.

To build resilience and experience growth, it is necessary to acknowledge, name, and validate the pain we and others are experiencing—to lament. Therefore lament, especially when done in community, has the potential to help us both build resilience and to begin the healing process. Theologian Kathleen O'Connor describes it this way:

> If disasters turn people's hearts to stone, if trauma drains away emotions and creates a 'dam of silence,' then acts of grieving have the potential to reverse the dehumanizing process. Grieving practices can help restore people's humanity by opening them up to a whole range of emotions. They can begin to melt the icy despair that cuts them off from their own spirits and from knowledge of divine presence. Under such circumstances, grieving is not simply something to be desired; it is necessary for human flourishing.[87]

To reconnect to our emotions and feelings, hurt people need to have the capacity to confront the pain and mourn the loss.[88] For O'Connor, grieving "is not an activity for the faint-hearted but a fearsome enterprise that may take generations to complete."[89]

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[87] Kathleen M. O'Connor, *Jeremiah: Pain and Promise* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2012), 60.
[88] O'Connor, *Jeremiah: Pain and Promise*, 60.
[89] O'Connor, *Jeremiah: Pain and Promise*, 60.

The tradition of holding a watch or vigil over the body of a dead person, practiced in some countries, provides precisely such an opportunity for people to lament and grieve in community. The first time I experienced the death of a close family member was when I was eighteen years old. My dear Uncle Chema died very young, leaving us and my grandparents devastated. It was a somber day for us, but it also seemed like a celebration. We prepared food to share with the family members and friends coming to be with us until the body was buried. Some neighbors brought us food and *pan* to lighten the burden of cooking for so many people. Some of the visitors were coming from far-away places. Many of them I had never met before. Many of them had not seen my *abuelos* in many years. Some of them were old and sick. Yet there they were, accompanying us through that dreadful night of grief. My *abuelos* did not want to leave my uncle's side, and frequently they would get up, hug the coffin and cry loudly while telling him, "*Nunca te olvidaré hijo mío*," (I will never forget you, my son). The people accompanying us that night were lamenting with us. Crying was allowed and indeed normal. Likewise screaming and fainting, because everything is allowed when we are grieving the loss of a loved one.

For me, such lamenting and mourning is an embodiment of the psalms of lament. It embodies what it means to lament in community while also celebrating the beauty of relationships and community. This practice is an opportunity to practice clean pain. Even though our grieving was not over after the body was buried and our friends and family members had gone, without any doubt their presence gave us strength. They covered us with a blanket of compassion. They were our empathetic witnesses.

Unlike other psalms of lament, Psalm 88 does not end in praise, which communicates that it is okay if we are not ready to praise God yet. We can stay in lament as long as we need. Even though this stage of acknowledgment of our reality does not feel like part of the healing process, it is. This honesty is the start of the process of experiencing healing and restoration. Only when we do this work can we authentically move from lament to praise and be able to dream and imagine a hopeful present and future. For *real hope is based on the truth*—the truth of God and the truth of the people's actual circumstances. From communal lament can spring communal hope, and from communal hope can spring communal praise and meaning.

Psychologist Maria P.P. Root suggests that trauma permanently changes the hurt person's construction of reality.[90] Their narrative is altered by trauma. Thus, to heal from trauma, it is necessary to integrate this fragmenting and wounding experience and rebuild a narrative that allows meaning to be built out of it and in which hope is present—"hope in a life of meaning and purpose, not just survival."[91]

Masten argues that hope and a sense that life has a meaning may be close relatives of resilience. She observes, "Resilient people identified across diverse adversities, including disasters, often identify hope and meaning as protective influences in their lives."[92] She explains that resilience studies also show that spiritual beliefs and religious faith provide similar protection to that of hope and meaning. [93] "In numerous case reports

[90] Christie Cozad Neuger, *Counseling Women: A Narrative, Pastoral Approach* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 106.
[91] Neuger, *Counseling Women*, 107.
[92] Masten, *Ordinary Magic*, 135.
[93] Masten, *Ordinary Magic*, 135.

and studies, resilience is associated with hope, optimism, faith, and belief that life has meaning."[94] As my grandfather used to say, "*La esperanza es lo ultimo que muere*" (Hope is the last thing that dies).

Psalm 79 (NRSV) is an example of communal lament that leads to hope and praise:

> *O God, the nations have invaded Your inheritance;*
> *they have defiled Your holy temple;*
> *they have laid Jerusalem in ruins.*
> *They have given the dead bodies of Your servants for food to the birds of the heavens,*
> *the flesh of Your godly ones to the beasts of the earth.*
> *They have poured out their blood like water round about Jerusalem;*
> *and there was no one to bury them.*
> *We have become a reproach to our neighbors,*
> *a scoffing and derision to those around us.*
> *How long, O LORD? Will You be angry forever?*
> *Will Your jealousy burn like fire?*
> *Pour out Your wrath upon the nations which do not know You,*
> *and upon the kingdoms which do not call upon Your name.*
> *For they have devoured Jacob*
> *and laid waste his habitation.*
>
> *Do not remember the iniquities of our forefathers against us;*
> *let Your compassion come quickly to meet us,*
> *for we are brought very low.*
> *Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of Your name;*
> *and deliver us and forgive our sins for Your name's sake.*
> *Why should the nations say, "Where is their God?"*
> *Let there be known among the nations in our sight,*
> *vengeance for the blood of Your servants which has been shed.*
> *Let the groaning of the prisoner come before You;*
> *according to the greatness of Your power preserve those who are doomed to die.*
> *And return to our neighbors sevenfold into their bosom*
> *the reproach with which they have reproached You, O Lord.*
> *So we Your people and the sheep of Your pasture*

[94] Masten, *Ordinary Magic*, 164.

will give thanks to You forever;
to all generations we will tell of Your praise.

Psalm 79 also reflects the soul wounds that this nation has inherited from their ancestors, "*Do not remember the iniquities of our forefathers against us*," and the resilience and healing that their descendants would inherit if God responds to their supplication, "*To all generations we will tell of your praise*."

Resilience and Healing

If we do not face and acknowledge our sorrows and wounds early on, we will nonetheless find ourselves having to do so sooner or later. I recently met my friend's mom, who came from Mexico to see her son for the first time in seventeen years. She cooked a delicious Mexican dinner for us. When I asked her who had taught her to cook so well, she told me that she had had to learn at a very young age because she had to feed her family. "*Mi mamá murió cuando yo tenía catorce años*" (My mom died when I was fourteen), she said, "*Y yo tenía que cocinar para mis nueve hermanos y mi papá.*" (So, I had to cook for my nine siblings and my dad).

As the oldest of the children, she had to take care of her siblings and her alcoholic dad, who died two years after her mom passed away. Her story is a story of resilience and hope. She and her siblings worked tirelessly to build a house in which they could all live together. They built this house with their own hands, learning from their uncle, the only family member willing to help them. My friend's mom washed and ironed clothes for rich people, so her siblings could study. She proudly shares that all her siblings except

one obtained a college degree. When her siblings became older, she got married, helped her husband build their own house, and kept herself busy taking care of her children and working to help provide for the family's needs. She never stopped—until her mind and body forced her to stop. In her sixties, she started experiencing severe depression and anxiety. She was unable to eat and go out of her house. "*Mi psicóloga me dijo que mis heridas abiertas estaban pidiendo ser sanadas*" (My psychologist told me that my open wounds were asking to be healed), she said.

Resilience is not healing. Sooner or later, we have to treat our open wounds. Masten points out that "it is not surprising that the absence of symptoms related to mental health problems has been popular as a criterion for defining good adaptation, given that the study of resilience arose from efforts to understand and prevent the development of mental illness."[95] However, showing good adaption—specifically resilience—during or after a traumatic experience does not mean that we have not been deeply affected by this experience.

Psychiatrist Pasho Maksuti, who worked with Kosovar refugees, said, "I think there will be many people, children, women, and men who will need care. But not at this moment, because post-traumatic symptoms will start later than today, because some of them now have many, many problems with their house, with their family, and they do not have time to think about their stress."[96]

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[95] Masten, *Ordinary Magic*, 16.

[96] "Albania: Kosovo Crisis: Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome - Record Details - EBSCO Video," accessed March 20, 2021, https://video-ebscohost-com.proxy.lib.duke.edu/details/0_0aeeg98w?q=traumatic+Stress&deviceId=dc47d586-b7a4-4e5a-aead-7d3c4d7e3f96&lang=en&minDate=&maxDate=.

Similarly, Ignacio Martín-Baró says regarding the people of El Salvador during the Salvadoran civil war,

> Even if the war were to come to a rapid end, we must think of the mental health consequences that reveal themselves only in the long term. For example, we know that the so-called refugee syndrome has an initial period of incubation in which people manifest no major disorders; instead, it is precisely when they begin to rebuild their lives and return to normal that the critical cost of the war experience must be paid. The group that should command our attention most is the children, those who are constructing their identities and their life's horizons in the fabric of our present social relations. They are truly the "children of war," and we have the difficult task of ensuring that they do not structure their personalities by learning violence, irrationality, and the lie.[97]

People in the middle of a war and refugees who have to figure out how to provide for their family's basic needs are busy trying to survive. However, this does not mean that they are healthy. Martín-Baró points out that anyone who seems to be adapting to their environment, who does not suffer paralyzing anxiety attacks, who does not hallucinate danger or imagine conspiracies, who does not struggle with addictions to drugs or alcohol, who provide for their families and are not abusive towards them, would be considered healthy. However, this does not mean that they have not been affected by the traumatic wounds they have or continue experiencing.[98] They usually keep going until their bodies stop them and demand healing.

For this reason, Masten asks the question: Does resilience comes at a cost? She notes that the idea of resilience exacting a toll has two forms. One form of cost is that

[97] Ignacio Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, ed. Adrianne Aron and Shawn Corne (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 118.

[98] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 108.

individuals who endure great adversity do not come out of these traumatic experiences without some kind of wound or lasting effect. She shares that in her studies of Cambodian youth who survived the killing fields of Pol Pot, she observed high rates of recurrent PTSD and depression among these individuals as elders. However, as young adults, they were doing well by many of the criteria that researchers use to judge resilience, such as academic and work achievement and good social functioning.[99] The other form of cost comes from positive achievement itself. People's efforts to thrive and overcome adversity can be toxic and stressful too. Masten observes,

> In a chronically stressful environment, resilience could require enormous effort and generate additional stress. One of the classic studies of resilience, following the children of Kauai over the decades, raised the possibility of a cost to resilience in the midlife follow-up report. These investigators observed that individuals in the resilient group in midlife manifested more health problems than expected, and more than their high-risk but less adaptive peers. These health problems, such as back problems and problems with weight, appeared to be stress related.[100]

This issue has reemerged recently in a study of allostatic load, the cumulative burden of chronic stress and life events, among successful African American youth who strived to succeed in a chronically stressful environment. Researchers believe that the resilience among these youth came at a price—high blood pressure and high body mass index, mental health issues, and other health problems—related to the stress of success in a context of economic adversity and toxic racism.[101]

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[99] Masten, *Ordinary Magic*, 301.
[100] Masten, *Ordinary Magic*, 301.
[101] Masten, *Ordinary Magic*, 302.

Similarly, the undocumented Hispanic/Latinx community in the US is commonly understood as a very resilient people. They live day to day experiencing continuous traumatic stressors. Yet, all the while they continue contributing to this country, working and providing for their families here in the U.S. and in their home countries. On that basis, they are considered a resilient community. This is true. But it is also true that many of them don't have any option but to do so. They must suppress their pain and emotions and keep working and keep taking care of and providing for their families—for nobody else will do it. They must continue going even if their souls, minds, and bodies tell them to stop. Many of them have even stopped listening to their own bodies in order to be able to continue providing for and taking care of their loved ones. But, as we have seen, the body always keeps the score. Sooner or later, they will experience the effects of untreated physical, emotional, and spiritual wounds.[102]

By acknowledging and addressing their trauma, hurt people have an opportunity to experience healing and transformation. As Martín-Baró states,

> Precisely because trauma must be understood in terms of relationships between the individual and society, one cannot simply predict that a given type of social situation will automatically produce a trauma in anyone, or that a particular type of person will never suffer a trauma. We also have to underscore the possibility that exceptional circumstances, just as they may lead to deterioration or injury, may also lead to people's growth and development.[103]

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[102] Many healthcare workers and first responders experience a similar situation. As a defense mechanism to survive, many of them suppress the impact of the trauma they witness or endure on the job. They tell themselves that they just need to keep saving lives. But sooner or later, the trauma they have suppressed will come to the surface, often in the form of poor health, anxiety, depression, or addiction.

[103] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 124.

By naming, acknowledging, and validating their wounds, people have more opportunity to experience growth and development. By doing so, they protect others, especially their children, from their trauma. Thus, instead of passing on to them the soul wounds that they inherited and the wounds they experienced personally, they pass on resilience and, possibly, healing.

We are Each Other's Balm in Gilead

How then are we to find healing for ourselves and help one another to heal from such deeply embedded trauma, a trauma that sometimes endures for generations and centuries? Professor of psychiatry Richard F. Mollica reminds us that "there is a healing force hidden in all of us, even if depleted by violence, that is always striving for survival." This self-healing force, he says, "is one of the human organism's natural responses to psychological illness and injury." However, fostering self-healing cannot be done until the person who has experienced trauma understands its role in recovery.[104] In order for this to happen, they need the support of local healing systems, including hospitals, medical practitioners, traditional healers, clergy, and family elders. [105] According to what we have learned from other psychologists and resilience researchers, we can also add to Mollica's list friends and community.

Eduardo Duran offers another perspective on healing from the Native American oral tradition, stating that "the medicine is already within the pain and suffering. You just

[104] Mollica, *Healing Invisible Wounds*, 103.
[105]Mollica, *Healing Invisivle Wounds*, 104.

have to look deeply and quietly. Then you realize it has been there the whole time."[106] According to Duran, in the indigenous perspective, "all that we see or experience as reality has a dual nature."[107] The pain that people experience individually and collectively "contains the spirit of healing" within it. [108] According to this tradition, "the greater the suffering, the greater the capacity to heal and continue to live in a manner that is in harmony with healing entities." [109] Duran, therefore, points out that the profound suffering of people has an incredible power to transform the immediate situation as well as the world. [110] And when hurting people realize that their suffering is not in vain, they can gain a meaningful existential connection to their life and to the lives of other human beings.[111]

Regardless of where we believe this self-healing force dwells, within us or within the pain, hurt people cannot access it if they do not have an adequate support system. Thus, we depend on each other's compassion, help, and support—we depend on each other's grace.

Human beings are by nature resilient, and we have the natural capacity to build resilience and to heal our traumatic wounds. However, the support system, or lack of support system, of an individual who has experienced trauma influences the individual and collective ability to build resilience and, eventually, to experience healing. In order to

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[106] Eduardo Duran, *Healing the Soul Wound: Trauma-Informed Counseling for Indigenous Communities*, 2nd edition (New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 2019), 50.
[107] Duran, *Healing the Soul Wound*, 111.
[108] Duran, *Healing the Soul Wound*, 111.
[109] Duran, *Healing the Soul Wound*, 111.
[110] Duran, *Healing the Soul Wound*, 111.
[111] Duran, *Healing the Soul Wound*, 111.

access our resilience and to strengthen it, we not only need to feel others, but also ourselves—to tune into our spiritual, physical, and mental needs.

The scientific name for this self-sensing ability is *interoception*.[112] Van der Kolk states that "neuroscience research has shown that the only way you can change your survival orientation in your brain is by accessing your interoceptive world—the part of your brain that allows you to observe yourself."[113] He continues that a person can actually change their own psychology by opening themself up to themself, by knowing themself.[114] However, to know oneself is no easy task, especially for someone who has experienced trauma.[115] For van der Kolk, one of the strongest findings of trauma research is the hateful relationship that traumatized people have with their own bodies. That is why some traumatized people don't take care of their bodies. They try to make the feelings in their bodies go away by (ab)using alcohol, by (ab)using drugs, by having sex with the wrong people, etc. In fact, the only way to resolve trauma is to get to know oneself and cherish oneself, which is difficult to do when our bodies feel unsafe. "The body is where the panic is—the fear and the rage."[116] That is why most traumatized people try to avoid feeling or sensing their bodies. However, to *feel* and *know* one's body safely is an essential ingredient of healing.[117]

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[112] "Trauma in the Body: Interview with Dr. Bessel van Der Kolk," Still Harbor, accessed December 11, 2020, https://www.stillharbor.org/anchormagazine/2015/11/18/trauma-in-the-body.

[113] Van der Kolk, "Trauma in the Body."

[114] Van der Kolk, "Trauma in the Body."

[115] Van der Kolk, "Trauma in the Body."

[116] Van der Kolk, "Trauma in the Body."

[117] Van der Kolk, "Trauma in the Body."

Van der Kolk explains that the disturbing development of mental health treatments, especially the excessive use of drugs to treat mental health problems, could become an obstacle for people to be able to feel and know their bodies. Though he acknowledges that drugs "can be very helpful in making traumatized people less enslaved by their emotions,"[118] he recommends that "drugs should only be considered adjuncts in their overall treatments."[119] He cautions that,

> The drug revolution that started out with so much promise may in the end have done as much harm as good. The theory that mental illness is caused primarily by chemical imbalances in the brain that can be corrected by specific drugs has become broadly accepted, by the media and the public as well as by the medical profession. In many places drugs have displaced therapy and enabled patients to suppress their problems without addressing the underlying issues...The brain disease model takes control of people's fate out of their hands and puts doctors and insurance companies in charge of fixing their problems.[120]

In light of this reality, van der Kolk recommends that most people who have experienced severe trauma require a combination of treatments, methods, and experiences that "utilize the brain's own natural neuroplasticity to help survivors feel fully alive in the present and move on with their lives."[121] He emphasizes that the brain disease model

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[118] Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 36.

[119] Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 36.

[120] Van der Kolk gives the example of antidepressants. He says, "Consider the case of antidepressants. If they were indeed as effective as we have been led to believe, depression should by now have become a minor issue in our society. Instead, even as antidepressant use continues to increase, it has not made a dent in hospital admissions for depression. The number of people treated for depression has tripled over the past two decades, and one in ten Americans now take antidepressants." Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 36.

[121] Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 3.

overlooks four fundamental truths we need to acknowledge if we want to help people experience healing and restoration—to be fully alive in the present, namely that:

1. Our capacity to destroy one another is matched by our capacity to heal one another. Restoring relationships and community is central to restoring well-being.
2. Language gives us the power to change ourselves and others by communicating our experiences, helping us to define what we know, and finding a common sense of meaning.
3. We have the ability to regulate our own physiology, including some of the so-called involuntary functions of the body and brain, through such basic activities as breathing, moving, and touching.
4. We can change social conditions to create environments in which children and adults can feel safe and where they can thrive. [122]

We can conclude from van der Kolk's four fundamental truths that people who have experienced trauma can be active participants in their own healing process and that having a community that acknowledges their traumatic wounds and provides a support system contributes to their healing and restoration. As van der Kolk's teacher, Elvin Semrad, concluded, most human suffering is related to love and loss and the job of the care provider is to help people "'acknowledge, experience, and bear' the reality of life with all its pleasure and heart break. 'The greatest sources of our suffering are the lies we tell ourselves."[123] Healing, says Semrad, "depends on experiential knowledge: You can be fully in charge of your life only if you can acknowledge the reality of your body, in all its visceral dimensions."[124]

[122] van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 38.
[123] van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 26–27.
[124] van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 27.

Because of the active role hurt people can have in their own healing, Shamai prefers to use the term "inclusion" when working with hurt communities rather than "empowerment," which is often used by practitioners in the area of mental health and social work in situations of collective and national trauma. [125] Inclusion, for Shamai, does not communicate hierarchical relationships and acknowledges that the hurt people bring their own assets to the healing process.[126] By including the hurt people in their own healing process, care providers acknowledge their dignity, worth, and power. By doing this, the care providers also acknowledge people's capacity to cope with and adjust to various stressful situations. They are not passive recipients but active participants in their healing process. [127]

Psychologist Christina Bethell affirms that we are not only active participants in our own healing process but, most importantly, that we are our own, and others', medicine.[128] She believes that "*we are the human medicine*" because to heal traumatic wounds, we need healthy relationships "between us" and "within us." Thus, her "we are the medicine" approach is all about healthy relationships with others and with ourselves and about how we are making meaning of our experiences.[129] According to Bethell, healthy human beings' development from very early in life and all through life requires safe, stable, and nurturing relationships. She also affirms that it is essential that we understand that we have the power within ourselves to turn our attention toward

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[125] Shamai, *Systemic Interventions for Collective and National Trauma*, 98–100.
[126] Shamai, *Systemic Interventions for Collective and National Trauma*, 98–100.
[127] *Shamai, Systemic Interventions for Collective and National Trauma*, 98–100.
[128] *Christina Bethell*, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CqbpAHUzuB4.
[129] Stanford, *Christina Bethell*, 2016.

ourselves and change ourselves in ways that can help us thrive, which neuroplasticity and other sciences reveal is possible.[130]

Therefore, Bethell agrees with Masten that what we need for healing sounds very ordinary. For Bethell, it is all about relationships. "Relational wounding requires relational healing."[131] The way we interact with others and with ourselves can heal how trauma has affected our nervous system and our own perception of self. We can make "ordinary magic" happen for each other. Thus, putting in conversation Bethell, Masten, and Levine, one can conclude that "empathetic witnesses" can create an environment of "relative safety" where hurt people can experience "ordinary magic."

However, "relational healing" is challenging in a society that values individuality more than relationality. Bethell affirms that North Americans' spirit of individualism makes it scary to be vulnerable and to acknowledge that we need each other.[132] Needing each other in a healthy way, Bethell explains, is not the same as being dependent or co-dependent on each other. Instead, it is acknowledging that we are interconnected individuals and that what affects one individual affects that individual's entire family, friends, and extended community.

Like van der Kolk and others, Bethell notes that the healing journey starts with deactivating shame and building compassion. She states,

> Awareness is the first step—and awareness with compassion, acceptance for where you are—then connecting with the body. There are nine levels of brain integration that need to be gone through, but meditation and

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[130] Stanford, *Christina Bethell*, 2016.
[131] *Christina Bethell*, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CqbpAHUzuB4.
[132] *Christina Bethell*, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CqbpAHUzuB4.

> mindfulness practice is the first step to opening that up…Our lived moment-by-moment relational experiences and the experience we have with the self are what's driving a lot of the biologic and neurologic symptoms of trauma—and at the same time, they can also drive the healing.[133]

According to Bethell, *mentalization* helps people enter into a relational experience with awareness. She defines *mentalization* as the ability to sense ourselves—our feelings, our body, our needs, our wants, and our love—to know that we are sensing ourselves on purpose, the ability to sense other people on purpose, and to sense whether that person is able to sense that you are sensing them.[134] Bethell explains that mentalization is similar to what birds do when they fly and train together in the sky. As they fly, they are constantly *sensing* back into the center of their collective.[135] Mentalization is the ability to sense ourselves and others with our whole being.

Thus, human beings have the capacity to be not only our medicine, but, as author and lecturer Adrienee Maree Brown suggests, to be each other's medicine.[136] In fact, Maree Brown believes that one of the most important tasks of humanity is "to care for ourselves and each other as a revolutionary practice."[137] Being each other's medicine is not a new strategy for individual and collective healing. It is a capacity with which we all have been created.

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[133] Christina Bethell, "Transitioning from a Trauma-Based to a Trauma-Informed Society," in Thomas Hübl, *Healing Collective Trauma: A Process for Integrating Our Intergenerational and Cultural Wounds* (Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 2020), 22–23.

[134] Bethell, "Transitioning from a Trauma-Based to a Trauma-Informed Society," 23.

[135] Bethell, "Transitioning from a Trauma-Based to a Trauma-Informed Society," 24.

[136] Adrienee Maree Brown, "Report: Recommendations For Us Right Now From A Future," accessed June 4, 2021, https://sublevelmagazine.com/issues/the-speculative/report-recommendations-for-us-right-now-from-a-future.

[137] Brown, "Report: Recommendations For Us Right Now From A Future."

Physician Rachel Naomi Remen, who is one of the pioneers of holistic and integrative medicine, explains:

> People have been healing each other since the beginning. Long before there were surgeons, psychologists, oncologists, and internists, we were there for each other. The healing of our present woundedness may lie in recognizing and reclaiming the capacity we all have to heal each other, the enormous power in the simplest human relationships: the strength of a touch, the blessing of forgiveness, the grace of someone else taking you just as you are and finding in you an unsuspected goodness. Everyone alive has suffered. It is the wisdom gained from our wounds and from our own experiences of suffering that makes us able to heal. Becoming experts had turned out to be less important than remembering and trusting the wholeness in myself and everyone else. Expertise cures, but wounded people can best be healed by other wounded people. Only other wounded people can understand what is needed, for the healing of suffering is compassion, not expertise.[138]

Thus, we can heal each other merely by *being* who we were originally created to be. As Menakem reminds us, "Love and trust are not concepts or tactics. They are ways of being with someone, ways of being in the world, and ways of being in your body."[139] After all, adds Bethell, what is "between us" and "within us" is nothing more than love.[140] Human beings have the capacity to care for one another, to love, to have empathy and compassion, to be engaged, and to listen, and "when these things occur, we thrive and when they don't occur, our neurobiology, biology, and even our microbiome go haywire."[141]

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[138] Rachel Naomi Remen, *Kitchen Table Wisdom: Stories That Heal, 10th Anniversary Edition*, 10th Anniversary ed. edition (Riverhead Books, 2006), 216.

[139] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 290.

[140] *Christina Bethell*.

[141] Stanford, *Christina Bethell*.

Using biblical language, we could say that we have the capacity to be each other's Balm in Gilead (Jer. 8:21–22). We have the capacity to heal each other's wounds or, at the very least, to soothe each other's pain and leave a beautiful fragrance in each other's life.

Gilead was known as a fertile mountain where many herbs of medicinal value grew. Jeremiah 8:18–22 (NRSV) is one of the biblical passages in which the balm in Gilead is mentioned.

> *My joy is gone, grief is upon me,*
> *my heart is sick.*
> *Hark, the cry of my poor people*
> *from far and wide in the land:*
> *"Is the* LORD *not in Zion?*
> *Is her King not in her?"*
> *("Why have they provoked me to anger with their images,*
> *with their foreign idols?")*
> *"The harvest is past, the summer is ended,*
> *and we are not saved."*
> *For the hurt of my poor people I am hurt,*
> *I mourn, and dismay has taken hold of me.*
>
> *Is there no balm in Gilead?*
> *Is there no physician there?*
> *Why then has the health of my poor people*
> *not been restored?*

According to O'Connor, God is the implied speaker in this passage.[142] God is grieving and weeping for God's people. God cries out, "'Is there no balm in Gilead?' Is there no healing ointment, no physician, no way for the 'daughter of my people' to be

[142] O'Connor, *Jeremiah: Pain and Promise*, 63.

become healthy again?"[143] For O'Connor, the answer is: Yes! There is a balm in Gilead, but the medicine is useless, and the only thing left to do is to weep.[144]

God might as well be weeping and grieving for the wounds and pain human beings are experiencing now. God might as well be crying out, "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no healing for my people and my creation?" The answer would still be: Yes! There is medicine for human beings and the earth. We are each other's medicine. But the medicine is useless if we are not fully present for each other, if we do not reconnect to each other, if we do not have compassion and empathy for each other, and if we do not choose to love and value one another.

Conclusion

Being each other's balm in Gilead has a particular connotation during a pandemic when we depend on each other to survive. If the COVID-19 pandemic has left us with something positive, it is a reminder that we are interdependent individuals who need each other to survive in this fallen world. Our physical, spiritual, and mental well-being depends on the collective response to the pandemic. In addition, the restrictions regarding our interactions with people helped us realize that human beings cannot live in isolation. We need to see, talk to, touch, and feel each other. Regardless of the circumstances that

[143] O'Connor, *Jeremiah: Pain and Promise*, 64.
[144] O'Connor, *Jeremiah: Pain and Promise*, 64.

we are currently experiencing, we have the capacity to heal each other's wounds, to soothe each other's pain, and to leave a beautiful fragrance in each other's lives.

Jesus knew how much we need each other and that we are created with this healing capacity. Jesus also knew that the only way we could face the challenges the world presents us is by being united in love and staying together. Knowing that the disciples were going to experience the trauma of his sadistic crucifixion and that of their own violent persecution, Jesus prays that his disciples, and all of us, may be one. Recall his words in John 17:20–26b:

> *I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. 26 I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.* (John 17:20–26, RSV)

In this prayer, Jesus asks the Father to protect his disciples, and by extension us, from evil—from the power of the evil one, which is so deeply rooted in the world.[145] Jesus also asks the Father to sanctify us in the truth, which is nothing less than love, faithfulness, mercy, compassion, and grace. But this prayer also shows us Jesus' deep

[145] Justo L. Gonzalez, *Three Months with John* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005), 142.

desire for us: that we may be one with the Father and with each other. Jesus knows that to be completely one with the triune God and with each other, we need to be sanctified in faith, love, mercy, compassion, and grace.

The unity Jesus desires for us is part of God's salvific plan for humanity. What better way could there be to experience abundant life here on earth? It is not just about God's promise of eternal life; it is also about experiencing the kingdom of God here on earth by experiencing unity with others like the unity of the Father and the Son.

If a community truly seeks to be one with God and with each other, its members can find healing, restoration, and transformation. A united community can protect each other from the claws of lions. A united, empathetic, trusting, loving, and supportive community can provide what we need to cope with devastating situations. Yet though we were created with the capacity to love, to be united, to be each other's balm in Gilead, many of us don't practice this God-given gift. Thus, some communities are not safe places for hurting people; on the contrary, they can even deepen the wounds or create new ones.

Actually, our divine calling to reconcile and live in unity with others is sometimes used to oppress "the least of these." For some years, I was hesitant to use the word "reconciliation" in my preaching and teaching because in my ministry as a pastor and teacher with women from different countries in Latin America I have learned that the word *reconciliation* has often been used to oppress the least of these in those contexts, meaning particularly to oppress women and children. Culturally, we have been taught that family is family, and it does not matter how much your family hurts you; you should

always seek reconciliation. In the Christian tradition, we have been taught that no matter how much others hurt you, you should always strive to reconcile, especially if they belong to the family of Christ.

Because of this, many people, especially women and children who have experienced emotional, physical, and/or sexual abuse, have felt obliged to remain silent and even to live close to and have some kind of relationship with their abuser. Reconciliation in these cases usually means forgiving, forgetting, and having a friendly relationship with the one/s who hurt you—at least to seem to repair broken relationships. Churches usually urge the hurt people to forgive the perpetrators, arguing that, by doing this, they will be better Christians, more faithful, and more holy. However, as a pastoral counselor Christie Cozad Neuger reminds us, in some cases "forgiveness should probably be the last step in the healing process rather than the first,"[146] and only the hurt person can and should decide when she is ready to forgive.

On the other hand, some relationships cannot be repaired. In these cases, reconciliation might mean you take your way, and I take mine. And, from my point of view, being able to terminate a hurtful relationship also entails a kind of reconciliation and healing—the ending of suffering and oppression.

Thus, being a Balm in Gilead for each other also means understanding this dynamic. It means being fully present to the hurt people and accompanying them in their healing process without imposing on them preconceived ideas of how they should behave

[146] Cozad Neuger, *Counseling Women*, 101.

or react to a hurtful situation and towards the perpetrator of the abuse. In other words, being each other's Balm in Gilead means helping hurt people face their healing process with honesty and authenticity.

Throughout history and in the present, we can find people who provide a *relatively safe space* in the midst of trauma, who are empathetic witnesses, who cover others with a blanket of compassion, and people who, like the Lost Boys, are willing to protect others with their own lives. One of them is Saint Oscar Romero. Even though Romero did not physically surround the marginalized and oppressed people of El Salvador who were experiencing collective trauma to protect them from the harm inflicted on them by the beasts[147] (the government, the military, and the oligarchy of El Salvador), he did so with his words and tireless support. The people experienced his arms around them as he named, acknowledged, and validated their painful circumstances every Sunday morning, as he received them in his office, as he responded to their letters, and as he visited their humble villages.

Romero was a Balm in Gilead for the poor, marginalized, and oppressed people of El Salvador. He did not urge them to seek cheap reconciliation but to seek justice, restoration, and healing. Though unable to solve all their problems and to heal all their wounds, without doubt he soothed their pain and left a beautiful fragrance in their lives that, even more than forty years later, has not dispersed.

[147] In a hymn written by Guillermo Cuéllar Barandirán, for Saint Romero, he calls the government and the military *beasts*.

In chapter five, I will address how Romero was a Balm in Gilead for the poor, marginalized, and oppressed people of El Salvador, primarily through his preaching. But first, in chapter three, I will explore the deep, generational and collective trauma experienced by the poor, marginalized, and oppressed people of El Salvador for centuries, a deep collective trauma that Romero would seek to address in the particularly traumatic circumstances of his time.

Chapter 3

El Salvador: A History of Trauma, Resilience, and Hope

"*El ámbito en el que se da la plenitud de la realidad y en donde ella se revela es en la historia.*"

—Ignacio Ellacuría, *El Salvador: Historia Mínima*

Most nations and communities have experienced soul wounds or historical trauma throughout history. El Salvador is no exception. These soul wounds have been passed down from generation to generation, and they have played an essential role in the formation of the identity of the inhabitants of El Salvador. For, as Ignacio Martín-Baró notes, "with individuals and societies we are dealing with historical entities, not abstract realities, and while it is perfectly all right to speak of individuals and societies, it will not do to think of them as independent realities, as absolute totalities."[1] According to him, both the individual and society "exist to the extent that they mutually give each other existence."[2] In other words, says Martín-Baró, "the individual becomes an individual, a human person, by virtue of becoming socialized."[3] He clarifies that this does not deny the fact that society exists apart from any particular individual. Also, it does not deny that

[1] Ignacio Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, ed. Adrianne Aron and Shawn Corne (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 68.

[2] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 69.

[3] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychologist*, 69.

each human being has inherited attributes that are extremely important in defining the individual's identity. However, to understand real individuals, "we will have to consider their genetic heritage in reference to a social context."[4] In other words, human beings, and entire communities, are the result of a complex process in which their genetic endowment and social influence interact and mutually shape each other.[5] Thus, to be able to understand the identity of the people of El Salvador, one must first study the history of the country.

Since the beginning of the sixteenth century, El Salvador has been divided into two main social groups: the oppressors and the oppressed, or the rich and the poor. The oppressors are typically the members of the oligarchy and the government, plus the armed forces and some religious leaders who execute and/or support the plans of the oppressors. The oppressed are the poor and marginalized communities, those who are not intrinsically mute but whom the oppressors have forcibly silenced.[6] The historical context of El Salvador has influenced the identity of the members of these two groups collectively and individually. Both groups have inherited their ancestors' soul wounds. The oppressors have inherited their ancestors' captivity to the gods of power and money[7]

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[4] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 69.

[5] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*,69.

[6] Ignacio Martín-Baró, "El Liderazgo de Monseñor Romero: Un Análisis Psicososial," Collección Digital Ognacio Martín-Baró, n.d., 161, http://www.uca.edu.sv/coleccion-digital-IMB/articulo/monsenor-una-voz-para-un-pueblo-pisoteado/.

[7] For Archbishop Oscar Romero, the source of all evil is the worship of false gods: the gods of money, power, pride, egoism, nationalism, sex, lust, pleasure, etc. (CELAM Puebla, # 491). In his sermon of February 14, 1980, "Lent, God's Saving Plan in History," he talks specifically about the gods of power and money. He explains in that homily that the rich are idolaters of the gods of power and money and sacrifice the lives of the poor as offerings to these gods. Romero says, "What terrible sacrifices are being offered to the god of power, the god of money! So many victims, so much blood, for which God, the true God, the author of human life, will charge a high price from these idolaters of power."

and the ideologies that affirm their humanity while dehumanizing others. Through such means, they perpetuate oppression. The oppressed people have inherited their ancestors' physical, psychological, and spiritual wounds caused by the excruciating oppression and repression to which they were subjected for generations.

However, the oppressed people have also inherited their ancestors' resilience and hope. Despite the wounding oppression and repression they experienced throughout history, they continued fighting for a more humane and just society. Despite the great suffering that was inflicted on them by other human beings, they continued believing that human beings have the capacity to be agents of healing, restoration, liberation, and transformation.

In El Salvador, as in any other country in Latin America that has been invaded and then indoctrinated by the Roman Catholic Church, the Catholic Church had a significant influence on the social and political affairs of the country. Sadly, most Catholic religious leaders supported and perpetuated the oppression of the poor people. Nevertheless, some religious leaders who publicly denounced this oppression joined the poor, marginalized, and oppressed communities in their fight for justice and liberation. Two of these religious leaders were Jesuit priest Rutilio Grande and Archbishop (now saint) Óscar Arnulfo Romero Galdámez. Unfortunately, the government and the oligarchy perceived their preaching as "Marxist" or "Communist" when all they did was to put the Gospel in conversation with Vatican II and Medellín in their preaching and

teaching. Thus, as happened to many innocent people[8] who confronted the idolaters of the gods of power and money, their lives were ended by them.

In 1977, when Óscar Arnulfo Romero Galdámez was appointed as the Archbishop of San Salvador, most of the people of El Salvador lived in unbearable poverty and dehumanizing oppression. It was a crime to demand better wages, better working conditions, and land of one's own to work. Despite this, the men and women who worked in the coffee fields and the industrial workers organized themselves to demand better working conditions, such as a just salary and a workday of no more than eight hours. However, the oligarchy, the rich and powerful, did not want to give in to the workers' requests. On the contrary, the oligarchy and the government responded to their request with bullets and more oppression. The armed forces and the death squads persecuted, kidnapped, tortured, raped, disappeared, imprisoned, and killed those who demanded justice.[9]

In the following years, thousands of people were assassinated: peasants, industrial workers, students, intellectuals, nuns, and priests. Many of the people who were killed were members of Christian base communities,[10] where they learned that there is no

[8] In this chapter, when I use the word "people," I refer to the poor, marginalized, and oppressed people of El Salvador. I have adopted Martín-Baró's definition of "people": "It follows that the people is the disposed as opposed to the possessing, the oppressed as opposed to the oppressor, the exploited as opposed to the exploiter, the Have-Nots as opposed to the Haves, the miserable as opposed to the rich, the marginalized as opposed to those who belong, the slave as opposed to the master…*The people* is a search and an effort directed at creating a concrete community of free people. " Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 181–82.

[9] *Hay Que Cambiar de Raíz Todo El Sistema*, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BBVNNOT3Nfw.

[10] For Ellacuría, the Christian base communities were one of the best fruits of Medellín. Ellacuría explains, "En El Salvador, [las comunidades cristianas de base] fue[ron] la forma preferida de actuación del P. Grande y de su grupo sacerdotal de Aguilares. Este fenómeno responde a una doble

justification for passive acceptance of oppression and that their faith in God should guide them to be active participants in the construction of a more humane society.[11] This was the beginning of the civil war, but not the beginning of the conflict between the oligarchy and the poor people of El Salvador. The invasion at the beginning of the sixteenth century of the land that now is El Salvador precipitated the conflict. As scholars argue, the violence that the people of El Salvador experienced in the twentieth century was a consequence and effect of the deep and painful soul wounds the people and land of El Salvador had experienced ever since the sixteenth century.[12]

Thus, the main purpose of this chapter is to explore the soul wounds which the people of El Salvador inherited from their ancestors and the collective trauma they continued to experience before and during the time Romero was the Archbishop of San

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necesidad: a la necesidad de que la Iglesia sea cada vez más una auténtica comunidad participativa y a la necesidad de que la Iglesia establezca sus bases allí donde Jesús enseñó que su presencia estaba más próxima y plena: en el mundo de los pobres y de los oprimidos. ("In El Salvador, [the Christian base communities] was the preferred form of action for Fr. Grande and his group of priests from Aguilares. This phenomenon responds to a double need: to the need for the Church to be an increasingly authentic and participatory community, and to the need for the Church to establish its foundations where Jesus taught that his presence was closer and fuller: in the world of the poor and the oppressed"). In the pastoral letter from Monsignor Romero and Monsignor Rivera (August 6, 1978) the Christian base communities are defined as: "El tipo de comunidad organizada que surge alrededor de la palabra de Dios que convoca, concientiza y exige; y alrededor de la eucaristía y demás signos sacramentales para celebrar la vida, la muerte y la resurrección de Jesús, celebrando a la vez el esfuerzo humano por abrirnos al don de una humanidad mejor." (The type of organized community that arises around the word of God that summons, makes aware and demands; and around the Eucharist and other sacramental signs to celebrate the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, while celebrating the human effort to open ourselves to the gift of a better humanity). Ignacio Ellacuría, *Veinte Años de Historia En El Salvador (1969-1989): Escritos Políticos.*, vol. II (San Salvador: UCA editores, 1991), 694, http://repositorio.uca.edu.sv/jspui/handle/11674/2580.

[11] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 140.

[12] What Duran says about the people of Turtle Island is true also for the indigenous people of El Salvador. Their human problems were greatly magnified by the soul wounding caused by the colonizers.

Eduardo Duran, *Healing the Soul Wound: Trauma-Informed Counseling for Indigenous Communities*, 2nd edition (New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 2019), 94.

Salvador (1977–1980). Being aware of the nature of those traumatic wounds can help us understand the significance of Romero's homilies. Moreover, it can help us comprehend why his homilies were both the "voice of the trauma" of the people of El Salvador and a *balm* for their open wounds.

Since history is usually written by the powerful, I use resources written from the perspective of the oppressed in this chapter.[13] My primary source for this chapter is the seventh edition of the book *Historia de El Salvador: De Cómo La Gente Guanaca No Sucumbió Ante Los Infames Ultrajes de Los Españoles, Criollos, Gringos y Otras Plagas*. This book is significant because it highlights the historical and social trauma the poor people in El Salvador have experienced. Equipo Maiz published the first edition of *Historia de El Salvador* in 1989 to provide adults, youth, and children with a book about the history of El Salvador written from the perspective of the oppressed and exploited.

Equipo Maíz was founded in 1983 by the priest Miguel Cavada Diez,[14] who lived among the impoverished communities, and by some of his friends who worked with the Christian base communities, among them two sociologists—Alicia Garcia and Alfredo Vicente Ramírez. The original purpose of Equipo Maíz was to create Christian education resources for the Christian base communities—brochures, newsletters, posters, and books. The resources they created explain complicated events and concepts using drawings and a vocabulary that people could understand. Some of Miguel Cavada's

[13] Most of the resources I use in this chapter are in Spanish. All the translations into English are my own.

[14] Miguel Cavada Diez is the editor of *Homilias*, the compilation of Romero's homilies, which the UCA published.

favorite themes were: "*el rescate del legado de Monseñor Romero, la historia del El Salvador desde las y los explotados, la metodología del juego, la política, la Biblia, la música, el teatro, el análisis de la realidad*"[15] (rescuing the legacy of Monsignor Romero, the history of El Salvador from the perspective of the exploited, the methodology of the game, politics, the Bible, music, theater, and the analysis of reality). As one might imagine, it was not an easy task at that time to create this kind of resource for the oppressed, exploited, and persecuted people. The armed forces were also persecuting the members of Equipo Maíz. For many years, they worked clandestinely and had to change "offices" several times because their lives were in danger.[16] While *Historia de El Salvador* is my primary source for this chapter, I will also draw on other resources that provide an insight into the suffering and trauma of the poor, marginalized, and oppressed people of El Salvador.

The *Pipil* and *Lenca* People

At first, the territory that is now known as El Salvador was not called that, nor was it inhabited by a single people. At the time of the Spanish invasion in 1524, the indigenous groups that lived in these lands were the *Pipil*, who had emigrated from Mexican territories and lived to the south-west of the *Lempa* River, and the *Lenca*, who lived on the northeastern side of that river. This river functioned as a natural border.

[15] Equipo Maíz, "Miguel Cavada: Amigo, Hermano, Compañero.," *La Página de Maíz*, 2011, https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/bitstream/handle/2152/10990/Pag0325.pdf?sequence=327&isAllowed=y.

[16] I am thankful to my friend José Fidel Campos Sorto, who worked fifteen years for Equipo Maíz beginning in 1984, for sharing with me the story of this amazing group of people and the challenges they experienced. Some of them (including José Fidel) were imprisoned and tortured by the armed forces.

Although the *Pipil* and *Lenca* peoples had contact with each other, they were different. They were organized by social kindship groups called *calpullis,* whose land and fruits were communal. In turn, several *calpullis* constituted political-administrative units that are called *cacicazgos*. The *cacicazgos* were organized societies with a hierarchy organized mainly based on kinship. *Cuscatlán*, "Land of the Jewels," was the strongest *cacicazgo*. *Cuscatlán* belonged to the people *Pipil* and its center was in what today is *Antiguo Cuscatlán*. Since *Cuscatlán* was the strongest *cacicazgo*, the entire territory became known by this name.[17]

The main agricultural products of the *Pipil* and *Lenca* people were: corn, beans, root crops, squash, cocoa, fruits, pumpkins, tecomates, morros, tobacco, *chicha*, cotton, *henequén*, palm, and bamboo. Their domestic animals were the *chucho* and the *chompipe*. Their utensils included grinding stones, *comales*, and pots. Their primary tools were stone axes, knives, spears, arrows, and pikes. The *Pipil* and *Lenca* people used irrigation on the banks of the rivers. They cultivated the land by burning the brush on the mountains, and they respected the cycles of nature. They extracted copal, rubber, and balsam from the trees. They also extracted minerals like gold, copper, and obsidian from the earth and salt from the sea. The women were experts in cotton, tule, and *henequén* fabrics. They also made baskets and ceramic utensils.[18]

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[17] *Historia de El Salvador: De Cómo La Gente Guanaca No Sucumbió Ante Los Infames Ultrajes de Los Españoles, Criollos, Gringos y Otras Plagas*, seventh edition (San Salvador: Equipo Maíz, 2016), 22–26.

[18] *Historia de El Salvador*, 24–25.

Even back then, people were divided by social classes. A *cacique*, a man or woman whom the warriors elected, governed the *Pipil* and *Lenca* people. Other social groups were: 1) the nobles *o pilpitun*—women and men who had high political or religious positions; 2) the merchants o *poshtecas*—women and men who were dedicated to the exchange of products and took advantage of their trips to spy on other tribes and pass on the information to their warriors; 3) the artisans or *amautecas*—women and men who made textiles, ceramics, and cultivation tools; 4) the enslaved people—women and men who did the heavy labor and who could later become part of the community—the enslaved people were not enslaved forever; and 5) the commoners or *macehualtín*—the majority of women and men who cultivated the land that the *cacique* distributed to each family. The *macehualtín* also cultivated the land destined to support the priests and the temples.[19]

The Pipil people had laws to protect agriculture, social division, religion, and human relationships. The family was monogamous, formed by the union of a man with a woman. They imposed the death penalty on those who despised the gods, those who cheated on their wives, and on rapists and thieves.[20] The Pipil people worshiped the god Quetzalcóatl, the rising sun, Tlálot, goddess of rain and thunder, Tonatiuh, the setting sun, and Metzi, the moon. They practiced nahualismo, which means that they put their

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[19] *Historia de El Salvador*, 27.

[20] *Historia de El Salvador: De Como La Gente Guanaca No Succumbió Ante Los Infames Ultrajes de Los Españoles, Criollos, Gringos y Otras Plagas*, first edition (San Salvador: Equipo Maíz, 1989), 28.

Interestingly, that the first edition of *Historia de El Salvador*, written in 1989 during the Salvadoran civil war, includes this statement, but the seventh edition of 2016 does not. I wonder if it has something to do with the fact that, at that time, raping women and men was a normalized form of torture practiced by the Salvadoran armed forces.

lives under the protection of an animal.[21] One of many things we can learn from the indigenous people is that,

> *La gente indígena—pipil, lenca y otras—tenía un valor muy importante: se sentía parte de la naturaleza y no veía la tierra, el aire y el agua como propiedad individual de alguien, sino como complementos del ser humano en un todo que era su universo. Y sus ritos, sus creencias, sus ofrendas, sus peticiones no eran individuales, sino colectivas. Hasta su manera de hacer las guerras giraba en torno a la energía y la vida de su cosmos.*[22]
>
> The indigenous people—*Pipil*, *Lenca*, and others—had a very important value: they considered themselves to be part of nature and did not see the land, air, and water as someone's individual property, but as complements to human beings in a whole that was their universe. Moreover, their rites, beliefs, offerings, and requests were not individual but collective. Even their way of waging war revolved around the energy and life of their cosmos.

However, the Spanish invaders eliminated their religion, culture, and traditions. This created a deep and painful soul wound on the indigenous people.

The Invasion

Towards the fifteenth century, the countries of Europe were looking for new peoples with whom to trade—and to exploit their wealth and natural resources.[23] Voyages for commerce and exploration were possible thanks to the invention of the compass, the sextant, and gunpower. The Italians were the first to trade with the people from Asia and India. However, it was particularly challenging to get to the East. It was a route that took months, and they had to cross non-Christian kingdoms, which were often

[21] *Historia de El Salvador*, first edition, 20.
[22] *Historia de El Salvador*, 28.
[23] *Historia de El Salvador*, first edition, 29.

at war or charged exceedingly high taxes. For this reason, Europeans were seeking other trading partners and routes.[24]

One of the ambitious men looking for a route to the east was Cristobal Colón. Earlier than many of his peers, Colón was convinced that the earth was round, and he planned to navigate towards the west believing that taking that route would eventually get him to the east. In 1486, Cristobal Colón (more commonly known by his anglicized name Christopher Columbus) received the support of the rulers of Spain, Queen Isabel de Castillo and King Fernando de Aragón, for the voyage through the *Capitulaciones of Santa Fe*. Through this document, they gave Columbus the titles of Viceroy, Admiral of the Oceans, and governor of all the lands that he discovered. They also promised to give him a tenth of all the wealth he found. Columbus promised that all the lands discovered would become the domain of Spain. This document did not so much as consider what Spain/ Columbus would do with any people who might already be inhabiting those lands.[25]

On August 10, 1492, Columbus left Spain. Two months later, on October 12, 1492, he made landfall in what is now the Bahamas. Columbus and his ships landed on an island that the native people called *Guanahaní,* which he named the island of San Salvador. Columbus later arrived at two other islands that are now Cuba and the one inhabited by Haitians and Dominicans.[26] In April 1493, Columbus returned to Spain,

[24] *Historia de El Salvador*, 30–31.
[25] *Historia de El Salvador*, first edition, 33.
[26] *Historia de El Salvador*, 34.

carrying a few indigenous prisoners and some gold that he had stolen. To continue counting on the support of the Spanish monarchy, Columbus exaggerated the riches in the land he had found, which he believed (and died believing) were the East Indies.[27]

On September 25, 1493, Columbus undertook a second voyage, bringing with him seventeen ships and 1,500 men. With this trip began the looting of what is now known as the American continent. He made the third and fourth voyages in 1498 and 1502, respectively. On this last trip, Columbus reached the shores of the Central American Caribbean, landing in countries now called Honduras, Costa Rica, and Panamá.[28]

From August 11, 1492, to August 18, 1503, the head of the Catholic church was the Spanish Pope Alejandro VI, who had great political power. Since the Catholic church did not accept the existence of other religions, when the Spanish monarchy expelled the Arabs from Spain, the pope was delighted and gave them the title *of Reyes Católicos* (Catholic Monarchs). This was also the time of the *Santa Inquisición Española*, 1478–1834 (the Holy Spanish Inquisition). During this bloody and unholy time, all people who opposed the Catholic Church's doctrine were tortured and burned at the stake or punished in other humiliating ways. Many of the victims of the Catholic church were scientists who did not accept the dogmas of the Catholic church and women accused of being witches for practicing natural medicine.[29]

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[27] *Historia de El Salvador*, 35.
[28] *Historia de El Salvador*, 35.
[29] *Historia de El Salvador*, 36.

The Pope divided the "discovered" territories between Spain and Portugal because both had Catholic kingdoms. He gave absolute dominion over Africa and what today is Brazil to Portugal and the rest of America to Spain. He also gave them the mission to convert all the inhabitants of these territories to Catholicism. France and England took the territories that the Spaniards could not control, especially those in the Caribbean and North America.[30]

In Europe, whether the men and women found in America were humans was the subject of discussion. Since they spoke and dressed differently and had different customs, most Europeans believed they were not humans. However, the pope established, through a *Bula* or papal bull, that the indigenous people had a soul.[31]

The Spaniards said they came to America to make new Christians and bring civilization. The truth is that they came to steal gold, silver, and other natural resources and to dominate and exploit the indigenous people.[32] They brutally killed the indigenous people, whether with knives or through the diseases—like measles and smallpox—that they brought to America. The diseases traveled faster than the invaders; therefore, when the Spaniards attacked the indigenous people, they were already sick, weak, and unable to protect themselves. For this reason, they were trounced.[33]

In 1524, Pedro de Alvarado and his brother Diego invaded the territory that today is El Salvador. They reported to the Spanish *Conquistador* Hernán Cortés, who had

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[30] *Historia de El Salvador*, 37.
[31] *Historia de El Salvador*, 38.
[32] *Historia de El Salvador*, 40.
[33] *Historia de El Salvador*, first edition, 41.

already subdued the Aztecs. The territory of (now) El Salvador was first attacked by 150 men on foot and 100 on horseback. They were supported by about five thousand indigenous persons who had forcibly become allies of the Spaniards; some of them, like the *tlaxcaltecas,* came from Mexico.[34]

The *Pipiles* resisted the invasion and managed to wound Pedro de Alvarado in one leg. He reported that due to this injury, his leg was "four fingers" shorter than the other.[35] After several days of fighting, the invaders reached the *cacicazgo* of *Cuscatlán,* which today is *Antiguo Cuscatlán.* The *cacique* ordered the people to welcome the Spaniards and their allies. However, shortly after this, the invaders began abusing the people and the land. Therefore, the indigenous people fled to the mountains and continued to resist. Pedro de Alvarado returned to Guatemala without defeating the *Pipil* people. However, the invaders persisted, and, in 1539, fifteen years later, they were finally able to subdue the *Pipil* people.[36]

The invaders had instructions from the Spanish monarchy: 1) to seek to win the land through peaceful means; 2) to preach the Catholic faith and baptize indigenous people; 3) not to let the indigenous people make human sacrifices; 4) to read the *requerimento* to the indigenous people before using force—the *requerimiento* being a document that described the advantages of accepting the Catholic faith and submitting to Spain. This document also stated that if the indigenous people refused to accept the

[34] *Historia de El Salvador*, 41.
[35] *Historia de El Salvador*, 42.
[36] *Historia de El Salvador*, 42–43.

Catholic faith and submit to Spain, Spain would wage war against them, and they would become enslaved.[37] Actually, the Spanish invaders did not respect the above terms of the *requerimiento.* Nevertheless, they kept the king and queen happy with the riches they sent to Spain. Some priests initially protested the abuses against the indigenous people, but when the people refused to accept the Catholic faith, these priests also became their executioners.[38]

The invaders destroyed the temples of the indigenous people and raped the women. As they took ownership of the land, they took ownership of the indigenous women. They did with them as they pleased.[39] For the *Pipil* people, who punished rape with death, the rape of their women and girls created painful and deep soul wounds, historical trauma, still bleeding today through the bodies of their descendants. As Equipo Maíz notes, "*Somos mestizos a la fuerza*" ("We are *mestizos* by force,").[40] "*Las primeras niñas y niños mestizos nacidos fueron hijos de la violencia, engendrados en el odio y en el miedo dado que el rapto y la violación de mujeres indígenas fueron tan frecuentes como el robo de alimentos, joyas y otros bienes"* (The first mestizo girls and boys born were children of violence, engendered in hatred and fear since the kidnapping and rape of indigenous women were as frequent as the stealing of food, jewelry, and other goods).[41] We, the *mestizo* people, are the fruit of these rapes. Even though we might not be aware

[37] *Historia de El Salvador*, 42.
[38] *Historia de El Salvador*, 47–48.
[39] *Historia de El Salvador*, 44.
[40] *Historia de El Salvador*, 48.
[41] *Historia de El Salvador*, 55.

of this, we continue experiencing the effects and consequences of our ancestor's soul wounds on our bodies.

As the invaders did not find much gold in this territory, their main profit was the land. All the territory that today is known as El Salvador was distributed among only fifty-four of them. The indigenous people were forced to work the land to benefit only these ambitious invaders.[42]

The arrival of the invaders meant ruin for the indigenous people of Central America. Even though there are no exact numbers, historians estimate that between the years 1502 and 1600, the indigenous population from Central America was reduced by 90 percent due to the plagues, wars of conquest, slavery, and labor exploitation.[43]

However, it was not only the indigenous people of El Salvador who were wounded but also the land. Soul wounding of the land occurs when the land has been exploited and when there is a massacre of human beings on the land. As Eduardo Duran notes, "Basically, the land needs to undergo assessment and treatment in order to restore balance. It is difficult to restore balance to the community of human beings if the land's soul has been wounded and left unhealed."[44] Thus, the healing of the people is intrinsically related to the healing of the land.

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[42] *Historia de El Salvador*, 44.
[43] *Historia de El Salvador*, 50.
[44] Duran, *Healing the Soul Wounds*, 164.

Colonial Period

The invaders wounded the indigenous people and their land, but they could not completely dominate them. The indigenous people's resilience was strengthened by their collective desire to liberate their land and people. Many of them continued fighting to protect their people, land, culture, traditions, and religious beliefs.[45] However, the Spaniards continued exploiting them, raping their women, and stealing the fruits of their lands. The invaders sold in other countries the *cacao*, *algodón*, *bálsamo*, and the *añil* that the indigenous people had planted and tended. The *añil* was the most important product and one that gave them great wealth.[46] As the editors of *Equipo Maíz* explain,

> *Durante la época de la Colonia, que duró cerca de 300 años, se impuso el sometimiento económico—con un nuevo régimen de trabajo y el despojo de las fuentes de riqueza de los pueblos indígenas, sobre todo las tierras—y el sometimiento ideológico, con la imposición de la cultura española, incluyendo la religión católica, el idioma castellano, las costumbres, el modo de pensar, y la organización social.*[47]
>
> During the colonial era, which lasted nearly 300 years, the indigenous people were victims of economic subjugation with a new work regime and the dispossession of the sources of wealth of the indigenous peoples, especially the land. They were also the victims of ideological subjugation with the imposition of the Spanish culture, including the Catholic religion, the Spanish language, customs, way of thinking, and social organization.

This was the beginning of private land ownership and the rich-poor divide.[48] The invaders owned the private *latifundios* o *haciendas*, the best land in the country. At the beginning of the colonial period, there were in El Salvador approximately 450 *haciendas*

[45] *Historia de El Salvador*, 52.
[46] *Historia de El Salvador*, 52.
[47] *Historia de El Salvador*, 52.
[48] *Historia de El Salvador*, 53.

of different sizes. They occupied approximately one third of the territory of El Salvador. However, by 1700, most of these properties had expanded through the illicit appropriation of land.[49] They gave the indigenous people the worst land. This land was communal and was administered by the indigenous communities. However, when a Spaniard wanted to take possession of a land that belonged to the indigenous communities, he would release his cattle there to destroy the cornfields. The Spaniards would do this until the indigenous people despaired and abandoned their land. There were also *tierras ejidales* administered by the municipality. This land could not be sold or transferred, yet many of these *tierras* ended up being the property of the owner of the *haciendas*. There were also *tierras realengas* that belonged to the king.[50]

The Spanish laws prohibited enslaving the indigenous people. The Spaniards could only enslave the indigenous people captured in the war. Therefore, many times the Spaniards deliberately provoked the indigenous people, so that they would rebel and make war on them. Once the indigenous people were defeated, they were divided among the invaders and became their slaves.[51]

Since many indigenous people died from the heavy work in the fields or from the diseases the Spaniards brought to America, the Spaniards brought enslaved Africans to replace them. However, this practice stopped when the Spaniards realized that it was too expensive for them to buy black enslaved people.[52]

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[49] *Historia de El Salvador*, 53.
[50] *Historia de El Salvador*, 53–55.
[51] *Historia de El Salvador*, first edition, 56–57.
[52] *Historia de El Salvador*, 54.

During the colonial period, there were different social groups: Spaniards, those who came directly from Spain; *criollos,* the Spaniards' children who were born in El Salvador and inherited the wealth of their parents; and *mestizo,* children of Spaniards and indigenous people, who could hold administrative positions but not own land; and the dominated, meaning the indigenous and black people, who were the most exploited and mistreated.[53]

The Spanish king implemented la *encomienda,* a labor system that assigned a group of non-Christian indigenous men and women and their families to a Spanish *encomendero,* who had to instruct them in the Catholic faith and teach them to speak *castellano*. The *encomenderos* paid the religious orders a fee called the *sínodo*. However, the *encomenderos* greatly benefited from the *encomienda.* They forced the indigenous people to give them tributes—corn, beans, fruits, silk, honey, salt, clothes, fabrics, pots, and labor. "*San Salvador tenía 60 o 70 encomenderos con diez mil indios tributarios y San Miguel tenía 60 encomenderos con cinco mil indios tributarios*" (San Salvador had 60 or 70 *encomenderos* with ten thousand tributary Indians and San Miguel had 60 *encomenderos* with five thousand tributary Indians).[54] The tributes were divided by the *encomenderos* and the king. Even the *tlaxcaltecas* and other indigenous groups that helped the Spaniards in the invasion of Central America were forced to pay these tributes.[55]

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[53] *Historia de El Salvador*, 60.
[54] *Historia de El Salvador*, 57.
[55] *Historia de El Salvador*, 57.

In 1552, to have better control of the indigenous people, the invaders, with the help of the church, forced them to live in "*pueblos indios*." The king assigned them communal land. They had to work this land to harvest their food and collect the tributes they had to deliver to the crown, the *encomenderos*, and the church, and supply the nascent cities. They also had to work on the *haciendas* for virtually no pay.[56]

There were other forms of exploitation of the indigenous people. For instance, they were forced to buy, at a very high price, the products that the Spaniards brought from Spain. The women had to spin and weave cotton or thread. Since the work was excessive, they had to do it even while they were attending mass. They were whipped if they did not finish their work on time.[57]

In the rural areas, the *corregidores* or "greater majors" were in command. They were also judges with political and military power within the municipalities, which functioned as a jail. However, they created a system to divide the indigenous people, which is one of the strategies of the powers and principalities to keep the people oppressed.[58] The "greater majors" chose from within the indigenous communities men who acted as "lower majors." They oversaw the indigenous people and collected their tributes. If these "lower mayors" did not deliver the tributes on time, they were flogged or imprisoned. To avoid this punishment, they became the oppressors of their own people.

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[56] *Historia de El Salvador*, 59.

[57] *Historia de El Salvador*, first edition, 59.

[58] Homiletician Charles Campbell notes in his book *The Word Before the Powers* that isolation and division is one of the strategies of the powers and principalities to accomplish their deadly purposes.

Charles L. Campbell, *The Word Before the Powers: An Ethic of Preaching* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 33–34.

By 1700, the people in power added another layer of oppression for the indigenous people, *a juez de milpa*, a man from the same indigenous community who forced the people to work more.[59]

As the editors of *Equipo Maíz* state, once the stage of military conquest was over, in El Salvador and throughout America, the church was the main instrument used to dominate the indigenous population.[60] In other words, they "converted to Christianism" and subdued the indigenous people with both the cross and the sword.

This is how Jesus' "commandment" from Matthew 28:19–20 reached Latin America. A mural in *El Castillo de Chapultepec* in Mexico City depicts the Spaniards violently forcing the indigenous people to get baptized. On this mural, there is a note that reads, "*Tal parece que los españoles trajeron a Cristo a América para crucificar al indio*" (It seems that the Spaniards brought Christ to America to crucify the Indian). Another note on this mural says, "*Sepan los habitantes de esta Nueva España que habéis nacido para callar y obedecer y no discurrir, ni opinar, en los altos asuntos del gobierno*" (Let the inhabitants of this New Spain know that you were born to be silent and obey and not to discuss, or to express an opinion, in the high affairs of the government). The indigenous people of America were forced to remain silent. The church numbed the will of the people, making them believe that their new exploited condition was God's will. The priests preached to the indigenous people messages of resignation, obedience, and the hope of a better life after death. They did this because the church also

[59] *Historia de El Salvador*, 61.
[60] *Historia de El Salvador*, first edition, 62.

benefited from the exploitation of the people. The church received the tithes and first fruits.[61]

Despite the Catholic church's teaching, there were many revolts of indigenous people who were tired of suffering hunger, long and arduous hours of work, humiliation, and corporal punishments. However, the Spaniards always repressed the indigenous people's resistance. Those who participated in the revolts were whipped, jailed, dismembered, hanged, or executed. The church justified these atrocious acts as necessary measures to subdue the indigenous people.[62]

Nevertheless, we must acknowledge that not all religious people agreed with the mistreatment and exploitation of the indigenous people of America. One of them is Bartolome de las Casas (1484–1566), a Dominican friar who, after witnessing the brutal treatment of the indigenous people from the Caribbean, experienced an "awakening." Repenting from his own exploitation of the indigenous people, Bartolome de las Casas became one of their most fervent advocates. Las Casas said, "I prefer an unbaptized living Indian than a dead Cristian."[63] Another was Pedro Cortés y Larraz (1769–1838), who after visiting the province of San Salvador, denounced the priests who abused the indigenous people. He wrote,

> Y*o no puedo acomodarme, ni sentir bien del método que se observa en el castigo de los indios, ni que haya tantos que puedan influir en que sean castigados…Examínese si es o no conforme al espíritu de la iglesia el violentar a los indios con azotes para oír misa y para confesar y comulgar en la cuaresma, como se hace muy regularmente…cuando se sabe que por*

[61] *Historia de El Salvador*, 62–63.
[62] *Historia de El Salvador*, first edition, 63.
[63] *Historia de El Salvador*, first edition, 64.

> *voluntad, ni quieren oír misa, ni confesarse, ni comulgarse, como lo declaran muchos curas y consta a todos.*[64]
>
> I cannot accommodate myself, nor feel good about the method that is observed in the punishment of the Indians, nor that there are so many who can influence their punishment ... We must examine whether or not it is according to the spirit of the church to violate the Indians with lashes to force them to hear mass and to confess and receive communion in Lent, as is done very regularly ... when it is known that voluntarily, they neither want to hear mass, nor go to confession, nor receive communion, as many priests declare and it is clear to all.

In short, most of the priests and religious orders participated in the exploitation and abuse of the indigenous people. Thus, the Catholic Church also created painful soul wounds in the people of El Salvador and Central America in general.

As the *haciendas* grew, they needed more and more laborers. The *hacendados* brought in the poor *mestizos o ladinos*, who were not accepted in the "*pueblos indios*" or the Spaniards' villages. "*Por eso vivían como colonos en rancherías en las haciendas y trabajaban en ellas como peones, una mano de obra barata, disponible y una fuerza militar potencial apreciable, al servicio de los fines y ambiciones personales del hacendado*" (That is why they lived as settlers in *rancherías* on the *haciendas* and worked in them as laborers, a cheap, available labor force and a valuable potential military force, at the service of the personal goals and ambitions of the landowner).[65] Thus, the rich and powerful also exploited the *mestizos* and *ladinos*.

In colonial times, the church controlled most social and cultural life. The main education centers were under the control of the church, especially the Jesuit (or Society

[64] *Historia de El Salvador*, 64.
[65] *Historia de El Salvador*, 68.

of Jesus) order. The literary and artistic work of that time demonstrates a great religiosity among the people. Thus, the church became a parallel power to the colonial administration and sometimes was even more effective. This caused problems between the crown and the church. Therefore, in 1767, the king ordered the expulsion of the Jesuits and promoted a series of measures to reduce the power of the church, but the Catholic religion was already deeply rooted among the people.[66]

During colonial times and beyond, the indigenous people from El Salvador worked the land but were not allowed to enjoy its harvest. In fact, since the invasion, the indigenous people suffered from being separated from the land to which they were intrinsically connected. This separation caused a deep soul wound on the indigenous people and the land, whose effects and consequences we continue to witness today.

Independence from Spain

After three centuries of colonial domination, Central America gained its independence from Spain. However, the invasion had changed the indigenous people forever. Their faith, laws, culture, language, and traditions had been almost completely eradicated, and many of them kept the language and religion that the invaders forced on them.[67]

In November 1811, the province of San Salvador gave the "*primer grito de independencia*." Still, Central America officially declared independence from Spain on

[66] *Historia de El Salvador*, first edition, 65.
[67] *Historia de El Salvador*, 66.

September 15, 1821.[68] However, the indigenous people and poor *mestizos* were independent from Spain, but not from the *criollos.* This dominant class continued controlling the land and wealth of El Salvador. The *criollos* sought to be independent from Spain only because they did not want to share the political power, sources of wealth, and, especially, the labor of the indigenous people.[69]

On the other hand, the dominant class understood that if they did not support the independence cause, the people would fight for it, as had happened in Mexico. That would put their properties and wealth at risk. Therefore, for the dominant classes in Central America, independence from Spain had a preventative character: to prevent the people from taking power. The powerful "merely" wanted to protect their wealth and privileges.[70] Thus, in the end, the ones who benefitted the most from independence from Spain were the powerful and wealthy families.

Soon after the declaration of independence, the *Imperio Mexicano* attacked San Salvador and temporarily invaded it. Mexico invited Central America to join the newly formed *Imperio Mexicano*. Since El Salvador rejected the invitation, the Mexican emperor, Agustín de Iturbide, sent Vicente Filísola to take over San Salvador. San Salvador resisted for two months but finally gave up on February 9, 1823. However, after the Mexican emperor was overthrown in March 1823, the Mexican forces had to retreat from San Salvador.[71]

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[68] *Historia de El Salvador*, 72.
[69] *Historia de El Salvador*, 70.
[70] *Historia de El Salvador*, 84–5.
[71] *Historia de El Salvador*, 86.

The two decades following independence, between 1824 and 1842, were years of significant instability for El Salvador. They had twenty-three different heads of the government and participated in forty battles. Historians estimate that the number of people who died at this time is very similar to the number of people who died during the Salvadoran civil war, more than 75,000.[72]

As Eduardo Duran states, "Colonizing is a dehumanizing activity."[73] Therefore, colonization processes affect human beings at a deep "soul" level. Consequently, decolonizing is a process of restoring our humanity and healing our souls. It means liberation from those who have taken our humanity from us.[74] However, the decolonizing process may take centuries to reach some kind of completion. Even then, people might continue acting and living as colonized individuals, for the colonized mentality is the most challenging aspect of colonization to overcome.

Under the oppression of the Salvadoran oligarchy and the church

After the independence from Spain, the *criollos,* the dominant class, were divided between liberals and conservatives. Each group was fighting for its own interests. These were violent times for El Salvador, and, as always, the poor, marginalized, and oppressed people suffered the most. They were forced to enlist in the armed forces of one of the two political groups fighting for power. [75]

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[72] Erick Rivera Orellana, ed., *El Salvador: Historia Mínima* (El Salvador: Talleres de la Editorial Universitaria, 2011), 41.

[73] Duran, *Healing the Soul Wound*, 15.

[74] Duran, *Healing the Soul Wound*, 15.

[75] *Historia de El Salvador*, 89, 96.

On several occasions, the indigenous people took up arms against the dominant class. They were tired of the abuses of the *terratenientes*, who continued oppressing and repressing them. The *nonualco* Anastasio Aquino led the most crucial uprising. However, the rich people, supported by the authorities of the Catholic Church, repressed the revolts.[76] They did not want to share their wealth with the indigenous people. The more the rich people had, the more they wanted. It was impossible to satiate their hunger for land, wealth, and power.

From independence from Spain in 1821 until 1840, El Salvador had been part of the *Federación Centroamericana*. When the *Federación* dissolved in 1840, El Salvador declared itself an independent state. Nevertheless, several decades of internal wars and wars against neighboring countries, along with the weakness of the economy and the natural disasters they experienced—including earthquakes, droughts, epidemics, plagues, and storms—hindered the development of the country.[77]

Twenty years later, in 1859, El Salvador declared itself a "*República Libre Independiente y Soberana*." At this time, coffee had a significant positive impact on the economy of El Salvador. In fact, coffee was becoming the central axis of the economy.[78] The leading promoter of coffee in El Salvador was Gerardo Barrios, who governed the country four different times between the years 1858 and 1868. Barrios was a member of the oligarchy and a prominent liberal leader.[79] Barrios engaged in a long war with Rafael

[76] *Historia de El Salvador*, 93–8.
[77] *Historia de El Salvador*, 104.
[78] *Historia de El Salvador*, 108.
[79] *Historia de El Salvador*, 108.

Carrera, the conservative president of Guatemala, because, contrary to Barrios, Carrera opposed the unification of Central America. However, Barrios' main opponent was the Catholic Church, which had gained the power that the federal government had reduced between 1830 and 1838. The church accused Barrios of being anticlerical and despotic on account of his liberal agenda. The reforms that Barrios promoted included the reorganization of public finances, the production of coffee, the creation of an armed institution of permanent and professional character, and secular public education.[80]

On June 19, 1863, Rafael Carrera defeated Barrios and exiled him. Carrera installed the conservative Francisco Dueñas as the President of El Salvador. When Carrera died in 1865, Barrios tried to come back to El Salvador to fight against Dueñas' government; instead, he was arrested and executed on August 29, 1865.[81]

Both Barrios and Dueñas sold the land that belonged to the king at a meager price, and sometimes they just gave it away to those who already had substantial holdings. When this land was gone, they started stealing the land from the *tierras ejidales* and the *tierras communales*.[82] In addition, when President Rafael Zaldivar was in power, the National Legislative Assembly passed laws that made all forms of communal property illegal. In 1881, President Zaldivar decreed the extinction of *tierras communales*, the only type of land that belonged to the indigenous communities. In 1882, the president also decreed the extinction of the *tierras ejidales*, which belonged to the inhabitants of

[80] *Historia de El Salvador*, 108–10.
[81] *Historia de El Salvador*, 110.
[82] *Historia de El Salvador*, 111.

the municipalities. To this point, they had always decided how to use the land. The president argued that they were an obstacle to the development of the economy and the progress of the country.[83] This law stipulates that,

> *La existencia de tierras bajo la propiedad de las Comunidades impide el desarrollo agrícola, estorba la circulación de la riqueza y debilita los lazos familiares y la independencia del individuo. Su existencia contraría los principios económicos y sociales que la República ha adoptado*.[84]
>
> The existence of lands owned by the communities impedes agricultural development, hinders the circulation of wealth, and weakens family ties and individual independence. Its existence runs counter to the economic and social principles that the Republic has adopted.

The government gave the land to the *hacendados* for the cultivation of coffee. The *hacendados* also received other benefits, like lower taxes and low prices for the supplies they needed to cultivate coffee. This was the beginning of what is known as the *oligarquía cafetalera*.[85]

The violent dispossession of the land provoked peasant revolts in *Izalco*, *Atiquizaya*, *Cojutepeque*, *Santa Ana*, and other places. As with the other revolts, these too were repressed by the armed forces. Without their land, the peasants did not have any option but to work in the *haciendas* as *colonos*. The *colonos* lived in the *hacienda* and worked for the *hacendado and* cultivated a small piece of land with basic grains for their subsistence. They became a secure and reliable workforce for the *hacendados*. The *hacendados* gave the *colonos* contracts that included "*adelantos*" (money advances) to

[83] *Historia de El Salvador*, 111.
[84] Rivera Orellana, *El Salvador: Historia Mínima*, 44.
[85] *Historia de El Salvador*, 111.

keep them in debt. To "pay" this debt, they had to work in the coffee plantations.[86] However, they were not able to pay off their debt because they received meager pay for their long hours of work. Additionally, the *colonos* had to buy from the landowners' stores.[87] Thus, the landowners ensured that whatever money they paid or lent returned to them via purchases and debt payments. As Héctor Lindo-Fuentes describes,

> *Las comunidades indígenas que habían sido actores importantes en la construcción del estado y que desempeñaban un papel significativo en la economía pasaron a ser descritas como obstáculos en el camino hacia la modernidad. Los líderes liberales promovieron una agenda cultural homogeneizadora y el sistema escolar imponía el uso de castellano. La perdida de las tierras comunales les quitó su base económica y perdieron poder en los gobiernos locales*.[88]
>
> The indigenous communities that had been important actors in the construction of the state and had played a significant role in it came to be described as obstacles on the path to modernity. Liberal leaders promoted a homogenizing cultural agenda, and the school system imposed the use of Spanish. The loss of communal lands took away their economic base and they lost power in local governments.

At this time, the Salvadoran economy depended on the cultivation of coffee. The wealthy coffee growers were also in charge of the government. Thus, they owned most of the land and controlled the banks and foreign trade. In short, they controlled absolutely everything. By contrast, the small coffee producers depended on the oligarchs who lent them money at high interest rates and paid them a meager price for their coffee. Things were even worse for the *jornaleros,* who received meager pay for their arduous labor at

[86] Rivera Orellana, *El Salvador: Historia Mínima*, 111–12.
[87] *Historia de El Salvador*, 112.
[88] Rivera Orellana, *El Salvador: Historia Mínima*, 45.

the *haciendas*. They were basically enslaved. Some testimonies that narrate that even until the 1860s and ’70s, the *colonos* and *jornaleros* were punished with whips and stocks.[89]

On the other hand, the liberal reforms promoted by the governments of Santiago González (1871–1976), Rafael Zaldívar (1876–1885), and Francisco Menéndez (1881–1890) proposed the construction of a secular state in El Salvador. In other words, they were seeking the separation of civil from ecclesiastical power. This implied that El Salvador would tolerate the public practice of all religious cults. Of course, the Catholic Church fought back. They did not want to lose the power to determine what is true and what is false, what is acceptable and what is reprehensible.[90]

In 1896, El Salvador inaugurated its first railway, which was possible thanks to loans received from Great Britain, the leading world power at that time. English people benefitted from this because they owned mining companies in El Salvador. The railroad, roads, ports, the telegraph (1870), and the telephone (1888) made it easier to export coffee. The coffee trade made it possible to circulate more money in El Salvador. Therefore, it was necessary to create a banking system. The *Banco Internacional*, founded in 1880, was the first bank in El Salvador. In 1883, El Salvador adopted the peso as its national currency, but in 1892 the national currency was named “colon,” in honor of the fourth centenary of the “discovery of America” by Cristobal Colón.[91]

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[89] *Historia de El Salvador*, 1012–13.
[90] Rivera Orellana, *El Salvador: Historia Mínima*, 47–49.
[91] *Historia de El Salvador*, 114.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the United States of America became a world power and replaced Great Britain as the world's superpower. They took over the railroad and the mining companies in El Salvador. The United States intended to dominate all of Latin America, and they had the support of the dominant classes of the Latin American countries because they believed that with the help of the US, it would be easier to dominate and exploit their own people.[92]

Central America was especially important to the US because it was a bridge between the north and the south of the continent. In addition, the US needed Central America to protect the interoceanic canal they had built in Panama and to prevent the advance of the anti-imperialistic movement that had begun in Mexico, to the south.[93] In 1910, the US tried to build a naval base in *El Golfo de Fonseca*, but the opposition they encountered made them reconsider.

Not all Salvadorans supported the intervention of the US in El Salvador. One of the persons who opposed the US intervention was Manuel Enrique Araujo. Araujo was President of El Salvador from 1911 to 1913. According to the historians from Equipo Maiz, Araujo was one of the few honest presidents that El Salvador has had. He tried to improve the living conditions of the working class, and this won him many enemies among El Salvador's oligarchy, who brutally killed him in February 1913.[94]

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[92] *Historia de El Salvador*, 116–18.
[93] *Historia de El Salvador*, 117.
[94] *Historia de El Salvador*, 119–20.

After Araujo's death, Carlos Meléndez illegally took over the presidency. This was the beginning of the oppressive and repressive Meléndez-Quiñonez dynasty that continued for fourteen years, from 1913 to 1927.[95] During all these years, El Salvador was in a state of siege. Contrary to when Araujo was in power, the Menléndez-Quiñonez dynasty favored the intervention of the US in El Salvador. Therefore, in 1922, the US gave a loan to El Salvador, and, to guarantee their repayment, the US kept 70 percent of the customs taxes.[96]

Carlos Meléndez also used a tactic typical of powers and principalities: division. He created the *Liga Roja*, an organization formed by working-class persons, peasants, and indigenous people to manipulate elections and attack the opposition. [97] The members of the *Liga Roja* created terror in El Salvador because they repressed and oppressed their own people. The soul wounds of the people of El Salvador were getting deeper and deeper, and this time it was their own people who were inflicting them.

The poor and oppressed people of El Salvador continued fighting for justice and equity, but their demands were always met with violence. The women were an essential part of this fight for justice. For instance, in 1991, women market vendors marched on the streets of San Salvador to protest the new monetary system established by President Carlos Meléndez in response to the economic crisis of that time. Due to this new

[95] *Historia de El Salvador*, 120–21.
[96] *Historia de El Salvador*, 118.
[97] *Historia de El Salvador*, 120–21.

monetary system, the silver coins in circulation lost all their value overnight. El Faro, the first digital newspaper in Latin America, describes the women's demonstration:

> *Las vendedoras del mercado, lideradas por doña Concepción Cornejo de Figeac, convocaron a una manifestación de mujeres para el 28 de febrero. La multitud se reunió a tempranas horas de la mañana a las afueras del Mercado Central y desde ahí comenzó su recorrido por las calles de la capital. Cuando llegaron al Palacio Nacional las fuerzas de seguridad las recibieron con golpes y balazos. Lograron entrar al edificio, irrumpieron en la sesión de la Asamblea Nacional Legislativa, y obligaron a los diputados a suspender la vigencia del decreto de desmonetización de la plata. Más tarde, esa misma mañana, llegaron mujeres de Santa Tecla con las que habían coordinado la acción. Las autoridades impidieron la llegada de otro grupo que venía de Santa Ana. Las calles se llenaron de manifestantes y el Gobierno sacó a la calle a todas las tropas de la Policía y el Ejército a las que pudo echar mano. Estas dispararon contra las mujeres que se defendieron con la única arma que tenían a su disposición: las piedras de la calle. Al menos 10 policías murieron lapidados. Los cuerpos de muchas mujeres, entre las que se encontraba la líder anónima de las tecleñas, quedaron tendidos en la calzada.*[98]
>
> The market vendors, led by Concepción Cornejo de Figeac, called for a women's demonstration on February 28. The crowd gathered early in the morning at the Central Market and from there they began their journey through the streets of the capital. When they arrived at the National Palace, the security forces received them with blows and bullets. Nevertheless, they managed to enter the building, broke into the session of the National Legislative Assembly, and forced the deputies to suspend the validity of the decree of demonetization of the silver. Later that morning, women from Santa Tecla with whom they had coordinated the action arrived at the National Palace. The authorities prevented the arrival of another group that came from Santa Ana. The demonstrators filled the streets, and the government sent into the streets all the Police troops and the Army that it could get hold of. They fired at the women who defended

[98] Héctor Lindo, "Las Heroínas Que Revirtieron La Política Monetaria de 1921," elfaro.net, accessed November 3, 2021, https://elfaro.net/es/202107/ef_academico/25584/Las-heroínas-que-revirtieron-la-política-monetaria-de-1921.htm.

As Hector Lindo explains, there is very little information in El Salvador about this march because the government imposed strict press censorship the next day. However, *El Faro* collected information published in the *Diario de Costa Rica* on March 18 and 19, 1921, that describes the repression and violence the government used against the women protesters.

> themselves with the only weapon they had at their disposal: the stones in the street. At least ten policemen were stoned to death. Many women's bodies, including the anonymous leader of the *Tecleñas*, were left lying on the road.

Other women-led demonstrations were violently repressed, like the demonstration led by women who supported the opposition candidate, Miguel Tomás Molina, in 1922.[99]

The government, the oligarchy, and the church decided to interpret these demonstrations for justice and equity as rebel strategies influenced by the socialists and/or communist doctrines to advance their agendas. On October 31, 1927, Mons. Alfonso Belloso, who was then the apostolic administrator and whom that same year became the second Archbishop of San Salvador, issued a pastoral letter titled "*El presente momento social*" (The Present Social Moment). In this letter, the church communicates her position on socialist doctrines.[100] Mons. Belloso writes, *"Un católico que se aficione a cualquiera de los sistemas socialistas corre el riesgo de contaminarse de herejía…Mayores males acarrean las instituciones socialistas realizadas conforme al ideal, que las tradicionales con todas sus deficiencias, lacras y deformidades"*[101] (A Catholic person fond of any socialist system runs the risk of becoming contaminated with heresy ... Greater evils socialist institutions carried out according to their principles than the traditional ones with all their deficiencies, blemishes, and deformities). In the same letter, Mons. Belloso condemns the Communist movement. He says,

> *Confiar en la solución de problemas tan complejos y espinosos a mítines populares y a conferencias tendenciosas—por más que se adoren con los*

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[99] *Historia de El Salvador*, 121.

[100] Luis Armando González, "Iglesia, organizaciones populares y violenia socio política," *Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas*, n.d., 735.

[101] *Historia de El Salvador*, 144.

> *nombres de centros culturales y campañas [de] analfabetismo—sería reconocido desacierto. No necesitamos agrupaciones propagandísticas que lancen a los cuatro vientos ideas inspiradas por el comunismo extranjero, sino Círculos de Estudios que, de la observación directa de nuestra vida social íntima, infieran las causas y los remedios de sus dolencias. Invitamos, pues, a todos los intelectuales salvadoreños a esta labor tranquila y de veras provechosa…proponiéndoles para nuestra mutua inteligencia el siguiente criterio: El sistema económico-social más aceptable es el que mejor concilia el mayor bien posible de el individuo con el mayor bien posible de la colectividad.*[102]
>
> Trusting the solution of such complex and thorny problems to popular rallies and tendentious conferences — no matter how much people adorn them with the names of cultural centers and illiteracy campaigns— would be recognized as a mistake. We do not need propaganda groups that throw ideas to the four winds inspired by foreign Communism, but Education Circles that, from direct observation of our intimate social life, infer the causes and remedies of their ailments. We, therefore, invite all Salvadoran intellectuals to this calm and truly beneficial work ... We propose the following criteria for our mutual understanding: The most acceptable socio-economic system is the one that best reconciles the greatest possible good of the individual with the greatest possible good of the collective.

However, in reality, Mons. Belloso was trying to protect only the "greatest possible good" of the oligarchy and the Catholic Church.

Darker Years for the People

The global economic crisis of 1929, caused by the greed of US capitalists, greatly affected El Salvador. The crisis caused a significant reduction in the demand and price of coffee. Thus, the coffee growers earned less money. Nevertheless, the ones who suffered the most were the poor people who, during the crisis, were even poorer.[103] Before the

[102] González, "Iglesia, organoizaciones populares y violenia socio política," 735–36.
[103] *Historia de El Salvador*, 125.

crisis, the *jornaleros* earned 50 *centavos* per day and two meals of beans and *tortilla.* After the crisis, the *jornaleros* earned 25 *centavos* per day and two meals. The situation was even worse for the women because even though they worked as much as the men, they were paid much less and received less food. Also, many people lost their jobs because some coffee growers decided not to harvest the coffee because the prices were too low to make doing so affordable.[104]

At this time, women did not have the right to vote or to be elected. However, Prudencia Ayala, a Salvadoran writer, social activist, and pioneer advocate for women's rights in El Salvador, wanted to register as a candidate for the presidency, but she was forbidden from doing so. In that election, the people voted for Arturo Araujo. Araujo promised the people to distribute lands from the state and the landowners, raise the minimum salary, and reduce the working hours. Of course, the rich did not support Araujo. Furthermore, Araujo could not fulfill his promises and the people were tired of waiting. Therefore, the public protests increased, especially those led by the *Regional* and the *Partido Comunista*, founded in 1930.[105]

On December 2, 1931, the military staged a coup d'état and promoted General Maximiliano Hernandez Martínez as president. Martínez was fond of theosophy and spiritualism.[106] He was known as el "*Brujo*"—a nickname that reflected his strange and unorthodox beliefs. For instance, he believed it to be a greater crime to kill an ant than a

[104] *Historia de El Salvador*, 125.
[105] *Historia de El Salvador*, 127–28.
[106] *Histpria de El Salvador*, 134.

man because men reincarnate, while ants die definitively.[107] This explains why he had zero regard for human life, especially for the life of the poor.

Soon after the coup d'état, there were municipal elections, and the *Partido Comunista* won several mayoralties. However, the government annulled those results.[108] The people were tired of the injustice, exploitation, oppression, and repression to which they were subjected. Therefore, on January 22, 1932, they started the *insurrección popular* (the popular insurrection). Nevertheless, before it even happened, the government learned about the plans of the "rebels," and it immediately formed the *Guardias Cívicas*, whose members were poor civilians under military command who collaborated with the army. Many men joined the *Guardias Cívicas* because they obtained benefits: they could report anyone; they could carry arms; and they were protected by the authorities.[109] Once again, the powers created a strategy to manipulate indigenous people and peasants to oppress and repress their own people.

Before they could even get their plans up and running, the government captured the insurrection leaders. One of the captured leaders was Farabundo Martí, one of the prominent leaders of the insurrection. Farabundo Martí capably organized the *Fundacion del Socorro Rojo Internacional* (SRI) and the organization of the *Federación Nacional de Trabajadores de El Salvador* (FTRS), founded in 1924. Martí was jailed many times, and he resisted by going on a hunger strike each time. He was expelled from El Salvador

[107] *Historia de El Salvador*, 143.
[108] *Historia de El Salvador*, 129.
[109] *Historia de El Salvador*, 135.

several times, but he kept coming back to join his people in the resistance against the government and the oppressive powers. However, this time the powers decided to end the threat that Farabundo Martí's life represented to them, and they killed him on February 1, 1932.[110]

Even without the guidance of their leaders and amidst great confusion, the indigenous and peasants continued with the uprising.[111] They succeeded in taking some towns and attacking the barracks. However, the army quickly crushed the insurrection because they were poorly armed and did not have a good attack strategy. After the insurrection, General Martínez started cruel repression of the indigenous people, peasants, and industrial workers who were members of the FRTS. Some people say that about 30,000 people were killed, but others say that deaths totaled 10,000 or 15,000.[112] Historian Erik Ching explains,

> *La rebelión fue un evento significativo, la violencia rural y la movilización campesina han tenido un lugar importante en la historia de El Salvador, por lo que la rebelión en sí no fue un momento decisivo. Más bien fue lo que sucedió posteriormente. Después de que el gobierno aplastó la rebelión, se definió un precedente que configuró todo un discurso que haría infames a los Hechos del 32. Bajo el liderazgo del Presidente (y General) Maximiliano Hernández Martínez, el gobierno salvadoreño se vengó de toda la zona occidental. Las unidades armadas y grupos paramilitares asesinaron a miles de campesinos, quienes tenían poca o ninguna relación en la rebelión. Fue un horrible y trágico episodio, uno de los peores casos de represión estatal en la historia moderna de América Latina. El asesinato en masa consolidó a los militares en el gobierno, lo cual resultó en 50 años de dictadura militar, el más largo capítulo de ininterrumpido control militar en la historia moderna de Latinoamérica.*[113]

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[110] *Historia de El Salvador*, 130–32.
[111] *Historia de El Salvador*, 130–31.
[112] Equipo Maíz, *Historia de El Salvador*, 131–34.
[113] Rivera Orellana, *El Salvador: Historia Mínima*, 63–64.

> The rebellion was a significant event. Together, rural violence and peasant mobilization have had an important place in the history of El Salvador, so the rebellion itself was not a decisive moment; rather, it was what happened afterward. After the government crushed the rebellion, it established a precedent that configured an entire discourse that would make the rebellion of 1932 infamous. Under the leadership of President (and general) Maximiliano Hernández Martínez, the Salvadoran government took revenge on all the western zones. Armed units and paramilitary groups murdered thousands of peasants who had had little or no involvement in the rebellion. It was a horrible and tragic episode, one of the worst cases of state repression in the modern history of Latin America. The mass murder consolidated the military in government, resulting in fifty years of military dictatorship, the longest chapter of uninterrupted military control in modern Latin American history.

The massacres of 1932 had enormous consequences for the people of El Salvador. Ching states that the modern history of El Salvador was created with blood. For this reason, poet and activist Roque Dalton describes the Salvadoran people as "nacidos medio muertos en 1932" (born almost dead in 1932).[114]

Even though General Martínez was a brutal murderer and had unorthodox beliefs, the Catholic church supported him. The Catholic Church's leaders and the oligarchy believed that Martínez was a great president because he "*salvó a la nación de las garras del comunismo*" (he saved the nation from the claws of Communism). [115] He received full support from the two archbishops during Martínez' time in government, Mons. Belloso and Mons. Chávez y González. Priests were present at the executions of the "rebels" as a sign of the church's legitimization of the violent act. In addition, after the 1932 massacre,

[114] Rivera Orellana, *El Salvador: Historia Mínima*, 64.
[115] *Historia de El Salvador*, 136.

the church celebrated many masses to give thanks to God for General Martínez' success in controlling the rebels.[116]

El Salvador experienced economic growth during the government of General Martínez for two main reasons: 1) the world economic crisis was ending; and 2) Martínez renegotiated with the US the repayment of the debt. The US stopped withholding 70 percent of the customs taxes, as they had been doing since 1922. Martínez promoted some economic measures: the *ley moratoria*, 1932; the creation of the *Banco Central de Reserva*, 1934; the creation of the *Banco Hipotecario*, 1935; and the *Ley de crédito Rural*, 1942. However, these measures mainly favored rich people. The *ley moratoria*, which extended the payment period of debts and decreased the interest, favored the rich who had debts. The *Banco Central de Reserva* remained in the power of the coffee growers. Even though the *ley de crédito rural* tried to democratize the credit, in the end, more than anyone else it affected the campesinos who could not make the payments. General Martínez distributed some land and built some houses through the *Fondo para Mejoramiento Social*, but only a few people who were members of the *Pro-Patria* party that he founded benefitted from this action.[117]

Nevertheless, by 1944 Martínez had issues with the coffee growers due to the coffee exportation taxes. Martínez's problem with the oligarchy, the despair of the people, the desire for power among the young officers, and Martínez' sympathy with Hitler and the fascists were some of the causes that precipitated the military insurrection

[116] *Historia de El Salvador*, 144.
[117] *Historia de El Salvador*, 140, 142.

of April 2, 1944.[118] Martínez was able to control the military uprising, but he could not control the people. After the military uprising, there was a general strike in which railroad workers, factory workers, public and commercial employees, and elementary school, middle school, high school, and college students participated. Even the bankers, large merchants, and coffee growers gave money to finance the strike. However, the worst thing for Martínez was that the United States stopped supporting him. The US took this decision because a police officer killed a student who was the son of a North American. Thus, Martínez had no option but to resign from the presidency.[119]

After Martínez resigned, General Andrés Ignacio Menéndez became the provisional president. He called for presidential elections. One of the candidates for the presidency was Doctor Arturo Romero, who had founded the *Partido de la Unificación Democrática* (PUD). He was known for his fight against Martínez' dictatorship.

With the end of Martínez' dictatorship, the organization and mobilization of working people became possible, and this led to the creation of the *Unión Nacional de Trabajadores* (UNT).[120] However, once again, the oligarchy opposed the organizations and political parties that advanced the interests of the people. Therefore, they sided with General Salvador Castañeda Castro and the *Partido Agrario* (Agrarian Party) to fight against the UNT and the followers of Arturo Romero.

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[118] *Historia de El Salvador*, 145.
[119] *Historia de El Salvador*, 146.
[120] *Historia de El Salvador*,144.

The oligarchy supported a military group that staged a coup on October 20, 1944. This coup brought to power Coronel Osmín Aguirre, who collaborated particularly closely with General Martínez. Many called Aguirre's presidency "*el reino del terror*" (the reign of terror). He destroyed the UNT, expelled its leaders, and started great repression against the unionized working people. For this reason, hundreds of Salvadorans had to go into exile.[121]

Under pressure from the United States (which asked Aguirre to normalize the situation), Aguirre organized a dishonest electoral process. As a result, on March 1, 1945, General Castaneda Castro was inaugurated as president. General Castaneda Castro was a faithful defender of the interests of both the oligarchy and the United States. Thus, as previous governments had done, this government also repressed popular organizations. He prohibited strikes and demonstrations.[122] Nevertheless, the people continued organizing themselves and fighting for their rights. In 1947, the *Comité de Reorganización Obrero Sindical* (CROS) was founded. Fearing the government's repression, this committee worked underground.[123]

Like many other presidents, General Castaneda Castro did not want to give up power. Therefore, he tried to extend the presidential term through constitutional reform. However, on December 14, 1948, he was overthrown. After this, the *Consejo de Gobierno Revolucionario* (Revolutionary Government Council) was installed, starting

[121] *Historia de El Salvador*, 149.
[122] *Historia de El Salvador*, 151.
[123] *Historia de El Salvado*r, 151.

what was called "*La Revolución del 48*" (The Revolution of 1948). Three members of the military and two civilians formed this Council. The people were hopeful because the Council promised they would make several reforms for the benefit of the people. At first, they seemed to be making a positive change in El Salvador, purging the public administration and the military and prosecuting and imprisoning Aguirre and Castaneda Castro. However, the people soon realized that this one was no different than the previous governments, for it also repressed the people and defended the interests of the oligarchy.[124]

This Council remained in power until September 1950. Colonel Oscar Rosario succeeded it. That same year, the Constitution of 1950 was decreed. This constitution established the government as the main promotor of national development. Since the price of coffee was very good at that time, the government introduced some public works that facilitated the development of textiles, footwear, cement, and chemical industries. Also around this time, the government allowed the deforestation of the coastal forest to plant cotton.[125]

Osorio promoted the creation of some national institutions and the establishment of laws that were intended to strengthen the economic regime. He created the following institutes: *El Instituto Salvadoreño del Seguro Social (SSS)*, *El Instituto Regulador de Abastecimiento*, *El Instituto de Vivienda Urbana (IVU)*, and *El Instituto de Colonización*

[124] *Historia de El Salvador*, 152.
[125] *Historia de El Salvador*, 153.

Rural (ICR). He created these laws: the law of minimum wage and the individual and collective hiring law. He also gave women the right to vote and legalized unionization.[126]

For this reason, the *Comité de Reorganización Obrera Sindical* (CROS) did not have to work underground anymore. This allowed them to create and maintain a labor organization with great impact. At first, the government and the unions maintained a good relationship. However, when Osorio realized that he could not control or weaken the unions by creating divisions—a strategy the powers had used before—he repressed the labor unions in March of 1951, intensifying that repression in 1952. Equipo Maíz explains, "*Muchos de sus dirigentes sindicales, estudiantes, y políticos fueron exiliados. El CROS fue proscrito y muchos de sus militantes capturados, torturados y asesinados*" (Many of the union leaders, students, and politicians were exiled. The CROS was banned and many of its leaders were captured, tortured, and killed). [127] Even under this violent repression, the labor movement continued fighting under the *Comité Pro-Defensa de los Derechos Laborales*.[128]

Another military man, José María Lemus, succeeded Osorio. Lemus governed from 1956 to 1960. Lemus came to power despite obvious electoral fraud. He supposedly obtained 94 percent of the votes. Lemus allowed the return of the exiled people and the reorganization of labor unions. The workers united nationally and created the *Confederación General de Trabajadores de El Salvador (*CGTS). On the other hand, the

[126] *Historia de El Salvador*, 154.
[127] *Historia de El Salvador*, 155.
[128] *Historia de El Salvador*, 155.

government, advised by the United States, created the *Confederación General de Sindicatos de El Salvador,* and repressed the CGTS, which was forced to work underground and joined the fight for the defeat of Lemus.[129]

In the 1960s, the *Mercado Común Centroamericano* (MERCOMUN) was established. The purpose of the *Mercado Común* was to create regional production and consumption to strengthen the industry and depend less on agro-exportation. Central American countries reduced taxes on industrial products made in the region and increased them on imported ones. They also created institutions to promote regional integration. However, this initiative also benefited businesspeople the most, especially Salvadorans and Guatemalans, as had been the case with the previous economic initiatives. Because of this, and the good prices of coffee, cotton, and sugar cane, in the 1960s El Salvador achieved the highest economic growth in its history. These were glorious years for the oligarchy, but most people in El Salvador continued to live in extreme poverty.[130]

On the advice of the US, some Central American countries created the *Consejo de Defensa Centroamericano* (CONDECA). Its founding members were El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Honduras; Costa Rica and Panama had observer status. The purpose of this alliance was to collaborate, with the help of the US, in their fight against any *guerrilla* activity.[131]

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[129] *Historia de El Salvador*, 156.
[130] *Historia de El Salvador*, 159.
[131] *Historia de El Salvador*, 159.

Lemus was defeated on November 26, 1960. A *Junta Civico Militar* (Civic-Military Council) took control of the government. The organized popular movements supported the Council, but the oligarchy and the military rejected it. This Council sought to create stability and tranquility in El Salvador, but they did not have much time to achieve it. On January 25, 1961, a *Directorio Civico-Militar* (Civic-Military Directory) overthrew the Council, and the people began experiencing great repression once again, as happened every time they fought for justice.[132]

The editors of Equipo Maíz explain that after the triumph of the Cuban revolution in 1959, "*Los Estados Unidos impulsaron un plan para contrarrestar el descontento popular y evitar que otros pueblos de América Latina siguieran el ejemplo de Cuba. Este plan se llamó Alianza para el Progreso*" (The United States promoted a plan to counter public discontent and prevent other peoples of Latin America from following Cuba's example. This plan was called the Alliance for Progress). To support the Alliance for Progress, the *Directorio Cívico-Militar* promoted some reformist measures and assured the people that "*El Salvador ha terminado la explotación del hombre por el hombre*" (El Salvador has ended the exploitation of men by men).[133]

In 1962, to continue providing help to El Salvador, the US ordered El Salvador to hold elections. However, only one political party, the *Partido de Conciliación Nacional* (PCN), and one candidate, Julio Adalberto Rivera, participated in the elections. Julio

[132] *Historia de El Salvador*, 160.
[133] *Historia de El Salvador*, 160.

Adalberto Rivera was a member of the *Directorio Cívico-Militar*. Thus, Rivera became the President of El Salvador in July 1962.[134]

Rivera made some changes that were well received among the people. For instance, he established a minimum salary for people who worked in the fields and introduced proportional representation in the Legislative Assembly; before this, the party that obtained the majority of the votes chose the legislators.

However, he also created the *Organización Democrática Nacionalista* (ORDEN) under the direct command of "*Chele*" Medrano, director of the National Guard. The ORDEN became a nightmare for the people of El Salvador. It set up a structure of control and espionage throughout the country. Many of its members were ex-soldiers or members of the ruling party. Even though most of them were poor, and they experienced the oppression of the government, they joined ORDEN because they believed the government rhetoric about the Communist threat and because of the protection and benefits it provided them.[135]

Despite the constant oppression and repression that the poor people of El Salvador continued to experience, their resilience continued gaining strength, and they continued fighting to create a more just and humane society. In 1964, the *Unión Nacional de Obreros Católicos* (UNOC) was created, which later became the *Unión de Obreros Cristianos* and worked on the creation of the *Federación Cristiana de Campesinos*

[134] *Historia de El Salvador*, 157.
[135] *Historia de El Salvador*, 161–62.

Salvadoreños (FECCAS).[136] In 1965, the *Federación Unitaria Sindical de El Salvador* (FUSS) was born. The FUSS did a good job organizing the working people. In April 1967, FUSS organized the first factory strike, known as the "*Histórica Huelga de ACEROS, S.A.*"[137]

In the presidential elections of February 1967, more political parties participated: *Partido de Conciliación Nacional* (PCN), *Partido Demócrata Cristiano* (PDC), and *Partido Acción Renovadora* (PAR). Colonel Fidel Sanchez Hernández, from the *Partido de Conciliación Nacional*, was elected President of El Salvador.[138] Hernández faced various very serious problems during his presidency. These included: teachers' strikes organized by the *Asociación Nacional de Educadores Salvadoreños* (ANDES) in 1968, the MERCOMUN was in crisis, and, most serious of all, the war against Honduras.[139]

The main reasons for the war between El Salvador and Honduras were:

> 1) The Honduran bourgeoisie was affected by Salvadoran imports. The Honduran people were consuming more Salvadoran products than Honduran products.
> 2) The Honduran peasants were demanding agrarian reform. Since approximately 300,000 Salvadorans were living in Honduras and many of them were occupying Honduran land "illegally," the landowners, to avoid sharing their land with the peasants, proposed to the government to take the land from the Salvadoran people.
> 3) They also had a border conflict because they did not have a clear border between the two countries.[140]

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[136] *Historia de El Salvador*, 162.
[137] *Historia de El Salvador*, 163.
[138] *Historia de El Salvador*, 163.
[139] *Historia de El Salvador*, 164.
[140] *Historia de El Salvador*, 164.

The war between El Salvador and Honduras started on June 14, 1969. This war was known as "*las cien horas*" (the one hundred hours). It was also called "*la guerra de el fútbol*" (the war of soccer) because they took as their pretext for the war the soccer game that the national teams of Honduras and El Salvador played for the qualifying rounds for the 1970 World Cup in Mexico.[141] However, as the Salvadoran writer Jacinta Escudos explains, "*las causas reales de la guerra tenían que ver con los intereses hegemónicos de los grandes terratenientes de ambos países"*[142] (the real causes of the war had to do with the hegemonic interests of the powerful landowners from both countries). Nevertheless, as always, the ones who suffered the most were the poor people. Escudos describes the oppression experienced by the Salvadoran people who migrated to Honduras seeking the opportunities they did not have in their own country:

> *Las tensiones políticas y comerciales entre ambos países culminaron con el rompimiento de las relaciones diplomáticas a finales de junio. Nuestros compatriotas comenzaron a ser expulsados de sus casas, a ser amenazados y asesinados. Un grupo denominado La Mancha Brava se encargaba de las ejecuciones, mientras un amenazante ambiente anti salvadoreño iba en aumento. Volantes y campos pagados en prensa escrita describían a nuestros connacionales como "ladrones, borrachos, vividores, maleantes y rufianes." La OEA, que comenzó a mediar para evitar el conflicto, era catalogada de "Organismo Encubridor de Agresores."*
>
> *Muchos salvadoreños fueron capturados y mantenidos en lo que la prensa de nuestro país describió como auténticos campos de concentración. Otros comenzaron a retornar, muchos de ellos con apenas la ropa que traían puesta, dejando atrás todas sus pertenencias a merced del saqueo y la expropiación… Muchos de quienes retornaban venían con enfermedades como hepatitis y tifoidea, debido a las condiciones de*

[141] *Historia de El Salvador*, 165.

[142] Jacinta Escudos, "La sombra de una guerra," *Séptimo Sentido* (blog), July 14, 2019, https://7s.laprensagrafica.com/la-sombra-de-una-guerra/.

> *hacinamiento e insalubridad en las que permanecieron detenidos en Honduras.*[143]
>
> The political and commercial tensions between the two countries culminated in the breakdown of diplomatic relations at the end of June. Our compatriots began to be expelled from their homes, threatened, and killed. A group called *La Mancha Brava* was in charge of the executions while a threatening anti-Salvadoran atmosphere grew. Flyers and ads paid for in the written press described our compatriots as "thieves, drunks, lurkers, thugs, and ruffians." The OAS, which began to mediate to help solve the conflict, was classified as a "Concealing Organism for Aggressors."
>
> Many Salvadorans were captured and held in what the press in our country described as authentic concentration camps. Others began to return, many of them owning only the clothes on their backs, having left all their belongings behind at the mercy of looting and expropriation… Many of those who returned brought diseases such as hepatitis and typhoid due to the overcrowded and unsanitary conditions in which they were detained in Honduras.

The Salvadoran government was not ready to receive the more than 95,000 persons deported from Honduras who were in a desperate situation.[144]

On June 14, 1969, the Salvadoran air force bombed the airports of *Toncontín, Pedro Sula,* and *Santa Rosa.* Since El Salvador did not have enough military aircrafts, they also used civil airplanes that belonged to rich Salvadorans. The Honduran air force attacked the *Refineria de Acajutla* and *El Puerto de la Unión*. [145] Equipo Maíz explains that "*El ejército Salvadoreño invadió Honduras y, para variar, cometió muchos abusos en contra de la población civil hondureña, con el pretexto de "vengar" los maltratos*

[143] Escudos, "La sombra de una guerra."
[144] Escudos, "La sombra de una guerra."
[145] *Historia de El Salvador*, 165.

hechos a la población salvadoreña por la "Mancha Brava" de Honduras" (The Salvadoran army invaded Honduras and, as usual, committed many abuses against the Honduran civilian population, under the pretext of "avenging" the mistreatment of the Salvadoran population by the "*Mancha Brava*" of Honduras).[146]

The *Mercado Común Centroamericano* was seriously affected because Honduras stopped importing Salvadoran products. Around the same time, El Salvador had conflicts with Nicaragua and Costa Rica; therefore, the Salvadoran economy declined significantly. Most important, the war between Honduras and El Salvador had repercussions that led to the civil war in El Salvador.[147] Escudo notes,

> *El acumulado de las demandas por mejores niveles de vida y la eventual represión por parte del Gobierno contra quienes organizaban o participaban en las protestas públicas llevó a la creación de movimientos armados, que culminarían en las acciones que llevaron a la guerra civil de los ochenta.*
>
> *Terminada la guerra El Salvador-Honduras, los ejércitos de la región renovaron su armamento y equipo, algo que al Gobierno de Estados Unidos vio con buenos ojos. Se temía la influencia que podría tener el régimen de Fidel Castro en Cuba sobre los incipientes movimientos insurgentes centroamericanos. Sin saberlo, esa modernización de equipo y técnica militar resultarían útiles para las guerras internas que se desarrollarían en varios países centroamericanos*.[148]
>
> The accumulated demands for better living conditions and the eventual repression by the government against those who organized or participated in public protests led to the creation of armed movements, which would culminate in the actions that led to the civil war of the 1980s.
>
> After the El Salvador-Honduras war ended, the region's armies restocked their weapons and equipment, something that the United States government approved. They feared the influence that the Fidel Castro

[146] *Historia de El Salvador*, 166.
[147] Escudos, "La sombra de una guerra."
[148] Escudos, "La sombra de una guerra."

> regime in Cuba could have on the developing Central American insurgent movements. Without knowing it, this modernization of military equipment and techniques would be useful for the internal wars that would develop in several Central American countries.

The people of El Salvador were tired of living in extreme poverty and of being constantly subjected to injustices and repression. As historians Knut Walter and Philip J. Williams note, by this time the extreme military control of the rural areas of El Salvador, which had been established after the insurrection of 1932, began to weaken. Walter and Williams explain that this happened because the rural areas had changed, but not the army.

> La gente que vivía y trabajaba en las áreas rurales (los campesinos, los ocupantes ilegales, y los trabajadores migrantes) estaba sujeta a una miseria creciente, puesto que la tierra y las oportunidades de trabajo se volvieron más escasas. Más aún, las poblaciones rurales se volvieron más conscientes de su situación y estaban más dedicadas a transformarla actuando directamente. El ejército, en cambio, continuó considerando a la población rural en los mismos términos que en las décadas de los cuarenta y cincuenta: una masa de campesinos ingenuos y, o atemorizados, algunos de los cuales podían ser moldeados como soldados y reservistas completamente obedientes y, de esta manera, podrían controlar al resto.[149]
>
> People who lived and worked in rural areas (peasants, squatters, and migrant workers) experienced increasing misery as land and job opportunities became scarcer. Furthermore, rural populations became more aware of their situation and were more dedicated to transforming it by acting directly. The army, by contrast, continued to view the rural population in the same terms as in the 1940s and 1950s: a mass of frightened indigenous peasants, some of whom could be molded into completely obedient soldiers and reservists and who, in this way, could control the rest.

[149] Rivera Orellana, *El Salvador: Historia Mínima*, 81–82.

However, many people from villages, towns, and cities, tired of the misery and repression in which they lived, joined the *guerrilla* organizations in the 1970s, which caused a rapid growth in these organizations. The strongest *guerrilla* organizations at that time were: *Fuerzas Populares de Liberación* (FPL) launched in 1970, *Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo* (ERP) launched in 1972, *Fuerzas Armadas de la Resistencia Nacional* (FARN) begun in 1975, *Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores Centroamericanos* (PRTC) begun in 1976, and *Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación* (FAL-PCS) begun in 1979. Even though all the *guerrilla* organizations represented the political left, they had ideological differences that complicated the development of *la lucha*.[150]

In January 1970, El Salvador held a national agrarian reform congress. This congress was called by Dr. Juan Gregorio Guardado, president of the legislative assembly. Among the people attending this congress were representatives of the government, representatives of the *Universidad Nacional*, the *Universidad Centro Americana José Simeón Cañas*, the Catholic Church, the *Federación Unitaria de los Sindicatos Salvadoreños* (FUSS), and the *Asociación Nacional de la Empresa Privada* (ANEP). Yet the ones who cared the most about agrarian reform were not invited: the peasants.[151]

After the *Congreso Nacional de Reforma Agraría*, the priest José Inocencio "Chencho" Alas, who represented the Catholic church in the *Congreso*, was kidnapped

[150] *Historia de El Salvador*, 168.
[151] *Historia de El Salvador*, 167.

and tortured.[152] Father Chencho was one of about fifty priests who founded Christian Base Communities in El Salvador and put into practice the teachings of Medellín.[153] The people and the church at that time had no idea that this was only the beginning of the persecution against the religious leaders who sided with the poor, marginalized, and oppressed people.

In 1972, El Salvador held elections and Napoleón Duarte and Guillermo Ungo, candidates of the *Union Nacional Opositora* (UNO), won the elections. The UNO was created in 1971 by an alliance between the *Partido Demócrata Cristiano* (PDC), *Movimiento Nacional Revolucionario* (MNR), and the *Unión Democrática Nacionalista* (UDN). However, the military and the oligarchy committed fraud and inaugurated Colonel Arturo Armando Molina as the president of El Salvador.[154]

At that time, the global economy was in crisis, petroleum had become extremely expensive, and the international companies did not have "enough profits" and sought cheap labor. Therefore, as an economic measure, Molina created what is known as the "*zonas francas*." The *zonas francas* promoted the entry of large international companies and factories to El Salvador by creating tax-free zones. Thus, the *zonas francas* increased the exploitation of the factory workers, who received a meager salary for long days of work, all while ensuring the profits of multinationals.

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[152] *Historia de El Salvador*, 172.

[153] *El Cambio de Mons Oscar Romero, Profeta y Mártir*, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YPYrrtR-gFo.

[154] *Historia de El Salvador*, 169.

In addition, the government prohibited the creation of labor unions in the companies and factories of the *zona franca*.[155] The huge multi-national corporations (many of which were from the US), existed simply to take advantage of the local resources El Salvador offered, while only peripherally responding to the needs of the people. As Martín-Baró notes, "Neither wage rates, hiring and firing policies, production quotas, nor assembly line changes are designed to meet the needs of the country or region where they operate; on the contrary, they reflect the internal demands of their own global networks."[156] They did not seek to respond to the needs of the population; rather, they promoted and ensured the favorable development of the companies' objectives—chiefly profit.[157]

Colonel Molina continued to press for agrarian reform. Some of the reasons why he wanted agrarian reform were:

1) To counteract the MERCOMUN crisis by diversifying the economy and expanding the domestic market to help the industrialists and merchants sell their products.

2) To solve the problem of Salvadorans expelled from Honduras.

3) To gain votes for the presidential elections of 1977.

4) To stop the popular organizations that organized in the *Bloque Popular Revolucionario* (BPR) and the *Frente de Acción Popular Unificado*

[155] *Historia de El Salvador*, 170.
[156] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 94.
[157] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 94.

(FAPU) from fighting for the right to own land and to improve their living conditions.[158]

In June 1976, President Molina announced the agrarian reforms and assured the people that he would make it happen. However, the oligarchy, organized through the *Frente de Agricultores de la Región Oriental* (FARO) and the *Asociación Nacional de la Empresa Privada* (ANEP), opposed the agrarian reform.[159] In October 1976, a new decree of the Legislative Assembly practically canceled the project. As Martín-Baró explains, the cancelation of the agrarian reform project was followed by a period of violent repression, especially in the peasant areas. The oligarchy wanted to erase the expectations and illusions awakened in certain peasant groups that the country could change one day. Thus, the Armed Forces, who had publicly compromised their honor and prestige in implementing the agrarian reform project, implemented a different project: massive repression of the peasants.[160]

As demonstrated in this chapter, the political repression, directed mainly against laborers and peasants, was not something new in El Salvador. Since 1932, the people of El Salvador have paid "with their blood the quota of violence necessary to maintain an almost feudal system of exploitation."[161] However, for the first time in the history of El

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[158] *Historia de El Salvador*, 171.

[159] *Historia de El Salvador*, 172.

[160] Ignacio Martín-Baró, "Monseñor: Una voz para un pueblo pisoteado," Colección Digital Ignacio Martín-Baró, 1980, 3, file:///Users/almaruiz/Zotero/storage/9G67SHLM/monsenor-una-voz-para-un-pueblo-pisoteado.html.

[161] Martín-Baró, "Monseñor: Una voz para un pueblo pisoteado," 3.

Salvador, the repression included and even took as its primary objective the Catholic Church.[162]

The Persecution of Catholic Church

Once again, some priests, such as Rutilio Grande and Archbishop Oscar Romero, who reproached the oppression of the poor people of El Salvador, confronted the government, the oligarchy, and even the authorities of the Catholic Church. They also helped the people organize to fight for their liberation, to "fight" for justice and equity.

Though the changes in the Catholic Church in El Salvador and the rest of Latin America began with Vatican II and were concretized at the episcopal meeting held in Medellín in 1968,[163] Equipo Maíz explains that by 1977 many priests and nuns, inspired by the theology of liberation, were no longer ignoring the suffering and exploitation of the poor people. Instead, these priests and nuns accompanied the poor people in their just fight to achieve better living conditions. Their ministry was committed to the people. These religious leaders saw all that the people could be but had been kept from becoming by the historical conditions.[164]

In the *Comunidades Eclesiales de Base* (Christian base communities, small groups led by lay people who worked to improve their local communities and establish a

[162] Martín-Baró, "Monseñor: Una voz para un pueblo pisoteado," 3.
[163] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 139.
[164] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 23. Martín-Baró believed that a liberatory psychology would be constructed from a praxis that is committed to the people, that sees all they could be but have been kept by historical conditions from becoming. I have adapted this to the ministry of the religious leaders who adopted the teachings of Vatican II and Medellín because I believe they practiced a "liberatory ministry."

more just society), the people read and interpreted the Bible from their perspective of poor, marginalized, and oppressed people. The biblical teachings illumined their concrete circumstances and vice versa.[165] Thus, the rural and urban working-class sectors most closely tied to the church no longer believed that their miserable oppressed situation was the will of God or that God tolerated it. Instead, as Martín-Baró explains, they understood that "their faith in God should guide them toward the construction of a more just and humane society."[166]

This new understanding of God and scripture did not incite the people to revolution, as the oligarchy and the more conservative church leaders argued, but it did help them understand "that there is no justification for passive acceptance of oppression, and it offered them a religious basis for their search for profound social change."[167] In addition, the Christian base communities offered the poorest communities "an organizational model that could be easily translated into the social or even the political sphere."[168]

However, the oligarchy of El Salvador and the governments from Latin America and the U.S. saw this change as a potential danger. In this movement within the Catholic Church and some Protestant churches, they saw the ghost of communism. Therefore, the most progressive sectors of the Catholic Church in Latin America were perceived as a threat to the national security of the established regimes and were targeted

[165] *Historia de El Salvador*, 169.
[166] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 140.
[167] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 140.
[168] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 140.

with systematic persecution.[169] The campaign of persecution against the Church was directed against priests, religious congregations, institutions, or organizations linked to the Church and, certainly, against all lay people engaged in ecclesiastical work, very specifically against peasants who were catechists and preachers of the word.[170]

Before the civil war started, the first priest sacrificed to the gods of power and money was Jesuit priest Rutilio Grande, a close friend of Archbishop Oscar Romero. Rutilio Grande fully understood the suffering of the poor and oppressed people of El Salvador because he was one of them. Grande's mission in the last years of his life was to defend the faith and promote justice.[171] He fought for a future reality that would manifest the kingdom of God. This is the hope he shared with the people he served. However, the more people organized themselves, the more oppression and repression they, and those who helped them, experienced. Thus, their soul wounds were only getting deeper and deeper.

On February 3, 1977, Grande's dear friend Monsignor Oscar Arnulfo Romero y Galdámez was appointed Archbishop of San Salvador. Romero was born on August 15, 1917, in Ciudad Barrios, Departamento de San Miguel (El Salvador). When Romero was thirteen years old, he joined the seminary of San Miguel, El Salvador. Since he was one of the best students, in 1937, the bishop of San Miguel sent him and one of his classmates to study in Rome. Romero stayed in Rome from 1937 to 1943, where he studied at the

[169] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 140.
[170] Martín-Baró, "Monseñor: Una voz para un pueblo pisoteado," 4.
[171] Cardenal, *Historia de una Esperanza*, 575.

Gregorian University, led by the Jesuits. Romero's education in Rome was a decisive element in his formation, first as a seminarian and later as a priest and bishop. One of his main concerns in ministry was to be with the people and provide them with the pastoral care they needed.[172]

On February 20, 1977, El Salvador held presidential elections. The candidate from the UNO won the elections, but again the military and the oligarchy stole the elections and inaugurated General Carlos Humberto Romero as president. The UNO summoned the people to *Plaza Libertad* to claim the presidency, and the people took over the *Plaza Libertad* for a week. On the tragic morning of February 28, the army invaded the *plaza* and massacred the people.[173]

On March 12, 1977, a death squad killed Rutilio Grande and his sacristan Manuel Solorzano and young assistant Nelson Lemus. As Martín-Baró notes, "*El asesinato del P. Grande representaba algo más que la eliminación de un sacerdote; representaba el ataque mediante la violencia asesina a una línea pastoral, a la opción preferencial de la Iglesia católica por los pobres, a la identificación de sacerdotes y religiosos con los sufrimientos y esperanzas del pueblo de Dios*"[174] (The assassination of Fr. Grande represented something more than the elimination of a priest; represented the attack through deadly violence on a pastoral line, on the preferential option of the Catholic Church for the poor, on the identification of priests and religious leaders with the

[172] Roberto Morozzo della Rocca, *Oscar Romero: La Biografía* (San Salvador: UCA editores, 2015), 16–17.

[173] *Historia de El Salvador*, 170.

[174] Martín-Baró, "Monseñor: Una voz para un pueblo pisoteado," 6.

sufferings and hopes of the people of God). The government and the oligarchy were sending a clear message: nothing and no one was going to mess with their wealth, and those who tried would become their offerings to the gods of power and money.

Archbishop Romero was facing a significant challenge in El Salvador, the poor people of El Salvador were being crucified by economic exploitation, social oppression, and state repression.[175] Acts of social injustice and violence threatened the identity of the people of El Salvador as a community and society. They were exposed to constant violence, "the violence of the oligarchy against the peasants, the violence of the armed forces against the church that defended the poor, and even the violence of the revolutionary *guerrilla*."[176]

In April, just two months after Romero was appointed Archbishop of San Salvador, a small group of *guerrilleros* members of the *Fuerzas Populares de Liberación* (FPL) kidnapped Mauricio Borgonovo, the Minister of External Relations of El Salvador. In exchange for the life of Borgonovo, the FPL asked for the release of thirty-seven political prisoners. Despite Romero's intervention, they did not reach an agreement, and Borgonovo's body was found lifeless on May 10, 1977. The next day, the priest Alfonso Navarro and his companion Luisito Torres were assassinated out of revenge for Borgonovo's death. This act of cowardice demonstrated that the right blamed the Catholic Church leaders of El Salvador, especially those who sought justice for the poor,

[175] Cardenal, "Archbishop Romero Memorial Lecture: Rutilio, Romero and Pope Francies," 2.

[176] Vicenzo Paglia, "El Amor Es Más Fuerte Que La Muerte," La Universidad: Órgano científico-sociocultural de la universidad de El Salvador, Número Especial Dedicado a Monseñor Romero, 2018, 21–27.

marginalized, and oppressed, for this revolutionary violence.[177] A week later, Aguilares, Grande's beloved community, was occupied by the army. They killed at least fifty people and arrested hundreds.[178]

As in most countries, poor women suffered the greatest oppression. María, an activist member of the CO-MADRES (Committee of Mothers and Relatives of the Political Prisoners, Disappeared, and Assassinated of El Salvador "Monseñor Romero") founded in 1977, said in an interview with Lynn Stephen, published in Stephen's book *Women and Social Movements in Latin America: Power from Below*,

> Here in El Salvador we are exploited by the government. They behave as if they are our bosses. And women have been the most exploited. Because even when a woman goes to work in the countryside, she is paid less than a man for the same work.[179]

In addition, during that time, poor women of all ages were exposed to violent events such as rape. In fact, rape was a well-documented method of terrorizing and torturing women "to maintaining national security." Women perceived as "subversive" became sexual objects of the state, regardless of their age.[180] María continues, saying, "We have to make people understand how men of power in El Salvador have turned into beasts who don't respect women of any age."[181]

Many men who were considered subversive were victims of rape too. The Salvadoran army, National Police, National Guard, and Treasury Police have all been

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[177] Douglas Marcouiller and Jon Sobrino, *El Sentir con la Iglesia de Monseñor Romero*, 2nd ed. (San Salvador: UCA editores, 2012), 34.
[178] Marcouiller and Sobrino, *El Sentir con la Iglesia*, 34.
[179] Stephen, *Women and Social Movements*, 51.
[180] Stephen, *Women and Social Movements*, 37.
[181] Stephen, *Women and Social Movements*, 46.

implicated in using rape as a systematic method of torture of both women and men.[182] Thus, they punished prisoners uniformly with rape, sexual brutality, and often death.

As Ignacio Martín-Baró notes, during the years Romero was Archbishop of San Salvador, the marginalized and oppressed people were experiencing a "lack of voice, disunity, and an agonizing oppression. They were not mute, but they were forced to be silent."[183]

Many people responsible for this unbearable oppression and repression attended mass at the Cathedral of San Salvador, where Romero presided over mass every Sunday. Thus, those who called themselves faithful Christians were the same people who were exploiting and oppressing the poor people of El Salvador. As Jesuit priest Rodolfo Cardenal notes, "They expected their pastors to keep the people silent, passive, and resigned to their faith."[184] They wanted the religious leaders to teach the people that the suffering they experienced in this life was going to be greatly rewarded in the life to come and that nothing needed to change now. However, Romero did not accept this traditional role because he knew that the Gospel does not tolerate oppression. [185] He publicly proclaimed God's preferential option for the poor. As Romero himself admitted in a letter to Cardenal Baggio, prefect of the Congregation of Bishops, on May 21, 1978, he could not remain quiet in the face of so much violence. Romero wrote,

> *Me tocó, en los primeros meses de pastor de esta arquidiócesis, asistir, impotente, al asesinato de dos sacerdotes, a la expulsión y/o exilio de casi otros veinte, a la profanación de la Sagrada Eucaristia en la ocupación*

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[182] Stephen, *Women and Social Movement*, 46.
[183] Martín-Baró, "El Liderazgo de Monseñor Romero: Un Análisis Psicososial," 161.
[184] Cardenal, "Archbishop Romero Memorial Lecture: Rutilio, Romero and Pope Francies," 4.
[185] Cardenal, "Archbishop Romero Trust: Archbishop Romero Memorial Lecture," 4.

> *militar de toda una zona rural (Agulares-El Paisnal) y de su iglesia y casa parroquial y, sobre todo, al hostigamiento, encarcelamiento, tortura, desaparición y asesinato de campesinos salvadoreños pobres de mi arquidiócesis, en quienes repetidamente se crucificaba al Señor Jesucristo (Lumen Gentium, 8)…Ante esta iniquidad, tanto más escandalosa por suceder en un país cuyos gobernantes se precian de católicos, no podía callar.*[186]
>
> In my first months as pastor of this archdiocese, I witnessed impotently the assassinations of two priests, the expulsion and/or exile of nearly twenty more, the profanation of the Blessed Sacrament in the military occupation of an entire rural zone (Aguilares-El Paisnal), including its church and parish house, and above all the harassment, jailing, torture, disappearances, and murder of poor Salvadoran peasants from my archdiocese, in whom the Lord Jesus Christ was repeatedly crucified (*Lumen Gentium*, 8)…Confronted with this iniquity, all the more scandalous for occurring in a country whose governors pride themselves on being Catholic, I could not be silent.

Even though Romero did not see himself as politician and did not intend to be political in his teaching and preaching, his behavior was political because it played "a role in the social confrontation of class and group interests."[187]

In July 1977, El Salvador had another fraudulent presidential election in which General Carlos Humberto Romero was "elected" as the president of El Salvador. President Romero created the plan known as "*Bienestar para todos*." This plan consisted of: 1) the creation of the "*Ley para la Defensa y Garantía del Orden Público*," which gave freedom to the security forces, the army, and ORDEN to use violence to "maintain the public order;" 2) increased repression, murders, imprisonments, torture, and

[186] Marcouiller and Sobrino, *El Sentir con la Iglesia*, 34.
[187] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 55.

disappearances; 3) strengthening ORDER and the *Escuadrones de la Muerte*, which massacred the people.[188]

Nevertheless, the people from El Salvador were amazingly resilient. The more repression the people experienced from the government and the oligarchy, the more they organized to fight for justice. The peasants took over the land to demand the right to own the land. The industrial workers took over the factories to demand higher wages and better working conditions. The people without homes marched in the streets demanding land to build houses. Market vendors, teachers, students, women, and other marginalized and oppressed groups organized to fight for their rights. [189] However, as had happened before, the government responded by killing, arresting, torturing, and disappearing the people by creating more individual and communal traumatic wounds.

After centuries of experiencing severe oppression, the people realized that it was not enough to fight for better salaries, a piece of land, and other rights. They realized that El Salvador really needed a new government, a government that came from the poor people and that cared about the poor people. What was needed was what Monsignor Romero said once, "*Hay que cambiar de raíz todo el systema*"[190] (we need to change the system from its roots). For Romero, the worst sin of the system was its strategy to divide the poor people of El Salvador by creating a confrontation among peasants, for the members of the army and death squads came chiefly from the peasantry. In his homily of

[188] *Historia de El Salvador*, 172.
[189] Equipo Maíz, *Historia de El Salvador*, 173–74.
[190] Equipo Maiz, "Hay que cambiar de raíz todo el sistema," March 24, 2008, https://1library.co/document/zg9jvn6q-hay-que-cambiar-de-ra%C3%ADz-todo-el-sistema.html.

April 16, 1978, Romero says, "*Digo yo ¡qué satánico ha tenido que ser este sistema que ha logrado aprovechar el hambre de los hombres, ganarse el pan aunque sea persiguiendo, enemistándose, dividiéndose, cuando pertenecen a la misma pobreza!"*[191] (I say how satanic this system must have been that has managed to take advantage of the hunger of men, [who] earn their bread even if it is by persecuting, antagonizing, dividing, when they belong to the same poverty!). Thus, Romero acknowledged that the members of the security forces were not entirely responsible for the violent acts that they committed against their own people but that those who sent them and took advantage of their hunger to manipulate them were. He said in his homily of November 4, 1979, "*El mal existe y a quienes hay que juzgar y castigar es a los altos jefes que han podrido las mentes de esos hombres*"[192] (Evil exists and those who must be judged and punished are the powerful bosses who have rotted the minds of these men).

With the intention "to change the system from its roots," in August 1979 the *Foro Popular* was created, which was formed by PDC, UDN, MNR, along with some organizations and unions. As Equipo Maiz describes, "*El Foro Popular exigía la formación de un gobierno democrático, la disolución de los escuadrones de la muerte y medidas económicas en favor de la gente pobre*" (The *Foro Popular* demanded the formation of a democratic government, the dissolution of the death squads and economic

[191] "ART_Homilies_Vol2_82_TheGoodShepherd.Pdf," accessed November 23, 2021, http://www.romerotrust.org.uk/sites/default/files/homilies/ART_Homilies_Vol2_82_TheGoodShepherd.pdf.

[192] "1979 11 04 En La Iglesia Se Prolonga La Liberacion Sacerdotal de Cristo.Pdf," accessed November 23, 2021, http://www.romerotrust.org.uk/sites/default/files/homilies/1979%2011%2004%20En%20la%20Iglesia%20se%20prolonga%20la%20liberacion%20sacerdotal%20de%20Cristo.pdf.

measures in favor of the poor people).[193] However, once again, the government did not listen to them.

On October 15, 1979, the military youth, led by Colonels Adolfo Arnoldo Majano Ramos and Jaime Abdul Gutiérrez Avendaño, staged a coup d'état against General Romero, and they formed the *Junta Revolucionaria de Gobierno*. This *Junta* ruled El Salvador until March 2, 1980. During the time that the *Junta* was in power, the repression against the people of El Salvador continued. Therefore, the civilians who were members of the *Junta* resigned.

Despite the increase in killings, disappearances, torture, and imprisonments, the people continued fighting for their rights. On January 11, 1980, they created the *Coordinadora Revolucionaria de Masas* (CRM), which was formed by *Bloque Popular Revolucionario* (BPR), *Frente de Acción Popular Unificado* (FAPU), *Ligas Populares 28 de febrero* (LP-28), *Movimiento de Libración Popular* (MLP) y *Unión Democrática Nacionalista* (UDN). On January 22, 1980, the CRM organized the biggest protest in the history of El Salvador. Like the other protests, this one was also violently suppressed.[194]

On March 6, 1980, the agrarian reform was decreed, which affected properties over 500 hectares in size. In addition, the government nationalized banks and international trade. Great repression against the people accompanied these reforms. The murders, disappearances, torture, and massacres continued. Many peasants fled the terror

[193] Equipo Maíz, *Historia de El Salvador*, 175.
[194] *Historia de EL Salvador*, 179.

caused by the army's and the death squads' invasions of their villages and sought refuge in the cities and in other countries, such as Honduras and the United States.[195]

During the three years that Romero served as the Archbishop of San Salvador, he never stopped advocating for the welfare and rights of the poor, marginalized, and oppressed. However, on March 24, 1980, another tragedy affected the people of El Salvador: their beloved pastor and most fervent advocate, Monsignor Romero, was killed by a death squad led by Major Roberto D'Aubuisson, founder of the political party *Alianza Republicana Nacionalista* (ARENA).[196] A bullet pierced Romero's body when he was celebrating mass and was preparing to present the offerings of bread and wine before the altar. Now his blood, like the blood of many others whose lives had also been sacrificed as offerings to the gods of power and money, ran through the beautiful and violated land of El Salvador.

After Romero's death, the oppression and repression against the poor people worsened. Their pastor had been killed, but the people continued resisting injustice knowing that they were not alone: even in death, they felt that Romero continued resisting with them. His prophetic and encouraging message stayed alive through his homilies and pastoral letters.

El Salvador was officially in a state of civil war from January 1981 to January 1992. Martín-Baró and others argue that because "of the government's failure to smash the rebel movement by exclusively military means, the Salvadoran armed forces—

[195] *Historia de El Salvador*, 178.
[196] *Historia de El Salvador*, 180.

financed, trained, and directed by the United States—have applied a model known as 'low-intensity conflict.'"[197] Thus, the civil war of El Salvador was a sociopolitical rather than a military war. Though by force, it sought to win over "the 'hearts and minds' of the people who generate, feed, and support the insurgency."[198] This strategy included,

> Propaganda campaigns, the open or clandestine transmission of news, rumors, and interpretive schemata; and civic-military actions that meet the material needs of the populace or change images either of the enemy or of one's own forces. These strategies are accompanied by threats and systematic acts of harassment and torture that demonstrate the futility and danger of supporting the resistance…In order to make people feel insecure, psychological warfare tries to penetrate their primary frame of reference—their basic beliefs, their most precious values, and their common sense.[199]

Whether through physical or psychological violence, during the civil war, El Salvador experienced the most violent and traumatic time in its history.[200] As Demetria Martínez describes in her novel *Mother Tongue*, "War is a god that feasts on body parts."[201] In El Salvador, war fed on the body parts of men, women, youth, and children who were raped, mutilated, and killed. Moreover, as ever, the people who were most affected by the war were the poor. Martín-Baró explains,

> Military conscription is discriminatory and recruits heavily from the humblest sectors, and therefore the great majority of those who die on the battlefields, day after day, are the poor. The poorest sectors, especially the campesinos, are also the ones who suffer the war's direct impact, through the destruction of their homes and crops, just as it is they who are most affected by the machinery of repression, by the work of the 'death squads' and military operations of all types. And, once again, the poorest sectors

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[197] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 138.
[198] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 138.
[199] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 139.
[200] Rivera Orellana, *El Salvador: Historia Mínima*, 89.
[201] Demetria Martínez, *Mother Tongue* (New York: One World, 1996), 161.

> are the ones who are most brutalized by the increase in the cost of living, by rising unemployment and declining health care—damage added to a socioeconomic situation that is already very serious.[202]

The government, the oligarchy, the armed forces, and the death squads fed the bodies of the poor people of El Salvador to the god of war as they pleased. The two best-known massacres during the war are the massacre of the Sumpul River in Chalatenango in May 1980 and the massacre of El Mozote in Morazán in December 1981.

The war also had harmful effects on the mental health of the Salvadoran people. According to Martín-Baró, undermining social relations was the worst of the effects. Martín-Baró explains,

> If the foundation for a people's mental health lies in the existence of humanizing relationships, of collective ties within which and through which the personal humanity of each individual is acknowledged and in which no one's reality is denied, then the building of a new society, or at least a better and more just society, is not only an economic and political problem; it is also essentially a mental health problem.[203]

In fact, collective trauma can be one of the "normal" consequences of a social system based on social relations of exploitation and dehumanizing oppression.[204] Exploitation, oppression, and dehumanization corrode the roots of human relations, putting the mental health of the people and the historical viability of the country in danger.[205] On the other hand, the land reform and the establishment of a just economic

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[202] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 116.
[203] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 120.
[204] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 125.
[205] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 112,115.

system, and society in general, is essential for the physical, spiritual, and mental well-being of the people.

Martín-Baró was especially concerned about the traumatic wound's mental health consequences that often reveal themselves only in the long term. He feared that those that were likely to be most affected by this were the children of war, whose identities and life's horizons were constructed in the fabric of broken social relations.[206] History has proved him right. For decades after the civil war, El Salvador continues experiencing great violence caused by the government and armed forces that continue violating people's human rights and the various gangs that continue killing and spreading terror in El Salvador. The "children of war" did what they learned in a society that was dominated by terror and violence.

However, in El Salvador, the "roots of human relations" were already damaged before the civil war. In other words, the blood shed during the Salvadoran civil war came from the accumulated open soul wounds, the unhealed historical trauma passed down from generation to generation.

Conclusion

As described in chapter one, if trauma is not addressed and dealt with in previous generations, it must be dealt with in subsequent generations. Trauma's effects and consequences are passed down intergenerationally, and it is cumulative. For this reason,

[206] *Martín-Baró, Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 118.

"unresolved trauma becomes more severe each time it is passed on to a subsequent generation."[207] The Salvadoran people have experienced collective trauma that has been passed down from generation to generation.

This traumatic wound is rooted "in the distortions of social relations and the disruptions of community life that are the products of an oppressive, terror-ridden society."[208] Martín-Baró identifies three salient trends that, according to him, best define the reality of El Salvador, and all Latin America, in the 1980s: "1) the unequal division of labor, 2) massive unemployment and marginalization, [and] 3) the dynamic of exploitation and repression."[209] Nevertheless, as Martín-Baró points out, the people of El Salvador have tremendous faith in the human capacity to change the world, and hope for a tomorrow that is violently and repeatedly denied them.[210] This faith and hope strengthened their resilience and helped them to continue fighting for justice. Because they had faith and hope, they believed in the message they constantly heard in the *comunidades de base* and the homilies of priests like Grande and Romero that a future of peace and justice was possible for El Salvador. They learned that the poor, marginalized, and oppressed people could benefit from this future of peace and justice and, more importantly, help bring it about.

Some of them participated in the fight for justice from within El Salvador, like the *Co-Madres* who continued denouncing the crimes and looking for their loved ones who

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[207] Duran, *Healing the Soul Wound*, 18.
[208] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, x.
[209] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 86.
[210] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 31.

had been disappeared, even when they themselves were arrested and tortured by the armed forces; like the campesinos who returned from exile to repopulate the villages that had been destroyed; like the women and men who continued working in the human rights offices and being leaders of labor unions and student organizations even though their lives were in danger; and like the psychologist and physicians who clandestinely attended to the tortured people although it was strictly forbidden to do so. Others continued with the fight for justice from outside El Salvador, like the many refugees who fled to the United States "to live below the poverty line in urban *barrios*, but from their meager incomes continued to support their relatives at home."[211] Even though they themselves were wounded, they all contributed in different ways to the construction of a better life for the people of El Salvador. Thus, the Salvadoran people are people of many virtues. As Martín-Baró notes, "These virtues are alive in the popular traditions, in popular religious practices, in those social structures which have allowed the Salvadoran people to survive through history in conditions of inhuman oppression and repression."[212] In other words, these virtues enabled them to keep alive faith in their destiny and hope for their future, in spite the great suffering and communal trauma they experienced.[213]

Their faith and hope helped them strengthen their resilience. However, these virtues of faith and hope—which are necessary to overcome the violence they had experienced and become active participants in building a future of peace and justice—do

[211] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 7.
[212] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 31.
[213] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 31.

not necessarily protect the people from experiencing the consequences and effects of the traumatic wounds inflicted on them.

Understanding the soul wounds that El Salvador has experienced throughout history is essential to understanding the impact of Romero's message in their lives. The indigenous and poor people of El Salvador have been the subjects of great violence since the invasion by Spain. This was followed by the continuous infamous and bloody oppression and repression of the people by the government, the oligarchy, and the armed forces. The Catholic Church and others with power told the poor people of El Salvador that they did not have any value, that they were destined to live in submission and work for the benefit of the powerful, to carry the heavy cross of poverty and submission. However, Romero addressed them every Sunday morning from the Cathedral of San Salvador, visited their villages, received them in his office, and read and responded to their letters. He told them with words and deeds that they were beloved and valuable children of God. Romero's message to the poor and oppressed people of El Salvador was clear: the cross they were carrying was not imposed on them by God but by those who worship the gods of power and money.

In his homilies, Romero acknowledged, named, and validated the trauma and suffering the poor, marginalized, and oppressed people from El Salvador were experiencing. By doing this, Romero became the "voice of the trauma" of the poor, marginalized, and oppressed people of El Salvador. At the same time, he provided aspects of pastoral care through his homilies. He responded to the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of those who had inherited deep soul wounds and continued

experiencing collective trauma. Thus, Romero *sintió con la Iglesia* (felt with the Church). "*Sentir con la Iglesia*" (to feel with the Church)[214] is the motto that Romero chose in his episcopal consecration in 1970 and that guided his ministry as the Archbishop of San Salvador. Monseñor Ricardo Urioste, a close collaborator of Romero, notes that for Romero "*sentir con la Iglesia significaba estar arraigado en Dios, defender a los pobres y aceptar todos los conflictos procedentes de la fidelidad al Señor*" (feeling with the Church meant being rooted in God, defending the poor and accepting all the conflicts that come from being faithful to the Lord).[215] Romero's *Sentir con la Iglesia* led him to become an empathetic witness for the suffering people and a Balm in Gilead for their open wounds. In the following two chapters I will examine some of the influences on Romero's preaching and the ways in which Romero's homilies speak to the trauma of the Salvadoran people.

[214] This phrase is usually translated in English as "to think with the church." However, a better translation for the word "sentir" is "to feel." In my opinion, "to feel with the church" represents better Romero's life and ministry. He did not only "think" with God and the people, he *felt God's love and pain for the suffering of God's people in his own human body*, and he also *felt* the people's suffering.

[215] Marcouiller and Sobrino, *El Sentir con la Iglesia*, 28.

Chapter 4

Grande and Romero: Two Pastors, Two Prophets

"*En buena medida Rutilio Grande preparó el camino a Monseñor Romero*"

Miguel Cavada Diez, *XXV Aniversario de Rutilio Grande*

We cannot talk about Monsignor Romero's leadership and preaching without also talking about his dear friend, Jesuit priest Rutilio Grande, for Grande greatly influenced Romero's ministry as the Archbishop of San Salvador. Romero and Grande were close friends. Romero notes in one of his homilies that Grande was "*como un hermano"* (like a brother) to him.[1] Romero particularly admired Grande's ministry and his commitment to the holistic liberation of the poor. Indeed Grande, seeking to defend and unite the poor and the Gospel, denounced the oppressors and called them to conversion. Nevertheless, he also sought to instruct the oppressed in the Christian faith and empower them to be active participants in the transformation of society.

Romero had always cared for and about the poor, oppressed, and marginalized people of El Salvador. However, the assassination of his dear friend Rutilio and the increasingly virulent persecution and oppression that the Church and the poor experienced at the hands of the military provoked an evolution in his faith and ministry.

[1]Miguel Cavada Diez, ed., *Homilías: Monseñor Óscar A. Romero*, vol. 1, 7 vols. (San Salvador: UCA editores, 2005), 31.

As a result, Romero, inspired by his friend Rutilio and empowered by the Holy Spirit, decided to take a public stand against the exploitation, oppression, and marginalization of the poor people of El Salvador, announcing the Kingdom of God and trying to establish effective signs of its present reality.[2] Both Grande and Romero understood that the Church could not restrict her mission only to the spiritual problems of the people and dissociate herself from people's temporal problems.[3]

Just as the prophet Elisha received a double portion of the Spirit of the prophet Elijah (2 Kings 2:9–10), so too after Grande's death Romero received a double portion of Grande's Spirit. Thus empowered, he continued Grande's prophetic and pastoral ministry among the poor. Romero openly proclaimed in his homilies a message of liberation for the poor, marginalized, and oppressed people, and called the idolaters of the gods of power and money to conversion, to turn to God, by showing them the path to becoming a people of God, a way of defining their identity in Christ. Grande's death provoked an evolution in Romero's pastoral leadership, as he himself acknowledged.

In this chapter, I analyze the influence Grande had on Romero as a pastoral leader and as a preacher. I do this by first describing Grande's ministry and analyzing three of his homilies: Homilía en la solemnidad de la Transfiguración del Señor en catedral, August 6, 1970; Homilía en el tercer festival del maíz, August 15, 1976; and Homilía de

[2]Rodolfo Cardenal, "Archbishop Romero Memorial Lecture: Rutilio, Romero and Pope Francies" (Plymouth, London, Durham, Glasgow, and Preston, 2016), http://www.romerotrust.org.uk/sites/default/files/ART%20Lecture%202016%20Rodolfo%20Cardenal.pdf.

[3] Miguel Cavada Diez, ed., *Cartas Pastorales, Dirscursos y Otros Escritos: Monseñor Óscar A. Romero*, First, vol. 7 (San Salvador: UCA editores, 2017), 46.

Apopa, February 13, 1977; and second, by describing Romero's evolution and Grande's role in that evolution.

Rutilio Grande: The Man, The Prophet, and the Pastor

Grande experienced the wounds that extreme poverty and oppression can inflict on a person's physical and emotional well-being. When Grande was three or four years old, his parents separated, and, at the same time, they lost the small family business that provided for the family's needs, *la tienda*. Consequently, like many other Salvadoran people, Grande's father had to migrate to Honduras in search of a job in the *campos bañeros*.[4] Since their father was absent, the oldest child in the Grande family took on the role of the father. However, this son was somewhat intolerant and impatient with the young Rutilio and his brothers. Thus, Grande grew up without a paternal figure, and his mother died when he was very young. The only person who cared for Grande and comforted him was his grandmother, who introduced him to the Christian faith. In addition to growing up in a dysfunctional family (perhaps the reason for Grande's emotional and mental issues), Grande was also physically weak due to the poor nutrition he received at home and, from the age of twelve, at the seminary he joined.[5]

Like most peasant children, Grande suffered emotionally and physically all his life from the consequences of poverty.[6] However, this did not stop him from fighting for

[4] Rodolfo Cardenal, *Historia de una Esperanza: Vida de Rutilio Grande* (San Salvador: UCA, 1985), 22.

[5] Cardenal, *Historia de una Esperanza*, 23–32, 40.

[6] Cardenal, *Historia de una Esperanza*, 60–90.

the rights of the peasants of El Salvador, and in fact presumably empowered him to do so. As the historian and theologian Jesuit priest Rodolfo Cardenal says regarding Grande, "surprisingly this weak man gave much strength to many others."[7] Amid his weaknesses, Grande strove to be faithful to God—serving God and God's people.[8] It seems that giving himself unconditionally to the poor, marginalized, and oppressed of El Salvador was if not the cure then at least the antidote for his struggles.[9] By practicing this prophetic and pastoral ministry, Grande found meaning and purpose in his life. "*Si desde arriba lo sostuvo el amor de Dios, desde abajo fue el pobre quien le produjo alegría y gozo…La bondad que vio en los campesinos y campesinas fue la fuerza que lo mantuvo y le hizo sentir gozo en medio de la debilidad y el sufrimiento*" (If the love of God sustained him from above, from below it was the poor who gave him happiness and joy… The goodness he saw in the peasants was the strength that sustained him and made him feel joy amid weakness and suffering), notes Jon Sobrino.[10] Thus, one could say that the poor people of El Salvador strengthened Grande's resilience. Though Grande continued to experience physical and mental limitations, he gained great strength fighting for the liberation of the poor people of El Salvador. As the editors of the book *XXV Aniversario de Rutilio Grande: Sus Homilías* say, "*Limitado como todos, fue valiente y audaz cuando se trataba de defender al pobre y al Evangelio, aquello que Dios había unido, pero que tantas veces tratamos de separar"* (Even though he had limitations like everyone else, he was brave

[7] Cardenal, *Historia de una Esperanza*, 91.
[8] Cardenal, *Historia de una Esperanza*, 91.
[9] Cardenal, *Historia de una Esperanza*, 211.
[10] Salvador Carranza, Miguel Cavada Diez, and Jon Sobrino, eds., *XXV Aniversario de Rutilio Grande. Sus Homilías.* (San Salvador: Centro Monseñor Romero-UCA, 2002), 33-34.

and audacious when he tried to defend the poor and the Gospel, which God had united, but that we so many times try to separate).[11]

Throughout his years of ministry, especially during his time as parish priest of Aguilares, Grande sought to unite his faith with this devotion to seeking justice. Grande believed that by working together, the Church, the government, the oligarchy, and the poor people could transform the painful reality of El Salvador. According to Cardenal, in Aguilares, Grande and his team of Jesuit priests and seminarians started to build a Church rooted in vibrant communities. The foundation of these communities was the reality of parish life—popular piety and religiosity were dominant. Therefore, the principal task was to evangelize and teach people to live according to the liberating gospel of Jesus Christ. Following the example of Jesus of Nazareth, through his teaching and preaching Grande "denounced the exploiter and made the exploited people aware of their dignity and rights." [12] "He called the exploiters to conversion and to those exploited he spoke the Word of God, that for so long had been denied them."[13] Through Grandes' proclamation of the Word of God and their own reading of Scripture, "the peasants discovered they had a voice and something important to do." [14] They accepted Grande's invitation to take on their Christian responsibility to transform society. Thus, the new and free men and women from these communities would emerge from a process of personal and community transformation.[15]

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[11] Carranza, Cavada Diez, and Sobrino, 5.
[12] Cardenal, "Archbishop Romero Memorial Lecture: Rutilio, Romero and Pope Francies."
[13] Cardenal, "Archbishop Romero Memorial Lecture: Rutilio, Romero and Pope Francies.".
[14] Cardenal, "Archbishop Romero Memorial Lecture: Rutilio, Romero and Pope Francies.".
[15] Cardenal, "Archbishop Romero Memorial Lecture: Rutilio, Romero and Pope Francies.".

Grande's message to the Church

Grande, inspired by the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Vatican II, and Medellín, challenged Church leaders to act according to their Christian faith and fight for the holistic liberation of the oppressed people of El Salvador. Grande believed that the responsibility to defend and unite the poor and the gospel began with religious leaders. He believed that priests could positively influence society because they bear an immortal and revolutionary message—the Gospel of Jesus—which contains the necessary elements to transform society radically.[16] For this reason, Grande said, "where there is poverty and misery, the priest would throw the transforming yeast of the gospel to begin the liberation of humanity. Where there was injustice, he would cry out like a prophet for justice to be established."[17] In short, Grande strongly believed that the Church is called to be part of a Christian revolution that is based on the essence of the gospel—love.[18] Love, for Grande, "*Es una palabra clave, que resume todos los códigos éticos de la humanidad, los sublima y los depara en Jesús. Es el amor de fraternidad compartida que rompe y echa abajo toda clase de barreras, prejuicios y ha de superar el odio mismo*" (Is a key word, which summarizes all the ethical codes of humanity, exalts them, and presents them to Jesus. It is the love of shared fraternity that brings down and breaks down all kinds of barriers and prejudices and overcomes hatred itself).[19]

[16] Cardenal, Historia de una Esperanza, 117.
[17] Cardenal, Historia de una Esperanza, 117.
[18] Thomas M. Kelly, ed., *Rutilio Grande, SJ: Homilies and Writings* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), 23.
[19] Carranza, Cavada Diez, and Sobrino, *XXV Aniversario de Rutilio Grande*, 76.

However, as we know, the Church has often failed to embody this essence of the gospel. Grande accused the church leaders, especially the bishops and the Apostolic Nunciature in El Salvador, of being responsible for: conniving with the oppressor class; failing to follow the evangelical commitment to denounce concrete instances of injustice; excluding the people in the appointment of bishops and parishes; and lacking coherence between their principles and actions. Grande also accused the priests and other religious leaders of favoring the ruling class; of being interested primarily in making a profit; of promoting classism in the Catholic schools; of disunion, paternalism, and clericalism; of marginalizing nonreligious people; of inadequate preaching; concentrating in urban centers, and lack of knowledge of the true national reality.[20] For all these reasons, said Grande, the Church was not living by Jesus' teachings, for Jesus Christ "took [a] critical position against the rich who were without conscience and without heart, saying how difficult it would be to enter the kingdom of heaven if they persist in their attitudes."[21] Thus, in the homily he preached on August 6, 1970, the homily on the Solemnity of the Transfiguration of the Lord, by quoting a section from the second Vatican Council Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, Grande challenged the Church to live as what they are—the community of the baptized. He said,

> *'Los gozos y las esperanzas, las tristezas y las angustias de los hombres de nuestro tiempo, sobre todo de los pobres y cuantos sufren, son a la vez gozos y esperanzas, tristezas y angustias de los discípulos de Cristo. Nada hay verdaderamente humano que no encuentre eco en su corazón.'*

[20] Cardenal, *Historia de una Esperanza*, 151.
[21] Kelly, *Rutilio Grande*, 25.

> *He aquí, mis queridos amigos y hermanos, el reto que el mundo actual hace a la Iglesia de Cristo, el Salvador del mundo. He aquí el reto que nuestra patria hace a la Iglesia, en este día solemne, en la festividad titular, de Aquél que está en el centro de nuestra fe Cristiana, en el misterio de su transfiguración.*
>
> 'The joys, hopes, griefs, and anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts.'
>
> My dear brothers and sisters, here is the challenge that the actual world has for the Church of Christ, the savior of the world. This is the challenge that our country makes for the Church, on this solemn day, on the naming feast, of the One who is at the center of our Christian faith in the ministry of his transfiguration. [22]

Grande invited members of the Church to change their attitudes and to turn their lives toward the light of the gospel and interpret it in light of the signs of the time.[23] Grande was fully aware that the Church should seek the people's liberation not only from sin but also from the injustices and oppression they were experiencing—a holistic liberation of historic dimensions.[24]

In addition, Grande believed that the organization of groups and movements to fight for justice was part of the pastoral responsibilities of priests.[25] Grande thought that he, and the other priests, could change the country's situation by working with the best of the country—the poor people.[26] He hoped that as the poor people—who were the majority in El Salvador—grew in their knowledge of the Christian faith, they would

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[22] Carranza, Cavada Diez, and Sobrino, *XXV Aniversario de Rutilio Grande*, 46.
[23] Kelly, *Rutilio Grande*, 27.
[24] Cardenal, *Historia de una Esperanza*, 185.
[25] Cardenal, *Historia de una Esperanza*, 206.
[26] Cardenal, *Historia de una Esperanza*, 207.

organize their communities and pressure the powers to bring about the changes demanded by justice.[27] In summary, Grande urged the Church to opt for what Medellín called *una Iglesia comprometida con los pobres*[28] (a Church committed to the poor) and later for what Puebla called "*la opción preferencial por los pobres*" (the preferential option for the poor).

Grande's Message to the Oppressors

Grande also challenged the traditional politicians and the oligarchy—the people's oppressors—with his prophetic message. He urged the politicians to be faithful to the promises they made to the people during their electoral campaigns and to respond to the needs of the poor and oppressed people of El Salvador.[29] At the same time, he urged the oligarchy to come clean about their scams and abuses of power, repent, change their attitudes, and make amends.[30] For example, on August 6, 1970, on the Feast of the Transfiguration, Grande preached such a message from the pulpit of the San Salvadoran Cathedral.[31] Present in the Cathedral were the President of El Salvador, all the civil and religious authorities, the oligarchy, and the people of El Salvador. Of course, Grande did not waste this opportunity to admonish the wealthy and powerful for their abuses against the poor and challenged them to live instead according to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The central theme of the sermon was the transfiguration of the people of El Salvador. Grande

[27] Cardenal, *Historia de una Esperanza*, 207.
[28] Carranza, Cavada Diez, and Sobrino, *XXV Aniversario de Rutilio Grande*, 11.
[29] Cardenal, *Historia de una Esperanza*, 109, 333–34.
[30] Kelly, *Rutilio Grande*, 25.
[31] Carranza, Cavada Diez, and Sobrino, *XXV Aniversario de Rutilio Grande*, 21.

insisted that only when the Church and the wealthy and powerful experience transfiguration and work together to change the oppressive systems and structures they safeguard, will the poor be able to live fully into their identity of transfigured people. After explaining the sacramental meaning of baptism, Grande described more closely what is required of Salvadorans to live as transfigured people. He said:

> *La transfiguración y la resurrección son equivalentes en la teología del evangelio y constituyen como el acontecimiento central del cristianismo…*
>
> *Ser bautizado es estar de lleno centrado en los cauces del evangelio. ¡Ser bautizado es aceptar el evangelio de Cristo hasta sus últimas consecuencias! Ser bautizado es entrar de lleno en un cambio de actitud mental frente a la vida, frente al mundo, frente a los valores, frente a Dios. 'cambien de actitud', era el slogan de Jesús, ya desde el comienzo de su vida pública, como mensajero de la Buena Nueva. Y todo seguidor de Jesús ha de estar en un continuo cambio de actitud mental, revisando a la luz del evangelio su vida propia, e interpretando bajo esta luz meridiana los signos de los tiempos.*
>
> *Estamos acostumbrados a escuchar públicamente en ocasiones solemnes una serie de alabanzas a las bellezas naturales de nuestra querida nación: se alaban sus lagos encantadores, sus cafetales en flor, sus majestuosos volcanes.*
>
> *¿Y qué decimos del hombre salvadoreño? ¿Qué diremos de todos los hijos de este suelo bendito, en donde todos nos confesamos bautizados en nombre de Cristo transfigurado? ¿Está trasfigurado el hombre salvadoreño?*
>
> *Hemos dicho que Cristo es nuestro libertador. Es libertador de todo hombre y de todo el hombre, del hombre integral. El hombre no solamente es alma; si así fuera, dejaría de ser hombre. Ni tampoco es sólo cuerpo, porque así mismo dejaría de ser hombre. Es un compuesto integral, inseparable: alma y cuerpo. Y Cristo salvador vino a salvar a todo hombre, para transfigurarlo en todo sentido, en un hombre nuevo, auténticamente libre de toda situación de pecado y de miseria, capaz de autodeterminarse y de gozar de todas las prerrogativas de hijo de Dios, conquistadas por el triunfo de la resurrección de Cristo. Esta transfiguración del hombre, conquistada, pregonada y exigida por Cristo a sus seguidores tiene su punto de partida en el bautismo, compromiso sagrado de cada bautizado con Cristo resucitado.*

Volvemos a preguntar, ¿está transfigurado el hombre salvadoreño? ¿Está transfigurado esa inmensa mayoría del pueblo salvadoreño, que la forma nuestro campesinado? ¿Está transfigurada esa otra minoría que tiene en sus manos los medios de económicos, el poder de decisión, el control de la prensa y de todos los medios de comunicación?

Hay que hacer dolorosas confesiones. ¡Muchos bautizados en nuestro país no han comulgado todavía los postulados del evangelio, que exigen una transfiguración, y por tanto, ellos mismos no están transfigurados en su mente y en su corazón y ponen un dique de egoísmo al mensaje de Jesús salvador, y a la voz exigente de los testigos oficiales de Cristo en medio de su Iglesia, el papa y los obispos!

¿Y qué decir del resto inmenso de nuestra población, la gran mayoría formada por todos nuestros campesinos? Esa gran mayoría, ¿está plenamente transfigurada, en esta tierra nuestra de bautizados?...

Puede estar plenamente seguro el Excmo. Señor Presidente de nuestra república aquí presente, y todo gobierno constituido, que en esta línea netamente evangélica, en esta línea del papa y de todos los obispos de la Iglesia universal, contará siempre con la colaboración de la Iglesia en nuestro país, a fin de conseguir todos juntos, ***solidariamente****, la transfiguración total, íntegra y verdadera de todos y cada uno de los habitantes de este suelo sagrado, en el que hemos nacido, al que amamos, y por cuyo bien todos nos hemos de afanar. ¡En esto coinciden plenamente nuestros más caros y entrañables ideales, como bautizados y como ciudadanos!*

La Iglesia dentro de su esfera y el Gobierno en la suya propia, con el mutuo respecto dentro de sus ámbitos legítimos, han de colaborar ***eficazmente****,* ***audazmente****, y* ***urgentemente*** *a fin de propiciar 'leyes justas, honestas y convenientes', según lo exige la 'soberanía' del pueblo en el artículo 1 de nuestra constitución.* ¿Cuál es ese pueblo soberano? ¿La gran mayoría o la pequeña minoría? *¿Cuál de los dos grupos es el realmente alienado en esta nación?*

La Iglesia y el gobierno han de colaborar ***eficazmente****,* ***audazmente****, y* ***urgentemente*** *para transfigurar al pueblo salvadoreño que vive en los valles, junto a los hermosos lagos, junto al río Lempa, a la orilla de los cafetales y cañales en flor, en las faldas de nuestros montes y volcanes, en los pueblitos y caseríos y en las grandes y explosivas concentraciones urbanas, y junto a los grandes latifundios…*

Y solamente entonces, CRISTO SALVADOR TRANSFIGURADO, será realmente nuestro PATRONO, al estar transfigurados todos nosotros, los bautizados en su nombre, por haber sido fieles al mandato del Padre, según lo hemos escuchado en el Evangelio de este día: 'ESTE

ES MI HIJO MUY AMADO, ESCUCHAD Y PONED POR OBRA SU MENSAJE'.

Solamente entonces, todos los hijos de esta Patria del Divino Salvador, rubricaremos nuevamente y con verdad plena, según lo proclamamos en nuestro himno nacional, la tercera palabra que ondea al viento en nuestra bandera: ¡LIBERTAD, plena, completa y definitiva para todos los hijos de Dios, los salvadoreños![32]

The transfiguration and the resurrection are equivalent in the theology of the gospel and constitute the central event of Christianity…

To be baptized is to be squarely focused on the purpose of the Gospel. To be baptized is to accept the Gospel of Christ and its final consequences! To be baptized is to enter fully into a change of attitude toward life, the world, values, and God. 'Change of attitude' was a slogan of Jesus from the beginning of his public life as a messenger of the Good News. And every follower of Jesus has to be continuously changing their attitude, turning his or her own life toward the light of the Gospel, and interpreting it in the light of the signs of the times.

On solemn holy days, we are used to listening to people praise the natural beauty of our dear nation: the beautiful lakes are praised, the coffee in bloom, the majestic volcanoes…

And what do we say about the Salvadoran people? What will we say of all the children of this blessed soil, where all of us confess to being baptized in the name of the transfigured Christ? Are the Salvadoran people transfigured?

We have said that Christ is our liberator. He is the liberator of all people and of all of humanity, of the integral human being. A person is not only a soul; if this were so, one would cease to be a person. Neither is the person only a body because again one would cease to be a person. The person is an integrated compound, inseparable: soul and body. And Christ our Savior came to save the entire person, to transfigure it in this sense into a new person, authentically free from all situations of sin and misery, self-determining and free to enjoy all the privileges of being a child of God, conquered by the triumph of the resurrection of Christ. This transfiguration of the person so conquered, proclaimed, and demanded by Christ and his followers has its starting point in baptism, the holy commitment of each baptized with the resurrected Christ.

Thus, we return to the question: Are the Salvadoran people transfigured? Is the vast majority of the Salvadoran people, represented by our peasants, transfigured? Is the minority transfigured, the one that has in

[32] Carranza, Cavada Diez, and Sobrino, "XXV Aniversario de Rutilio Grande," 39–50.

its hands all the economic power, decision-making power, control of the media, and means of communication?

Some painful confessions need to take place. Many persons who are baptized in this country have not accepted the teachings of the gospel that demand a transfiguration. Therefore, those same people are not transfigured in their minds and in their hearts, and they put a dam of selfishness in front of the message of Jesus our Savior and the demanding voice of the official witnesses of Christ through the Church, the pope, and her bishops!

And what can we say about the vast numbers of people in the rest of the population, the great majority made up of our peasants? Is this great majority fully transfigured in this land of our baptism?...

You can be completely certain, your Excellency, Mr. President of our Republic present here, and the entire government, that this line of thought is clearly evangelical. It shares the line of thought with the pope and all the bishops of the universal Church, always counting on the collaboration of the Church of our country. And finally, in **solidarity,** we should work together for the total, integrated, and true transfiguration of each and every one of the inhabitants of this sacred land, a land in which we were born, a land that we love, and a land for whose good we all have worked. This coincides completely with our most valuable and cherished ideals as baptized and as citizens.

The Church, within its sphere and the government in its appropriate sphere, with mutual respect for each other's lawful scope, should work together **effectively**, **boldly**, and **urgently**. Together they should promote "just, honest, and convenient laws," according to the necessary "sovereignty" of the people in Article 1 of our constitution. Who are the sovereign people? The great majority or the small minority? Which of the groups is really alienated in this nation?

The Church and the government need to work together **effectively**, **boldly**, and **urgently** to transfigure the Salvadoran people, who live in the valley close to those beautiful lakes, close to the Lempa River, on the edge of the coffee fields in bloom, on the foothills of our mountains and volcanos, in the little communities and farmhouses, in the great urban concentrations, and close to the large latifundia.

Only then can we call ourselves full and proud sons of our homeland; only then can we approach each other without remorse, at the feet of the Savior of the World, Patron of our Republic!

And CHRIST OUR SAVIOR TRANSFIGURED will really be our PATRON when all of us are transfigured, those baptized in his name, having been faithful to the commands of the Father, according to what we have heard in today's gospel: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"

> Only then will all the children of this homeland of El Salvador sign again with complete truth according to that which we proclaim in our national hymn, the third word that flies in the wind on our flag: FREEDOM, full, complete, and definitive for all the children of God, the Salvadorans!

Grande's Feast of the Transfiguration homily echoes the words of Medellín, "*No tendremos un continente nuevo sin nuevas y renovadas estructuras; sobre todo, no habrá continente nuevo sin hombres nuevos, que a la luz del Evangelio sepan ser verdaderamente libres y responsables*" (We will not have a new continent without new and renewed structures; above all, there will be no new continent without new humans, who in the light of the Gospel know how to be truly free and responsible).[33] Grande did not romanticize the identity of the baptized children of God. He said it clearly: the baptized are not living as transfigured people.[34] Most important, the wealthy and

[33] "Documento_Conclusivo_Medellin.Pdf," para. 2, accessed July 22, 2022, https://www.celam.org/documentos/Documento_Conclusivo_Medellin.pdf.

[34] On August 1977, five months after Grande's assassination, Romero also preached from the San Salvadoran Cathedral on the Feast of the Divine Savior of the World. Romero started his homily saying that the Catholics, the baptized, are the transfiguration of Christ. He says, "*Y yo os diría, queridos católicos, que todos nosotros, la Iglesia, somos aquí la transfiguración de Cristo: un pueblo que se ilumina por la fe, que lo alienta una gran esperanza, que lo conglutina un gran amor. Somos de verdad la gloria del Señor, máxime cuando tomamos conciencia de que ese nombre glorioso de nuestra patria es un regalo de predilección del Señor. Tratamos de honrarlo, de recibirlo con cariño y de tributarle este hermoso homenaje de la mañana del 6 de agosto, todos los años. Y no es una fantasía poética decir que este pueblo es la transfiguración de Cristo, es la realidad teológica, evangélica, del sublime ideal de Cristo al hacer su Iglesia"* (I want to tell you, dear Catholics, that all of us here as church are the transfiguration of Christ. We are a people enlightened by faith, encouraged by great hope, and united by great love. We are truly the glory of the Lord, especially when we recognize that the glorious name of our country is a gift of the Lord's predilection. Every year on the morning of August 6 we do our best to honor the Divine Savior, to give him a warm welcome, and to render him fitting homage. It is not poetic fancy to say that this people of ours is the transfiguration of Christ. This is the theological, evangelical reality of Christ's sublime ideal in forming his church). Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2005, vol. 1, 228.

Grande would agree that the baptized were given by God the capacity to live as transfigured people; however, Grande was more aware than Romero was at this time of the reality that most baptized did not live as transfigured people. The wealthy, because of their greediness and hunger for power and money, and the poor, because of the excruciating oppression they were experiencing, were not able to enjoy fully their God-given gift of transfiguration.

powerful, because of their reluctance to listen to Jesus and practice his teachings, have become an obstacle to the poor enjoying their transfiguration fully. To support his argument, Grande quotes Paul VI (*Populorum Progressio*, 9) in this homily, who says that the denunciation and fight against the dehumanizing and unjust poverty that many people experience is the responsibility of all the baptized because this coincides entirely with the essence of the gospel.[35]

As one might imagine, this homily was not well received by those whose bank accounts were affected when the poor oppressed sought to fully live into their identity of transfigured people. And this homily cost Grande the rectorate of the *Seminario Mayor de San José de la Montaña*.

On a similar occasion, in the sermon Grande preached in Aguilares on August 15, 1976, for the Third Festival of Corn, reflecting on Luke 1:3955 Grande denounced the selfishness and greed of the oligarchy:

> *[María] es la que ha sido elegida por los siglos como Reina, como la mujer bella y tipa. Porque no le irán a tomar medidas de cintura de avispa, ni ha comprado votos de esos que mercan por ahí, en las fiestas y allá en el hotel Sheraton… ¿Por qué? Porque hay gente por ahí, muy de gran colmillo, que no le tiene temor… ¡No le tienen temor a Dios!*[36]
>
> *Lo he dicho otras veces, pero hay que repetirlo hasta la saciedad. A los poderosos los hizo destrepar de sus puestos; a los autosuficientes, ¡porque tienen dioses aquí! Y a los humildes los levantó; los trepó a los humildes. A los que tenían hambre los llenó de bienes, y a los ricos de corazón perverso que no quieren atol para todos, sino para ellos nada más…Que quieren el gran guacalón para ellos, pero no quieren compartirlo con los hermanos en esta Eucaristía de la fraternidad… A esos bárbaros, ¿verdad?, dice: 'A los que tenían, a esos soberbios, los*

[35] Carranza, Cavada Diez, and Sobrino, *XXV Aniversario de Rutilio Grande*, 48–49.
[36] Carranza, Cavada Diez, and Sobrino, *XXV Aniversario de Rutilio Grande*, 62–63.

destrepó, a los ricos los dejó ir con las manos vacías', por caínes, por crueles, porque son esos ingratos de la ANEP.

> Mary has been chosen as a Queen forever like a beautiful woman. But she does not go and measure her waist, nor does she buy the votes of those who do business there at the parties in the Sheraton Hotel…Why? Because there are people out there who feel very superior to everyone else, who have no fear. They have no fear of God!...
>
> I have said it before, but it must be repeated again and again. To the powerful who climb down from their high places; to the self-sufficient, because you have gods here! And to the humble who side with them; the humble who admire and try to be like them. Those who hunger will be full of everything they need, while the rich and wicked of heart who do not want anyone to have porridge will have nothing more. Those who want everything for themselves and do not want to share with their brothers in the Eucharist of fraternity—to these barbarians—right?— it says: 'He has brought down the powerful and sent the rich away empty-handed.' This is so because they are Cains, because they are cruel, and because they are selfish members of the National Association of Private Enterprise.[37]

Grande's message is clear: the government's and the oligarchy's greed and hunger for power are the reasons for the excruciating poverty and oppression the majority of the people of El Salvador are experiencing.

Because of such messages, the powerful, and those who sided with them, called Grande a Marxist and an agitator of the masses. But Grande knew that those who fight for justice would face opposition and persecution—just as Jesus did.[38] Therefore, empowered by the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Grande never stopped proclaiming a message of love, unity, restitution, equality, and justice.

[37] Kelly, *Rutilio Grande*, 96–97.
[38] Kelly, *Rutilio Grande*, 115.

Grande's Message to the Poor and Oppressed People

Grande also had a message for the oppressed. He could not ignore the suffering of the crucified people of El Salvador. Out of compassion for them, Grande returned to his people and shared their suffering. As Rodolfo Cardenal states, Grande found the crucified Jesus in the poor and exploited people of El Salvador, and in the crucified Jesus he found the crucified people.[39] Therefore, Grande preached a Jesus incarnated in the people. In the homily Grande preached in Apopa (February 13, 1977), Grande says to those who were persecuting the poor and the religious leaders who served and cared for the poor,

> *!Hay de Ustedes hipócritas que de dientes a labio se hacen llamar católicos y por dentro son inmundicia de maldad! ¡Son caínes y crucifican al Señor cuando camina con el nombre de Manuel, con el nombre de Luis, con el nombre de Chabela, con el nombre del humilde trabajador del campo!* [40]
>
> Woe to you hypocrites who call yourselves Catholics and inside you are filthy evil! You are Cains, and you crucify the Lord when he walks with the name of Manuel, with the name of Luis, with the name of Chabela, with the name of the humble field worker!

By identifying Jesus with the poor campesinos y campesinas, Grande not only denounced the dehumanizing injustice the people suffered, he also returned hope to the *campesinos* y *campesinas* who were afflicted and felt forsaken by God. [41] As Jon Sobrino notes,

> *[Grande] lo hizo sobre todo hablándoles de Jesús. Jesús era uno de ellos, 'un peregrino que iba por cantones y caseríos'. Jesús no era una imagen sin palabra ante quien se hacen novenas y a quien se le lleva en procesiones. Era mucho más que eso. Era palabra viva y actual,*

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[39] Cardenal, *Historia de una Esperanza*, 112.
[40] Carranza, Cavada Diez, and Sobrino, *XXV Aniversario de Rutilio Grande*, 22.
[41] Carranza, Cavada Diez, and Sobrino, *XXV Aniversario de Rutilio Grande*, 21.

interpelante y animante, una palabra 'limpia y clara como el agua que baja de los montes'. Y para los campesinos era ante todo una palabra de Esperanza. [42]

[Grande] did it above all by talking to them about Jesus. Jesus was one of them, 'a pilgrim who went through cantons and hamlets.' Jesus was not a wordless image before whom people do novenas and whom people carry in processions. He was much more than that. He was a living and current word, challenging and encouraging, a word 'clean and clear as the water that comes down from the mountains.' And for the peasants, it was, above all, a word of hope.

Thus, the word of God that Grande preached was a word incarnated in his country, in his people. Grande says in his homily from February 13, 1977, in Apopa,

La Iglesia no debe ser un museo de tradiciones muertas, de enterradores. Se extiende por todas las naciones, las lenguas, las razas y las culturas diversificadas del mundo, en historias concretas que viven los pueblos. No estamos hablando en Japón, sino aquí en nuestro país, y la Palabra de Dios debe encarnarse en el país.[43]

The Church should not be a museum of dead traditions, of gravediggers. It extends through all the nations, languages, races, and diversified cultures of the world, in concrete stories lived by peoples. We are not talking in Japan, but here in our country, and the Word of God must be incarnated in the country.

Grande prioritized evangelization and conversion, but by faithfully proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ, he influenced the people's social, economic, political, cultural, and religious reality.[44] He sought to educate the poor to change their own reality.[45] As

[42] Carranza, Cavada Diez, and Sobrino, *XXV Aniversario de Rutilio Grande*, 27.
[43] Carranza, Cavada Diez, and Sobrino, *XXV Aniversario de Rutilio Grande*, 74.
[44] Kelly, *Rutilio Grande*, 44–45.
[45] Kelly, *Rutilio Grande*, 40.

theologian Thomas M. Kelly states, Grande used a method developed by Paulo Freire called *conscientización.*[46]

Conscientización occurs when an oppressed group of people understands a problem and takes the initiative to respond to that problem in their context.[47] In fact, Grande described the pastoral goal of the missionary team in Aguilares as: "EVANGELIZATION in order to recreate a Church of living communities of new people with pastoral agents conscious of their human vocation who become promoters of their own destiny and who bring change to their reality along the lines of Vatican II and Medellín."[48] Grande believed that the poor can also create positive change in society. So, Grande sought to empower the poor to be the agents of their own history. As Cardenal notes, for Grande, "when the poor are respected and become agents of their own history, the kingdom of God approaches by becoming present in such actions."[49] Thus, for Grande, the oppressed and suffering people of El Salvador had to be aware of their situation of oppression and organize their communities to construct an alternative society, one that was less dependent and more just.[50] As Cavada Diez notes, "*Rutilio Grande no*

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[46] Martín-Baró provides a clear explanation of the term *concientización*, "For Freire literacy does not consist simply in learning to write on paper or to read the written word; literacy is above all learning to read the surrounding reality and to write one's own history. What counts is not so much learning how to code and decode strange words, but rather learning to say the word of one's own existence, which is personal but, more significantly, collective. And to pronounce that personal and collective word, people must take hold of their fate, take the reins of their lives, a move that demands overcoming false consciousness and achieving a critical understanding of themselves as well as of their world and where they stand in it."

Ignacio Martí-n-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, ed. Adrianne Aron and Shawn Corne (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 40.

[47] Kelly, *Rutilio Grande*, 40.

[48] Kelly, *Rutilio Grande*, 42.

[49] Cardenal, *Historia de una Esperanza*, 186.

[50] Cardenal, *Historia de una Esperanza*, 185.

hizo otra cosa que liberar estas mentes y despertar la conciencia. A partir de ahí, el pueblo comenzó a caminar, a organizarse, a exigir por sí mismos, a plantear sus derechos y también sus sueños, a luchar por su vida y dignidad" (Rutilio Grande did nothing but free these minds and awaken their conscience. From there, the people began to walk, organize, make demand for themselves, voice their rights and dreams, to fight for their lives and dignity).[51] Grande encouraged the *campesinos* and *campesinas* to "*congregarse a dialogar la palabra de Dios*" (come together to discuss the word of God).[52] In other words, Grande encouraged the *campesinos* y *campesinas* to get together in community to study, discern what the word of God says to them and their reality, and act in accordance with God's message for them.[53]

Grande worked with the people, especially those from el Paisnal and Aguilares, to help them create different and new structures to improve their circumstances. For him, the people's religious life and community actions are intimately related. He says in one of his homilies,

> *La fracción del pan fue desde el comienzo de la Iglesia el punto de partida de la Revolución Cristiana: se vivía con alegría el sentido comunitario de la misma celebración de la Eucaristía. De la celebración se salía con una mística de acción comunitaria, dispuestos a vivir un comunismo sano: vendían tierras y traían dinero a los pies de los apóstoles. Si los apóstoles hubieran tenido nociones de cooperativas sin duda hubiera comenzado un sistema de organización de aquellas comunidades cristianas primitivas de un influjo más duradero e influyente. El culto y la reunión en torno a la eucaristía es altamente explosivo: da unidad, sentido comunitario y fraternal, para llevar eso mismo a una acción de vida, con dinamismo de*

[51] Carranza, Cavada Diez, and Sobrino, *XXV Aniversario de Rutilio Grande*, 17.
[52] Carranza, Cavada Diez, and Sobrino, *XXV Aniversario de Rutilio Grande*, 30.
[53] Carranza, Cavada Diez, and Sobrino, *XXV Aniversario de Rutilio Grande*, 30.

transformar al hombre integral y a la comunidad en que vive.[54]

> The breaking of the bread was from the beginning of the Church the starting point of the Christian Revolution: the communal sense of the celebration of the Eucharist was lived with joy. People left the celebration with a passion for community action, willing to live a healthy communism: they sold lands and brought the money to the feet of the apostles. If the apostles had had notions of cooperatives, without any doubt they would have started a more enduring and influential system of organization in those primitive Christian communities. The worship and the gathering around the Eucharist are highly explosive: it gives unity and creates a sense of community and friendship, to take this into the action of life, with the dynamism of transforming the integral human being and the community in which they live.

Grande was against individualism. For him, individualism is the negation of community.[55] "*No vale decir 'sálvese quien pueda con tal de que a mí me vaya bien'. ¡Nos tenemos que salvar en racimo, en mazorca, en matata, o sea en comunidad"* (It is not worth saying 'every man for himself as long as I am doing well.' We have to save ourselves as a bunch, as a cob, as a bush, that is, as a community!), said Grande.[56] He believed the people of El Salvador could do this if they followed the "code of the kingdom": love. [57] Grande insisted that Christians are called to and are capable of leading a Cristian revolution, a revolution of love, ignited by the essence of the gospel. Grande says in his homily of August 6, 1970,

> *Esto es lo que le da sentido, vigor y dinamismo a nuestra existencia cristiana, situándonos en medio de los acontecimientos de la vida, con la brújula de la palabra de Dios en nuestra inteligencia y en nuestro corazón. Esto es lo que nos hace capaces de una 'revolución' netamente cristiana, purificando dicha palabra de todo sentido abusivo, peyorativo y*

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[54] Cardenal, *Historia de una Esperanza*, 110–11.
[55] Carranza, Cavada Diez, and Sobrino, *XXV Aniversario de Rutilio Grande*, 31.
[56] Carranza, Cavada Diez, and Sobrino, *XXV Aniversario de Rutilio Grande*, 31.
[57] Carranza, Cavada Diez, and Sobrino, *XXV Aniversario de Rutilio Grande*, 76.

> *exclusivo. Revolución cristiana basada en las esencias del Evangelio, cuya médula es el AMOR, y que no excluye a ningún hombre que viene a este mundo, ni por el color de la piel, ni por la posición social, ni por su grado de inteligencia, ni siquiera por el pecado que trata de remediar*.[58]
>
> This is what gives meaning, vigor, and dynamism to our Christian existence, placing us amid the events of life, with the compass of the word of God in our minds and in our hearts. This is what makes us capable of a truly Christian 'revolution', purifying said word of all abusive, pejorative, and exclusive meanings. Christian revolution is based on the essence of the Gospel, whose core is LOVE, and that does not exclude any human being who comes to this world because of the color of their skin, their social position, their intelligence, not even because of the sin they try to overcome.

Seven years later on February 13, 1977, while experiencing increasing oppression and persecution, Grande reminded the *campesinos y campesionas* who had gathered in Apopa that love was their best weapon against the violence they experienced. He said,

> *La violencia está en la Palabra de Dios, que nos violenta a nosotros y que violenta a la sociedad, y que nos une y nos congrega, aunque nos apaleen. Por lo tanto, el código se resume en una palabra, AMOR: contra el antiamor, contra el pecado, contra la injusticia, contra la dominación de los hombres, contra la destrucción de la fraternidad.*[59]
> Violence is in the Word of God, which confronts us and society, unites us, and brings us together, even if they beat us up. Therefore, the code is summed up in one word, LOVE: against anti-love, against sin, against injustice, against the domination of humans, against the destruction of fraternity.

Even amid persecution and suffocating repression, Grande did not stop preaching love. However, the best message for the *campesinos* and *campesinas* was Grande's

[58] Carranza, Cavada Diez, and Sobrino, *XXV Aniversario de Rutilio Grand*e, 42.
[59] Carranza, Cavada Diez, and Sobrino, *XXV Aniversario de Rutilio Grande*, 76–77.

embodiment of love. The people listened to Grande because his actions accompanied his words. He was a pastor willing to give his life for his sheep.

Grande did not only talk about God but, most importantly, let God talk.[60] Thus, Grande's homilies communicated the message of God proclaimed loudly through the reality the people were experiencing. "*En ellas se entrelaza la palabra de Dios y la realidad del pueblo, de tal manera que se convierten en un mensaje nítido*" (In them the word of God and the reality of the people are intertwined, in such a way that they become a clear message), notes Cavada Diez.[61] Therefore, Cavada Diez describes Grande's homilies as, "*Una Palabra popular, encarnada en la realidad, oportuna y profética*" (a popular Word, incarnated in reality, timely and prophetic).[62]

Grande not only knew the heart of God well, he also knew his people and the reality they were living well. Therefore, Grande was not only a great theologian and exegete, he also understood very well the social, political, and economic reality the people from El Salvador were experiencing. Thus, as Cavada Diez notes, he was able to unite, "*con tanta naturalidad el mensaje de la Biblia con la realidad de su pueblo que el resultado es una predicación donde al pueblo le queda claro lo que Dios dice, lo que Dios siente, y lo que Dios exige*" (so naturally the message of the Bible with the reality of his people that the result is preaching where it is clear to the people what God says, what

[60] Carranza, Cavada Diez, and Sobrino, *XXV Aniversario de Rutilio Grande*, 20.
[61]Carranza, Cavada Diez, and Sobrino, *XXV Aniversario de Rutilio Grande*, 19.
[62]Carranza, Cavada Diez, and Sobrino, *XXV Aniversario de Rutilio Grand*, 23.

God feels, and what God demands).[63] By doing this, he practiced in his homilies what the *Evangelii nuntiandii*, 43, stipulates:[64]

> In fact, there are innumerable events in life and human situations which offer the opportunity for a discreet but incisive statement of what the Lord has to say in this or that particular circumstance. It suffices to have true spiritual sensitivity for reading God's message in events.[65]

Grande had the spiritual sensitivity necessary to read God's message in the lives of the poor, oppressed, and persecuted people and in the events of violence they suffered. He did not keep that message to himself, but openly and courageously shared God's liberating message with the Salvadorans.

However, speaking for God could be costly. To this day, there has not existed a true prophet who has been exalted and loved by all. Grande was no exception. He paid a costly price for saying loud and clear what God said about the oppression, repression, and persecution that the poor people of El Salvador were experiencing at the hands of the military and the rich and powerful.

A New Prophet Raised Up

After Grande was assassinated, God did not leave the poor people of El Salvador without a prophet, but raised up another prophet from among them, Monsignor Romero. Like Grande's preaching, Romero's preaching was "*una palabra popular, encarnada en*

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[63] Carranza, Cavada Diez, and Sobrino, *XXV Aniversario de Rutilio Grande*, 20.
[64] Carranza, Cavada Diez, and Sobrino, *XXV Anniversario de Rutilio Grande*, 20.
[65] "Evangelii Nuntiandi (December 8, 1975) | Paul VI," accessed June 6, 2022, https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi.html.

la realidad, oportuna, y profética" (a popular word incarnated in reality, timely, and prophetic). However, it was not always like this. For instance, six years after Grande preached a timely, prophetic message, incarnated in reality, from the pulpit of the San Salvadoran Cathedral on the Feast of the Divine Transfiguration, Romero preached from the same pulpit and on the same occasion (August 6, 1976); however, Romero's approach was much more conservative.[66] As Colón-Emeric points out, in this homily, "Romero acknowledges that there are national crises in need of resolution, but his denunciation lacks bite. In fact, the only ones mentioned in connection to violence are the agents of the liberation theology that he rejects…The call for conversion hints more of national nostalgia than of hope for the kingdom."[67] This was one of the reasons why religious leaders who had implemented the teachings of Vatican II and Medellín did not trust Romero. For them, Romero was merely one of many religious leaders who wanted to maintain the status quo. Ignacio Martín-Baró notes that to that point Romero was known for his conservative doctrinal positions, his relationship with the Salvadoran oligarchy, and his identification with the Opus Dei (a traditionalist and politically ultra-conservative ecclesiastical movement). However, in his later homilies on the Feast of the Transfiguration, after Grande's death and as the repression, persecution, and oppression of the Church and the poor increased, Romero increasingly gave more attention to the reality the people of El Salvador were experiencing and their need to live fully into their

[66] It was not the first time that Romero preached from the pulpit of the Cathedral of San Salvador on the Feast of the Transfiguration. He also preached in August 1946. For an analysis of this homily and all the homilies on the transfiguration of the Lord that Romero preached, read Edgardo Colón-Emeric's book, *Óscar Romero's Theological Vision: The Transfiguration of the Poor.*

[67] Colón-Emeric, *Óscar Romero's Theological Vision, 82*.

identity as transfigured children of God—so much so that Colón-Emeric understands the transfiguration of the poor to be Romero's theological vision.[68]

It seems that the circumstances made him more attuned to Grande's mission, which in turn was the mission of Medellín. Indeed, as Cavada Diez notes, "*En buena medida Rutilio Grande preparó el camino a Monseñor Romero*" (Rutilio Grande largely paved the way for Monsignor Romero).[69] In his homily of June 19, 1977, Romero called the experience of evangelization in Aguilares "*una antorcha en lo alto*" (a beacon on a hill). Grande, inspired by Vatican II and Medellín, ignited that beacon in Aguilares, which Romero took throughout his archdiocese to illuminate the path of the poor, marginalized, and oppressed people. As Cavada Diez says, "*De hecho, con sus palabras y gestos proféticos Oscar Romero llegó a hacer de toda la arquidiócesis una antorcha que iluminó, inspiró y dio esperanza a muchas personas. Pero Rutilio ya había comenzado*"[70] (In fact, with his prophetic words and gestures, Oscar Romero managed to turn the entire archdiocese into a beacon that illuminated, inspired, and gave hope to many people. However, Rutilio had already started this.)

Romero aptly described Grande's ministry in Aguileres as: "*un movimiento atrevido de un evangelio más comprometido*" (a daring evangelical movement). On June 19, 1977 he said to the people of Aguilares, "*Hermanos, porque yo creo que hemos mutilado mucho el evangelio. Hemos tratado de vivir un evangelio muy cómodo, sin*

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[68] Theologian Edgardo Colón-Emeric did an extensive study of Romero's theology of transfiguration in his book *Óscar Romero's Theological Vision: Liberation and the Transfiguration of the Poor*.

[69] Carranza, Cavada Diez, and Sobrino, *XXV Aniversario de Rutilio Grande*, 17.

[70] Carranza, Cavada Diez, and Sobrino, 11.

entregar nuestra vida. Solamente de piedad. Pero he aquí que en Aguilares se inicia un movimiento atrevido de un evangelio más comprometido"[71] (Brothers and sisters, I believe that we have mutilated the gospel a lot. We have tried to live a very comfortable gospel, without giving our lives. We have lived a gospel only of piety. However, behold, in Aguilares, a daring movement of a more committed gospel begins). After Grande's death, Romero understood that he had to continue leading this daring evangelical movement that invited people to be faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We find signs of Grande's teachings in Romero's letters, speeches, and, particularly his homilies. In fact, we can find in Romero's homilies all the core elements and theological principles characteristic of Grande's homilies:

1. Citing word for word the Magisterium of the Church;
2. An emphasis on the incarnation of Jesus in the poor, marginalized, and oppressed people of El Salvador;
3. An emphasis on the incarnation of the word of God in the concrete circumstances of the people;
4. A message of hope, helping the people encounter God in their concrete circumstances;
5. A message of unity, justice, liberation, restitution, equity, and restoration;
6. The revolution of love;
7. A call to repentance and conversion; and

[71] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2005, 151.

8. The transfiguration of the poor.[72]

Thus, there is a strong similarity between the elements and theological themes included in Grande's and in Monsignor Romero's homilies. Romero included some of these elements in his homilies before he became the Archbishop of San Salvador and before Grande's death. For instance, long before becoming the Archbishop of San Salvador, as corroborating evidence Romero cited the Magisterium of the Church in his homilies, especially the words of Popes Pius XII and Paul VI.[73] However, after Grande's death, Romero adopted an incarnated-in-reality approach. Romero started exposing the teachings of the Magisterium in connection with the reality that the people of El Salvador were experiencing.[74] He did the same with Scripture. Therefore, just as he did with Ignatius's *sentir con la Iglesia*,[75] he adopted, adapted, and expanded Grande's timely, incarnated-in-reality, prophetic, and pastoral message. This was a noticeable change. And as a result, Romero's ministry shifted in tone after Grande's death. Some even argue that Romero experienced a conversion after Grande's assassination.

Conversion or Evolution?

When Romero stood before Grande's dead body, he realized that, with Grande gone, the people were without a pastor, and that now God was calling him to become their pastor and to continue Grande's ministry among the poor, marginalized, and

[72] I will analyze these elements and theological principles in Monsignor Romero's homilies in chapter five under the categories of: *Sentir con Dios, Sentir con el pueblo, and Sentir con la Iglesia*.

[73] Colón-Emeric, *Óscar Romero's Theological Vision*.

[74] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2005, 25.

[75] Colón-Emeric, *Óscar Romero's Theological Vision*, 185.

oppressed people of El Salvador. For Romero, Grande was not *"una inspiración revolucionaria, sino una inspiración de amor*" (a revolutionary inspiration, but an inspiration of love).[76] More importantly, for Romero, Grande was chosen and anointed by God to serve God and God's people. In his homily of March 5, 1978, preached in *El Paisnal*, where Grande was born, Romero describes Grande's birth and vocation:

> *Aquí también, en un hogar, en un pueblito como el de Belén de Judea, nace Rutilio Grande con las señales de un predilecto, de un elegido por Dios en su mismo pueblo, y viene Dios y lo unge como David. Y podemos decir que desde aquel día el Espíritu de Yahvé posaba sobre él, como dice la Biblia del jovencito David. Rutilio es aquel hombre que llevó de aquí el amor a su pueblo. Aquel hombre que vivió este paisaje que estamos viviendo en este momento, aquel hombre que como los niños de hoy, de El Paisnal, sintió lo polvoriento de estas calles, lo triste de esa pobreza, las dificultades de vivir en un pueblecito apartado y, sin embargo, también la riqueza moral de nuestro pueblo, la riqueza de ese hombre, donde él aprendió a rezar, donde él aprendió a ver a Dios y amar al prójimo, donde Monseñor Chávez y González en una visita pastoral lo encuentra entre los muchachitos de la catequesis y le pregunta: "¿quieres ser sacerdote?" Y se lo lleva para el seminario.*[77]
>
> Here too, in a home, in a little town like Bethlehem in Judea, Rutilio Grande is born with the signs of a favorite, of someone chosen by God in his own town, and God comes and anoints him like David. Moreover, we can say that from that day the Spirit of Yahweh rested on him, as the Bible says about the young David. Rutilio is that man who brought love to his people from here. That man who lived in this landscape where we are at this moment, that man who, like the children of today from El Paisnal, felt the dustiness of these streets, the sadness of poverty, and the difficulties of living in a remote little town. However, he also felt the moral wealth of our people, the wealth of human beings. El Paisnal is where he learned to pray, to see God, and to love his neighbor, [it is] where Monsignor Chávez y González found him among the boys of the catechesis and asked him: "Do you want to be a priest?" And took him to the seminary.

[76] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2005, 34-35.

[77] Miguel Cavada Diez, ed., *Homilías: Monseñor Óscar A. Romero*, first, vol. 2, 7 vols. (San Salvador: UCA editores, 2005), 320.

When Romero stood before Grande's dead body, God called Romero to become, like Grande, an inspiration of love. However, as mentioned above, the religious leaders who had implemented the teachings of Vatican II and Medellín did not trust Romero because the oligarchy and the conservative bishops and priests had chosen him to become the Archbishop of San Salvador. However, following Grande's death, when Romero quickly became a public prophetic voice that denounced the suffering, oppression, and repression of the poor people, those religious leaders believed he had experienced a conversion "from [being] a conservative to becom[ing] the moral leader of the Salvadoran people in the fight against military dictatorship and the oligarchy."[78]

However, the people who collaborated closely with Romero, among them Jesús Delgado, Ricardo Urioste, and Gregorio Rosa Chávez, did not describe his reaction to Grande's death as a conversion but as an evolution.[79] Those who knew him argue that Romero had always cared for the poor, marginalized, and oppressed, and that he had in fact confronted the oppressive government of El Salvador on several occasions before he became the Archbishop of San Salvador. Catholic Church historian René Chanta notes that during the time (1961–1967) Romero was the director of the weekly Catholic newspaper *Chaparrastique*, edited in San Miguel, Romero wrote several articles

[78] Roberto Morozzo della Rocca, *Oscar Romero: Prophet of Hope* (Boston, MA: Pauline Books and Media, 2015), loc. 1216.

[79]Morozzo della Rocca, *Oscar Romero: Prophet of Hope*, loc. 1218.

denouncing social injustice.[80] In one article, published on September 8, 1962, Romero reflected on the celebrations for the Salvadoran Independence Day. He wrote,

> *¿Cual Patria? ¿La que sirven nuestros gobiernos no para mejorarla sino para enriquecerse? ¿La de esa historia cochina de liberalismo y masonería cuyos propósitos son embrutecer el pueblo para maniobrarlo a su capricho? ¿La de las riquezas pésimamente distribuidas en que una "brutal" desigualdad social hace sentirse arrimados y extraños a la inmensa mayoría de los nacidos en su propio suelo? ¿La de los profesionales y obreros y padres de familia, etc. sin pizca de sentido de responsabilidad?*[81]
>
> Which country? The one that our governments serve not to improve it but to enrich themselves? That of that filthy history of liberalism and freemasonry whose purposes are to brutalize the people to maneuver them at their whim? That of the badly distributed wealth in which a "brutal" social inequality makes the vast majority of those born on their own soil feel undeserving and alienated? That of professionals, workers, parents, etc. without even some small sense of responsibility?

As Chanta notes, it is highly relevant that it was in 1962 that Romero addressed social issues, denounced social injustice, and criticized the concept of *patria*—which was heavily used in military environments—, *before* the publication of the documents of the Second Vatican Council and the celebration of the Conference of the Latin American Episcopate in Medellín.[82]

But that was hardly the only occasion on which Romero denounced injustice. On February 22, 1964, when Romero was the Episcopal Secretary of the Diocese of San

[80] René Chanta, "La Conflictividad de Oscar Arnulfo Romero Años 1962-1964: Una Aproximación" 19 (July 19, 2011): 21.

[81] Oscar Romero, "¿Cuál Patria...?," *Monseñor Romero*, September 8, 1962, Semanario Chaparrastique.

[82] Chanta, "La Conflictividad de Oscar Arnulfo Romero," 25.

Miguel, he wrote about the upcoming elections in San Miguel. In this article, Romero denounced the electoral campaign for its defamations and slander, and he stated that when politics is not used for the benefit of the people, it becomes a dangerous passion. He wrote, "*La política es una pasión creada por Dios para facilitar y enardecer a los hombres en el servicio de la Patria. Pero como todas las pasiones es una espada de doble filo; si no se esgrime en servicio del pueblo, destroza honores comenzando por el propio del que la maneja*"[83] (Politics is a passion created by God to facilitate and inflame persons in the service of their country. But like all passions, it is a double-edged sword; if it is not wielded in the service of the people, it destroys honor, starting with the honor of the politician). This publication got him into trouble with the government. The Minister of Internal Affairs, Coronel Shánchez Hernández, wrote a letter to Monsignor Machado y Escobar, Bishop of San Miguel, accusing Romero of violating the electoral law of El Salvador. This law states that, "*No se podrá hacer en ninguna forma propaganda política por clérigos o seglares, invocando motivos religiosos o valiéndose de las creencias religiosas del pueblo…En los templos, con ocasión de actos de culto propaganda religiosa, tampoco se podrá hacer crítica de las leyes del Estado, de su gobierno o de los funcionarios públicos en particular*" (Political propaganda may not be carried out in any way by clerics or laity invoking religious motives or using the religious beliefs of the people… In temples, during religious events and worship, there shall be no criticism of

[83] Oscar Romero, "Civismo en Política," *Monseñor Romero*, February 22, 1964, Semanario Chaparrastique.

the nation's laws, its government, or public officials in particular).[84] On this occasion, Romero counted on the support of Monsignor Machado y Escobar, who replied to the Minister of Internal Affairs expressing his disagreement with the accusations against Romero.[85] Romero also responded to these accusations in an article he titled "Acusado de Político" (Accused of Being a Politician), published in the *Chaparrastique* newspaper on February 29, 1964. In this article, Romero accepted that he had made public declarations about politics, but "*en cumplimiento del deber de la Iglesia de orientar la conciencia del pueblo acerca de sus deberes de ejercer su acción política conforme a su conciencia y no por momentáneas conveniencias demagógicas*" (in compliance with the Church's duty to guide the people's conscience about their responsibility to exercise their political action according to their own conscience and not for momentary demagogic reasons).[86] As Chanta notes, this provides another perspective on the life, ministry, and values of Romero before he became the Archbishop of San Salvador. It shows that Romero cared for the well-being of the people of El Salvador and was not afraid to voice his critiques in writing. However, at that time, he was not ready to address social and political issues from the pulpit.

Similarly, the Jesuit Father César Jerez, who accompanied Romero and Urioste on their visit to Rome after Grande's assassination and after the celebration of the *Misa Unica* (the celebration of one mass in the archdiocese as a visible sign of unity and

[84] Chanta, "La Conflictividad de Oscar Arnulfo Romero," 27.
[85] Chanta, "La Conflictividad de Oscar Arnulfo Romero," 28.
[86] Chanta, "La Conflictividad de Oscar Arnulfo Romero," 29.

protest against the persecution of the Church), argues that Romero did not experience a "change" or "conversion," as many people suggested. Instead, said Jerez, Romero went back to his humble roots. However, according to Jerez, this process of returning to his roots started for Romero when he was appointed Bishop of Santiago de María (1974–1977) and witnessed the dehumanizing poverty the *campesinos* and *campesinas* were experiencing, not after Grande's death. In María López Vigil's book *Piezas para un Retrato*, Father Jerez shares a conversation he had with Romero during their visit to Rome. Jerez asked Romero, "Why did you change, Monseñor?" According to Jerez, Romero responded:

> *Es que uno tiene raíces... Yo nací en una familia muy pobre. Yo he aguantado hambre, sé lo que es trabajar desde cipote. Cuando me voy al seminario y le entro a mis estudios y me mandan a terminarlos aquí a Roma, paso años y años metido entre libros y me voy olvidando de mis orígenes. Me fui haciendo otro mundo. Después, regreso a El Salvador y me dan la responsabilidad de secretario del obispo de San Miguel. Veintitres años de párroco allá, también muy sumido entre papeles. Y cuando ya me traen a San Salvador de obispo auxiliar, ¡caigo en manos del Opus Dei! y ahí quedo...*
>
> *Me mandan después a Santiago de María y allí sí me vuelvo a topar con la miseria. Con aquellos niños que se morían nomás por el agua que bebían, con aquellos campesinos malmatados en las cortas de café. Ya sabe, padre, carbón que ha sido brasa, con nada que sople prende. Y no fue poco lo que nos pasó al llegar al arzobispado, lo del padre Grande. Usted sabe que mucho lo apreciaba yo. Cuando yo miré a Rutilio muerto, pensé: si lo mataron por hacer lo que hacía, me toca a mí andar por su mismo camino. Cambié, sí, pero también es que volví de regreso.*[87]
>
> It's just that we all have our roots, you know…I was born into a poor family. I have suffered hunger. I know what it is like to work from the time you are a little kid…when I went to seminary and started my

[87] Maria López Vigil, *Piezas para un Retrato*, First (San Salvador, 1993), 148–49.

> studies, and then they sent me to finish studying here in Rome, I spent years and years absorbed in my books, and I started to forget where I came from. So, I started creating another world. When I returned to El Salvador, they made me a bishop's secretary in San Miguel. I was a parish priest for 23 years there, but I was still buried under paperwork. Furthermore, when they sent me to San Salvador to be an auxiliary bishop, I fell into the hands of Opus Dei, and there I remained…
>
> Then they sent me to Santiago de María, and I encountered extreme poverty again. I encountered those children dying just because of the water they were drinking and those *campesinos* almost dead because of the hard work of the coffee harvest…You know, Father, when a piece of charcoal has already been lit once, you do not have to blow on it much to get it to flame up again. And everything that happened to us when I got to the archdiocese, what happened to Father Grande and all…it was a lot. You know how much I appreciated him. When I saw Rutilio dead, I thought, 'If they killed him for what he was doing, it's my job to go down that same road.' So yes, I changed. But I also came back home again.

In other conversations, Romero shared that he did not believe he experienced a sudden conversion but that it was all part of his faith development. For example, at the Puebla Conference, a journalist asked Romero how his conversion had happened. Romero answered, "You can call it a conversion if you like, but I think it would be more accurate to describe it as a development in the process of awareness. I have always wanted to follow the gospel, even though I could not guess where the gospel would lead me."[88] Likewise, when a reporter asked Romero about "his conversion to the defense of human rights,"[89] he gave the following answer:

> I would not talk about a conversion the way many do—if you wish to understand it that way—because I have always had affection for the people, for the poor person. Before becoming a bishop, I was a priest for twenty-two years in San Miguel…When I visited the cantons, it was a real

[88] Morozzo della Rocca, *Oscar Romero*, loc.1273.
[89] Morozzo della Rocca, *Oscar Romero*, loc. 1255.

> pleasure for me to be with the poor and to help them. Various small-scale projects were completed for their benefit while I served there as a priest. Upon arriving in San Salvador, however, the same fidelity with which I had tried to inspire my priesthood made me understand that my affection for the poor, my fidelity to Christian principles and loyalty to the Holy See had to take *a slightly different direction*. On February 22, 1977, I took possession of the archdiocese and on that day many priests were expelled. My predecessor, *Monseñor* Chávez, had already seen several priests violently exiled, which I could not prevent either. Less than a month after my installation, on March 12, 1977, the murder of Father Rutilio Grande occurred…At a meeting of priests, we spent a day deliberating the stand that we should take with respect to the death of Father Rutilio Grande. It was a grace-filled day for me since I understood *the need to take a stand*. In fact, a decision was made: to celebrate just one Mass in the cathedral and not to permit parish masses on the following Sunday. This decision cost me a lot, but it was something that had a strong impact on the diocese, and it helped me *feel courageous*.[90]

The priest Inocencio "Chencho" Alas,[91] who was present at this meeting of clergy, shares that a day before celebrating the Single Mass, Romero received a letter from the *nuncio* demanding he stop the plan of celebrating the Single Mass. After reading the letter, Romero, being the humble person he was, asked Alas what he should do. Alas reminded him of what they had learned in the Christian *Cursillo Movement: "Se acuerda cuántas veces dijimos allí que cuando no encontramos una respuesta para el problema que enfrentamos, lo mejor es ir a hablar con Jesús? ¿Por qué no hace eso? ¿Por qué no va y habla con el Señor y deciden entre los dos qué es lo que hay que hacer?"* (Do you remember how we said back then that when we could not find the answer to a problem we were facing, the best thing to do was to go and talk with Jesus? Why don't you do

[90] Morozzo della Rocca, *Oscar Romero*, loc. 1255–64. Emphasis my own.

[91] This is the same priest who was kidnapped and tortured in 1970 after representing the Catholic Church in the *Congreso Nacional de Reforma Agraría*.

that? Why don't you go and talk with the Lord? Between the two of you, you can decide what needs to be done).[92] According to Alas, after praying in the chapel for an hour, Romero came out and told him, "*Ya hablamos. Él también está de acuerdo.*" (We've talked. He's in agreement too).[93] Alas therefore argues that more than experiencing a conversion, Romero experienced the guidance of the Holy Spirit, which empowered him to develop into the religious leader the poor, marginalized, and oppressed people needed.[94] Thus, one could say that after Grande's death, Romero received a double portion of Grande's Spirit to continue with the ministry of liberation and revolutionary love his dear friend started. Only the Holy Spirit would give Romero the strength and wisdom he needed to defend and unite the poor and the gospel as his friend did. Now, guided by the Holy Spirit, Romero understood where the gospel was taking him: to put his *sentir con la Iglesia* into action—to take a stand and publicly side with the poor. Therefore, Romero actively and publicly joined the people of El Salvador in their fight against injustice. In other words, he became the pastor of the poor people from El Salvador.[95]

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[92] Vigil, *Piezas para un Retrato*, 106–8.

This testimony also appears in *El Cambio de Mons Oscar Romero, Profeta y Mártir*, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YPYrrtR-gFo.

[93] Vigil, *Piezas para un Retrato*, 108.

[94] Alas, *El Cambio de Mons Oscar Romero, Profeta y Mártir*, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YPYrrtR-gFo.

[95] *Historia de El Salvador*, 170.

Romero's Spirituality

As Roberto Morrozzo della Rocca notes in his biography of Romero, Romero prayed a great deal and felt prompted to action by his prayer.[96] As a spiritual discipline, Romero practiced the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola. [97] Since studying at the Gregorian University, which the Jesuits ran, Romero periodically made an Ignatian retreat.[98] In a diary entry of 1972, Romero wrote: "The exercises of Saint Ignatius [of Loyola] are a personal effort to put Christianity into practice. They are not the great general principles of revelation or of the magisterium, but a personal conversation with God."[99] In an interview in Puebla during the general assembly of Latin American bishops, Romero was asked to share his understanding of the role of the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius in América Latina. Romero shared that the role of the spiritual exercises is the renewal, liberation, and development of the person. He said,

> *Yo creo que la teología de los [Ejercicios Espirituales] debe ser una teología cristocéntrica, una teología eclesiológica y, agregaríamos hoy, también una antropología adecuada… Y, decía también, una antropología, una teología que, teniendo naturalmente a Dios como centro, mire en el hombre la imagen de Dios. Ese teocentrismo que San*

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[96] Morozzo della Rocca, *Óscar Romero, loc. 350*.

[97] Saint Ignatius of Loyola has been designated as an *apostolic mystic*. As Harvey D. Egan notes, Saint Ignatius's apostolic successes are the expressions of his radical mysticism. For Saint Ignatius, the Spiritual Exercises include every method of examination of conscience, meditation, contemplation, vocal or mental prayer, and other spiritual activities. In other words, the spiritual exercises are "any means of preparing and disposing our soul to rid itself of all its disordered affections and then, after their removal, of seeking and finding God's will and the ordering of our life for the salvation of our soul." The spiritual exercises require a holistic process. To interiorize the subject of any exercise, the exercitants are guided to fully utilize their senses, emotions, passions, fantasy, memory, reason, intellect, heart, and will.

Harvey D Egan, "Ignatius, Prayer and the Spiritual Exercises," *The Way* 60, no. 2 (April 2021): 47–58, https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAiACO210906000359&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

[98] Morozzo della Rocca, *Óscar Romero, loc. 352*.

[99] Morozzo della Rocca, *Óscar Romero, loc. 226*.

> *Ignacio nos enseña en los [Ejercicios Espirituales] lo veríamos desde el hombre, y en el hombre veríamos la imagen de ese Dios de tal manera que el "para la mayor gloria de Dios" lo traduciríamos en "el hombre que es gloria de Dios en la medida en que se realice, en que se libere, en que se promueva.*[100]
>
> The theology of the Exercises should view humankind as the image of God, with God, naturally, as center. The theocentrism that St Ignatius teaches us in the Exercises would be seen from the human angle, and in the human person, we would see the image of God. Thus, we would translate 'for the greater glory of God' as 'human beings who are God's glory in so far as they realize themselves, free themselves, and develop themselves.

Romero believed that to be present for others, we first need to be aware of our own personal struggles and seek renewal and restoration. However, he insisted that the renewal and restoration that a person experiences must not stay at the individual level, but should free a person to work for the common good. The joy of freedom, restoration, and liberation is contagious. He says,

> *Unos [Ejercicios Espirituales] medirían su eficiencia por la renovación que realicen en el hombre. No sería suficiente si un hombre se siente renovado sólo en una piedad individual, perdonado de sus pecados personales, muy a gusto por sentir su conciencia tranquila. Hay que pasar de una piedad individualista a una piedad comunitaria, a un sentido social de la piedad, de la vivencia de Dios. El hombre que ha hecho bien los [Ejercicios Espirituales] en América Latina tiene que ser un hombre que sí siente la alegría de sentirse hijo de Dios; pero, además de esa alegría personal, individual, no está contento sin llevar ese tesoro a los demás, sin promover a todos sus hermanos. Hay que pasar de una piedad individual a una piedad de irradiación social. Unos [Ejercicios Espirituales] que sólo contentaran el alma del que los ha hecho, no sería*

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[100] "Los Ejercicios Espirituales Hoy En América Latina.Pdf," accessed January 30, 2022, http://repositorio.uca.edu.ni/3478/1/Los%20ejercicios%20espirituales%20hoy%20en%20Am%C3%A9rica%20Latina.pdf.

Monseñor Romero was interviewed by P. José Magaña in Puebla in 1979.

> *fruto adecuado. Hoy en América Latina se espera más que la satisfacción personal.* [101]
>
> It would not be sufficient for people to feel renewed only in their individual piety, with their personal sins forgiven, and with the good feeling of a tranquil conscience. They must move from individualistic piety to communitarian piety, to a social awareness coming out of piety and experience of God. Of course, those who make the Exercises well in Latin America must indeed feel the joy of having their sins forgiven and of being children of God. However, besides that personal and individual joy, they are not content unless they convey that treasure to others and raise up all their brothers and sisters. They must move from individual piety to a piety of 'social radiation.' Retreats that only make the retreatants feel contented are not producing adequate results. Today, in Latin America, more than personal satisfaction is demanded.

Romero's piety allowed him to see in the human person the image of God, and it moved him to social awareness. The courage Romero experienced when he stood before Grande's dead body, courage to take a stand and fight against the injustices and abuses that the poor people of El Salvador were experiencing, was continually nurtured by the Holy Spirit and his closeness to the suffering of the poor, exploited, oppressed, and repressed people.

In June 1870, as preparation for his consecration as auxiliary bishop, Romero participated in a spiritual retreat. On June 8, Romero wrote on his *Cuaderno Ejercicios Espirituales* reflecting on God creator, "*Él crea mi naturaleza, él es autor del nuevo ser de mi bautismo y de mi sacerdocio. En mi episcopado será su Espíritu el que me dará tremendos poderes nuevos*" (He creates my nature, he is the author of the new being of

[101] "Los Ejercicios Espirituales Hoy en América Latina.Pdf."

my baptism and my priesthood. In my episcopate it will be his Spirit who will give me tremendous new powers).[102] Indeed, the Holy Spirit did give Romero "tremendous new powers" in a timely way. I say "timely" because if, before being appointed as the Archbishop of San Salvador, Romero had been as outspoken and confrontative with the government and the oligarchy as Grande was, Romero would not have become the Archbishop of San Salvador. Thus, the Holy Spirit gradually prepared Romero for such a time as the one in which the people of El Salvador were living at that point in history.

Psychologist and Jesuit priest Martín-Baró notes that we can only understand Romero's leadership in relation to the circumstances the people of El Salvador were experiencing. Neither Romero's personality traits nor the nature of his ecclesiastical position allow us to understand the historical role of Romero during the last three years of his ministry. Martín-Baró argues that Romero's leadership during the last three years of his ministry defied the leadership theories developed at that time, which described the profile of a good leader. As Martín-Baró describes,

> *Un breve análisis sobre los rasgos de la personalidad de Monseñor Romero nos manifiesta un hombre sencillo, inteligente, aunque no brillante, relativamente tímido para el trato interpersonal, afable y cariñoso en círculos restringidos, no muy seguro, pero abierto ante las demandas de la realidad, sobre todo respecto a su propia función sacerdotal. Estos rasgos de ninguna manera corresponden a la descripción más o menos implícita que de los grandes lideres se suele hacer y, sin duda ninguna, es una imagen difícil de compaginar con la*

[102] Óscar Arnulfo Romero, "Ejercicios Espirituales," 1966-1972, 325, https://jimdo-storage.global.ssl.fastly.net/file/d9883ca3-a5ef-42f9-945a-6bf7e5e232c5/San%20Romero%20de%20Am%C3%A9rica_Ejercicios%20Espirituales.pdf.

> *imagen que se forma quien, sin haberlo conocido personalmente, supiera de su acción y predicación en los tres años de su arzobispado*.[103]
>
> A brief analysis of Monsignor Romero's personality traits shows us a simple man, intelligent but not brilliant, relatively shy in interpersonal relationships, affable and affectionate in restricted circles, not very sure of himself, but open to the demands of reality, especially regarding his own priestly function. These features in no way correspond to the more or less implicit description that is usually made of great leaders, and, without a doubt, it is an image that is difficult to reconcile with the image that is formed by someone who, without having known him personally, knew of his actions and preaching in the three years of his archbishopric.

For Martín-Baró, Romero's leadership during that time was not something he looked for or desired; rather, his leadership emerged as a response to the peculiar circumstances the poor people of El Salvador were facing. The people were tired of the dehumanizing exploitation and bloody repression they had experienced for centuries. They were pushing "*con un increíble vigor por emerger a la historia y tomar en sus propias manos las riendas de su destino*" (with an incredible vigor to emerge into history and take the reins of their destiny into their own hands).[104] Thus, Romero was called to serve people who had inherited deep soul wounds and continued experiencing new ones. Acknowledging their open and painful wounds, Romero, empowered by the Holy Spirit, decided to contribute to their healing process. Perhaps without knowing it, through his ministry and leadership, Romero created a support system for the poor people of El Salvador.

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[103] Ignacio Martín-Baró, "El Liderazgo de Monseñor Romero: Un Análisis Psicososial," Collección Digital Ognacio Martín-Baró, n.d., 155, http://www.uca.edu.sv/coleccion-digital-IMB/articulo/monsenor-una-voz-para-un-pueblo-pisoteado/.

[104] Martín-Baró, "El Liderazgo de Monseñor Romero," 153.

Romero's leadership was transformative. He recognized the wounds and needs of the people and tried to guide them through a process of change for them and the entire Salvadoran society. With the help of the Holy Spirit and the support of the people, during these three years Romero became the leader nobody, not even he himself, would have imagined he would become. Furthermore, during these three challenging years, Romero was able to "struggle well" amid the extreme violence, oppression, and repression the people and the church of El Salvador were experiencing. Even though like his friend Rutilio, Romero had previously struggled with debilitating physical and mental health issues, during his leadership as an archbishop, he did not show the slightest hint of mental agitation, emotional imbalance, or severe bodily illness.[105] As happened to Father Grande, Romero's resilience was strengthened by his ministry and by his close contact with the poor people of El Salvador. He had an "open-door" office policy. He frequently interrupted important meetings to receive people who came to report the violence they and their communities were experiencing or who needed help finding their loved ones who had been detained and disappeared by the armed forces.[106] He also frequently visited poor neighborhoods, villages, cantons, and hamlets. Certainly, the people shared with Romero the irrefutable denunciation of their sufferings and the oppression and repression exerted against them by those in power. But they also shared with him their sincere faith, their spirit of community, and their willingness to give their lives in Christian witness. In response to Romero's empathy, care, and love for them, they supported his leadership.

[105] Martín-Baró, "El Liderazgo de Monseñor Romero," 160.
[106] Martín-Baró, "El Liderazgo de Monseñor Romero," 161.

Most important of all, they saw him as their pastor, their spiritual leader. Therefore, the decisions Romero made after Grande's assassination, including the Single Mass, were vital in gaining the trust of the archdiocesan clergy who wanted to implement the teachings and demands of Medellín, that of the members of the Christian base communities, and of the growing Christian popular organizations. Their support gave Romero great strength, so much so that he did not care about disobeying the nuncio and facing the admonition of the hierarchy of the church, which he deeply respected and honored.

Of course, Romero also needed God's continued approval of his ministry, and he therefore spent long hours in silent prayer.[107] Romero also continued practicing the Spiritual Exercises, which were a source of renewal and strength. In his sermon of March 2, 1980, Romero acknowledges that "*Si no fuera por esta oración y esta reflexión que trato de mantener unido con Dios, no sería yo más que lo que dice San Pablo: 'una lata que suena*'" (If it were not for this prayer and this reflection through which I try to remain united with God, I would be nothing more than what Saint Paul says: 'a clanging cymbal').[108]

However, Romero listened to Scripture and to the "cries of the people" as a form of prayer— the kind of prayer most important for a preacher.[109] Romero dedicated many

[107] Martín-Baró, "El Liderazgo de Monseñor Romero," 155.

[108] Miguel Cavada Diez, *Homilías: Monseñor Óscar A. Romero*, First, vol. 6, 7 vols. (San Salvador: UCA editores, 2009), 350.

[109] The USCCB Catholic Bishops Committee says in Fulfilled in Your Hearing, "Attentive listening to the Scriptures and to the people is, in essence, a form of prayer, perhaps the form of prayer most appropriate to the spirituality of the priest and preacher."

hours on Saturday nights to the preparation of his homilies. The nun who cared for him in the *Hospitalito*, where Romero lived, shared that Romero stayed up until the wee hours of the morning on Sundays working on his homily. He studied commentaries on the biblical readings and remembered the events of the week. However, Romero actually worked on preparing the homily all week long, for in preparation for his homily, Romero listened to the people's suffering, learned about the events of the week, and sought advice on their veracity.

One could say that Romero read scripture and the events of the week with a "hermeneutic of suspicion"[110] He listened to people who read Scripture and the events of the week from different perspectives. For this reason, he was in constant dialogue and sought the advice and support of the archdiocesan clergy, of the closest and most committed lay sectors, of specialists (Christian or not) whose science or experience could help him make more rational and constructive decisions or tackle problems with the best chance of success. As Martín-Baró shares, little by little, a series of concentric circles of people formed around Romero, whose proximity was determined by the function and capacity of each one and by different degrees of Christian identification. Romero unified everyone with himself respecting each one in their position, in their Christian role, and in

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USCCB Bishop's Committee on Priestly Life and Ministry United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Fulfilled in Your Hearing: The Homily in the Sunday Assembly*, 1st ed. (Washington, D.C.: USCCB Publishing, 1982), 10.

[110] This term was coined by the philosopher Paul Ricoeur, and is extensively used in Justo and Catherine González book, *The Liberating Pulpit*.

Justo L. González and Catherine González, *The Liberating Pulpit* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Pub, 2003).

their social work.[111] Martín-Baró shares, "*Era frecuente ver en el círculo más próximo de Monseñor tanto a un abogado como a un dirigente campesino, a un sacerdote como a una secretaria, a una religiosa o a un profesor"* (It was common to see in the Monsignor's closest circle both a lawyer and a peasant leader, a priest as well as a secretary, a nun or a teacher).[112] However, it was in the solitude of prayer that he decided, before God, what he had to say.[113] In his last homily from the Cathedral of San Salvador, Romero shared,

> *Le pido al Señor, durante toda la semana, mientras voy recogiendo el clamor del pueblo y el dolor de tanto crimen, la ignominia de tanta violencia, que me dé la palabra oportuna para consolar, para denunciar, para llamar al arrepentimiento, y, aunque siga siendo una voz que clama en el desierto, sé que la Iglesia está haciendo el esfuerzo por cumplir con su misión.*[114]
>
> As I listen during the whole week to the cries of the people and behold so much horrible crime and such shameful violence, I ask the Lord to give me appropriate words for consoling, denouncing, and calling to repentance. Though I continue to be a voice crying out in the desert, I know that the church is trying hard to fulfill her mission.

Thus, the final product was always a homily that embodied Romero's *sentir* with the Church.

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[111] Martín-Baró, "El Liderazgo de Monseñor Romero: Un Análisis Psicososial," 163–64.
[112] Martín-Baró, "El Liderazgo de Monseñor Romero,"164.
[113] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2005, 1:15.
[114] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2009, 6:426.

Monsignor Romero's *Sentir con la Iglesia*

"*Sentir con la Iglesia*" (to feel with the Church)[115] is the motto that Romero chose in his episcopal consecration in 1970 and that guided his ministry as the Archbishop of San Salvador. Romero adopted the phrase *sentir con la Iglesia* from Saint Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises. Even though the expression "*sentir con la Iglesia*" does not appear literally in the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, the exercises communicate the essence of this expression in different ways.[116] For instance, in paragraph 352, the section on rules that concludes the Spiritual Exercises, reads, "*Para el sentido verdadero que en la iglesia militante debemos tener, se guarden las reglas siguientes*" (For the true feeling/sense that we should have in the militant Church, the following rules are kept).[117] As theologian Edgardo Colón-Emeric explains, the rules that follow in the exercises are structured into three groups: 1) external practices of piety, which are the majority; 2) adherence to authorities of the church; for Saint Ignatius, "*sentir con la iglesia* is *sentir* with the *magisterium* as taught by the theologians and lived by the saints;"[118] 3) dogmas concerning God and humanity, "faith and works, grace and freedom, and love and fear."[119]

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[115] Theologians usually translate this phrase as "to think with the church." However, I believe that a better translation for the word "sentir" is "to feel." "To feel with the Church" represents Romero's life and ministry better. He did not only "think" with God and the people, he *felt God's love and pain for the suffering of God's people in his own human body*, and he also *felt* the people's suffering.

[116] Douglas Marcouiller and Jon Sobrino, *El Sentir con la Iglesia de Monseñor Romero*, 2nd ed. (San Salvador: UCA editores, 2012), 7.

[117] San Ignacio de Loyola, *Obras de San Igancio de Loyola* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1997), 302.

[118] Colón-Emeric, *Óscar Romero's Theological Vision*, 184.

[119] Colón-Emeric, *Óscar Romero's Theological Vision*, 185.

It seems that for Saint Ignatius *sentir con la Iglesia* mainly meant *sentir* with the Magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church.[120] However, as Colón-Emeric explains, "the density of the Ignatian *Sentir con la Iglesia* was the object of adoption, adaptation, and accretion by Óscar Romero."[121] The meaning of Romero's motto, *Sentir con la Iglesia,* evolved throughout his ministry, as he himself evolved as a religious leader. Even though some theologians would argue that before Grande's death, Romero cared only about *sentir* with the Magisterium of the Church, during the three years he served as archbishop, Romero demonstrated with words and deeds his *sentir* not only with the Magisterium but also, and most importantly, with God and with the poor, oppressed, and suffering people. Romero's homilies consequently embody his *sentir* with God, the people, and the Magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church.

During a spiritual retreat before his consecration as a bishop, on June 8, 1970 Romero reread the church's magisterial documents. He mentions reading the first chapter of *Gadium et Spes* and chapter 5 from *Lumen Gentium.* These documents helped Romero reflect on human dignity, *Gadium et Spes,* and the call to holiness, *Lumen Gentium.* As Colón-Emeric notes, "these readings confirmed the orientation of Romero's consecration."[122] The same day, Romero wrote about his *Ejercicios Espirituales* that after some overwhelming days of fatigue and work, he felt *la dulzura y la intimidad con Jesús* (the sweetness and the intimacy with Jesus). He continued by saying, "*Siento que me*

[120] I will address this in under the section "*Romero's Sentir con la Iglesia*"
[121] Colón-Emeric, *Óscar Romero's Theological Vision,* 185.
[122] Colón-Emeric, *Óscar Romero's Theological Vision*, 187.

llama como un jefe, a planear una nueva fase, a confiarme un cargo [que] será delicado. Le entrego todo. El mes del Corazón de Jesús me inspira el deseo de una consagración más a fondo. Quisiera distinguirme por eso: ***por ser el obispo del Corazón de Jesús****"* (I feel he called me as a boss, to plan a new phase, to trust me with a new position that will be delicate. I give him everything. The month of the Sacred Heart of Jesus inspires in me the desire for a deeper consecration. I would like to be distinguished by this: *by being the bishop of the heart of Jesus*).[123]

In that same retreat, on June 9, 1970, Romero wrote on his notes about the *Ejercicios Espirituales* a list of four things he was committed to doing as an auxiliary bishop. Second on this list is his fidelity to the Magisterium. Regarding this commitment he wrote, "*su doctrina es mi criterio*" (its doctrine is my criterion).[124] Thus, for the soon-to-be consecrated Bishop Romero, "*sentir con la Iglesia*," is *sentir* with the Heart of Jesus and with the Magisterium.

However, as Romero's life and ministry evolved, so too did his *sentir con la Iglesia*. As Romero spent more time with the poor, oppressed, and marginalized people, he *sintió* (felt) their pain. In his interview in Puebla (1979) regarding Saint Ignatius's Spiritual Exercises, Romero shared his now evolved understanding of Saint Ignatius' *sentir con la Iglesia*. When asked about the characteristics of the theology in which the Spiritual Exercises take form today in Latin America, he answered,

> *Yo creo que la teología de los [Ejercicios Espirituales] debe ser una teología cristocéntrica, una teología eclesiológica y, agregaríamos hoy,*

[123] Romero, "Ejercicios Espirituales."
[124] Romero, "Ejercicios Espirituales".

también una antropología adecuada… Eclesiológica: la teología de los [ejercicios espirituales] daría hoy oportunidad para presentar una continuación de Cristo en nuestra historia y en nuestra realidad latinoamericana vivida desde la Iglesia, Cuerpo Místico de Cristo, en la historia. Una Iglesia sentida no sólo en cuanto a magisterio, sino en cuanto pueblo. Pueblo que pone en esa Iglesia su esperanza; pueblo que es él mismo Iglesia. Un Cristo encarnado en una Iglesia latinoamericana de pobres, de oprimidos, de sufridos. Esa es la eclesiología. El 'sentir con la Iglesia' de San Ignacio sería ese sentir con la Iglesia encarnada en este pueblo necesitado de liberación...[125]

I think the theology of the Exercises should be a Christocentric and ecclesiological theology. In these times, it should also include adequate anthropology…In its ecclesiology, the theology of the Exercises today should provide an opportunity to make present a continuation of Christ in our history, in our Latin American situation as lived in history by members of the Church, Christ's mystical body. It would be a Church felt not only as the *magisterium* but as a people who put their hope in the Church, a people who are themselves the Church and are Christ, who has become flesh in a Latin America Church of the poor, oppressed, and suffering. Such should be the ecclesiology. Saint Ignatius' '*sentir con la Iglesia' would* be to feel with the Church incarnated in these people in need of liberation.

Furthermore, when asked about the rereading of the Spiritual Exercises in Latin America, Romero responded,

El 'sentir con la Iglesia', San Ignacio lo presentaría hoy como una Iglesia que el Espíritu Santo suscita en nuestro pueblo, en nuestras comunidades, una Iglesia que no sólo es la doctrina del magisterio, la fidelidad del Papa, sino, también, el servicio a este pueblo y la interpretación de los signos de los tiempos a la luz del Evangelio.[126]

Saint Ignatius would present today's '*sentir con la Iglesia*' as a Church that the Holy Spirit is stirring up in our people, in our communities, a Church that means not only the teachings of the *Magisterium,* fidelity to the pope, but also service to this people and the discernment of the signs of the times in the light of the gospel.

[125] "Los Ejercicios Espirituales Hoy en América Latina.Pdf."
[126] "Los Ejercicios Espirituales Hoy en América Latina.Pdf."

Therefore, Jon Sobrino notes that for Romero *sentir con la Iglesia* meant *sentir* with God, *sentir* with the people, and *sentir* with the Magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church.[127] Again, Romero's homilies testify to this. Thus, several years after Grande's death, Romero still echoes his dear friend's desire to defend and unite the poor and the gospel.

Conclusion

Despite what many people say, Romero always cared for the poor. However, his different responsibilities sometimes took his attention away from the people's suffering. As he got closer to the suffering of the poor people in Santiago de María, Romero's eyes were opened again, and he could see with the eyes of God. In addition, Romero was inspired and encouraged by the daring evangelical movement, the revolution of love, that Grande started in Aguilares. Inspired by Grande's love for the poor and his faithfulness to the gospel of Jesus Christ, Romero decided while standing before Grande's dead body to continue with his dear friend's ministry of love, justice, liberation, and restoration. That day, Romero received a double portion of Grande's Spirit and became the pastoral and prophetic Spirit-guided leader whom the poor people of El Salvador needed. One could say that Grande helped Romero to *sentir con la Iglesia* at a deeper level.

Romero's homilies embody his *sentir con la Iglesia*. Thus, in the following chapter I analyze how Romero's homilies reflect his *sentir* with God, the people, and the

[127] Marcouiller and Sobrino, El *Sentir con la Iglesia*, 5.

Magisterium of the Church. I also explore specifically how Romero's messages helped the people who had and were experiencing traumatic wounds.

Chapter 5

Romero's Homilies: A Balm for a Wounded World

On March 23, 1980, a day before his assassination, Óscar Romero preached:

> *En Tejutla, en el cantón de Los Martínez, celebramos la fiesta patronal del cantón y allá me entregaron una denuncia espantosa. El día 7 de marzo, como a las 12:00 de la noche, un camión lleno de efectivos militares, vestidos de civil y uniformados otros, abrieron las puertas, se introdujeron a la casa sacando en forma violenta a culatazos y puntapiés a todos los miembros de la familia; violaron a cuatro jóvenes, golpearon salvajemente a sus padres y las amenazaron que si decían algo que se atuvieran a las consecuencias. Hemos sabido la tragedia de estas pobres muchachas.*[1]
>
> *En horas de la tarde, fue capturado el joven reservista Emilio Mejía, quien, con otras personas, se conducía en un transporte hacia Cojutepeque. Fue traído a su cantón, San José de la Ceiba, donde, esa misma tarde, fue muerto frente a la casa de don Salvador Mejía. Allí fue recogido por su madre, doña Carmen Martínez de Mejía, por la mañana del día siguiente y enterrado por la tarde. Se dice que esto sucedió por equivocación, pues buscaban a otra persona con el mismo nombre. Fatal equivocación.*
>
> *Fue capturado en su propia casa el señor Emilio Mejía, en el cantón San Juan Miraflores Arriba, delante de su propia esposa, doña Pilar Raymundo de Mejía, y, después de ser maltratado, fue sacado de la casa. Al día siguiente lo encontró su esposa, como a dos cuadras de distancia, decapitado.*
>
> *Fueron capturados en su propia casa, en el cantón San Miguel Nance Verde, don José Cupertino Alvarado y sus hijas Carmen Alvarado y María Josefa Alvarado, quienes fueron encontrados muertos en un cafetal detrás de la ermita del cantón San Juan Miraflores Arriba. Habiendo sido enterrados en una fosa común al día siguiente por sus familiares.*[2]

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[1] Miguel Cavada Diez, *Homilías: Monseñor Óscar A. Romero*, First, vol. 6 (San Salvador: UCA editores, 2009), 439.

[2] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 6:440–41.

'El día 21 de marzo, miembros del FAPU solicitaron al arzobispado que se les ayudara con el entierro de diecisiete cadáveres que tenían en la catedral porque tenían miedo de ser reprimidos en la calle, camino del cementerio y, por eso, se veían obligados a enterrarlos en la catedral…'[3]

En La Laguna, mataron al matrimonio de Ernesto Navas, Audelia Mejía de Navas y a sus hijitos Martín e Hilda de trece y siete años y once campesinos más. Tenemos, sin nombres, en Plan de Ocotes, cuatro campesinos y dos niños, entre estos, dos mujeres; en El Rosario, tres campesinos más. Esto fue el sábado.[4]

A las 12:00 horas, soldados del Ejército, en la población de El Almendral, jurisdicción de Majagual, La Libertad, capturaron a los campesinos Miguel Ángel Gómez de Paz, Concepción Coralia Menjívar y José Emilio Valencia sin haber sido puestos en libertad. Pedimos que se les consigne a los tribunales

El jueves, 20 de marzo, a las 4:00 de la tarde, en el cantón El Jocote, Quezaltepeque, fueron asesinados el dirigente campesino Alfonso Muñoz Pacheco, secretario de conflictos de la Federación de Trabajadores del Campo; el campesino Muñoz era ampliamente conocido en el campo por su dedicación a la causa de los campesinos.

Y algo muy horroroso, muy importante, este mismo día jueves 20, fue localizado aún con vida el campesino Agustín Sánchez, quien había sido capturado el 15 por soldados en Zacatecoluca que lo entregaron a la Policía de Hacienda. Ha afirmado el campesino Sánchez, en una declaración ante notario y testigos, que su captura sucedió en la hacienda El Cauca, departamento de la Paz, cuando trabajaba en la filiación de la Unión Comunal Salvadoreña. Lo mantuvieron durante cuatro días torturándolo, sin comida ni agua, con azotes constantes, asfixias, hasta que, el día 19 de marzo, junto con otros dos compañeros, les dieron balazos en la cabeza, con la suerte de que este balazo solo le destrozó el pómulo derecho y el ojo. Moribundo, en la madrugada, unos campesinos le dieron ayuda, hasta que una persona de confianza lo trasladó a esta capital. Este horrendo testimonio, no lo pudo firmar el campesino porque tenía deshechas las dos manos. Personas de reconocida honorabilidad presenciaron este horrible cuadro y hay documentos fotográficos que revela el estado en que recogieron a este pobre campesino.

Tenemos informe, aún no confirmado, de la muerte masiva de veinticinco campesinos en San Pablo Tacachico. A última hora, al comenzar la misa, llega la confirmación de esta terrible tragedia. [5]

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[3] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 6:443.
[4] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 6:446.
[5] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 6:451–52.

We celebrated the patronal feast in the village of Los Martínez in Tejutla, and the people there made a frightful denunciation. Around midnight on March 7, a truck filled with soldiers arrived; some were in uniform, and some were in civilian dress. They forcibly entered a house and violently removed everyone in the family, kicking them and beating them with their rifles. They raped four young women, savagely beat the parents, and warned them that they would suffer the consequences if they said anything. We have learned about the tragedy of the poor girls.

One afternoon the young reservist Emilio Mejía was captured when he was traveling with other persons toward Cojutepeque. He was taken to his own village, San José de la Ceiba, and on the same afternoon, was killed in front of the house of Don Salvador Mejía. The next morning, his mother, Doña Carmen Martínez de Mejía, claimed his body and buried him that afternoon. It is said that this happened by mistake; they were looking for another person with the same name. A fatal mistake!

Emilio Mejía was captured in his own house in the village of San Juan Miraflores Arriba, in the presence of his wife, Doña Pilar Raymundo de Mejía. He was beaten and dragged from the house. The next day his wife found him about two blocks away, decapitated.

Third, in the village of San Miguel Nance Verde, José Cupertino Alvarado and his daughters, Carmen Alvarado and María Josefa Alvarado, were captured in their own house and were later found dead in a coffee grove behind the chapel of the village of San Juan Miraflores Arriba. They were buried in a common grave the following day by their family.

On March 21, members of the FAPU asked the archdiocese to help them with the burial of the seventeen bodies they had in the cathedral because they were afraid of being repressed in the street on the way to the cemetery. For that reason, they felt obliged to bury them in the cathedral.

In La Laguna, they killed the couple Ernesto Navas and Audelia Mejia de Navas and their children: Martin, age thirteen, and Hilda, age seven. They also killed eleven other *campesinos*. The people of Plan de Ocotes have reported, without giving names, that four *campesinos* and two children were killed, including two women. In El Rosario three more *campesinos* were killed. That was on Saturday.

At noon, in the village of El Almendral in the jurisdiction of Majagual, La Libertad, army soldiers captured the *campesinos* Miguel Ángel Gómez de Paz, Concepción Coralia Menjívar, and José Emilio Valencia, and they have not been released. We ask that they be brought before the courts.

At four o'clock on Thursday, March 20, in the village of El Jocote, Quezaltepeque, *campesino* leader Alfonso Muñoz Pacheco was killed. As

> secretary of conflicts for the Federation of Rural Workers, he was widely known in the countryside for his dedication to the cause of *campesinos*.
>
> It is important to note that another very horrifying thing happened that same Thursday the twentieth. The *campesino* Agustín Sánchez, who had been captured by soldiers in Zacatecoluca and handed over to the Finance Police, was found alive. In a declaration notarized before witnesses, Sánchez stated that his capture took place in the El Cauca estate in the department of La Paz while he was working in association with the Salvadoran Communal Union. They held him without food or water for four days. They tortured him with constant whipping and suffocation. Finally, on March 19 he was shot in the head along with two other companions, but by luck the bullet destroyed only his right eye and cheekbone. Early in the morning he was found in a moribund state by some *campesinos*, who attended to him until a person of confidence could transport him to the capital. The *campesino* was unable to sign this horrifying testimony because both of his hands are smashed. Highly respected persons witnessed this terrible situation, and there is photographic evidence that reveals the state in which they found this poor *campesino.*
>
> Earlier we had unconfirmed information regarding the massive death of twenty-five *campesinos* in San Pablo Tacachico. At the last minute, just as Mass was beginning, confirmation of this terrible tragedy arrived.

By naming, acknowledging, and validating the painful and traumatic reality of the poor, marginalized, and oppressed people of El Salvador, Romero became the voice of their trauma. He was their prophet and pastor who, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, publicly condemned the atrocious violence committed against them and comforted and guided their hurting souls. Furthermore, by acknowledging, naming, and validating the trauma, suffering, and violence that many people experienced in El Salvador, Romero

was not complicit in the abuse of power and in rendering invisible the poor and hurting people.[6]

Romero's homilies were his primary way of communicating with the people of El Salvador and beyond. Most of his listeners had inherited soul wounds and had been exposed to continuous traumatic stress over many generations. During this time of collective trauma, the spiritual leadership of Óscar Romero provided them with a Spirit-led and compassionate presence. He was an instrument of peace, love, transformation, restoration, healing, and hope, one who listened carefully to the voice of God in Scripture and in the cries of the poor and suffering people.

The *campesino* families of El Salvador where subjected to excruciating poverty. As Romero says in his homily of January 27, 1980, *"Hay hambre no porque la tierra no dé, sino porque los hombres acaparan lo que la tierra da y dejan a otros con hambre"* (There is hunger not because the land has not produced enough food but because some people have monopolized the fruits of the land, thus leaving others hungry).[7] When the poor people, and their allies, fought for justice and better living conditions, they experienced violent repression and oppression. Death squads and the military arrested,

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[6] As Nancy J. Ramsay says in *Telling the Truth: Preaching About Sexual and Domestic Violence*, "In fact, by not acknowledging and naming the suffering and violence that many people experience, the church becomes complicit in the abuse of power and the invisibilization of the victims."

John S. McClure and Nancy J. Ramsay, eds., *Telling the Truth: Preaching About Sexual and Domestic Violence* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 1999), 60.

[7] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2009, 6:238.

tortured, and disappeared priests, peasant leaders, union leaders, and other poor women and men whom they labeled "subversives."[8]

Amid these circumstances, Romero preached from the Cathedral of San Salvador every Sunday morning.[9] Though his homilies routinely lasted as long as two hours, people listened attentively. If they were not present, they heard the sermons on the radio.

Romero's homilies follow a simple pattern. He begins the explanation or exposition of God's word with the title he gives to the homily. The title usually reflects the doctrinal theme he will develop in the homily or the central message, which he then explores in three main points or thoughts. As he develops these points, he connects the lectionary readings to the Liturgical Calendar and the events of the week.

One of the reasons why people looked forward to hearing Romero's homilies every Sunday is because they learned about the events of the week through his homilies. He shared the good news—the celebrations and religious feasts, the meetings in the community, the visitors and letters of support—and the bad news; he denounced the acts of violence (as we see in the example with which this chapter opened). He named the imprisoned, disappeared, killed, and tortured people. No wonder that, according to his biographer, Roberto Morozzo, many people defined Romero's homilies with one word: *verdad* (truth).[10]

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[8] Lynn Stephen, *Women and Social Movements in Latin America: Power from Below*, Illustrated edition (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), 34.

[9] Except for the times when the Cathedral was occupied. The last occupation before Romero's death lasted several months.

[10] Roberto Morozzo della Rocca, *Oscar Romero: La Biografía* (San Salvador: UCA editores, 2015), 131.

In preparation for each Sunday homily, Romero listened to the "cries of the people" during the week.[11] As the Catholic Bishop's Committee states in *Fulfilled in Your Hearing*, "Attentive listening to the Scriptures and to the people is, in essence, a form of prayer, perhaps the form of prayer most appropriate to the spirituality of the priest and preacher."[12] This act of listening and praying prepared him to lament with them and to name, acknowledge, and validate in the homily the violence, oppression, and persecution that they were suffering—in short, to be the voice of their trauma. By preaching the truth about the suffering of the poor people of El Salvador, Romero practiced what he believed, namely that "*La Iglesia sirve al dolor humano donde quiera que esté*" (the church is at the service of human pain wherever it exists)."[13] Romero in this way put the Sunday Mass and the homily in service of the suffering people.

Romero was the prophet and pastor that the poor, marginalized, and oppressed people of El Salvador needed for such a time as this. For Romero's homilies include both prophetic denunciation and elements of pastoral care. Through his homilies the people heard both a prophetic preacher who spoke for God and a pastoral preacher who spoke on behalf of the poor, voiced their trauma, and responded to their needs. Through his Scripture-steeped homilies, Romero communicated God's judgment on the personal, social, political, economic, and cultural circumstances which the people of El Salvador

[11] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2009, 6:426.

[12] USCCB Bishop's Committee on Priestly Life and Ministry United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Fulfilled in Your Hearing: The Homily in the Sunday Assembly*, 1st ed. (Washington, D.C.: USCCB Publishing, 1982), 10.

[13] Miguel Cavada Diez, ed., *Homilías: Monseñor Óscar A. Romero*, First, vol. 3 (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 2006), 319.

were experiencing. At the same time, he helped the people hear the God who was speaking to them amid their suffering. Pastoral care and prophetic proclamation are essentially intertwined in Romero's sermons.[14] Or, using Gabor Maté's and Peter Levine's language, we could say that Romero was an "empathetic witness" for the suffering people of El Salvador and that through his homilies, he created a "blanket of compassion" for them.[15] He felt with and for them.

Indeed, it was fundamentally because of his *sentir con la Iglesia*—his *sentir* with God, the people, and the Magisterium of the Church at the affective, cognitive, and conative levels, that Romero was able to preach prophetic and pastoral homilies. He was able to *sentir con la Iglesia* by listening attentively to the voice of God in both scripture and the people's painful reality and by allowing both scripture and the people's concrete circumstances to illuminate each other. He used the same hermeneutical approach with the Magisterium of the Church, inviting the people's concrete circumstances to influence his reading and understanding of the magisterial documents. Romero's empathetic response to the suffering of the poor, marginalized, and oppressed people of El Salvador

[14] Homiletician Dale P. Andrews argues that pastoral care and prophetic proclamation are inextricably fused. For instance, for Andrews, African American pastoral preaching is also prophetic preaching because it seeks to restore the spiritual and mental well-being of Black people, which is a way to confront the powers that seek to destroy them. In this sense, a sermon that provides pastoral care is also prophetic. However, I would also say that a prophetic sermon that is faithful to scripture (as are Romero's sermons) provides pastoral care because it draws people into the reality of God. To analyze Andrews' understanding of "prophetic care," see *Preaching Prophetic Care: Building Bridges to Justice: Essays in Honor of Dale P. Andrews.*

Phillis-Isabella Sheppard et al., eds., *Preaching Prophetic Care: Building Bridges to Justice* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2018).

[15] Peter A. Levine, *In an Unspoken Voice: How the Body Releases Trauma and Restores Goodness*, 1st edition (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2010), locs. 146 & 156.

led him to become a *Balm* in *Gilead* (Jeremiah 8:22) that soothed their pain and left a beautiful fragrance in their lives.

Furthermore, Romero's *sentir con la Iglesia* enabled the people to strengthen their resilience. Through his homilies, he provided a space for communal lament, proclaimed a message of hope amid suffering, and helped the poor, oppressed, and suffering people of El Salvador reclaim their agency and participate in the creation of a better future.

In this chapter, I explore Romero's theological, hermeneutical, and pastoral approach to preaching to the suffering and wounded people of El Salvador. To that end, I analyze Romero's homilies for how they embody his *sentir* with God, the people, and the Magisterium of the Church.

Romero's *Sentir* con la Iglesia

What did *sentir* mean to Romero? His homilies show that what Romero was doing was not merely understanding but empathizing with the Church.[16] Certainly his homilies show cognition or awareness of what was going on in their lives. But they do so much more. Martín-Baró points out,

> *Monseñor Romero era un hombre con una gran capacidad para empatizar con los sentimientos ajenos…[S]ufría en carne propia las debilidades de*

[16] Charles Campbell explains, in his book *The Word Before the Powers*, "The preacher does not stand over against the congregation but rather stands with them as one who also struggles with complicity in the face of the powers; all stand together in need of redemption. The preacher does not 'beat up on people' or load them up with guilt but rather seeks to set them free, possibly even tapping into their longing for release. Preaching thus moves beyond simplistically condemning or challenging individuals and moves toward naming and confronting the powers that hold people captive. The 'tone' of preaching consequently becomes more empathetic and hopeful than judgmental and angry."

Charles L. Campbell, *The Word Before the Powers: An Ethic of Preaching* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 92.

> *su propio clero, las incomprensiones y bajezas de la oligarquía, de cuya Amistad había creído gozar hasta antes de su arzobispado, pero, sobre todo, los ataques y desmanes continuos contra los pobres y humildes del pueblo salvadoreño. Todo ello le producía un verdadero sufrimiento que él trataba de asimilar en largas horas de silenciosa oración y que se convertía en fustigante cólera a la hora de la denuncia pública. Muy posiblemente esta capacidad de empatizar permitió a Monseñor Romero mantener esa última apertura hacia las personas, que alimentaba lo que algunos han llamado su 'frescura ética', es decir, esa capacidad profunda de captar lo que de bueno hubiera en los acontecimientos más diversos y abrirse a ellos por encima de prejuicios e intereses.*[17]
>
> Monsignor Romero was a man with a great capacity to empathize with the feelings of others… [H]e suffered in his own flesh the weaknesses of his clergy, the misunderstandings and crimes of the oligarchy, whose friendship he had thought he enjoyed until before his archbishopric, but, above all, he suffered the continuous attacks and excesses against the poor and humble Salvadoran people. All of this caused him real suffering that he tried to assimilate in long hours of silent prayer and that turned into lashing anger at the time of public denunciation. Quite possibly, this ability to empathize allowed Monsignor Romero to maintain an openness towards people, which fed what some have called his 'ethical freshness,' that is, that profound ability to capture what was good in the most diverse events and open up to them beyond prejudices and interests.

Pastoral theologian Emmanuel Y. Lartey's treatment of empathy is useful to understand Romero's *sentir* with the Church. In his book, *In Living Color*, Lartey notes that empathy has three characteristics: of *feeling* (the affective level), of *thinking* (the cognitive level), and of a *tendency to action* (the conative level).[18] In his homilies, Romero communicates his *sentir* with God, the people, and the Magisterium of the Church at the *affective*, *cognitive*, and *conative* levels.

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[17] Ignacio Martín-Baró, "El Liderazgo de Monseñor Romero: Un Análisis Psicosocial," Collección Digital Ognacio Martín-Baró, n.d., 155, http://www.uca.edu.sv/coleccion-digital-IMB/articulo/monsenor-una-voz-para-un-pueblo-pisoteado/.

[18] Emmanuel Y. Lartey, *In Living Color: An Intercultural Approach to Pastoral Care and Counseling*, 2nd edition (London; Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2003), 92.

As a result, Romero's preaching shows his care for what Lartey calls the well-being of the whole person. Says Lartey:

> Pastoral care consists of helping activities, participated in by people who recognize a transcendent dimension of human life, which, by the use of verbal or non-verbal, direct or indirect, literal or symbolic modes of communication, aim at preventing, relieving or facilitating persons coping with anxieties. Pastoral care seeks to foster people's growth as full human beings together with the development of ecologically and socio-politically holistic communities in which all persons may live human lives.[19]

In short, Lartey understands pastoral care as "a contemporary expression of the age-long activity or ministry of the 'cure of souls' (*cura animarum*)."[20] Drawing from the work of Clebsch and Jaekle (1967), Lartey identifies seven primary functions of Christian pastoral care or this cure of souls: healing, guiding, sustaining, reconciling, nurturing, liberating, and empowering.[21] These seven functions can be practiced through five primary models of pastoral care that manifest the shape and form of pastoral care (and that we can see taking place in Romero's sermons): pastoral care as therapy, pastoral care as ministry, pastoral care as social action, pastoral care as empowerment, and pastoral care as personal interaction.

Lartey describes pastoral care as therapy as a model in which the pastoral caregiver's role is to make people better. In this model, "The helper has a Messianic function. He or she heals, helps, or saves us or enables us to be healed, helped, or saved."[22] Lartey explains that the pastoral healer listens deeply to the sighs and groans of

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[19] Lartey, *In Living Color*, 30–31.
[20] Lartey, *In Living Color*, 42.
[21] Lartey, *In Living Color*, 44.
[22] Lartey, *In Living Color*, 55.

people in distress—as we see Romero doing in the sermon excerpt that opened this chapter. Furthermore, Lartey explains, "The healer listens for, and is sensitive and open to, the transcendent in whatever form or shape, knowing that transcendence mediates love, support, and help. Healers seek that their presence, words and activities become channels through which the love, support, and help immanent in transcendence is mediated." [23] Pastoral healers are open and attentive. By being open, they respect the mystery and awesomeness of the divine. By being attentive, they focus and direct themselves and others to the presence of the divine, even in unexpected places.[24]

The potential pitfalls of this model "include the danger of oversimplifying the issues at stake, the quest for single factors accountable for problems, the desire for quick-fix miracle cures, the problems of overdependence upon the curer or caregiver, and the potential for abuse by the powerful [caregiver]."[25] Therefore, it is essential to acknowledge that in many situations of life, healing, in the sense of restoration to a former position of strength or ability, will not occur. In these situations, the pastoral caregiver helps the people by enabling and facilitating coping mechanisms within them and/or helping them draw upon sustaining forces outside themselves, within their immediate or cultural circumstances.[26] To be sustained thus means "to find strength and support, from within and without, to cope adequately with what cannot be changed."[27]

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[23] Lartey, *In Living Color*, 63.
[24] Lartey, *In Living Color*, 63.
[25] Lartey, *In Living Color*, 56.
[26] Lartey, *In Living Color*, 64.
[27] Lartey, *In Living Color*, 64.

Pastoral care as ministry Lartey understands as "the operation or activity of particular persons, viewed as agents or intermediaries," who have been recognized as being summoned by God for this activity.[28] It engages five pastoral care activities: proclamation (*kerigma*), service (*diakonia*), fellowship (*koinonia*), administration (*oikonomia*), and worship (*eucharistia*)—all of which we see Romero doing. Lartey defines *proclamation* as an activity "in which the essentials of belief and their attendant practices are set forth in coherent form for a community. This includes the teaching (*didache*) and the prophecy (forth-telling) that form part of the round of activities in most communities of faith."[29] *Worship* "offers the opportunity for communities of faith to express their spiritual longings and aspirations before God in meaningful and appropriate forms relevant to their belief and life experience."[30] In this model, the pastoral care provider acts as a mediator between the people and the divine and between individuals, communities, and nations in conflict. In this sense, the pastoral care provider acts as a reconciler, promoting harmonious relationships between individuals, communities, and/or nations.[31]

To describe pastoral care as social action, Lartey draws on the work of Brazilian liberation theologians Leonardo and Clodovis Boff, who distinguish three levels of liberation theology: professional, pastoral, and popular. They write concerning pastoral liberation theology: "It is the theology that sheds light of the saving word on the reality of

[28] Lartey, *In Living Color*, 56.
[29] Lartey, *In Living Color*, 56–57.
[30] Lartey, *In Living Color*, 57.
[31] Lartey, *In Living Color*, 65.

injustice so as to inspire the church to struggle for liberation."[32] Pastors practice pastoral liberation theology through "sermons, talks, pastoral care, counseling and community action from their bases and churches, pastoral institutes and centers within the communities."[33] Consider how Romero fits the model that Lartey describes:

> The model of pastoral care implied in this approach has been described as prophecy to structures or speaking truth to power. Essentially it is based on a socio-economic and political analysis of a specific social context. Such analysis is undergirded by historical criticism and theological reflection. Its aim is the transformation of societies and persons. The goal in view is a more socially just and equitable distribution of the human and material resources found on earth. Through participation in the life of the poor, an attempt is made to read the documents of faith and to examine the life situation from the perspective of the poor, the marginalized, and the oppressed. Such an approach is from start to finish praxis (action-reflection) based.[34]

According to this model, pastoral care providers need to be involved in social and cultural action for personal and communal liberation.[35]

At the heart of pastoral care as empowerment, says Lartey, is the belief "that there is something of worth and value within human persons as they presently are"[36]—which Romero came to believe deeply about the people he served. Empowerment implies building on a pre-existing strength and resources within and around people and communities.[37] This model was inspired particularly by the works of Brazilian philosopher of education Paulo Freire (Freire 1972a, 1972b). Pastoral caregivers who

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[32] Lartey, *In Living Color*, 58.
[33] Lartey, *In Living Color*, 1 22.
[34] Lartey, *In Living Color*, 58.
[35] Lartey, *In Living Color*, 67.
[36] Lartey, *In Living Color*, 58.
[37] Lartey, *In Living Color*, 58.

work with this model "seek to assist in the 'conscientization' of the oppressed and marginalized through enabling them to ask questions about their life situations." [38] Through the process of conscientization, people become more aware of their situation and of the resources they possess to respond to and change things.[39]

According to this model, the pastoral care provider is a guiding and nurturing figure. As a guide, the pastoral caregiver enables "people through faith and love, to draw out that which lies within them."[40] As a nurturing figure, the pastoral caregiver facilitates growth. This is done through a process of caring (acceptance, affirmation, grace, and love) and confrontation (openness and honesty about their reality).[41] (We will see more clearly over the course of the chapter how Romero intentionally does this.) In other words, the pastoral care provider who practices this model becomes part of the person's support system that help her access her self-healing force.[42]

The fifth model that Lartey describes is pastoral care as personal interaction. In this model, the caregiver employs skills to assist people to "explore, clarify and change (or else cope more effectively with) unwanted thoughts, feelings, and behavior. The focus tends to be on the individual, even when work is done in groups. In such interaction, much value is given to the person cared for gaining insight." [43] The person cared for gains

[38] Lartey, *In Living Color*, 58–59.
[39] Lartey, *In Living Color*, 58–59.
[40] Lartey, *In Living Color*, 65.
[41] Lartey, *In Living Color*, 66.
[42] Mollica, *Healing Invisible Wounds*, 103.
[43] Lartey, *In Living Color*, 59.

insight by interpreting the matter causing concern along the lines of particular theories or schemes of understanding.[44]

Examining Romero's homilies, one recognizes that while he employs elements of each of these models, the ministry, social action, and empowerment models predominate.

Take, for example, the homily for the funeral mass of José Roberto Valdes. Romero says that the purpose of this homily is to provide:1) *una palabra de consuelo* (a word of comfort); 2) "*una palabra de repudio a la violencia*" (a word of repudiation of violence); 3) "*una palabra de apoyo a los reclamos justos de nuestro pueblo*" (a word of support for the just claims of our people); 4) "*una palabra de esperanza"* (a word of hope); and 5) "*una palabra del más allá"* (a word of transcendence).[45] This is how Romero's thoughts were structured.[46] As homiletician Charles Campbell notes, when prophetic preaching does not condemn people but names the powers that hold them captive and "envisions alternatives to the way of death," it becomes deeply pastoral.[47] Romero's homilies were pastoral because, through them, Romero not only denounced and unmasked the oppression of the poor people, but also listened to them, gave voice to their suffering, helped them encounter God amid their suffering, and envisioned and worked with them for a better future.

Furthermore, Romero gave the people the opportunity to express their feelings in a place where they were validated and treasured, which, according to Lartey, "might have

[44] Lartey, *In Living Color*, 59.
[45] Cavada Diez, *Homilía*, 1:423–24.
[46] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 1:17.
[47] Campbell, *The Word Before the Powers*, 92.

cathartic value, especially where their expression has been, for any number of reasons inhibited, suppressed, misunderstood, or misinterpreted,"[48] as was the case of the poor, marginalized, and oppressed people of El Salvador. Thus, one way Romero provided care for the people was by being a story-stimulator and a story-interpreter.[49]

However, as the Catholic Bishop's Committee explains in *Fulfilled in Your Hearing*, there are occasions when nothing the preacher says can change the situation. For instance, the preacher cannot raise a dead loved one to life; the preacher's words will not stop inflation or lower unemployment. Nevertheless, the preacher's words "can help people make connections between the realities of their lives and the realities of the Gospel."[50] They can help the people see "how God in Christ has entered and identified himself with the human realities of pain and of happiness."[51] Through his homilies, Romero certainly enabled the people to encounter God in the midst of their suffering and to obtain a more objective view of who they are as God's beloved children.

In the following sections, I analyze how Romero's *sentir* with God, the people, and the Church—affectively, cognitively, and conatively—enabled him to express various elements of pastoral care in his homilies.

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[48] Lartey, *In Living Color*, 72.

[49] Lartey argues that the pastoral care practitioner becomes a story-listener, story-stimulator, story-interpreter, and story-prohibited.

Lartey, *In Living Color*, 72.

[50] Bishop's Committee on Priestly Life and Ministry United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Fulfilled in Your Hearing: The Homily in the Sunday Assembly*, 10.

[51] Bishop's Committee on Priestly Life and Ministry United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 10.

Romero's *Sentir* con Dios

Romero was the "voice of the people's trauma" through his preaching. However, his sermons were not guided primarily by a psychological tactic or strategy. Rather, Romero's approach to trauma and resilience was rooted deeply in his theology—his faith in and understanding of God—which he presented through his sermons.[52] This theological approach is critical for Romero and offers important insights for contemporary preachers. Thus, a careful exploration of Romero's *sentir* with God is vital for understanding the depth of Romero's preaching as the voice of the people's trauma.

As Romero desired, he became "*el obispo del Corazón de Jesús*" (the Bishop of the Heart of Jesus).[53] This desire accompanied Romero until his death, but it was especially in the last three years of his ministry that Romero led the people of El Salvador with the Heart of Jesus. Because of this, Romero could *feel*, *think*, and *act* with Jesus. Romero *felt* with Jesus by rejoicing with what brings joy to Jesus' heart and suffering with what breaks Jesus' heart. Romero *thought* with Jesus by reflecting on Scripture and the peoples' concrete circumstances and proclaiming a God-given message that was prophetic, pastoral, timely, and relevant for that time in history. Finally, Romero *acted* with Jesus by continuing with Jesus' salvific ministry on earth—amplifying Jesus' voice and being Jesus' hands and feet among the poor, marginalized, and oppressed—and teaching the Church to do the same.

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[52] Edgardo Colón-Emeric, *Óscar Romero's Theological Vision: Liberation and the Transfiguration of the Poor* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2018). Chapter 5.

[53] Óscar Arnulfo Romero, "Ejercicios Espirituales," 1972 1966, 325, https://jimdo-storage.global.ssl.fastly.net/file/d9883ca3-a5ef-42f9-945a-6bf7e5e232c5/San%20Romero%20de%20Am%C3%A9rica_Ejercicios%20Espirituales.pdf.

On February 25, 1980, a month before his assassination, Romero had a final retreat. In his notes from this retreat Romero shares that he was experiencing the fear of dying a violent death, which he knew was highly probable. With that in mind, Romero rededicated himself to the Sacred Heart of Jesus,[54] writing in his notes to the *Ejercicios Espirituales*,

> *Así comento mi consagración al Corazón de Jesús que fue siempre fuente de inspiración y alegría cristiana en mi vida. Así también pongo bajo su providencia amorosa toda mi vida y acepto con fe en él mi muerte por más difícil que sea. Ni quiero darle una intención como lo quisiera por la paz de mi país; y por el florecimiento de nuestra Iglesia…porque el Corazón de Cristo sabrá darle el destino que quiera.*[55]
>
> Thus, I accept my consecration to the Heart of Jesus, which was always the source of inspiration and Christian joy in my life. Thus, I also place my whole life under his loving providence, and I accept my death with faith in him, no matter how difficult it may be. Therefore, I do not want to give it an intention as I would like for the peace of my country, and for the flourishing of our Church…because the Heart of Christ will know how to give it the destiny it wants.

Romero entrusted his life to the Heart of Christ, for he believed in God in the manner of Jesus, and he saw God through Jesus.[56]

Romero grew closer to the Heart of Jesus through praying, reading Scripture, and listening to "*el clamor del pueblo*" (the cries of the people). In his silent prayer, Romero encountered a Jesus who loved him, comforted him, affirmed his ministry, and moved him to action. In Scripture, Romero encountered a healer and a liberator Jesus, whose

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[54] Colón-Emeric, *Óscar Romero's Theological Vision*, 187.
[55] Romero, "Ejercicios Espirituales," 310.
[56] Douglas Marcouiller and Jon Sobrino, *El Sentir con la Iglesia de Monseñor Romero*, 2nd ed. (San Salvador: UCA editores, 2012), 11.

ministry the Church must continue. In the "cries of the people," Romero encountered a crucified Jesus incarnated in the poor and oppressed people of El Salvador. Thus, Romero's *sentir* with God is *sentir* with the Heart of Jesus.

Romero's *sentir* with God is reflected in his homilies in the way in which he radically proclaimed and defended Jesus' cause.[57] Romero explains in his homily of January 14, 1979, "*Y nosotros predicando en nuestros púlpitos, con nuestra limitación, con nuestras deficiencias, no somos más que pequeños ecos del gran Profeta, que es Cristo, nuestro Señor. Nuestro cuidado está en ser fiel eco a esa voz de Cristo, el único que debe hablar al pueblo y a la consciencia*" (And we, preaching in our pulpits, with our limitations, with our deficiencies, are nothing more than small echoes of the great Prophet, who is Christ, our Lord. We care to be a faithful echo to that voice of Christ, the only one who should speak to the people and the conscience).[58] Thus, for Romero, every preacher must be an *echo* of Jesus Christ to guide the Church to continue in the course of history the life and the work of Jesus, preserving the image of her founder. By doing this, the Church becomes the Body of Christ in history.[59]

For Romero, understanding Jesus's identity is crucial for a preacher because we know God chiefly through Jesus. As the *Dei Verbum* states, the mystery of the Father and his love is revealed in Christ.[60] Since Jesus' identity is God's identity, "to know Christ is

[57] Marcouiller and Sobrino, *El Sentir con la Iglesia de Monseñor Romero*, 11.
[58] Miguel Cavada Diez, ed., *Homilías: Monseñor Óscar A. Romero*, First ed., vol. 4 (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 2007), 172.
[59] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2005, 1:229.
[60] Romero, Christ, Manifestation of God and Man, 5.

to know God."[61] Thus, for Romero, "*Jesús es la homilía viviente de la revelación del Padre*" (Jesus is the living homily of the Father's revelation.)[62] Romero says in his homily of January 27, 1980,

> *La misma persona de Cristo es como una homilía perenne de la revelación del Padre. La voluntad eterna de Dios se hace humana, se envuelve de carne de hombre y vive aquí, en Cristo. Cristo, aun cuando no habla, está hablando; es la perenne homilía de Dios.*[63]
>
> The very person of Christ is like an eternal homily of the Father's revelation, the eternal will of God becomes human, clothed in human flesh and living here in the person of Christ, who, even when he is not speaking, is nonetheless speaking because he is the eternal homily of God.

In other words, "*Cristo es la Epifanía de Dios*" (Christ is the epiphany of God).[64] In one of his homilies, Romero proclaims, *"¡Qué hermoso es pensar que en Cristo tenemos una revelación de Dios, una revelación de la verdad infinita! Dios nos ha dicho todo cuando nos ha dado toda su palabra"* (How wonderful to think that in Christ we have a revelation of God, a revelation of the infinite truth. When he has given us his Word, God has told us everything).[65]

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[61] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2009, 6:227.

[62] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 6:226.

On this, Romero agrees with German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, another martyr who was assassinated when Romero was twenty-eight years old. Bonhoeffer noted that "the proclaimed word has its origin in the incarnation of Jesus Christ," or elsewhere, "the proclaimed word is the Christ bearing human nature." Furthermore, Bonhoeffer, like Romero, believed that the proclaimed Christ is both the historical Christ and the present Christ, the Christ who lives among the people. Bonhoeffer says, "Therefore, the proclaimed word is not a medium of expression for something else, something which lies behind it, rather it is the Christ himself walking through his congregation as the word"

Richard Lischer, ed., *The Company of Preachers: Wisdom on Preaching, Augustine to the Present*, first edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002), 34.

[63] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 6:226.

[64] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2005, 2:144.

[65] Cavada Diez, 2:144.

Furthermore, Jesus reveals the God who accompanies us in our history, the same God who revealed himself to Moses in the burning bush, saying, "I am who am" (Exodus 3:14). In his sermon of June 5, 1977, Romero reflects on this phrase and explains:

> *"Soy el que soy" se puede entender en este sentido metafísico, la esencia misma de Dios, su ser que no puede dejar de ser. Pero es mucho más simpático presentarlo como el Dios de la revelación; el Dios que no es el producto de mis pensamientos; el Dios que no es como la corona de mis esfuerzos por descubrirlo, sino un Dios que me sale al encuentro, un Dios que se revela; un Dios que me dice en Moisés: soy el que soy, el que estoy contigo, el que está con tu pueblo, el que en esta hora en que se oyen los lamentos de un pueblo atribulado, esclavo de los capataces del faraón, está oyendo esos gemidos y quiere valerse de ti para liberarlo; un Dios que se preocupa de la esclavitud de los hombres para hacerlos libres; un Dios que vive con los pueblos subdesarrollados para que se desarrollen en la verdadera imagen que Él quiso hacer de cada rostro humano; un Dios que se preocupa de nosotros. Así nos presenta y es nuestra reflexión de esta mañana: desde la Iglesia, sentirnos nosotros precisamente como Iglesia, una comunión con Dios.*[66]
>
> The words "I am who I am" can be understood in a metaphysical sense that communicates the very essence of God, a being who cannot cease to be. But it is much more appealing to present God as the God of revelation. God is not simply the result of my thoughts or the culmination of my efforts to discover him. Rather, he is a God who comes looking for me, a God who reveals himself. He is a God who tells me, as he told Moses, "I am who I am." He is the one who is with you, the one who is with your people, the one who at this moment hears the cries of an anguished people enslaved by Pharaoh and wants to use you to free them. This is a God who is concerned about the people's enslavement and wants to set them free. This is a God who lives among underdeveloped peoples so that they will develop into the true image that he desires to place on every human face. This is a God who is concerned about us. This is how God presents himself to us this morning in our reflection: from the perspective of church, let us feel that we are truly church, a communion in God.

[66] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2005, 1:124–25.

Thus,"*Cristo es la homilía que nos está explicando continuamente que Dios es amor, que Dios es fuerza, que está sobre él el Espíritu del Señor, que él es la palabra divina, es la presencia de Dios entre los hombres*" (Christ is the homily that continually explains to us that God is love, that God is power, that the Spirit of the Lord is upon Jesus Christ, that he is the divine Word, that he is God's presence among us).[67]

Romero defines the homily as "*la explicación sencilla de la palabra eterna y la aplicación concreta de esa palabra que es luz, es fuerza, ilumina, consuela, orienta"* (a simple explanation of the eternal Word and the concrete application of the Word that is light, is strength, the Word that enlightens, comforts, and guides).[68] Consequently, if Jesus is the living homily of the Father's revelation, Jesus' identity is the explanation of the eternal Word and the practical application of this Word.[69] Furthermore, Jesus himself is the Word that is light and strength, the Word that enlightens, comforts, and guides.

Romero has a sacramental understanding of the homily, for he believes every homily must be an instantiation of the divine Homily, revealing God through the great

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[67] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2009, 6:227.

[68] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 6:224.

[69] In *Preaching Jesus*, homiletician Charles Campbell proposes a new direction for homiletics based on Hans Frei's post-liberal theology. According to Campbell, Frei's literary approach sought to overcome the old dichotomy between the 'Jesus of History,' of the historical criticism approach, and the 'Christ of Faith,' of the theological approach, by focusing on "Jesus' identity" revealed in the gospels. In Frei's approach, Campbell affirms that the biblical narrative renders the unique, unsubstitutable identity of Jesus of Nazareth through the interplay of character and incident. Above all else, "Jesus is what he does and undergoes" in the biblical narrative. Thus, preaching serves to identify Jesus, who is the one preached. According to Campbell, Frei's crucial homiletical move is from the identity of Jesus of Nazareth to the Church that is formed by his identity.

Charles L. Campbell, *Preaching Jesus: The New Directions for Homiletics in Hans Frei's Postliberal Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2005).

saving mystery of the Son.[70] Furthermore, for Romero, the homily *"es actualización, es decir, que hace presente, actual, como si estuviera sucediendo ahora, con toda su fuerza viva, la palabra de Dios aquí entre nosotros; es realidad de Cristo, que vive a través de su palabra"* (actualizes, that is, it makes God's Word present and actual here among us with all its vital power, as if it were happening now. It makes present the reality of Christ, who lives through his word).[71] Thus, Romero believes that the homily is a path that leads us to praise Jesus and surrender to him in faith. In his homily of January 27, 1980, Romero explains,

> *La homilía, pues, es un discurso de carácter sagrado, litúrgico, que lleva el corazón del hombre, del oyente, a la fe en Dios, a la celebración de la redención que se hace presente en el sacrificio eucarístico: predicamos y celebramos. Por eso, la misa no queda completa si solo venimos a oír y no nos quedamos a la parte eucarística. Lo principal no es la predicación, esto no es más que el camino; lo principal es el momento en que adoramos a Cristo y nuestra fe se entrega a él, iluminados con esa palabra; y, desde allí, vamos a salir al mundo a realizar esa palabra. Se oye, pues, la palabra, se acomoda a la realidad, se celebra y se alimenta en la vida de Cristo, y lleva el compromiso del hombre a su deber, a su hogar, a sus servicios en el mundo para que sea verdaderamente vida según Dios.*[72]
>
> The homily, then, is a sacred liturgical discourse that leads the hearts of those who hear it to believe in God, praise him, and celebrate the redemption that is made present in the eucharistic sacrifice. We preach what we celebrate. That is why the Mass remains incomplete if we come only to listen to the homily and do not remain for the eucharistic part. The main thing is not the preaching; that is only the path to what is most important: the moment we adore Christ and, illumined by the word, commit ourselves to him by our faith. So the word is heard and takes account of the reality; it is celebrated and nourished in the life of Christ,

[70] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 6:224.
[71] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 6:226.
[72] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 6:225.

> and it moves people to commit themselves to their duties and their homes, and to serving the world and truly living their lives as God wishes.

For this reason, Romero believes that "the people celebrate the Word in the sacrament of the Eucharist."[73] The homily, the proclamation of the Word of God, leads people's hearts to faith in God. It leads them to the celebration of redemption, which becomes present in the Eucharist sacrifice.[74] Therefore, in his homilies, Romero brings into conversation the biblical texts, the people's concrete circumstances, the liturgical celebration, and the celebration of the Eucharist. He understands preaching as a historical event because it is linked to a long series of past and contemporary events.

Furthermore, for Romero, the primary purpose of his homily is building up the Body of Christ, helping the Body of Christ "*a encontrarse con Dios*" (to have an encounter with God).[75] He rejoiced when the people found in his words "*un vehículo para acercarse a Dios*" (a vehicle to get closer to God).[76] Romero believes that those who have not had an encounter with God live a sad life, a life of idolatry and falsehoods. In his homily of February 10, 1980, Romero shares, "*Ningún hombre se conoce mientras no se haya encontrado con Dios. Por eso tenemos tantos ególatras, tantos orgullosos, tantos hombres pegados de sí mismos, adoradores de los falsos dioses, no se han encontrado con el verdadero Dios y por eso no han encontrado su verdadera grandez,"* (We do not know ourselves until we have encountered God. That is why we

[73] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 6:224.
[74] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 6:225.
[75] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 6:254.
[76] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 6:234.

have many pompous egoists and self-absorbed people worshiping false gods. They have never encountered the true God and have never found their own true greatness). [77]

Moreover, for Romero, the divine and human Christ is not only the revelation of God, but also the revelation of humankind. Thus, only in Christ can human beings' divine gifts bear fruit and find real meaning. Reflecting on Hebrews 1:1–6, he says on December 25, 1977,

> *Pero antes quiero decirles mi segundo pensamiento: Cristo, así como es la revelación de Dios, es la revelación del hombre. Oía cuando entrabamos a la misa que un seminarista les estaba leyendo el número 22 del documento Gaudium et spes, o sea del diálogo de la Iglesia con el mundo actual, redactado por el Concilio Vaticano II. Y allí dice en ese número que el misterio del hombre ya no se puede descifrar si no es en Cristo. Cristo revela el hombre, al mismo hombre. Sin Cristo, el hombre es un absurdo. ¿Qué sentido tiene mi vida?, ¿de dónde vengo?, ¿para dónde voy?, ¿qué significa mi inteligencia, mi capacidad de amar, de ser libre?, ¿qué significan todos estos bienes que Dios ha puesto bajo mis pies?*
>
> *Cuando se olvida uno de Cristo, convierte todas esas capacidades humanas —inteligencia, libertad, amor, capacidad de dominar, de organizar la tierra— en un sistema de opresión, de esclavitud, de odio, de venganzas. Cuando lo mancha el pecado, este retrato de Dios que es el hombre, no hay cosa más horrible. Pero cuando en Cristo volvemos a descubrir qué es el hombre, comprendemos lo que nos ha dicho hoy San Pablo en la carta a los hebreos: impronta. Impronta es el sello. Un sello, que se pone en un papel, deja la misma figura del sello. Esa figura del sello es Cristo, el sello es Dios.*[78]
>
> But first I want to speak to you about my second point: just as Christ is the revelation of God, so is he the revelation of humanity. When we were beginning Mass, I heard a seminarian reading section 22 of the document *Gaudium et Spes*, the document of the Second Vatican Council on the church's dialogue with the modern world. This part of the document states that humanity's mystery cannot be understood except through Christ (GS 22). Without Christ, human life is absurd. What

[77] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 6:254.
[78] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2005, 2:146–47.

> meaning does my life have? Where do I come from? Where am I going? What is the meaning of my intelligence, my ability to love and to be free? What is the meaning of all these material goods that God has placed at my feet?
>
> When people forget about Christ, all of these human abilities—intelligence, freedom, love, the ability to dominate and organize the earth—become a system of oppression, slavery, hatred, and vengeance. When sin stains that portrait of God, which is humanity, there is nothing more horrible. However, when in Christ we discover the meaning of humanity again, then we understand what Saint Paul has told us today in the letter to the Hebrews about the "exact imprint" (Heb 1:3). The exact imprint is an impression placed on a piece of paper by a seal. It leaves the same image that is on the seal. The image of the seal is Christ, and the seal is God.

Human beings cannot live separated from God. God helps humanity to know, love, understand, and value themselves and others. Human beings' separation from God and the suffering and oppression this separation causes in the lives of the poor break the heart of Jesus. On October 8, 1978, Romero proclaimed,

> *No es sembrar aquí la discordia, simplemente es gritar al Dios que llora, el Dios que siente el lamento de su pueblo porque hay mucho atropello, el Dios que siente el lamento de sus campesinos que no pueden dormir en sus casas porque andan huyendo de noche, el lamento de los niños que claman por sus papás que han desaparecido: ¿dónde están? No es eso lo que esperaba Dios.*[79]
>
> We are not planting discord with these. We are simply crying out to the God who is weeping, to the God who hears the laments of his people because there is so much violence, to the God who feels the distress of his *campesinos* who cannot sleep in their homes because they must spend their nights in flight. God hears the wailing of the children who cry out for their parents who have disappeared: where are they? This is not what God wants.

[79] Cavada Diez, *Homilías: Monseñor Óscar A. Romero*, 2006, 3:313.

Romero believed in and preached not an apathetic God,[80] but One who is deeply affected by the suffering of God's children. For that reason, God calls to conversion the oppressors and those who do not respond to the needs of the hurt people with love, empathy, and compassion. As God, Romero was also affected by the people's suffering, for he "*era el obispo del Corazón de Jesús*" (was the Bishop of the Heart of Jesus).

Romero understood God, through Christ, as both transcendent and present *in* history, acting *on* and *through* people.[81] This belief, and his love for God and the poor people, inspired him and guided him to fight for justice and for a better future for the poor, marginalized, and oppressed. Romero understood that it is not possible to care for the people without recognizing and challenging the political, social, and economic oppressions they suffer. [82] In this, Romero follows the instructions of Proverbs 31: 8–9, to "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. [To s]peak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy." For, as

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[80] Marcouiller and Sobrino, *El Sentir con la Iglesia*, 10.

[81] Martín-Baró cites Piazza and Glock (1979) who "maintain that 'the kind of God in which one believes is more relevant to the political and social positions than the mere fact of belief,'" Similarly Martín-Baró, Neal (1965), who did research on the involvement of the Boston-area Catholic priests on social justice issues, concluded that such involvement "depended on whether they experienced God as remote, far from the earth, and acting *on* people, or, instead, as immanent, in the world, and acting *through* people." Those who understood God as present in this world and acting through people were more prone to become involved in social justice issues.

Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 142.

[82] Communicator, writer, and strategist Alistair Campbell, as quoted by Emmanuel T. Lartey in his book *In Living Colo*r, "It is no longer possible to speak of comfortably of care, whilst ignoring the political, social, and economic oppressions of our world; no longer permissible to assume that one culture—in West or East, in North or South—can supply all the insights needed to restore humanity to man; no longer valid to speak of freedom without recognizing its complexity and without acknowledging the risks entailed in truly seeking it for all men and women."

Lartey, *In Living Color*, 50.

the Jesuit theologian Jon Sobrino points out, Christology can only be developed by taking into account both Jesus and the poor communities.[83]

For Romero, God is empathetic. This understanding of God grounds Romero's empathy and guides his preaching in relation to trauma. Thus, for Romero, *sentir* with God is *sentir* with the poor people.

Romero's *sentir con Dios*: Knowing the Heart of Jesus through Scripture

Romero learned the desires and pains of the Heart of Jesus through Scripture, which he believed to be sacramental. It reveals the identity and mission of Jesus, which is in turn the identity and mission of his Father, and for that reason, it has a Christological identity. For him, the whole Bible—the Old *and* New Testaments—reveals Christ's saving mystery, manifested in his life, death, and resurrection.

Moreover, since Romero believes that all the parts of Scripture are intrinsically connected and shed light on each other, in his homilies he invites Scripture to interpret Scripture. He reflects on the Word of God in light of the lectionary readings assigned that day and other biblical texts that he finds relevant to the theme the lectionary readings suggest.

Even though Romero believes the whole Bible is inspired by God, it is clear from his homilies that he particularly values the Gospels. Romero believes that putting aside the fact of divine inspiration, there is no other part of the Bible that has proven its

[83] Jon Sobrino, *Jesucristo Liberador: Lectura Histórica-Teológica de Jesús de Nazaret* (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1991), 116.

authenticity and truthfulness in what it says as the four Gospels. He says,

> *Veinte siglos en que lo han criticado, no solo amigos sino enemigos, para deshacer lo que dice, no han logrado más que darle más brillo a estas palabras de San Lucas: 'Las realidades que presenciaron los testigos oculares y que nos transmitieron a nosotros, hechos que comprueban la verdad, la solidez de las cosas que tú crees.'*[84]
>
> For twenty centuries, this book has been criticized by friends and enemies who want to tear apart what it says. Nevertheless, they have only given greater splendor to the words of Saint Luke: 'The realities that the eyewitnesses saw and that they transmitted to us are events that prove the truth and the soundness of the things that we believe.'

Romero believes that the Gospels accurately present the life and identity of the historical Jesus and his saving work. He advises the people never to doubt the truth of the Gospel.[85] To Romero the Gospels of Saint Matthew, Saint Mark, Saint Luke, and Saint John are the homilies of the Christian communities.[86]

Romero's *sentir con Dios*: A Church that Continues with Jesus' Homily

For Romero, the Church has an essential and sacramental calling to continue with Jesus' homily in her time in history. Therefore, the Church, the Body of Christ, must acknowledge and embrace her vocation as the continuation of Jesus' homily and her role in God's salvific plan for humanity. Romero made this clear in his homily of January 27, 1980, in which he says: *"La Iglesia es la prolongación siempre actual y operante de la homilía de Jesús. Jesús está predicando mediante su Iglesia. La Iglesia es la*

[84] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2009, 6:229.
[85] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 6:229.
[86] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 6:229–30.

prolongación de la homilía que Cristo inició allá en Nazaret: 'El Espíritu del Señor sobre mí'" (The Church is the actual and operative prolongation of Jesus' homily. Jesus is preaching through his Church. The Church is the prolongation of the homily that Jesus initiated there in Nazareth: '*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me*').[87] That is why the Church can also say what Jesus says in the gospel of Luke 4:18–19: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Thus, when the Church faithfully continues with Jesus' mission in the world, she becomes a medium of salvation.

For Romero, the homily does not end when the preaching moment ends; it continues finding its way in the world through the Body of Christ in history. In other words, the homily continues living through all the believers, especially the poor, marginalized, and oppressed, through whom Jesus continues living and preaching.[88] On January 27, 1980, Romero says, "*El mejor micrófono de Dios es Cristo y el mejor micrófono de Cristo es la Iglesia y la Iglesia son todos ustedes*" (The best microphone of God is Christ and the best microphone of Christ is the Church and the Church is all of you).[89] Consequently, all the Church's members, being the timely and active prolongation of Jesus' homily, can be a true microphone of Jesus, just as Jesus is a true microphone of God.[90] Romero says in his homily of July 8, 1979, "*Si alguna vez nos quitaran la radio,*

[87] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 6:226.
[88] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 6:226.
[89] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 6:231.
[90] Miguel Cavada Diez, ed., *Homilías: Monseñor Óscar A. Romero*, First, vol. 5 (San Salvador: UCA editores, 2008), 87.

nos suspendieran el periódico, no nos dejasen hablar, nos mataran a todos los sacerdotes y al obispo también, y quedaran ustedes, un pueblo sin sacerdotes, cada uno de ustedes tiene que ser un micrófono de Dios, cada uno de ustedes tiene que ser un mensajero un profeta" (If some day they take away our radio station, if they close down our newspaper and do not let us speak, if they kill all the priests and the bishop and just *you* are left, a people without priests, then each one of you will have to be a microphone of God; each one of you will have to be a messenger and a prophet).[91] The Holy Spirit empowers the Church to amplify the message of Jesus Christ and continue with Jesus' mission on earth through her words and deeds.

In his homilies Romero therefore speaks both of the identity of Jesus and of the continuing work of Jesus *on* and *through* the people, especially those with whom Jesus most closely identified, namely the poor, marginalized, and oppressed.[92] In his second pastoral letter, which he shared in his homily of August 6, 1977, after summarizing Jesus' identity Romero refers to the Church as an institution and explains that the Church, like Jesus, has to proclaim the good news that the Kingdom of God is at hand, especially for the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized. Like Jesus, the Church, says Romero, should show preference to and defend the poor, marginalized, and oppressed, for they have been "*más objeto de los intereses de los hombres que sujetos de su propio destino*" (used for others' interests and have not been in control of their own destinies).[93] Romero

[91] Cavada Diez, Homilías, 5:87.

[92] In the article, "A Conversion with Mary Catherine Hilkert's *Naming Grace*," homiletician Charles Campbell says that a sermon should include both the identity of Jesus and the continuing work of God in and through the Church, or what he calls "parables of Grace."

[93]Cavada Diez, *Cartas Pastorales, Discursos y Otros Escritos*, 2017, 7:65.

says,

> *Como Jesús, la Iglesia tiene que seguir denunciando el pecado de nuestros días. Tiene que denunciar el egoísmo que se esconde en el corazón de todos los hombres, el pecado que deshumaniza a los hombres, que deshace a las familias, que convierte el dinero, la posesión, el lucro y el poder como fin de los nombres. Y, como cualquiera que tenga un mínimo de visión, una mínima capacidad de análisis, la Iglesia tiene que denunciar lo que se ha llamado con razón el 'pecado estructural', es decir, aquellas estructuras sociales, económicas, culturales y políticas que marginan eficazmente a la mayoría de nuestro pueblo. Cuando la Iglesia oye el clamor de los oprimidos no puede menos que denunciar las formaciones sociales que causan y perpetúan la miseria de la que surge ese clamor.*
>
> *Pero, como la de Cristo, le denuncia de la Iglesia no se inspira en el odio ni en el resentimiento, sino que busca la conversión de los corazones y la salvación de todos.*[94]
>
> The Church, like Jesus, has to go on denouncing sin in its own day. She has to denounce the selfishness hidden in everyone's heart, the sin that dehumanizes persons, destroys families, and turns money, possessions, profit, and power into the ultimate ends for which persons strive. Moreover, like anyone who has even the slightest foresight, the slightest capacity for analysis, the Church has also to denounce what has rightly been called *structural sin*: those social, economic, cultural, and political structures that effectively drive the majority of our people onto the margins of society. When the Church hears the cry of the oppressed, she cannot but denounce the social structures that give rise to and perpetuate the misery from which the cry arises.
>
> However, like Christ, this denunciation by the Church is not inspired by hatred or resentment. On the contrary, she looks for the conversion of the heart of all men and women and their salvation.

Thus, like Jesus, the Church should not simply proclaim the kingdom of God in the abstract: she must also denounce sin and advance the progress of the solutions that seem most likely to bring the Kingdom of God into being.[95] In his homily "The Church,

[94] Cavada Diez, *Cartas Pastorales, Discursos y Otros Escritos*, 7:65.
[95] Cavada Diez, *Cartas Pastorales, Discursos y Otros Escritos*, 7:65.

Christ's Continuing Incarnation" (September 24, 1977), Romero consequently clarifies that the Church preaches love and that if she preaches against the sins of the world and admonishes sinners, she does not do it to offend them, but to invite them to repent and convert in order that they might be saved and join those who seek the truth of God's Kingdom.[96]

Only if the Church strives to achieve the kingdom of truth, peace, justice, and love will she be faithful to its own mystery, which is to be the Body of Christ in history.[97] In the homily titled, "The Church Mission" (May 8, 1977), as he frequently does in his homilies Romero defends the position of the Church by clarifying that being in solidarity with the suffering and the hope of the people does not mean that the Church is being political. He says,

> *El Concilio, he puesto entre comillas esa frase, dice: deber de la Iglesia es "dar su juicio moral, incluso sobre materias referentes al orden político, cuando lo exijan los derechos fundamentales de la persona o la salvación de las almas". Una frase muy hermosa del papa Pío XI —yo era estudiante en Roma y me emocionó mucho—: "La Iglesia no hace política, pero cuando la política toca su altar, la Iglesia defiende su altar". Los derechos del hombre le interesan a la Iglesia. La vida en peligro le interesa a la madre Iglesia. Las madres que sufren están muy en el corazón de la Iglesia en este momento. Los que no pueden hablar, los que sufren, los que son torturados, callados, le interesan a la Iglesia. No es hacer política. Simplemente la política está tocando el altar, está tocando la moral, y la Iglesia tiene el derecho de hablar su palabra de orientación moral.*[98]
>
> The Council has stated... 'The Church has the right to pass moral judgments, even on matters touching the political order, whenever basic

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[96] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2005, 1:334.
Hilkert says, "Naming grace in the Christian tradition can happen only if we are equally committed to naming the 'dis-grace' or sin that is also part of our human heritage." (Hilkert, 147).

[97] Cavada Diez, *Cartas Pastorales, Discursos y Otros Escritos*, 7:66.

[98] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2005, 1:59.

> personal rights or the salvation of souls make such judgments necessary' (*Gaudium et Spes*). When I was a student in Rome, I was moved by the following words of Pope Pius XI: 'The Church is not involved in politics, but when politics touches the altar, the Church defends the altar.' The rights of the human person are of great interest to the Church. Indeed, when lives are in danger, Mother Church is interested. At this moment, the Church is very mindful of suffering mothers. The Church is interested in those who cannot speak, those who suffer, or are tortured or silenced. This is not political. Rather politics has touched the altar and morality, and the Church has the right to speak its word of moral orientation.

Romero's message is clear and straightforward: The Church does not meddle with politics, but when politics negatively affects the lives of those whom Jesus has called the Church to love and care for, the Church denounces politics. By denouncing injustice and seeking to change the structures and systems that oppress and marginalize people, the Church is not being political, Marxist, or promoting subversion and hatred, but is contributing to the advancement of the Kingdom of God on earth.

However, the Church in her humanity often falls far from the love of God and her neighbor. Thus, in his homily of June 5, 1977, "The Church, Our Communion with God," Romero calls the Church to recover her identity as the Body of Christ in history and let God use her for God's divine purposes. Here by "Church," Romero refers to both the Church as an institution, the hierarchy of the Church, and the Church as the Body of Christ, the Christian community formed by all the believers. For they all represent the person of Christ amid humanity. He says,

> *Porque si los ministros del altar, nosotros los sacerdotes, servimos a la Iglesia, es con una vocación específica, como las religiosas también; pero ustedes que están en el mundo, padres y madres de familia, maestros de escuela, profesionales, obreros, jornaleros, empleados, señoras del mercado, el laicado en general, cómo transformarán al mundo ustedes,*

> *llevando esa presencia de Dios que llevan en su corazón como antorcha que ilumine ese ámbito de sus actividades. Un llamamiento específico para que sientan, pues, que Iglesia no solamente es el obispo y sus sacerdotes y sus religiosas, Iglesia son todos los bautizados en una comunión con el obispo, estrechando cada vez más la unidad de fe, de verdad, de sacramentos, de gobierno, como lo acabamos de decir.*[99]
>
> If the ministers of the altar, we priests, serve the Church with a specific vocation, if religious women do the same, then you, mothers and fathers, teachers in our schools, professionals, workers, people of the marketplace, the laity in general, you also have a specific vocation. Your vocation is to transform the world and bring to this world the presence of God that you carry like a torch that illuminates every area of human activity. Yes, I call upon you to know that the Church is not just the bishop, the priests, and the religious women. The Church is all those who have been baptized into this communion with the bishop, who seek to strengthen the unity of faith, truth, sacrament, and government.

In other words, the Church's vocation, the vocation of all the baptized, ordained or not, is to continue Jesus' ministry on earth and illuminate "every area of human activity."[100] Romero reminds the Body of Christ of their divine identity and vocation in the world. Thus, through his homilies, Romero cares for the Body of Christ by empowering them and guiding them to participate actively in the liberation and transformation of their communities—to participate in social action.

In order to do this, the Church, like Romero, needs to *sentir* with God and the people. In the next section, I analyze Romero's sentir with the people and how this *sentir* prepared him to provide pastoral care through his homilies to the poor, marginalized, and oppressed people of El Salvador who suffered violent and bloody repression.

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[99] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 1:131–32.
[100] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 1:131–32.

Romero's Sentir con el Pueblo

Romero was the "voice of the people's trauma" not only because of his theological convictions but also because of his love and empathy for the poor, marginalized, and oppressed people. Therefore, Romero's homilies were grounded in his theology and deep pastoral presence with those who had suffered trauma and/or were exposed to continuous traumatic stress.

Romero's *sentir* with God nourishes his ability to *sentir* with the people. This made him a pastor for the suffering people. In his homilies, he speaks not only for God, but also on behalf of the poor people and in response to their needs. Romero's *sentir* with the people can be understood as having empathy for the people—feeling with them, thinking with them, and acting with them to change their situation. By *feeling* with the poor, marginalized, and oppressed people, Romero entered their world, understood their experiences, and was able to care for them.[101] By thinking with them, Romero was able to propose solutions to the structural problems of El Salvador. By *acting* with them, Romero defended them with all he had, including his life. Therefore, Romero's *sentir* with the people, as his *sentir* with God, needs to be understood effectively, cognitively, and conatively. As Jon Sobrino points out, the people entered Romero's heart, mind, and will.[102] He experienced in his own soul, mind, and body the people's suffering and fears

[101] As Lartey explains, "Feeling permits us to be sensitive, caring, and to 'understand the experiences' of others. It is by feeling that we enter into the 'world' of others, whether through their writing or their speech."

Lartey, *In Living Color*, 74.

[102] Sobrino, "Monseñor Romero," 12.

and their faith and hopes. This enabled him to become the Spirit-guided pastor they needed at that time of suffering and trauma and to provide the pastoral care the people needed.

In the retreat before his consecration as an auxiliary bishop (June 9, 1970), Romero wrote on his *Ejercicios Espirituales* that his commitment to the poor was to "*amarlos como imágenes de Cristo*" (to love them as images of Christ).[103] Thus, as Ellacuría and Sobrino note, for Romero, "*Junto a Dios pilar transcendente, el pueblo era 'un pilar histórico'*" (Together with God, the transcendent pillar, the people were a historical pillar).[104] Romero not only leaned on these two pillars but depended on them to remain standing. The people were therefore much more than the recipients of his homilies: they were the light that helped him see the presence of Jesus among them and the microphone that helped him hear Jesus' voice.

For this reason, it was equally crucial for Romero to pray, study Scripture, and listen to the people as he prepared the homilies. Every day, Romero sought to hear the voice of God in prayer, in Scripture, and in the voice of the poor, marginalized, and oppressed people. Before formulating his opinion or conclusion on any issue, Romero took the time to listen to all parties involved and sought advice from priests, intellectuals, and experts. But it was particularly crucial for him to listen to the poor, those he thought of as the body of the crucified Christ. Ricardo Urioste Bustamente, the Vicar General of

[103] Romero, "Ejercicios Espirituales."
[104] Sobrino, "Monseñor Romero (1917-1980). Ensayo Ante Dios Con Su Pueblo," 12.

Monsignor Romero, shares an anecdote about Romero's discipline of listening to all people, especially the poor:

> *Yo recuerdo siempre una reunión en que él preguntó algo, no recuerdo qué era lo que preguntaba. Había allí pastoralistas, teólogos, moralistas, canonistas y todos los cerebros de la arquidiócesis. Y él preguntaba, uno respondía, y él iba tomando nota, tomando nota…Agradeció al final, y terminó la reunión…Bajábamos las gradas del seminario y había allí un pordiosero, y Monseñor se acercó a él. Yo dije, pues, le va a dar limosna, ¿Sabe que fue a hacer? A preguntarle lo mismo que nos estaba preguntando a nosotros…Creo que él tenía esa gran capacidad de escuchar, como que quería estar más seguro con el sensus fidelium, saber que es lo que la gente pensaba, lo que la gente creía y expresaba.*[105]
>
> I always remember a meeting in which he asked something, I do not remember what he was asking. There were pastoralists, theologians, moralists, canonists, and all the brains of the archdiocese. Romero asked questions, we answered, and he was taking notes, taking notes... He thanked us at the end, and the meeting ended... We were going down the steps of the seminary, and a beggar was there, and Monsignor approached him. I said, well, he is going to give him alms. Do you know what he was going to do? To ask him the same thing that he was asking us… I think he had that great ability to listen. It seems that he wanted to be surer with the *sensus fidelium*, to know what people thought, believed, and expressed.

Romero listens with particular attention to the poor because he believes they are at the center of Jesus's mission. In his homily from January 27, 1980, Romero reflects on Jesus' words in Luke 4:14–21,

> *'Me ha ungido, me ha enviado para dar la buena noticia a los pobres'. Esta es la misión de Cristo: llevar la buena noticia a los pobres, a los que solo reciben malas noticias, a los que ven pasar por encima de ellos las riquezas que hacen felices a otros. Para estos viene el Señor, para hacerlos felices y decirles: 'No ambicionen, siéntanse dichosos y ricos con el gran don que les trae el que 'siendo rico se hizo pobre' para estar con ustedes y saber que la mayor felicidad es compartir la alegría que Dios siente con sus pobres'.*

[105] Marcouiller and Sobrino, *El Sentir con la Iglesia*, 35.

'Me ha enviado para anunciar a los cautivos la libertad, a los ciegos la vista, libertad a los oprimidos, para anunciar el año de gracia del Señor.' Era el año sabático que todos esperaban con anhelo, porque ese año tenían que devolvérseles todas las cosas que se les habían quitado, y ese año también se cancelaban las deudas y comenzaba como una sociedad nueva. La hora que esperamos en El Salvador no en gracia de un año sabático, sino en la fuerza de una reestructuración que el pueblo anhela y que va a lograr con el Cristo que ha venido, precisamente, a anunciar las nuevas sociedades, la buena nueva, los nuevos tiempos.

Por eso, no me canso de decir a todos los hombres, sobre todo a los jóvenes que anhelan la liberación de su pueblo, que admiro su sensibilidad social y política, pero que me da lástima que la gasten por caminos que no son los verdaderos; que la Iglesia les está diciendo: por este camino, por el de Cristo. Pongan todo su empeño, toda su entrega, todo su sacrificio, hasta el afán de morir, pero muriendo por la causa de la liberación verdadera, que la ha garantizado aquel que está empapado del Espíritu de Dios y que no nos puede dar caminos de engaño; el que puede asumir todas las preocupaciones liberadoras, reivindicativas del pueblo, que son gritos que claman hasta Dios y que Dios tiene que escucharlos. Ojalá todos escucháramos también que el gran líder de nuestra liberación es este Ungido del Señor, que viene a anunciar la buena nueva a los pobres, a dar la libertad a los cautivos, a dar noticia de los desaparecidos, a dar alegría a tantos hogares en luto, a que la sociedad sea nueva como en los años sabáticos de Israel.[106]

'He has anointed me and has sent me to bring good news to the poor' (Luke 4:18b). This is the mission of Christ: to bring good news to the poor, to those who receive only bad news, to those who receive only abuse from the powerful, to those who watch the riches that make others happy pass them by. It is for these that the Lord comes, to make them happy and to tell them, 'Do not be greedy. Instead, consider yourselves happy and wealthy because of the great gift brought to you by the One who 'being rich became poor' in order to be with you (2 Cor 8:9). Realize that the greatest happiness is taking part in the joy that God shares with his poor.'

'He has sent me to proclaim freedom to the captives, to give sight to the blind, to liberate the oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's grace' (Luke 4:18c 19). This refers to the jubilee year for which everyone was longing because in that year all the things that had been taken away from the poor had to be returned to them. During that year all

[106] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2009, 6:233.

> debts were canceled, and it was like the beginning of a new society. The time for which we are waiting here in El Salvador is not a year of grace, but the power of reconstruction that the people want and that will be achieved with Christ, for he has come precisely to proclaim the good news of new societies and new times.
>
> That is why I never tire of telling everyone, especially the youth who long for their people's liberation, that I admire your social and political sensitivity. However, I feel sad when you squander it by following paths that are not the true ones. The Church is telling you to follow this path, the path of Christ. Make good use of all your determination, all your commitment, all your self-sacrifice, even to the point of dying, but be sure to die for the cause of true liberation. True liberation is guaranteed by the One who is steeped in the Spirit of God and cannot lead us astray. He takes onto himself all the people's desires and struggles for liberation, for the people's cries reach God's ears, and God must hear them. Let us hope that all of us will understand that the great leader of our liberation is the Lord's Anointed, who comes to announce good news to the poor, to give freedom to the captives, to give us news about the disappeared, to bring joy to all the homes that are mourning, so that our society will be made new, as during those years of grace in Israel.

Romero drew closer to the Heart of Jesus through his relationship with the poor. Other people shared with him the knowledge they had acquired through their studies of the sciences and/or theology, but the poor shared with Romero the wisdom and love they had received from God.

However, as a pastor, Romero felt the pain of all those who suffered. He accompanied and consoled them, regardless of their social status or role in the conflict. He preached on October 30, 1077,

> *Lo que me importa es que el pastor tiene que estar donde está el sufrimiento. Y yo he venido, como he ido a todos los lugares donde hay dolor y muerte, a llevar la palabra de consuelo para los que sufren, expresar la condolencia a la familia doliente, como la expresé también a la familia de la vendedora que fue también muerta en ese hecho de sangre, como también lo estoy enviando hoy a los familiares de los*

> *policías muertos. Para la Iglesia no hay categorías distintas, solo hay el sufrimiento y tiene que expresarse con el dolor donde quiera que se encuentre. Como estuve junto a la muerte del canciller Borgonovo, como he estado junto al dolor de los campesinos, pienso que es la voz de la Iglesia, una palabra de condolencia en el dolor.*[107]
>
> What concerns me is that a pastor must be present wherever there is suffering. Just as I have gone to many other places where there is suffering and death, so I came here to bring words of consolation to those who were suffering and to express my condolences to the sorrowing family. I did the same for the family of the woman vendor who was killed in that bloody crime, and I am sending my condolences also to the families of the police officers who were killed. For the church there are no distinct categories; there is only suffering. We must sympathize with pain wherever it is found. That is why I was present at the time of the death of the foreign minister Borgonovo; that is why I was present during the suffering of the *campesinos*.

While Romero named, acknowledged, and validated all people's suffering, he was especially affected by the suffering of the poor, those who, throughout the history of El Salvador, had suffered excruciating poverty, violent oppression, and exploitation.

Romero's *sentir con el Pueblo:* Knowing the Heart of Jesus through the Wounded People.

Romero's pastoral, empathetic presence with the traumatized people shaped his hermeneutical approach to Scripture. For Romero, Christ's message is not only revealed in Scripture but also in the people's concrete circumstances. Theologian Edgardo Colón-Emeric in his book, *Oscar Romero's Theological Vision: Liberation and the Transfiguration of the Poor*, says that Romero's homilies are like diptychs: on one panel

[107] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2005, 1:422.

is the Word that gives life to the Church, and on the other panel are the specific circumstances of the Church and the people of El Salvador that the Word illumines. Colón-Emeric says, "The light always comes from the scripture panel. The event's panel reflects back the light and also teaches one where and how to stand in order to better see this light. Preachers are tasked with contemplating these two panels together." As a Catholic priest, Romero most probably believed that the light always comes from the scripture panel and illuminates the people's specific circumstances. He usually moved in his homilies to the section where he shared the life of the Church and the events of the week, saying that the Word illuminates the reality the people are experiencing. In his homily of March 23, 1980, Romero says,

> *A la luz de la palabra divina que revela el proyecto de Dios para la felicidad de los pueblos, tenemos el deber, queridos hermanos, de señalar también las realidades; a ver cómo se va reflejando entre nosotros o se está despreciando entre nosotros el proyecto de Dios. Nadie tome a mal que, a la luz de las palabras divinas que se leen en nuestra misa, iluminemos las realidades sociales, políticas, económicas, porque de no hacerlo así, no sería un cristianismo para nosotros; y es así como Cristo ha querido encarnarse para que esa luz que él trae del Padre se haga vida de los hombres y de los pueblos.*[108]
>
> Dear sisters and brothers, we must examine our own reality in the light of the divine Word that reveals God's project. We must try to see whether that project of God is being realized among us or is instead being reviled. No one should take it amiss that we illuminate our social, political, and economic realities by the light of the divine Word read in our Mass because if we did not do so, we would not be Christians. This is why Christ wanted to become incarnate: so the light that he brings from the Father can become the life of persons and peoples.

[108] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2009, 6:425.

For Romero, there is no other way for a preacher. The preacher should always let the Word of God illuminate the concrete circumstances the people are experiencing, both the beautiful and the ugly—even though this will likely cause problems for the preacher. Reflecting on Romans 15: 4–9, Romero says,

> *La palabra de Dios… tiene que ser una palabra que arranque de la eterna antigua palabra de Dios pero que toque la llaga presente, las injusticias de hoy, los atropellos de hoy y esto es lo que crea problemas. Esto es ya decir: "La Iglesia se está metiendo en política, la Iglesia se está metiendo a comunista". Ya aburren con esa acusación. Ténganlo en cuenta de una vez: no se mete en política, sino que es, la palabra, como el rayo de sol que viene desde las alturas e ilumina. ¿Qué culpa tiene el sol de encontrar su luz purísima charcos, estiércol, basura en esta tierra? Tiene que iluminarlo, si no, no sería sol, no sería luz, no descubriría lo feo, lo horrible que existe en la tierra, así como también ilumina la belleza de las flores y le da el encanto a la naturaleza. La palabra de Dios, también, hermanos, por una parte ilumina lo horrible, lo feo, lo injusto de la tierra y alienta el corazón bueno, los corazones que gracias a Dios abundan, que se iluminan con esta luz eterna de su palabra divina.*[109]
>
> The word of God has to be a word rooted in the ancient, eternal word of God but that touches the present wounds, injustices, and oppressions of today. This is what creates problems. People begin to say, "The church is meddling in politics. The church is becoming communist." These accusations have become tiresome. Let me tell you this once and for all: the church is not meddling in politics. God's word is like a ray of sunshine that comes from high and illuminates. What fault does the sun have when its pure light finds filthy puddles, manure, and garbage here on earth? The sun has to shine on all of this. Otherwise, it would not be the sun; it would not be light. It would not uncover the ugly, horrible things that exist here on earth. Just as the sun illuminates the beauty of flowers and the enchantment of nature, so also, sisters and brothers, the Word of God illuminates the horror, ugliness, and injustice on earth. However, on the other hand, it also encourages those good hearts, which, thanks to God, are numerous. It brightens them with the eternal light of his divine word.

[109] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2005, 2:50.

Similarly, on January 27, 1980, after reading the Vatican II's explanation of the role of the homily in Mass, Romero says,

> *Aquí se nos dice, pues, cómo tiene que ser a partir de la palabra de Dios. El tema no lo inventa el que predica, sino la palabra de Dios lo impone: 'Habla de esto', 'di esto a mi pueblo'. El predicador lo que hace es aplicar esa palabra al pueblo, a la asamblea que se ha reunido con el fin de que se iluminen sus realidades; y, sobre todo, esto: de que el pueblo celebre esa palabra en el sacramento de la eucaristía.*[110]
>
> Here we are told that the homily must reflect on the word of God. The topic of the homily is not to be invented by the preacher but is to be determined by the word of God: "Speak about this!" "Say this to my people!" The preacher's task is to apply God's word to the assembled people who have come together to hear how their reality is illuminated.

As theologian Miguel Cavada Diez, the editor of Romero's homilies, points out, the essential principle in Romero's theology of preaching is that the Word of God is incarnated in the historical reality.[111] Thus, Cavada Diez explains that for Romero, the preacher's mission is to unite God's eternal message with the historical reality—the personal, familiar, and social reality.[112] Romero says in his sermon on November 27, 1977,

> *No podemos segregar la palabra de Dios, de la realidad histórica en que se pronuncia, porque no sería ya palabra de Dios, sería historia, sería libro piadoso, una Biblia que es libro de nuestras bibliotecas; pero se hace palabra de Dios porque anima, ilumina, contrasta, repudia, alaba lo que se está haciendo hoy en esta sociedad.*[113]
>
> We cannot separate God's word from the historical reality in which it is proclaimed. It would not then be God's word. It would be history, a pious book, a Bible that is just a book in our library. It becomes God's word

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[110] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 6:224.

[111] Miguel Cavada Diez, "Predicación y profecía. Análisis de las homilías de Monseñor Romero," *Revista Latinoamericana de Teología* 12, no. 34 (April 30, 1995): 4, https://doi.org/10.51378/rlt.v12i34.5409.

[112] Cavada Diez, "Predicación y profecía. Análisis de las homilías de Monseñor Romero," 9-10.

[113] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2005, 2:27.

because it vivifies, enlightens, contrasts, repudiates, and praises what is happening today in this society.

In other words, for Romero, "*del mismo modo que no es posible la salvación sin la encarnación de Jesús*; *así también, no hay palabra de Dios, Dios no habla aquí y ahora, si no hay una encarnación de la Sagrada Escritura en la realidad histórica presente"* (In the same way that salvation is not possible without the incarnation of Jesus; so also, there is no word of God, God does not speak here and now, if there is not an incarnation of Sacred Scripture in the present historical reality).[114] For Romero, preaching is the continuation of Christ's salvific project. He says in his Advent homily of December 24, 1978,

> *Y veremos cómo, si la redención se opera en esa larga historia, Dios quiere seguir el mismo estilo: salvando en la historia. Y por tanto, la predicación del Evangelio tiene que ser una prolongación del proyecto salvífico de Cristo, una aplicación a nuestra historia, a nuestro pueblo, a nuestra realidad. Una predicación, lo mismo que una celebración navideña, que solamente fuera un cuentecito romántico de hace veinte siglos y que no tuviera que encarnarse con el proyecto salvífico de Dios en las vicisitudes trágicas, dolorosas o esperanzadoras de nuestra historia, de nuestra realidad, no sería un cristianismo auténtico. Dios sigue salvando en la historia. Y por eso, al volver a este episodio del nacimiento de Cristo en Belén, no venimos a recordar el nacimiento de Cristo hace veinte siglos, sino a vivir ese nacimiento pero en el siglo XX, en 1978, en nuestra Navidad aquí, en El Salvador. Y por eso, es necesario que, a la luz de estas lecturas bíblicas, prolonguemos toda la historia del pensamiento eterno de Dios hasta los hechos concretos de nuestros secuestrados, de nuestros torturados, de nuestra propia triste historia. Es allí donde tenemos que encontrar a nuestro Dios.*[115]

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[114] Cavada Diez, "Predicación y profecía. Análisis de las homilías de Monseñor Romero," 10.

[115] Miguel Cavada Diez, ed., *Homilías: Monseñor Óscar A. Romero*, vol. 4 (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 2007), 86.

> We will see that, just as redemption was worked out over that long history, God wants to keep working in the same way, saving us in history. Therefore, preaching the Gospel must be a prolongation of Christ's salvific project, applying it to our history, people, and reality. Preaching and a Christmas celebration that is only a romantic little story from twenty centuries ago and that does not incarnate with God's salvific project in the tragic, painful, or hopeful vicissitudes of our history, of our reality, would not be an authentic Christianity. God continues to save us in history. Therefore, when we reflect on this episode of Christ's birth in Bethlehem, we do not recall the birth of Christ twenty centuries ago; instead, we are experiencing that birth now, in the twentieth century, in 1978. We are celebrating Christ's birth here in El Salvador. That is why, with the help of the light of these biblical readings, we need to extend the reach of the whole history of God's eternal thought so that it includes the concrete realities of our kidnapped captives, our tortured prisoners, and our own very sad history. That is where we have to encounter our God today.

Romero encountered God in the painful reality of the poor, marginalized, and oppressed. This informed Romero's reading and interpretation of Scripture, more so than the biblical commentaries he read and the Magisterium of the Church he dearly valued. His homilies demonstrate that the reality the people were experiencing illuminated Scripture for him and helped him determine the homily's theme.

Hence, as Cavada Diez notes, Romero does a "double reading": he reads the sacred Scripture *and* the "signs of the time." However, notes Cavada Diez, this reading should not be understood as a linear reading that goes only in one direction, as if the word of God were only in the sacred Scripture and not in the historical reality.[116] A linear reading of Scripture assumes that there is nothing of God in the historical reality, which is why it needs to be illuminated by Sacred Scripture.[117] However, as Romero repeatedly

[116] Cavada Diez, "Predicación y profecía. Análisis de las homilías de Monseñor Romero," 10–11.
[117] Cavada Diez, Cavada Diez, "Predicación y profecía. Análisis de las homilías de Monseñor Romero," 10–11.

says and demonstrates in his homilies, one can see the presence of God and hear God's voice in the historical reality. As Romero himself states, "*Dios habla desde la historia. Dios reclama desde lo bueno y bello que hay entre los hombres, como también reclama ante lo feo y malo que hay en las sociedades y hay en los hombres"* (God speaks to us in history. God cries out in the midst of all that is good and beautiful in the human person and cries out in the midst of all that is ugly and evil in society and the human person).[118] Thus, God speaks through the lives of the people. God speaks through the joy and happiness people experience, and God also speaks through the sorrow and traumatic wounds they suffer.

What made Romero such a prophetic and pastoral preacher was his ability to hear the voice of God clearly through both Scripture and the suffering people, and to let them illuminate each other with the light of Christ dwelling within them. This suggests that if we recognize only the light of Christ that comes from Scripture and let it illuminate the people's concrete circumstances, we typically try to change their reality intellectually, adapting it to what Scripture says. However, when we also recognize the light of Christ originating in the people's concrete circumstances and let it illuminate Scripture, our understanding and interpretation of Scripture is influenced by that light, and that can prompt an honest dialogue between Scripture and the people's life experiences.

By recognizing the light of Christ originating in both Scripture and the people's reality, Romero was able to give voice to their suffering and trauma. In his homily of July

[118] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2007, 4:217.

16, 1978, Romero reads Matthew 13:1–23 and Romans 8:18–23 (both included in the lectionary readings for that Sunday) in light of the suffering the people of El Salvador were experiencing. He says,

> *Y finalmente, hermanos —voy a terminar—, mi tercer pensamiento es el más animador en las lecturas de hoy. Es la segunda lectura de San Pablo que nos habla de la cosecha. Esta semilla tiene que producir una cosecha. San Pablo nos habla de la glorificación que un día se nos dará, que es superior a todos los do- lores y sufrimientos que se puedan tener en esta tierra. Yo oí en estos días esta frase de San Pablo, pero traducida al sufrimiento de un torturado que lo tuvieron amarrado tres días de los dedos y mientras sufría, decía: "Son mayores las esperanzas y la gloria que espero que este sufrimiento". Ánimo, queridos perseguidos; ánimo, torturados; ánimo, todos aquellos que esperan una patria mejor y no ven horizontes. Los sufrimientos son condición de la redención que no se ganó sino con un Cristo clavado en una cruz, pero después vino la resurrección. Y en el corazón de Cristo nunca se apagó la certidumbre de que el mundo iba a ser redimido a pesar de su fracaso aparente. No fracasamos, los cristianos, porque llevamos el Espíritu que resucitó a Cristo.*[119]
>
> And finally, sisters and brothers—I'm going to conclude—my third thought is what is most encouraging in today's scriptures, namely, the second reading from Saint Paul, which speaks to us about the harvest. This seed has to produce a harvest. Saint Paul tells us about the glorification that one day will be given to us, a glorification that is superior to all the pains and sufferings that can be experienced on this earth (Rom 8:18). I heard these words of Saint Paul on these days, but I heard them translated into the suffering of a man who was tortured and kept three days ganging from his fingers. As he suffered, he kept saying, "The hope that I have and the glory I await are greater than these sufferings." Take heart, you dear ones who are persecuted! Take heart, you who are tortured! Take heart, all you who hope for a better homeland but see no horizons! Your sufferings are the condition of redemption won only with a Christ nailed to a cross—but afterward came the resurrection! And in Christ's heart, there was never any dimming of the certainty that the world would be redeemed despite his apparent failure. We Christians cannot fail because we bear the Spirit that raised Christ.

[119] Miguel Cavada Diez, ed., *Homilías: Monseñor Óscar A. Romero*, vol. 3 (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 2006), 106–7.

Most significantly, Romero not only heard the voice of Christ in the people's cries but also saw in the poor and persecuted people the incarnated Jesus. On June 19, 1977, Romero says quite directly to the people of Aguilares, who had been under military occupation for a month, "*Ustedes son la imagen del Divino Traspasado*" (you are the image of the pierced Christ). [120] Likewise, in his homily of March 5, 1978, in El Paisnal, Romero reflects on the Christ incarnated in the poor people. He says,

> *Como dijeron otros jesuitas expulsados de esta región: que aquí aprendieron a ser cristianos, que ustedes les enseñaron la imagen verdadera del Cristo, que Ignacio de Loyola enseña y que no se aprende únicamente en el retiro espiritual, sino conviviendo aquí, donde Cristo es carne que sufre, aquí donde Cristo es cosa, donde Cristo con su cruz a cuestas, no meditado en una capilla junto al vía crucis, sino vivido en el pueblo; es Cristo con su cruz camino del Calvario.*[121]
>
> Here in El Paisnal the Jesuits expelled from this region learned how to be true Christians because you people showed them the true image of Christ, the image that Saint Ignatius taught. That image is not discovered only during a spiritual retreat; it is discovered by living here where Christ is the flesh that suffers, where Christ is carrying his cross. Christ is here, not as a meditation in the chapel on the Way of the Cross, but as living in the people.

A week before his assassination (March 16, 1980), Romero reflected powerfully on Matthew 25:35–36 in light of the division, disunity, senseless violence, and lack of regard for humanity that existed in El Salvador. He preached,

> *Cuántos se avergüenzan hoy de dar su testimonio a favor del inocente. ¡Qué terror se ha sembrado en nuestro pueblo que hasta los amigos traicionan al amigo cuando lo ven en desgracia! Si viéramos que es Cristo el hombre necesitado, el hombre torturado, el hombre*

[120] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2005, 1:150.
[121] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2005, 2:323.

prisionero, el asesinado; y si en cada figura de hombre, botadas tan indignamente por nuestros caminos, descubriéramos a ese Cristo botado, medalla de oro que recogeríamos con ternura y la besaríamos y no nos avergonzaríamos de él.

Cuánto falta para despertar en los hombres de hoy, sobre todo en aquellos que torturan y matan y que prefieren sus capitales al hombre, de tener en cuenta que de nada sirven todos los millones de la tierra, nada valen por encima del hombre. El hombre es Cristo y en el hombre, visto con fe y tratado con fe, miramos a Cristo, el Señor.[122]

So many people today are ashamed to give testimony in favor of the innocent. What terror has been sown among our people so that friends will even betray friends when they see them in trouble! If only we could see Christ in the needy, in the tortured, in the prisoner, in the murder victim; if only we could see Christ in every human being dumped so disgracefully along our highways, we would discover that it was Christ who was dumped there, and we would gather that precious treasure with tenderness; we would kiss him and never be ashamed of him.

What a great need there is to awaken in people today—especially those who torture and kill and prefer capital over human beings—an awareness that all those earthly millions are worthless compared to humanity. The human person is Christ, and when we see and treat the human person with faith, we are face to face with Christ the Lord.

For Romero, Christ lives in the midst of the trauma. Romero encounters in the suffering and traumatized people a Christ who suffers in his own body the oppression, injustice, torture, and sorrow they suffer and fights with them for their liberation. To Romero, it is through the suffering and traumatized people that Christ reveals himself. They help Romero hear the voice of God anew and to know aspects of God that Scripture by itself could not reveal. Thus, Romero, as pastoral healer, helps the traumatized people encounter the presence of the God amid their suffering.

[122] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2009, 6:400.

Romero's *Sentir con el Pueblo:* Doing Theology of History

By reflecting on the word of God proclaimed in the historical reality, Romero is doing theology of history. According to Cavada Diez, for Romero, "*El objeto de la predicación es mostrar la presencia de Dios en la historia*" (The purpose of preaching is to show the presence of God in history).[123] Explains Cavada Diez, "*La finalidad de la predicación no es, pues, tanto fijar la atención del oyente en la palabra de la escritura, como si allí fuera a encontrar la palabra de Dios, cuanto orientar al oyente, con la ayuda insustituible de la Sagrada Escritura, hacia la realidad histórica para que allí oiga al Dios que le habla desde la historia, desde lo positivo y lo negativo de la realidad"* (The purpose of preaching, then, is not so much to fix the listeners' attention on the word of Scripture, as if they were to find the word of God there, but rather to guide the listeners, with the irreplaceable help of Sacred Scripture, towards the historical reality so that there they hear the God who speaks to them from history, from the positive and the negative of reality).[124] By including in homilies, such as the one which I excerpted at length at the beginning of this chapter, the concrete circumstances that the people of El Salvador were experiencing, Romero was not *departing* from interpreting the Word of God and doing theological reflection:[125] on the contrary, it is in the historical reality of El

[123] Cavada Diez, "Predicación y profecía. Análisis de las homilías de Monseñor Romero," 11.
[124] Cavada Diez, " Predicación y profecía," 11.
[125] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2008, 5:567.

Salvador that he believed one can hear God's active voice and find God's salvific plan for Salvadorans. He says on November 19, 1978,

> *La salvación es un hecho histórico, no del pasado, sino la historia presente de cada pueblo, de cada hombre, de cada comunidad. Y esto es interesante que lo tengamos muy en cuenta, porque los hechos históricos, si nosotros los enfocamos directamente, semana a semana, no es por un afán de salirnos del Evangelio y de la mente de la Iglesia, sino para que esa salvación que Dios está haciendo de los salvadoreños, encarnada en su propia historia, la busquemos allí donde la debemos de buscar, en nuestros hechos históricos.*[126]
>
> Salvation is a historical event, not something of the past; it is the present history of every person, every man and woman, and every community, and it is interesting to keep this in mind because, the historical events, if we include them in the homily week by week, it is not out of any desire to avoid the gospel message and the mind of the church. Instead, we do this to discover the salvation that God is working on right now among Salvadorans, the salvation that is incarnate in our own history. Therefore, that is where we should seek salvation: in our own historical reality.

For Romero, preaching means actualizing the Word of God.[127] He identifies the presence of Christ in the lives of the poor, marginalized, and oppressed people, and from there he listens to Jesus' voice. Thus, Romero's homilies, like Grande's homilies, respond to the question: What does God say in the current reality, the historical reality, particularly to the poor and the oppressed?[128]

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[126] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2006, 3:400.

[127] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2005, 2:218.

[128] As Cavada Diez says regarding Romero's preaching, "*De lo que se trata en la predicación—para quien predica y para quien escucha—no es tanto de "entender" lo que dice la Biblia, sino de lo que "dice" Dios en la realidad actual, qué dice Dios ahora, hoy mismo. Por supuesto, para entender qué es lo que está pasando, para discernir los signos de los tiempos, es insustituible la palabra de Dios que ilumina como una lámpara. Pero la cuestión, repetimos, no es quedarse admirando la belleza de la lámpara (la Biblia), sino el camino que ilumina (nuestra realidad)*," (Preaching—for those who preach and for those who listen—is not so much about "understanding" what the Bible says but about what God "says" in the current reality, what God says now, today. Of course, to understand what is happening, to discern the signs of the times, the word of God that shines like a lamp is irreplaceable. But, again, this is not about to stay

Because Romero believed that Jesus continues speaking and saving in history and acting on and through people, starting in August 1977, Romero included in his homilies what he called "*el marco de la homilía*" (the frame of the homily), which included "the life of the Church" and "the events of the week." In these sections of the homily, Romero shared the joys the Church and the people were celebrating that week and named the atrocities they were lamenting. He usually had more to say regarding the former. For Romero, these sections are an integral part of the homily. He did not want people to hear them merely as a news report.[129] Therefore, often before and after sharing the "life of the church" and the "the events of the week," Romero would emphasize that this part of the homily is about letting the Word of God illuminate the present reality. [130]

In the section in which he recounted the "events of the week," Romero listed one by one the atrocities and violent acts that had happened during the past week and offered a pastoral judgment on them. For instance, in the homily of January 27, 1980, Romero recounts how the violence has struck close to home—his fellow priests and other religious and their extended families, along with other villagers:

> *Quiero expresar, en forma de condolencia, la triste noticia que tanto ha afectado al querido hermano, padre Porfirio Martínez, y su familia. Asesinaron, en San Francisco Chinamequita, a su papá, don Catarino Martínez, y a su mamá, doña Matea González de Martínez, y a un hermano y dos sobrinos y un huésped de su casa. Unas masacres no precisamente hechas por el ejército. Son también criminales, y no se puede tolerar. Saludo, también de condolencia, extensivo al padre Julio Menjívar, que es pariente de estas dolorosas víctimas.*

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admiring the beauty of the lamp (the Bible), but the path that it illuminates (our reality). Carranza, Cavada Diez, and Sobrino, *XXV Aniversario de Rutilio Grande*, 19.

[129] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2005, 2:140.

[130] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 6:246.

Quiero expresar, también, una condolencia a la hermana del hospital de la Divina Providencia, sor Teresa Alas, porque le mataron allá, en la región de Arcatao, a sus parientes: doña Concepción Alas de Mejía y su hijo, Gregorio Mejía; y los señores Salvador Mejía, Damián Mejía y otro hermano. Fue en cantón Yusique, cerca del Sumpul.

También quiero solidarizarme con el dolor de la familia del doctor René Quintanilla, de San Miguel, que también pereció víctima de la violencia. Solidaridad con la comunidad de Arcatao, donde sigue el terror, la amenaza, la crueldad. En el diario, ustedes pudieron ver la noticia de que apareció el guardia por el cual se levantó allá violencia y cómo fue, también, bárbaramente asesinado. No es justo que se hagan estas represalias por más culpable que sea un hombre, así como tampoco es justo tomar unas venganzas tan desproporcionadas como la tormenta que han desatado en Arcatao los agentes de la Guardia Nacional.

La comunidad de Aguilares también está de dolor y quiero solidarizarme también con ella. En la noche del 24 al 25 de enero, sorpresivamente, sacan de sus propias casas a José María Murillo, Aníbal Corado Tejada, Emilio Estrada Alegría y otro muchacho, no identificado; en otro cantón, Santos Rivas Lemus, Antonio Alas Pocasangre, Fidel Américo González, Efraín Ernesto González; y, finalmente, en otro lugar, a Juan Umaña. Lo triste es que, al día siguiente, los nueve capturados por la Guardia aparecen muertos con torturas horrorosas en un lugar de aquella región; y, cuando los querían enterrar, agentes de seguridad pusieron término a las pobres familias, que no les dieron tiempo más que de hacer cuanto antes esa triste operación. Se dice que el origen de todo esto es la muerte de dos guardias nacionales. Si es así, también es otra venganza irracional. Yo quiero agregar a esta nota de Aguilares, mi solidaridad con las religiosas y el sacerdote, que fueron la presencia valiente de la Iglesia, ya que acompañaron muy de cerca, en el dolor y el sufrimiento, a estas pobres familias de aquella comunidad parroquial.[131]

With sympathy, I want to convey some sad news that has profoundly affected our beloved brother, Father Porfirio Martínez, and his family. In San Francisco Chinamequita they murdered his father Don Catarino Martínez, his mother Doña Matea González de Martínez, a brother, two nephews, and a guest of the family. The army itself did not carry out this massacre, but it is nevertheless criminal and cannot be tolerated. I send sincere condolences also to Father Julio Menjívar, who is related to these tragic victims.

I also want to express my condolences to Sister Teresa Alas of Divina Providencia Hospital because they have murdered members of her

[131] Cavada Diez, 6:239–41.

> family there in the region of Arcatao. They killed Doña Concepción Alas de Mejía and her son, Gregorio Mejía, as well as Salvador Mejía, Damián Mejía, and another brother. This happened in the village of Yurique, near the Río Sumpul.
>
> I also want to express my solidarity with the grief of the family of Doctor René Quintanilla of San Miguel, who also died as a victim of violence.
>
> We stand in solidarity also with the community of Arcatao, where terror, threats, and cruelty continue unabated. You saw in the paper the news about the discovery of the soldier's body whose disappearance gave rise to the violence there, and you also saw how he was barbarically murdered. It is unjust to exact that kind of reprisal, as guilty as the man might have been, just as it is unjust to wreak disproportionate vengeance such as that unleashed by the National Guard on Arcatao.
>
> The community of Aguilares is also grieving, and I am in solidarity also with them. In a raid on the night of January 24, Jose María Murillo, Anibal Corado Tejada, Emilio Estrada Alegría, and another unidentified young man were taken from their homes without a warrant. In another village they seized Santos Rivas Lemus, Antonio Alas Pocasangre, Fidel Américo González, and Efraín Ernesto González; and in still another place, Juan Umaña. The next day, sadly, these nine men captured by the National Guard were found dead and with signs of horrible torture. When their poor families wanted to bury them, they were harassed by the security agents, who gave them barely enough time to perform this sad duty. The origin of all this was supposedly the death of two soldiers of the National Guard. I want to include in this message for Aguilares my expression of solidarity with the sisters and the priest. They made the church valiantly present by staying close to those families of the parish community in their grief and suffering.

Imagine being in the congregation and hearing such a sermon! Imagine hearing that your pastor knows so intimately and in such up-to-date fashion what you are experiencing through being exposed to continuous traumatic stress. Knowing the reality the people were experiencing was essential in Romero's preparation of the homily, for through Scripture and the people's reality Romero felt that God revealed the message of the homily to him. With that understanding, on September 16, 1979 Romero tells his

beloved people that they were co-authors of his homilies. He says, "*Entre ustedes y yo hacemos esta homilía que lleva la vida de nuestra Iglesia y la vida de nuestro país*" (Between you and I, we make this homily that carries the life of our Church and the life of our country).[132]

For Romero, a message that does not address the reality the people are experiencing is nothing but words in the air. He believed the people's concrete circumstances should be an essential part of the homily. Otherwise, the proclaimed word would be distant from reality and ineffective for people's lives. Romero says, reflecting on Romans 15:4–9,

> *Quiere decir, hermanos, que la historia actual, los acontecimientos de esta semana, de este día, no solo en un carácter nacional, sino en un carácter familiar... Cada familia ha tenido sus problemas en esta semana; más aún, cada uno de ustedes, yo mismo, hemos tenido nuestros problemas, nuestras dificultades personales, familiares, del barrio, del pueblo, de la nación, del mundo; y estas circunstancias actuales no las puede perder de vista el predicador, a no ser que quiera predicar un Evangelio que no diga nada a los hombres de hoy. Y eso es muy fácil. Por eso dicen muchas veces: "¿Por qué en tal iglesia, en tal parte, no hay problemas?". No puede haber problemas si estamos hablando de las estrellas, hablando de las cosas que no tocan los problemas que ejercitan nuestra paciencia, nuestra fortaleza, nuestro compromiso de hoy en la historia.*[133]
>
> That includes, sisters and brothers, all our present-day history, the events of this week and this very day, not only national events but also the events of our families. Every family has had its problems during this week. What is more, each of you and I myself have had our troubles, our personal or family difficulties, our problems in the neighborhood, in the town, in the nation, and in the world. The preacher cannot lose sight of these actual

[132] Miguel Cavada Diez, ed., *Homilías: Monseñor Óscar A. Romero*, vol. 5 (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 2008), 331.

[133] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2005, 2:50.

> circumstances unless he wants to preach a Gospel that says nothing to the people of today. This is very easy to do, and that is why people often ask, "Why are there no problems in that church or in that place?" There can't be any problems if we're talking about the stars or about things that do not touch on all the difficulties that test our patience, our strength, and our present commitment.[134]

In addition, in El Salvador the corruption of the press was part of a sad reality that revealed the complicity of the press with the oligarchy. The Salvadoran media, the press, radio, and television "ignored, mutilated, distorted, and manipulated the truth."[135] For this reason, Romero so forcefully promoted the archdiocese's media outlets, the YSAX radio station, and the *Semanario Orientación.* Partly also for this reason, he included in his Sunday homily detailed information on the most relevant events in the country—events which the media jealously hid or distorted. From Romero's pulpit, the people of El Salvador heard a truthful account of the reality they were living, "an objectification of their consciousness, and this permitted them to affirm their condemnation of and opposition to the repressive regime."[136] Romero's homilies in this way became the best, if not the only, trustworthy and reliable source of information on the reality of what was happening in the country.[137]

But Romero not only reported events; he also gave God's judgment on the injustices and violence against the poor people of El Salvador, the murders, tortures,

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[134] This attention to the specific suffering of the people is critical for addressing trauma. Often ignored in contemporary North America pulpits. We speak often in vague generalities, which don't name the specific trauma.

[135] Miguel Cavada Diez, ed., *Homilías: Monseñor Óscar A. Romero*, vol. 1 (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 2005), 15.

[136] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 197.

[137] Martín-Baró, "El Liderazgo de Monseñor Romero," 162.

rapes, disappearances, and massacres. Thus, as Martín-Baró notes, Romero's voice "*asume el grito del pueblo aplastado y, en un país en el que el dinero y la prepotencia han hecho de la palabra una prostituta, Monseñor Romero devuelve a la palabra humana su verdad y su valor*" (assumes the cry of the oppressed people and, in a country where money and arrogance have made the word a prostitute, Monsignor Romero returns to the human word its truth and its value).[138] In short, Romero was not only *a* microphone of God but also *the voice of the people*, which for him was nothing less than the voice of Christ. He says in his homily of July 29, 1979, "*Estas homilías quieren ser la voz de este pueblo. Quieren ser la voz de los que no tienen voz*" (These homilies want to be the voice of this people. They want to be the voice of the voiceless).[139] Through his homilies, he is the voice of those who are not intrinsically mute but have been forced to remain silenced on the pain of death.[140] However, as Cavada Diez notes, to be the voice of the poor Romero first had to "*Reconocer en los pobres la presencia y la voz de Dios; y escuchar y dialogar con el pueblo pobre*" (recognize in the poor the presence and voice of God and listen to and dialogue with the poor).[141] This was not difficult for Romero, for he admitted that "*con este pueblo no cuesta ser buen pastor. Es un pueblo que empuja a su servicio a quienes hemos sido llamados para defender sus derechos y para hacer oír su*

[138] Ignacio Martín-Baró, "Monseñor: Una voz para un pueblo pisoteado," Colección Digital Ignacio Martín-Baró, 1980, 6, file:///Users/almaruiz/Zotero/storage/9G67SHLM/monsenor-una-voz-para-un-pueblo-pisoteado.html.

[139] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2008, 5:155.

[140] Martín-Baró, "El Liderazgo de Monseñor Romero: Un Análisis Psicososial," 161.

[141] Miguel Cavada Diez, "Predicación y profecía. Análisis de las homilías de Monseñor Romero," *Revista Latinoamericana de Teología* 12, no. 34 (April 30, 1995): 16, https://doi.org/10.51378/rlt.v12i34.5409.

voz" (With these people, it is not hard to be a good shepherd. They powerfully attract to their service those of us who have been called to defend their rights and be their voice).[142] Furthermore, Romero believed that he was fulfilling the mission commended by God to be the voice of those whose voices had not been heard for so long. He preached on May 8, 1977,

> *Pero hay una voz en nombre de todo ese organismo que sufre, que clama y dice la verdad, la fortaleza, el aliento. Y yo siento, hermanos, que yo soy esa voz, y ciertamente, como lo hemos dicho en el mensaje que todos deben haber leído en los periódicos de esta semana, cumplimos una misión. Por una parte solidarizarnos con las angustias y esperanzas de los hombres de nuestro tiempo, especialmente, de los más pobres, de los que sufren. Y por otra parte fíjense que no es hacer política cuando hablamos así.*[143]
>
> But there must be a voice that speaks for the whole organism that suffers, a voice that cries out and speaks the truth, a voice that encourages and strengthens. I honestly feel, sisters and brothers, that I am that voice and that we are fulfilling a mission. That is precisely what we stated in the message that you all probably read in the papers this week. On the one hand, we are in solidarity with the anguish and the hope of the people of our time, especially those who are poor and suffer. On the other hand, be aware that we are not being political when we speak in this way.

Thus, Romero's homilies gradually became the channel through which the joys and sufferings of the Salvadoran people—their hope, faith, pain, trauma, and protest—were expressed.

However, in being the *voice of the poor people* who were forced to remain silenced, Romero was also the *voice of their trauma*—and this is central to this dissertation's thesis. With great care for the victim's dignity, he named those who had

[142] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2008, 5:543–44.
[143] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2005, 1:58–59.

been kidnaped, disappeared, tortured, imprisoned, and killed. By doing this, Romero was not only the voice of those who had been forced to remain silent but also the *voice of their trauma.*

Romero's *sentir* con el Pueblo: The Voice of Their Trauma

In Chapter one, I mentioned Michal Shamai's identification of three domains necessary to analyze to understand national and collective trauma: *space, time,* and *a significant other*. Shamai explains that the interactions between the *space, time, and significant other* domains and the interactions between the different aspects within each domain also warrant our attention when analyzing the traumatic event. Shamai points out that the interaction between these three domains determines the intensity of the "voice of the trauma."[144] This interaction explains why the traumatic injuries of some collectives are named, validated, and widely acknowledged while the traumatic wounds of other collectives are not.[145]

As noted in that earlier chapter, by analyzing the interaction of the three domains of space, time, and significant other concerning the human-made traumatic events the people of El Salvador experienced, we find that the trauma of the hurt people was deliberately suppressed. For instance, by analyzing the *significant other* domain, we find that those most affected by the violence were the poor, marginalized, and oppressed who

[144] Michal Shamai, *Systemic Interventions for Collective and National Trauma: Theory, Practice, and Evaluation*, 1st edition (New York, NY: Routledge, 2015), 33.
[145] Shamai, *Systematic Interventions*, 33.

demanded justice and an end to their oppression and exploitation. On the other hand, the ones who hurt them were the rich and powerful, whose voices were heard in the powerful United States. Moreover, the narrative the oppressors shared widely about the hurt people was that they were rebellious communists. Few outsiders recognized or validated their suffering because of the beliefs and prejudices against them. Most influential people inside and outside El Salvador considered them communist threats to the freedom and development of Central America. For that reason, the *voice of their trauma* was feeble and barely audible.

However, Romero, by naming, acknowledging, and validating their suffering in his widely broadcasted homilies, publicly amplified the voice of their trauma. Romero made it possible—indeed, unavoidable—for people from every place in El Salvador and from other countries and continents to understand the suffering and collective trauma which the people of El Salvador were experiencing.[146] He put them on the world map, brought their pain into our living rooms. And because of this, they received support and prayers from many people outside of El Salvador who heard or read those sermons, those truths of what was actually happening in El Salvador, the unredacted version. In turn, because it was common for Romero to read to his listeners the letters of support from religious leaders and lay people from El Salvador and other countries in his homilies, those letters of support became beacons of hope and points of connection for Romero and the suffering people of El Salvador.

[146] Romero's homilies were translated into many languages.

However, he also read in his homilies the letters he received from the persecuted people, letters in which they narrated to him the atrocities they were suffering. On December 25, 1977, Romero shared in his homily that amid the Christmas cards with messages of joy and celebration, he had received letters of lament and sorrow. By reading these letters as a part of the homily, he created a space for communal lament for a suffering people.[147] Two of the letters he read were from mothers and wives of people who had been disappeared and from *campesinos y campesinas* who denounced the injustice, abuse, and oppression they were experiencing. He says:

> *Así es como tienen un sentido profundo, en medio de tarjetas y telegramas de Navidad, me hayan llegado cartas que son lamentos profundos, por ejemplo el de aquellas madres y esposas: "En esta celebración de Navidad que con júbilo espera todo el pueblo cristiano, nosotras expresamos no una Navidad, sino el profundo dolor de un calvario al albergar en nuestro corazón esa separación insuperable de nuestros hijos y esposos". En otra carta parecida, dice: "Estamos angustiadas y tristes por el llanto de nuestros hijitos que a cada momento que se despiertan en la noche están llamando a sus padres y de ellos no nos dan ninguna razón en los cuerpos de seguridad". Y cartas de expresión así dolorosa, pues, son muchas las que llegan. Por nuestra parte, hemos tratado de hacer todo lo que está a nuestro alcance recurriendo a recursos jurídicos y estamos dispuestos siempre, pues, a ayudar al dolor de la humanidad.*
>
> *También cartas que llegan de los campos donde hoy se trabaja en cortas de café, etcétera, para denunciar anomalías, injusticias de mandadores, de caporales, etcétera, contra comida mala, a horas tardías, con la discriminación de los que van con ese nuevo título de "ayudas", maltrato a quienes van a veces a buscar trabajo.*[148]
>
> I have received some profoundly sad letters among the Christmas cards and telegrams. For example, some mothers and wives have written, 'During this Christmas celebration which Christians await with joy, we do not experience the delight of Christmas but rather the profound sorrow of

[147] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2005, 2:143.
[148] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2:140.

> Calvary because we feel in our hearts this insuperable separation from our children and spouses.' Another similar letter states, 'We are anguished and saddened by the cries of our children who wake up during the night and cry out for their fathers, but the security forces give us no information about them.' Many letters have arrived with similar painful expressions. In this regard, we have tried to do everything we can by appealing to the judicial authorities, and we are always willing to help out in these painful human situations.
>
> We have also received letters from the rural areas where people are involved in harvesting coffee and other crops. They denounce the anomalies and injustices of management—bad food, long hours, discrimination against those with the new title of 'helpers,' and mistreatment of those seeking work.

Similarly, in his homily of October 8, 1978, Romero read Isaiah 5:1–7 from the perspective of children who were suffering the arrest and disappearance of their parents and teachers.

> *En el Día del Niño, llegaron unas cartas tan conmovedoras, que yo quisiera, hermanos, simplemente mencionar una frase de unos niños campesinos que me dicen: "Quisiéramos rogarle interceda por los presos políticos. ¡Cuántos niños lloramos por la ausencia de un padre o madre, preso o desaparecido!" Y otra carta de una escuelita rural donde dice: 'Le vamos a agradecer mucho que por favor nos haga esta denuncia: que la Guardia Nacional se llevó a nuestro maestro. Nuestro maestro es bien bueno, él no se mete en ninguna política, no sabemos por qué se lo llevaron. Y no sabemos dónde lo tienen. Ni tiempo le dieron de cerrar la escuela. Queremos terminar el año. Somos alumnos de primero y segundo grado'.* ***Este es el clamor que dice Isaías, 'que esperé justicia y no viene más que clamor'***.[149]
>
> I received some very touching letters on the Day of the Children, sisters and brothers, and I would like to mention one thing that a group of *campesino* children wrote, "We would like to ask you to intercede for the political prisoners. There are so many of us children crying because our fathers or mothers are imprisoned or disappeared!" Another letter from a small rural school says, "We would be very grateful if you would please make this denunciation: the National Guard took away our teacher. Our teacher is a very good person; he is not involved in politics. We do not

[149] Cavada Diez, *Homilías: Monseñor Óscar A. Romero*, 2006, 3:320. Emphasis my own.

> know why they arrested him, and we do not know where they are holding him. They did not even give him time to close up the school. We want to finish the school year. We are students in the first and second grades."
> **This is what Isaiah cried out: "I looked for justice, and I heard nothing but laments" (Isa 5:7).**

For three years, Romero spoke honestly in such ways about the trauma the people were suffering. Every week, the suffering became worse, and this was just a taste of what the people of El Salvador were going to experience in the years to come. Romero's last week of life was especially tragic. In his homily of March 23, 1980, Romero narrates the atrocities that the land of El Salvador witnessed that week throughout the country—140 people were killed, among them were many children, women were raped, and countless people were imprisoned, disappeared, and tortured.

Neither then nor now is it usual for a preacher, especially a priest, to speak about rape or mutilated people from the pulpit. However, Romero was not willing to hide the atrocities the people suffered, for he understood his calling to speak for God and the people. In addition, by naming the people who were killed, disappeared, and/or tortured, Romero honored their lives and validated their pain and the pain of their loved ones. Through Romero's homily, their trauma was being voiced, and people in El Salvador and from many other countries learned about the injustice and violent assassination and treatment of the poor people.

Nevertheless, Romero's recounting of the events of the week was impartial. Romero's love for Christ's favorites was not blind. He understood that even those whom Christ came to liberate could, as a consequence of their open wounds, themselves become

oppressors. Thus, he equally denounced the crimes committed by the government, the oligarchy, the armed forces, the paramilitary groups, and the ones committed by popular organizations. Romero believed that they all needed to repent and follow the ways of Jesus for the liberation of El Salvador. It did not matter whether the violence and oppression were an offering to the gods of power and money or the way people were dealing with the effects and consequences of their traumatic wounds. For Romero, they all needed conversion, healing, and transformation to be able to live into their identity as transfigured people. So in his homily of March 23, 1980, as he denounced the atrocities the armed forces committed against the poor people (some of which appear in the excerpt with which this chapter begins), Romero also denounced a violent act the organized popular organizations Frente de Acción Popular Unificada (FAPU) and Bloque Popular Revolucionario (BPR) committed while they were occupying the Cathedral of San Salvador trying to protect the lives of many *campesino* families who could not return to their homes because they were persecuted. He says,

> *El director de la Policía Nacional, coronel Reynaldo López Nuila, solicitó telefónicamente la intervención del arzobispado para que los ocupantes de la catedral liberaran al cabo Miguel Ángel Zúñiga, que había sido secuestrado por los ocupantes de la catedral. De inmediato, el señor arzobispo mandó un delegado a la catedral, a quien no atendieron y le negaron tener allí al cabo Zúñiga. Luego, con un miembro del Socorro Jurídico, se dirigieron a la Universidad de El Salvador para hablar con la Coordinadora Revolucionaria de Masas y allí les informaron que era cierto la captura del cabo, pero que ya lo habían liberado… una comisión integrada por sacerdotes y laicos se hicieron presentes en el Hospital Militar para hablar con el cabo Miguel Ángel Zúñiga, quien manifestó que, cuando pasaba frente a catedral, se le acercaron cuatro individuos armados de metralletas y lo introdujeron a la catedral, llevándolo al sótano en donde lo golpearon y le aplicaron unos anillos de hierro en la*

muñeca y la mano y le hacían descargas eléctricas y golpes en los oídos y el estómago para que dijera el nombre de sus jefes y de sus compañeros, así como el número de los vehículos, y que todos estos datos los llevara a la Universidad Nacional. Uno de los que lo interrogaban le roció los ojos con líquido de olor azufrado que le produjo gran dolor y ardor. Le decían que iban a hacer con él, si no colaboraba, lo que hicieron a la gente de San Martín y que iban a matar a su mamá. Le ponían las pistolas en la cabeza. Él les juraba por Dios y por su madre que nunca había torturado ni hecho mal a nadie. Por fin, lo sacaron hasta la calle, donde abordó un taxi. El médico que lo atiende en el hospital manifestó que por de pronto el cabo Zúñiga no puede ver pero que esperan que pueda recuperar la vista. Tiene inmovilizados dos dedos a causa de las descargas eléctricas'... De ninguna manera aprobamos una cosa tan cruel. La persona está por encima de nuestros modos de pensar y hay que respetar.[150]

The director of the National Police, Colonel Reynaldo López Nuila, phoned to ask for the intervention of the archdiocese so that those occupying the cathedral would release Corporal Miguel Ángel Zuñiga, whom the occupiers had captured. The archbishop immediately sent a delegate to the cathedral, but the occupiers paid him no heed and denied that they had Corporal Zuñiga there. Later the archdiocesan representative and a member of Legal Aid went to the University of El Salvador to speak with the Revolutionary Coordinator of the Masses. There they were informed that it was true that the corporal had been captured but that he had already been released. a commission of priests and laypersons went to the military hospital to speak with Corporal Miguel Ángel Zuñiga, who stated that, while walking in front of the cathedral, four men armed with machine guns accosted him and led him into the cathedral. They took him down to the basement, where they beat him and placed iron rings on his wrists and hands. They applied electric shocks and beat him on the ears and in the stomach so that he would tell them the names of his superiors and his companions, as well as the number of vehicles they had. All this information would be taken to the national university. One of his interrogators sprayed his eyes with a liquid that smelled of sulfur and that caused great pain and burning. They told him that if he didn't collaborate they would treat him the same way the people of San Martín were treated and that they would kill his mother. They put a pistol to his head. He swore by God and by his mother that he had never tortured or caused harm to anyone. Finally, they put him out on the street, where he caught a taxi. The doctor who attended him in the hospital stated that for the moment the

[150] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2009, 6:444.

> corporal could not see but that they hoped he would recover his sight. He is unable to move two fingers because of the electric shocks applied'… In no way do we approve of such cruel behavior. The human person stands above our normal ways of thinking and must be respected.

Romero carefully listened to those on both sides of the conflict. However, because the government insisted on covering up their bloody crimes, with the help of his collaborators, Romero often had to launch his own investigation to get to the truth, as he did with the massacre of January 22, 1980. He needed to know the truth of the violent events to provide a pastoral judgment of them. In his homily on January 27, 1980, he reported on the massacre:

> *Los hechos: la conclusión a la que llegó esta comisión, después de haber oído testigos presenciales fidedignos y de haber platicado con numerosos corresponsales extranjeros que se encontraban en el lugar de los hechos, es la siguiente:*
>
> *Primero. La manifestación, convocada por la Coordinadora Nacional de Organizaciones Populares de Masas, se estaba realizando en una forma pacífica y ordenada. Esta actitud, desde un principio contrastó con la actitud provocadora de la derecha, a la que la misma Junta de Gobierno culpó como causante del desorden.*
>
> *Segundo. Antes de que se iniciara la balacera, desde una avioneta se estuvo arrojando veneno contra los manifestantes. Los efectos de esta acción criminal no fueron tan graves porque los participantes de la manifestación pudieron contrarrestarlos y fueron favorecidos por hallarse al aire libre.*
>
> *Tercero. También fue provocativa la actitud de algunos guardias nacionales que se encontraban en el interior del Palacio Nacional.*
>
> *Cuarto. Hay una gran convergencia de opiniones en señalar a estos guardias nacionales en el Palacio Nacional como los responsables de la balacera.*
>
> *Quinto. Algunos de los manifestantes defendieron a sus compañeros disparando también con armas de fuego.*
>
> *Sexto. El saldo fue de veintiún muertos y ciento veinte heridos...*[151]

[151] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 6:241–43.

> Here are the facts. After hearing trustworthy eyewitnesses and speaking with numerous foreign correspondents who were present at the scene, the commission came to the following conclusions.
>
> First, the demonstration convoked by the National Coordinator of Popular Organizations of the Masses was taking place in a pacific, orderly manner. From the very start, this peaceful attitude was contrasted with the provocative stance of the rightists, whom the governing junta blamed for causing the disorder.
>
> Second, before the shooting began, poison was sprayed on the demonstrators from an airplane. The effects of this criminal action were not serious because the demonstrators could take preventive measures and benefited by being outside.
>
> Third, another cause of provocation was the attitude of some National Guard soldiers stationed inside the National Palace.
>
> Fourth, there is general agreement in singling out the National Guardsmen in the National Palace as the ones responsible for the shooting.
>
> Fifth, some of the demonstrators defended their companions by also firing weapons.
>
> Sixth, the result of the shootout was twenty-one dead and 120 wounded…

In this way, Romero continued sharing the findings of the commission assigned to investigate this violent event.

Even though Romero provided an impartial pastoral judgment on the events of the week, he always came to the same conclusion regarding the use of violence by the poor. Romero understood that they resorted to violence because they were tired of so much suffering and injustice. In other words, the poor, oppressed, and marginalized acted out of their woundedness. Their open traumatic wounds were bleeding profusely, and that blood was now touching the oppressors.[152] Thus, Romero made the oppressors responsible for the violence and bloodshed in El Salvador. In his sermon of January 27, 1980, he says,

[152] Morena Palma, from Museo Jon Cartina, Guarjilla, who was 14 years old when the civil war started says in the documentary Blood of the Martyrs (2017), "*A necesidad de todo ese sufrimiento nace la*

El grito de liberación de este pueblo es un clamor que sube hasta Dios y que ya nada ni nadie lo puede detener. A quienes caen en la lucha —con tal que sea con sincero amor al pueblo y en busca de una verdadera liberación— debemos considerarlos siempre presentes entre nosotros no solo porque se mantienen en el recuerdo de los que continúan sus luchas, sino también porque la trascendencia de nuestra fe nos enseña que, con la destrucción del cuerpo, no termina la vida humana, sino que esperamos que, por la misericordia divina, es tras la muerte cuando los hombres alcanzaremos la liberación plena y absoluta. Las liberaciones temporales siempre tendrán que ser imperfectas y transitorias, y solo tienen validez y vale la pena luchar por ellas en cuanto reflejan en la tierra la justicia del reino de Dios.[153]

Se ha comprobado, una vez más, que la violencia no construye; sobre todo, la violencia de una derecha recalcitrante que instrumentaliza la violencia represiva de la Fuerza Armada para violar, en su favor, los sagrados derechos humanos de la expresión y la organización que el pueblo ya sabe defender. A esta violencia intransigente de la derecha vuelvo a repetir la severa admonición de la Iglesia cuando le hace culpable de la cólera y de la desesperación del pueblo. Ellos son el verdadero germen y el verdadero peligro del comunismo que hipócritamente denuncian.[154]

The people's cry for liberation is a cry that ascends to God; it is a cry that cannot be stopped by anybody or anything. We should consider those who fall in the struggle—as long as they sincerely loved the people and were seeking true liberation—as always present among us, not only because they are in the memory of those who continue to struggle but also because the transcendence of our faith teaches us that human life does not end with the body's destruction. Instead, we hope that we will reach, by divine mercy, our complete and absolute liberation after death. Earthly liberations will inevitably be imperfect and transitory. Nevertheless, they have validity and are worth fighting for only insofar as they reflect on earth the justice of God's kingdom.

Once again, it has been demonstrated that violence is not constructive, especially the violence of recalcitrant rightists who, for their own benefit, make use of the repressive violence of the Armed Forces to violate the sacred human rights of expression and organization which the

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guerrilla que era el ejercito para defender la gente civil. Y la guerrilla nace de la misma gente" (The guerilla was born from the need created by all that suffering. The guerrilla was the army that defended the civil people and it was born from the same people). *Blood of the Martyrs*, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SbSbm02crpQ.

[153] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 6:243–44.

[154] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 6:244.

> people are determined to defend. Given the right's intransigent violence, I repeat once again the severe admonition of the Church that such violence is the reason for the rage and desperation of the people (Mathew 2:17). The rightists are the real cause of the menace of the communism that they hypocritically denounce.

Moreover, by publicly and on record speaking the truth about the painful reality that the people of El Salvador were experiencing, Romero was not only *the voice of their trauma* but also *the guardian of their historical memory*.[155] Romero makes sure that the suffering of the people is not forgotten. Because of his homilies, recorded and published, no one can negate the injustices, killings, rapes, imprisonments, tortures, and disappearances of innocent people in El Salvador during the time Romero was the Archbishop of San Salvador.

Romero's *sentir con el Pueblo*: Providing Pastoral Care to Wounded People

Theologian and pastoral counseling scholar Edward Wimberly, drawing on work by Lartey, describes a liberation model of pastoral care that helps people "to interpret and reinterpret their human condition in light of sacred Scriptures."[156] In just this way, by listening to and putting into conversation the word of God and the people's concrete circumstances, Romero helped the poor and oppressed people of El Salvador "edit" or "re-author" or "reframe" any negative internalized stories and identities they might have embraced. Encountering God in Scripture and in their reality of pain and suffering helps

[155] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2005, 1:17.

[156] Edward P. Wimberly and Robert M. Franklin, *African American Pastoral Care and Counseling:: The Politics of Oppression and Empowerment* (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 2006), 24.

people understand the reality of their identity apart from the social context and cultural messages about their status. As Martín-Baró explains, the poor, marginalized, and oppressed people of El Salvador, in addition to seeing themselves as deprived of the product of their work and forced to accept someone else's definition of their personal being and social existence, also lacked adequate ways of looking at themselves and interpreting the meaning of their existence as individuals and as a community.[157]

Through his homilies, Romero became the conscience of the people. In the message of his homilies, Romero portrays not only the identity of Jesus but also the identity of the people—who they are, what they do and suffer, their hopes and sorrows, their pains and achievements. Thus, "*más allá del sentido teológico que tiene el carácter profético de la palabra de Monseñor, ser portador de la palabra de un pueblo tiene una esencial dimensión psicosocial: la de constituirse en conciencia y, en cuanto tal, en expresión de la identidad de un pueblo,"*(Beyond the theological meaning that the prophetic character of Monsignor's message has, being the bearer of the word of a people has an essential psychosocial dimension: that of becoming a conscience and, as such, an expression of the identity of a people), says Martín-Baró.[158]

As Martín-Baró notes, Romero not only acknowledged and named the bad things that happened in El Salvador, he also acknowledged and named the virtues of the people of El Salvador, "their uncompromising solidarity with the suffering, their ability to deliver and to sacrifice for the collective good, their tremendous faith in the human

[157] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 188.
[158] Martín-Baró, "El Liderazgo de Monseñor Romero," 162.

capacity to change the world, their hope for a tomorrow that keeps being violently denied to them."[159] For Romero, they were the poor peasants who, simply by the nature of their social location, were subjected to respond to the demands of those who have power over their lives by looking down and saying, "*como mande usted señor*" (as you desire Sr.). But they were also the beloved children of God; they were the people God preferred and *through* whom God continually manifested Godself.

In other words, Romero helped the poor, oppressed, and marginalized people re-narrate or reframe their stories by reminding them of their worth as human beings and as children of God and of God's love and promises for them. An example of this occurs in his homily "The Birth of the Lord" preached on December 24, 1979:

> *No hay redención sin cruz. Pero esto no quiere decir un pasivismo de nuestros pobres, a los que hemos mal adoctrinado cuando les decimos: "Es voluntad de Dios que tú seas pobre, marginado y no tienes más esperanza". ¡Eso no! Dios no quiere esa injusticia social; pero, sí, una vez que existe como un tremendo pecado de los opresores —y la violencia más grande está en ellos, que privan de felicidad a tanto ser humano y que están matando de hambre a tanto desnutrido—, Dios reclama justicia; pero le está diciendo al pobre, como Cristo, el oprimido, cargando con su cruz: 'Salvarás al mundo si le das a tu dolor no un conformismo que Dios no quiere, sino una inquietud de salvación, si mueres en tu pobreza suspirando por tiempos mejores, haciendo de tu vida una oración y acuerpando todo aquello que trata de liberar al pueblo de esta situación.*
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> *El Papa lo recordaba en México cuando dice que la devoción a María no es una devoción de débiles; que María, que supo soportar la huida y el destierro, la marginación, la pobreza, la opresión; María, la hija de un pueblo dominado por el imperio romano, que ve morir en la cruz injustamente a su Hijo, prisionero y torturado; María levanta su grito de santa rebeldía para decir a Dios que 'despedirá vacíos a los soberbios y orgullosos y, si es necesario, derribará del trono a los*

[159] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 31.

potentados; y, en cambio, dará su gracia a los humildes, a los que confían en la misericordia del Señor.' [160]

> There is no redemption without the cross, but that does not mean our poor people should be passive. We wrongly indoctrinated the poor when we told them, 'It is God's will for you to live poor and hopeless on the margins of society.' That is not true! God in no way wants social injustice, and whenever it exists, God judges it as the great sin of the oppressors. The greatest violence comes from those who deprive so many people of happiness, from those who kill people of starvation. God is telling the poor, as he told the oppressed Christ while he was carrying his cross, 'You will save the world by making your suffering a protest of salvation and by not conforming to what God does not want. You will save the world if you die in your poverty while yearning for better times, making your whole life a prayer, and embodying everything that seeks to liberate the people from this situation.'
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> The pope recalled this in Mexico when he said that devotion to Mary was not for the weak of the heart. Mary knew how to endure flight into exile, marginalization, poverty, and oppression. Mary was the daughter of a people dominated by the Roman Empire. She saw her son taken prisoner and tortured. She saw him die unjustly on the cross. Mary cries out in holy defiance, declaring that God 'will send the proud and the arrogant away empty-handed and, if necessary, bring the mighty down from their thrones. At the same time, he will give his grace to the lowly, to those who trust in his mercy' (Luke 1:52–53).

Romero consequently helped people be aware of their situation and discern the things that could be changed in their lives and society. He encouraged them to participate in this change by continuing with Jesus's mission on earth, a nonviolent resistance.[161] In short, he helped the people gain *concientización* by achieving a critical individual and,

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[160] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2009, 6:106–7.

[161] Campbell points out that when Jesus tells his disciples "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Matthew 16:24, NRSV), he is calling the church to this way of nonviolent resistance.[161] Campbell explains, Jesus' call to "take up your cross" is not a call to submit to the oppressors; on the contrary, Jesus "is calling us not simply to bear the burdens of life or to practice ascetic self-denial but to take up the way of resistance to the Domination system. He is calling us not passively to accept violence or abuse but actively to resist the powers of domination without resorting to their violent means."
Campbell, *The Word Before the Powers*, 64.

more importantly, a collective understanding of themselves, their world, and where they stand.[162] As Romero says, "*No se puede anhelar la liberación, la libertad, si no se tiene conciencia de estar esclavizado*," (we cannot yearn for liberation, freedom, if we are not aware of being enslaved).[163]

Furthermore, Romero responded to the collective trauma the people were experiencing by naming, acknowledging, and validating their suffering and by providing ways of coping with their pain. Therefore, through his homilies, Romero helped the people strengthen their collective resilience. He helped them find the capacity to stay present and connected even to what challenged them. In other words, through Romero's messages, the poor, marginalized, and oppressed people could find in God, within themselves, and within their communities the strength they needed to continue fighting for their liberation, even as they continued experiencing traumatic wounds.

As argued in Chapter Two, resilience can be experienced and expressed individually or collectively by a group, a family, an organization, and a culture.[164] Resilience spreads among people, positively changing the lives of people, families, neighbors, and communities.[165] How communities respond to collective trauma plays a role in the resilience of families and individuals who are community members.[166] Some resilience researchers claim that resilience depends on human and social capital. This

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[162] When using the empowerment pastoral care model pastoral care providers help people identify and acknowledge their worth and value.
Lartey, *In Living Color*, 58-59.
[163] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2007, 4:63.
[164] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 50.
[165] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 55.
[166] Masten, *Ordinary Magic*, 237.

includes people, networks, and local voluntary associations.[167] The sense of belonging and commitment to a community and the trust in other community members help people construct community resilience.[168]

In summary, trusting each other, counting on each other, and sharing resources help people build community resilience. Romero knew that only by working together in the community would the poor, oppressed, and marginalized people be able to change their situation of oppression. Therefore, he encouraged them to join base faith communities and to organize themselves to demand their liberation peacefully.

The majority of the poor, oppressed, and marginalized people of El Salvador responded to the collective trauma they had experienced and the continuous traumatic stress to which they were exposed by holding on to their faith, practicing religious rituals, participating in Christian base communities, joining unions and organized popular organizations, and by creating organizations like the CO-MADRES (Committee of Mothers and Relatives of the Political Prisoners, Disappeared, and Assassinated of El Salvador "Monseñor Romero") founded in 1977 by women who refused to carry their cross passively. Many of them were arrested, tortured, and raped. However, they continued fighting for justice and liberation. They made their suffering a protest of salvation. They made their lives a prayer, embodying everything that seeks to liberate their people from the violent oppression they were experiencing.

[167] Shamai, *Systemic Interventions for Collective and National Trauma*, 63-67.
[168] Shamai, *Systemic Interventions for Collective and National Trauma*, 63–67.

Even though Romero could not protect the people from experiencing traumatic wounds, he provided resources to help them cope with the traumatic circumstances they were experiencing. By helping them strengthen their resilience and, consequently, finding the capacity to stay present and connected even amid their suffering, Romero helped the people to grow even from their traumatic experiences.

In terms of Lartey's definition of pastoral care, Romero's homilies are a verbal activity that aims at preventing and relieving traumatic wounds and facilitating tools to cope with continuous traumatic stress. Consequently, Romero's homilies are a verbal activity that helps the people of El Salvador grow into their identity as fully transfigured people. Romero did this by speaking the truth about the poor, marginalized, and oppressed people's concrete circumstances, by helping them to see and hear God amid their suffering, and by helping them to edit or re-edit their lives in light of God's preferential option for them.

In addition, through his homilies, Romero also practiced the model of pastoral care as ministry, for he acts as an intermediary between God and the hurting people.[169] Therefore, Pope Francis' understanding of a preacher applies to Romero. In Pope Francis' words, a preacher is a dialogue facilitator between God and the people.[170] He

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[169] Lartey, *In Living Color*, 56.

[170] As Martín-Baró points out, "*La palabra de Monseñor fue un diálogo crítico con su realidad, un diálogo destructor de muerte y generador de vida, un diálogo en el que Dios se hacía patente y concreto al pueblo salvadoreño. Un diálogo que quienes sólo saben monologar desde la prepotencia del dinero y de las armas no pudieron soportar*"[170] (Monsignor Romero's word was a critical dialogue with his reality, a dialogue that destroys death and generates life, a dialogue in which God made himself visible and concrete to the Salvadoran people. A dialogue that those who only know how to monologue from the arrogance of money and weapons could not bear).
Ignacio Martín-Baró, "Monseñor: una voz para un pueblo pisoteado," 1980, 14.

says that the preacher is a two-way communicator and interpreter, someone who testifies to both God and the people. For, "A preacher needs to contemplate the word, but he also has to contemplate his people…He needs to be able to link the message of a biblical text to a human situation, to an experience that cries out for the light of God's word.'"[171] For this reason, Pope Francis believes that the preacher needs to know intimately both the heart of God and the heart of the community in order to help them have a fruitful dialogue during the homily.[172] While Pope Francis notes that God and God's people do not need intermediaries to speak to one another, they do, he thinks, "want someone to serve as an instrument and to express their feelings in such a way that afterwards, each one may choose how he or she will continue the conversation."[173]

Romero's desire was to be a facilitator of the dialogue between God and the people, not a hindrance, as he says in one of his homilies.[174] Romero believes that "*el dialogo se caracteriza por la pobreza: ir pobre para encontrar entre los dos la verdad, la solución"* (the dialogue is characterized by poverty: to go into the dialogue poor to find together the truth, the solution).[175] Thus, Romero approached the dialogue between God and the people with a humble spirit, seeking to learn from both.[176] Romero says in his homily of September 9, 1979, "*El obispo siempre tiene mucho que aprender de su pueblo y, precisamente, en los carismas que el Espíritu da al pueblo, el obispo encuentra la*

[171] Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 123.
[172] Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 109
[173] Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 113
[174] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2009, 6:234.
[175] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2005, 1:471.
[176] Romero understood that we are life-long learners, as the concept of Cultural Humility affirms. We should adopt a humble posture and listen to and learn from others.

piedra de toque de su humildad y de su autenticidad" (The bishop always has a lot to learn from his people, and it is precisely in the charisms that the Spirit gives to the people, that the bishop finds the touchstone of his humility and his authenticity).[177] Even more, for Romero the people were his prophet: "*Siento que el pueblo es mi profeta, a mí me está enseñando con la unción que el Espíritu ha hecho en su bautismo…"* (I feel that the people are my prophet, they are teaching me with the anointing that the Spirit has done in their baptism).[178] If the people are prophets, they are speaking for God. Therefore, in the life of the poor, Romero recognizes the presence and voice of God.[179] Thus, Romero listened attentively to the poor people and empowered them by acknowledging and naming the many gifts of the Holy Spirit that they possess. He preached on September 30, 1979,

> *Por eso, queridos hermanos —y yo aquí ya bajando a la realidad de nuestra arquidiócesis—, quiero admirar y darle gracias al Señor porque en ustedes, pueblo de Dios, comunidades religiosas, comunidades eclesiales de base, gente humilde, campesinos, ¡cuántos dones del Espíritu! Si yo fuera un celoso como los personajes del Evangelio y de la primera lectura diría: "¡Prohíbasele, que no hable, que no diga nada, solo yo obispo puedo hablar!". Y no, yo tengo que escuchar qué dice el Espíritu por medio de su pueblo y, entonces, sí, recibir del pueblo y analizarlo y, junto con el pueblo, hacerlo construcción de la Iglesia.*[180]
>
> So now, dear sisters and brothers, coming down to the reality of our archdiocese, I want to give thanks and praise to the Lord because of all the many gifts of the Holy Spirit found in you, the people of God, the religious communities, the ecclesial base communities, the humble folk, the *campesinos* and *campesinas*! If I were as jealous as the characters in the gospel or the first reading, I would say, "Prohibit them! Don't let them

[177] Cavada Diez, *Homilías: Monseñor Óscar A. Romero*, 2008, 5:304.
[178] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2008, 5:86.
[179] Cavada Diez, "Predicación y profecía. Análisis de las homilías de Monseñor Romero," 16.
[180] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2008, 5:372.

> speak! Let them keep quiet! Only I, the bishop, can speak." But no, I have to listen to what the Spirit is saying by means of his people, and then, after receiving the people's inspiration and analyzing it, I have to join with the people in building up the church.

Romero admitted, "*Yo también, hermanos, recibo la predicación de ustedes*" (Me too, brothers and sisters, receive the preaching from you).[181] For Romero, "*Todo aquel que predica tiene que ser primero un alma que es discípulo, que oye, que medita, que reflexiona, que ora*" (Everyone who preaches must first be a soul that is a disciple, that listens, that meditates, that reflects, that prays).[182] Thus, Romero listens to and is a disciple of both God and the poor, oppressed, and marginalized people of El Salvador. Only by listening to them could Romero honestly and faithfully address their trauma and help them build resilience.

As a dialogue facilitator between God and the people of El Salvador, Romero testifies to God and to the painful and traumatic reality that the poor, marginalized, and oppressed people were experiencing. However, Romero was not only "able to link the message of a biblical text to a human situation, to an experience that cries out for the light of God's word," he also helped the poor people identify the light of God's word in Scripture and in their own lives and experiences, so that they would be able to continue with their dialogue with God by listening to God's voice in Scripture and in their own lives—through their hopes, dreams, sufferings, and traumatic wounds. In other words, as Cavada Diez notes, in his homilies Romero provides "'*principios iluminadores' para que*

[181] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2006, 3:66.
[182]Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2008, 5:320.

cada oyente, guiado por esos principios, ilumine, a su vez, su propia realidad" ('illuminating principles' so that each listener, guided by those principles, illuminates, in turn, their own reality).[183] Using these *principios iluminadores*, the people could continue to dialogue with God and ask themselves how their reality and Scripture illuminate each other, how they challenge each other, and how they complement each other.[184] Romero says in his homily, "Lent is the Triumph of God's Saving Plan in History" (February 24, 1980), *"Y allá cada uno de ustedes en su corazón, la sinceridad con que está recibiendo esta palabra de Dios, para convertirse a Él y agradecerle y entablar con Dios su diálogo personal, o para rechazarlo,"* (Then in the heart of each of you, as you receive this word of God with sincerity, you can turn to God, thank him and enter into a personal dialogue with him, or you can reject him).[185]

As Chapter One mentions, trauma damages human beings' assumptions about themselves, God, others, and the world. The touch of trauma affects how we live in the world, how we see the world, and how we see and understand one another. It breaks relationships between self and self, self and God, self and others, and self and the earth. People who have experienced trauma and/or are exposed to continuous traumatic stress

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[183] Cavada Diez, "Predicación y profecía. Análisis de las homilías de Monseñor Romero," 14.

[184] The Catholic Bishop's Committee says in *Fulfilled in your Hearing*, "In order to make such connections between the lives of the people and the Gospel, the preacher will have to be a listener before he is a speaker. Listening is not an isolated moment. It is a way of life. It means openness to the Lord's voice not only in the Scriptures but in the events of our daily lives and in the experience of our brothers and sisters. It is not just my listening but our listening together for the Lord's word to the community. We listen to the Scriptures, we listen to the people, and we ask, "What are they saying to one another? What are they asking of one another?" And out of that dialogue between the Word of God in the Scriptures and the Word of God in the lives of his people, the Word of God in preaching begins to take shape."

Bishop's Committee on Priestly Life and Ministry United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Fulfilled in Your Hearing: The Homily in the Sunday Assembly*, 10.

[185] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2005, 1:489.

consequently need a support system that helps them access their self-healing force and reconnect with themselves, God, others, and creation. Romero acted as the support system for the suffering and traumatized people of El Salvador. His homilies and liturgical practices provided a sense of connection with the divine and a sense of meaning, belonging, and worthiness, making it possible for the poor, marginalized, and oppressed people to experience unity and support and, consequently, to cope with difficult circumstances and continuous traumatic stress.[186]

Romero's *sentir con el Pueblo*: The Building of a Just and Peaceful Society

As Lartey reminds us, pastoral care includes social action (acting with the people). Liberation theologians describe the model of pastoral care as social action as speaking truth to power and working for the transformation of societies and persons to obtain a more socially just and equitable distribution of the human and material resources found on earth.[187] Romero includes elements of this pastoral care model in his homilies, for Romero identifies the symptoms of the structural problems, names and acknowledges its causes, and proposes just and equitable ways to distribute the resources for the transformation of the Salvadoran society and the liberation of the poor, marginalized, and oppressed.

[186] Recall from Chapter One that pastoral care theologian Susan Dunlap found through her ethnographic research on people living without a home that religious beliefs and practices endure because they enable survival under challenging circumstances. Dunlap argues that for people without homes, these religious beliefs and practices "function as a form of resistance to powers that would dehumanize them and deprive them of the means to survive and thrive." Dunlap, *Shelter Theology*, 62.

[187] Lartey, *In Living Color*, 58.

For Romero, the causes of the violence in El Salvador are structural. Chief among them are social inequality and economic injustice, which those in power have maintained by inflicting violence and intolerable oppression against the poor for generations and generations.[188] Thus, Romero insisted that the liberation the Church preaches is, above all, "*el respeto a la dignidad de la persona, la salvación del bien común del pueblo y la trascendencia que mira, ante todo, a Dios y solo de Dios deriva su esperanza y su fuerza"* (respects above all the dignity of the person, the saving power of the common good of the people, and the transcendent vision that looks first of all toward God and derives its hope and its strength from God alone).[189] As Martín-Baró notes, Romero denounced the persecution, repression, and injustice against the poor. He announced possibilities of transformation that the Salvadoran society could experience if those in power repented and converted from their violent, exploitative, and oppressive actions against the poor and participated in a structural change, according to God's project for humanity. Romero understood that without a real conversion of hearts, Salvadoran society would never experience genuine structural transformation. Thus, through his homilies, Romero orients, encourages, and guides the Salvadoran people in a process of historical change, for historical trauma requires such a large-scale change. An example occurred on March 23, 1980, a day before his assassination, when Romero preached from Isaiah 43:16–21, Philippians 3:8–14 and John 8:1–11:

[188] Martín-Baró, "El Liderazgo de Monseñor Romero," 162–63.
[189] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2009, 6:453.

Yo creo que hasta repito demasiado esta idea, pero no me cansaré de hacerlo porque corremos mucho el peligro de querer salir de las situaciones inmediatas con resoluciones inmediatas y nos olvidamos que los inmediatismos pueden ser parches, pero no soluciones verdaderas. La solución verdadera tiene que encajar en el proyecto definitivo de Dios. Toda la solución que queramos dar a una mejor distribución de la tierra, a una mejor administración del dinero en El Salvador, a una organización política acomodada al bien común de los salvadoreños, tendrá que buscarse siempre en el conjunto de la liberación definitiva.

Hace poco me presentaban un esquema muy significativo, y es: el hombre que trabaja en política mira los problemas temporales —el dinero, las tierras, las cosas— y se puede quedar contento con solo resolver estos problemas; pero el político que tiene fe se remonta hasta Dios y desde Dios mira cómo ese tramo inmediato, que los políticos de hoy están tratando de resolver, no debe de mirarse separadamente de la perspectiva de Dios. Desde el principio al fin, en la historia, Dios lleva un proyecto, y la solución hay que acomodarla a esa perspectiva de Dios para que sea eficaz.

Y según esa perspectiva de Dios, como aparece en las palabras de hoy que se han leído en la Biblia: en primer lugar, reconocer que Dios es el protagonista de la historia; en segundo lugar, hay que partir de la redención del pecado; y en tercer lugar, no descartar a Cristo, que es el camino y la meta de la verdadera liberación. Aquí está, en las lecturas de hoy, y este es el proyecto que durante toda la Cuaresma hemos venido estudiando.[190]

I think I may be repeating this idea too much, but I don't tire of repeating it because we are in great danger of escaping from urgent problems by applying immediate solutions, and we forget that short-term measures can be patches and not true solutions. The true solution has to match up with the definitive project of God. Any solution we devise for a better distribution of land, for better financial administration in El Salvador, or for political organizations dedicated to the welfare of Salvadorans will always have to be sought in conjunction with our definitive liberation.

Not long ago, I was shown a very meaningful distinction. Some people working in politics see the immediate problems—money, land, things—and are happy with just solving those problems. But political actors who have faith look to God and ask how God views those immediate problems that today's politicians are trying to solve. The problems should not be seen separately from God's perspective. From

[190] Cavada Diez, 6:435.

> beginning to end God moves his project through history, and to be effective, the solution to any problem must coincide with that perspective of God.
>
> That perspective of God is revealed in the words that have been read today from the Bible. First, we must recognize God as the protagonist of history; second, we must start from redemption from sin; and third, we must not neglect Christ, who is the way and the goal of all true liberation. Here in today's reading we find a statement of the project that we have been studying throughout Lent.

Here, as Martín-Baró points out, Romero communicated what the social sciences have identified: that only a radical transformation of the social structures can bring forth a different type of social relations, where love and justice reign and where the rights of all people are respected.[191] In a society where this type of social relations predominates, people would not experience human-caused collective trauma and would not be exposed to continuous traumatic stress. However, Romero emphasized that this radical transformation can only occur when human beings' liberation project is a continuation of Jesus' liberation project. Thus, he named the actions and policies he considered necessary to act according to God's project for humanity and to create a more just society.[192] Martín-Baró notes that because this change is radical, it is revolutionary,[193] just like Jesus's ministry on earth. It is a "Christian revolutionary task," as Romero often says in his homilies.[194]

Even though Romero never understood himself as a politician, his ministry was political because his words and actions intended to cause a change in the existing

[191] Martín-Baró, "El liderazgo de Monseñor Romero," 165.
[192] Martín-Baró, "El liderazgo de Monseñor Romero," 165.
[193] Martín-Baró, "El Liderazgo de Monseñor Romero," 166.
[194] Martín-Baró, "El Liderazgo de Monseñor Romero, 167.

oppressive system of El Salvador.[195] Martín-Baró explains, "Neither the actor nor the action alone makes an act political. What makes an act political is the relationship of any action by any actor to the established order in society. To the extent that such an act has a negative or positive influence on either maintaining or changing the existing system, it has a political character."[196] Furthermore, Romero's homilies are political messages because they play "a role in the social confrontation of class and group interests."[197] Anyone who opts for the preferential option for the poor becomes a political figure. Jesus himself was a political figure. He proclaimed liberation for the poor and oppressed and challenged the status quo of those in power at that time. Like Jesus, Romero was persecuted by the idolaters of power and money. He received several threats. In his sermon of January 14, 1979, Romero shared that he had received threats against his life and that the President of El Salvador offered him protection. Romero's answer was characteristic of his leadership as the pastor of the people. He clarified that he did not need the protection of the government; what he needed—and most significantly what the people needed—was a change in the oppressive systems and structures of El Salvador, a radical change in the economic, social, and political systems. In other words, they needed a significant change in the oppressive systems and structures that had collectively

[195] Romero says in his homily of January 21, 1979, "*Quiero ratificar que mis predicaciones no son políticas, son predicaciones que naturalmente tocan la política, tocan la realidad del pueblo, pero para iluminarlos y decirles qué es lo que Dios quiere y qué es lo que Dios no quiere*" (I want to confirm that my sermons are not political; they naturally touch politics, touch the reality of the people, but to enlighten you and tell you what God wants and what God does not want).

Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2007, 4:190.

[196] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 54.

[197] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 55.

wounded the poor Salvadoran people for many generations. He says, "*Lo que yo quisiera del Supremo Gobierno, fuera un esfuerzo para garantizar esa verdadera paz que todos anhelamos pero que no se puede conseguir con represiones y con atropellos sino con justicia social, que es lo que más urge entre nosotros,"* (What I would ask of the supreme government is a sincere effort to guarantee a genuine peace for which all of us long and that can never be gained by repressive measures and violence. It can be gained only with social justice, which is the most urgent need our people have).[198]

However, Romero understood that without a real conversion of hearts, the Salvadoran people were not going to experience real structural transformation and a peaceful society. He says in his homily from March 23, 1980,

> *Lo segundo digo que es mirar cómo la liberación tiene que arrancar del pecado. Hay que tener en cuenta que todos los males tienen una raíz común y es el pecado. En el corazón del hombre están los egoísmos, las envidias, las idolatrías; y es allí donde surgen las divisiones, los acaparamientos; como decía Cristo: "No es lo que sale del hombre lo que mancha al hombre, sino lo que está en el corazón del hombre", los malos pensamientos. Purificar, pues, esa fuente de todas las esclavitudes. ¿Por qué hay esclavitudes? ¿Por qué hay marginaciones? ¿Por qué hay analfabetismo? ¿Por qué hay enfermedades? ¿Por qué hay un pueblo que gime en el dolor? Todo eso está denunciando que existe el pecado. "La pobreza —dice Medellín— es una denuncia de la injusticia de aquel pueblo".*
>
> The second thing I say is that we must understand how liberation can free us from sin. We must take into account that all evils have a common root, which is sin. The human heart is filled with selfishness, envy, and idolatry, and these evils give rise to division and domination. Christ told us, "It is not what comes out of people that defiles them; it is what is within the human heart" (Matt 15:18–19). There are evil thoughts that are the source of slavery, and they need to be purified. Why is there slavery? Why is there exclusion? Why is there illiteracy? Why are there infirmities? Why

[198] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2007, 4:176.

> are there people groaning in pain? All those things denounce the existence of sin, as Medellín said, "Poverty is a denunciation of the injustice the people suffer" (Medellín 14, 4).

Even though Romero does not use this language, Romero oriented the people towards a process of healing their open wounds, for according to trauma experts like Duran and others, this is the only way they could genuinely reconcile and love one another. They argue that selfishness, envy, and idolatry are the consequences of open and untreated soul wounds inherited by both victimizers and victims. Acknowledging these wounds and the hurt they have caused to others is part of the healing process. Also, knowing the nature of the open wounds help pastoral care providers understand what those we are caring for need to hear, want to hear, and are able to hear. [199]

Romero knew what the people, the government, the oligarchy, and armed forces and paramilitary groups *wanted* to hear, *needed* to hear, and *were able* to hear. However, as the ancient prophets did, Romero said what they *needed to hear*—even though this put his life at risk. He put his calling as representative of God and the poor people before his own safety. In the homily he preached the day before his assassination, Romero bluntly confronts the Armed Forces with the Word of God. Many people say that this is the reason why he became a martyr.

> *Yo quisiera hacer un llamamiento de manera especial a los hombres del Ejército, y en concreto a las bases de la Guardia Nacional, de la policía, de los cuarteles: Hermanos, son de nuestro mismo pueblo, matan a sus*

[199] In the book *Fulfilled in Your Hearing,* the Bishop's Committee says, "Unless a preacher knows what a congregation needs, wants, or is able to hear, there is every possibility that the message offered in the homily will not meet the needs of the people who hear it."

Bishop's Committee on Priestly Life and Ministry United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Fulfilled in Your Hearing: The Homily in the Sunday Assembly*, 4.

mismos hermanos campesinos y, ante una orden de matar que dé un hombre, debe de prevalecer la ley de Dios que dice: "No matar". Ningún soldado está obligado a obedecer una orden contra la ley de Dios. Una ley inmoral, nadie tiene que cumplirla. Ya es tiempo de que recuperen su conciencia y que obedezcan antes a su conciencia que a la orden del pecado. La Iglesia, defensora de los derechos de Dios, de la ley de Dios, de la dignidad humana, de la persona, no puede quedarse callada ante tanta abominación. Queremos que el Gobierno tome en serio que de nada sirven las reformas si van teñidas con tanta sangre. En nombre de Dios, pues, y en nombre de este sufrido pueblo, cuyos lamentos suben hasta el cielo cada día más tumultuosos, les suplico, les ruego, les ordeno en nombre de Dios: ¡cese la represión![200]

I would like to make an appeal, especially to the men of the army, and concretely to the National Guard, the police, and the troops. Brothers, you are part of our own people. You are killing your own brother and sister *campesinos*, and against any order a man may give to kill, God's law must prevail: 'You shall not kill!' (Exod. 20:13). No soldier is obliged to obey an order against the law of God. No one has to observe an immoral law. It is time now for you to reclaim your conscience and obey your conscience rather than the command to sin. The church defends the rights of God, the law of God, and the dignity of the human person and, therefore, cannot remain silent before such great abominations. We want the government to understand well that the reforms are worth nothing if they are stained with so much blood. In the name of God, then, and in the name of these suffering people, whose laments rise each day more tumultuously toward heaven, I beg you, I beseech you, I order you in the name of God: stop the repression!

Opting for the poor means defending the poor from their oppressors and victimizers, as Romero did. In other words, opting for the poor means defending the poor from the idolaters of power and money and the systems and structures that wound them. Jon Sobrino explains that without that defense, though there may be compassion, solidarity, and help, there is no real preferential option for the poor. Moreover, without

[200] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2009, 6:453.

that fight, there may be good intentions, but there is no preferential option for the poor.[201] Romero was aware that it is not enough to accompany the poor and oppressed people; one must also defend them.[202] He knew that opting for the poor requires sacrifices and being willing to be persecuted like them.

In his homily of September 16, 1979, Romero reflects on Mark 8:31–33, interpreting Jesus' harsh response to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan!" as an admonishment for Peter not being willing to make a sacrifice in response to his calling to proclaim good news to the poor, freedom for the prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor (Luke 4:18–19). Romero says, "*[Un Satanas] es para Cristo todo aquel que quiere predicarlo sin cruz, sin sacrificio*" To Christ [a Satan] is everyone who wants to preach him without a cross, without sacrifice).[203]

Interestingly, on April 16, 1978, reflecting on Acts 2:36, Romero presents another aspect of Peter. In this message, Peter was the brave disciple willing to give his life for the sake of the gospel. Romero says,

> *Una Iglesia que no provoca crisis, un Evangelio que no inquieta, una palabra de Dios que no levanta roncha —como decimos vulgarmente—, una palabra de Dios que no toca el pecado concreto de la sociedad en que está anunciándose, ¿qué Evangelio es ese? Consideraciones piadosas muy bonitas que no molestan a nadie, y así quisieran muchos que fuera la predicación. Y aquellos predicadores que, por no molestarse, por no tener conflictos y dificultades, evitan toda cosa espinosa no iluminan la realidad en que se vive, no tienen el valor de Pedro de decirle a aquella turba donde están todavía las manos manchadas de sangre que mataron a*

[201] Sobrino, "Monseñor Romero (1917-1980). Ensayo Ante Dios Con Su Pueblo," 16–17.
[202] Sobrino, "Monseñor Romero (1917–1980)," 17.
[203] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2008, 5:322.

> *Cristo: ¡ustedes lo mataron! Aunque le iba a costar también la vida por esta denuncia, la proclama. Es el Evangelio valiente, es la buena nueva del que vino a quitar los pecados del mundo.*[204]
>
> A church that does not provoke crisis, a Gospel that does not disturb, a word of God that does not rankle (to use a common expression), a word of God that does not touch the concrete sin of the society in which it is being proclaimed—what kind of Gospel is that? Just nice, pious considerations that bother nobody— that's the way many people would like our preaching to be. Those preachers who avoid every thorny subject so as not to bother anyone or cause conflict and difficulty shed no light on the reality in which they live. They do not have the courage of Peter, who told the crowd whose hands were still stained with blood, "You killed him" (Acts 2:36). Even though his accusation would cost him his life, he still made it. That is the Gospel of courage; that is the Good News of the one who came to take away the sins of the world.

This shows not only how the Church of Christ should respond to injustices and honestly address the sources of trauma, but also the evolution of Peter, an evolution that Romero himself experienced.

Similarly, on March 24, 1980, moments before he was assassinated, Romero reflected on the passage from John 12:23–26,

> *Muchos no lo comprenden y piensan que el cristianismo no se debe meter en estas cosas, cuando es todo lo contrario. Acaban de escuchar el evangelio de Cristo que es necesario no amarse tanto a sí mismo, [que no es necesario] que se cuide uno para no meterse en los riesgos, en la vida que la historia nos exige. El que quiera apartarse del peligro, perderá su vida, en cambio, aquel que se entrega, por amor a Cristo, al servicio de los demás, este vivirá como el granito de trigo que muere, pero aparentemente muere. Si no muriera se quedaría solo. Si la cosecha es, porque muere, se deja inmolar esa tierra, deshacerse y sólo deshaciéndose produce la cosecha.*[205]

[204] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2005, 2:416–17.

[205] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2009, 6:455.

> Many people do not understand the message. They think Christianity should not get involved in these things, but quite the opposite is true. You just heard the Gospel of Christ: we must not love our lives so much that we avoid taking risks in life that history calls for. Those who seek to shun danger will lose their lives, whereas those who, for the love of Christ, dedicate themselves to the service of others, will live. They are like that grain of wheat that dies, at least in appearance. If the grain does not die, it remains alone (John12:24–25). If it yields a crop, it is because it dies, allowing the land to be immolated; it is by being dissolved and only because it is dissolved that it produces the crop.

This is the message Romero often proclaimed: If you die while continuing with Jesus' salvific plan for humanity, your death will not be in vain. It will bear fruit.

Romero was not afraid to say what the oppressors needed to hear because he was confident that he was representing both God and the oppressed and wounded people, who trusted him as their pastor and defender. Besides, saying what the oppressor needed to hear was, for Romero, a way of caring for their souls. Most of the time, the oppressors were the government, the oligarchy, the armed forces, and the paramilitary groups. However, in some cases, the oppressors were members of the organized popular movements or *campesinos* who adopted the same strategies their oppressors used against them to oppress those under their lesser power. This is a consequence of what most psychologists call internalized oppression, and what psychologist Eduardo Duran calls the effect of the vampire bite—the effect of traumatic wounds.[206] Pastoral care providers understand it as 'identification with the oppressor' and 'internalization of the oppressor's views and values,'[207] which creates in the oppressed people self-hatred and ambivalence

[206] Refer to Chapter One of this dissertation.
[207] Lartey, *In Living Color*, 67.

of their self-worth. These diminishing feelings often provoke anger and violence against others who are like them or those close to them, creating more traumatic wounds. Regardless of who the oppressors are, for Romero, they are all children in need of repentance and conversion. In other words, they are human beings in need of healing.

Romero was aware that the oppressors, especially the members of the armed forces and paramilitary groups, needed themselves to be liberated, for, as the suffering of the poor people, they were also offerings to the gods of power and money.[208] The worshipers of the gods of power and money took advantage of their vulnerability, caused by their open wounds, extreme poverty, desperation, and frustration, and turned them against their own people. As Martín-Baró reminds us, in a battle, the poor people are the ones who lose the most. "Military conscription is discriminatory and recruits heavily from the humblest sectors, and therefore the great majority of those who die on the battlefields, day after day, are the poor,"[209] says Martín-Baró. Thus, the system of oppression revictimizes its victims repeatedly.[210]

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[208]Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2009, 6:309.

[209] Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 116.

[210] The least of these in El Salvador became the scapegoat of people who themselves were under oppression and victims of violence. In his book *The Word Before the Powers*, Charles Campbell notes that Jesus' exorcism of the Gerasene demoniac (Mark 5:1–20) "involves casting out the spirit of Roman oppression, which is embodied in a representative person. The demoniac is possessed by 'Legion,' a technical name for a Roman military division. In constantly breaking his chains among the tombs, the demonic acts out the community's repressed longing to be freed from their oppression and the death it brings to them. At the same time, the demoniac provides a scapegoat for the pent-up violence of the community; he continually bruises himself with stones, repeatedly enacting in his person the scapegoat mechanism whereby a society keeps its violence in check by channeling it onto a sacrificial victim—often by stoning. In short, the demoniac represents in an external form the spirit of oppression and the repressed desire for freedom that possesses the entire community, and his presence among the people serves to maintain order in the community by keeping their violent resentment in check…Jesus' exorcism thus challenges not only the particular spirit of oppression that holds the people captive within the Roman Empire but also the spirit of violence that demands scapegoats." Charles L. Campbell, *The Word Before the Powers: An Ethic of Preaching* (Louisville, KY, 2002), 54–55.

Furthermore, the worshipers of the gods of power and money also need to experience liberation and healing. As noted in Chapter One, the perpetrators and their descendants also carry in their bodies and psyches the consequences of trauma—the trauma they have inflicted on others.[211] These soul wounds are passed down generation to generation. Recall Bessel van der Kolk's explanation of the roots of suffering and violence, "Many of the world's wicked problems are the inevitable consequences of unresolved collective trauma and the disembodiment and loss of relation these ills create."[212] The violent and oppressive social, economic, and political systems in El Salvador were consequences of the oppressors' unhealed soul wounds. However, recognizing that many of the worshipers of the gods of power and money also act out of their woundedness demands much from their victims.

Romero's *sentir con el Pueblo*: A Message of Hope

As Romero listened to the cries of the people, he listened to the God who cries out from the suffering of God's people: Is there no doctor for my people? Is there no balm in Gilead? (Jeremiah 8:22) Through his homilies and presence among the suffering people, Romero became a balm for their open wounds. Because the violence and excruciating

[211] Recall Chapter 1; as Yellow Horse Brave Heart, Duran, van der Kolk and others note, when trauma is not treated, it might be repeated. We might unconsciously repeat the conditions of trauma upon ourselves or others, which is called *retraumatization or 'repetition compulsion.'* According to Freud, this "is an attempt to find conscious resolution to the original trauma." Socially, repetition compulsion surfaces as racism, ethnic hatred, wars, or social collapse.

[212] Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*, Illustrated edition (New York: Penguin Books, 2015), 181–82.

oppression they continued experiencing kept re-opening their wounds, he might not have been able to heal their soul wounds but he was able to soothe their pain.

As Jon Sobrino points out, like Isaiah, Romero was a prophet, a denouncer, an evangelizer, and an announcer. However, most significantly, Romero was a *consolador* (a comforter). He fulfilled Isaiah's calling "Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God" (Isaiah 40:1).[213] Romero comforted the suffering people and guided them to restore their relationship with God. Martín-Baró shares how the people sought comfort and consul in Romero,

> *Diariamente tiene que recibir en el Arzobispado a decenas de gentes acosadas por la violencia de los cuerpos militares o paramilitares y que vienen a Monseñor para buscar protección y ayuda, para denunciar los atropellos y asesinatos, o simplemente para encontrar un poco de consuelo espiritual y humano. Monseñor a todos recibe y a todos atiende. Pero su voz profética se vuelve más y más colérica a medida que es alimentada por un mayor torrente de dolor y sangre popular*.[214]
>
> Every day he has to receive dozens of people harassed by the violence of the military or paramilitary forces at the Archbishopric and who come to Monsignor to seek protection and help, to denounce the abuses and murders, or simply to find some spiritual and human consolation… Monsignor receives everyone and attends to everyone. However, his prophetic voice grows angrier and angrier as it is fed by a greater torrent of pain and popular blood.

Romero understood that people need not only a defender, but also a *consolador* (comforter). They need a comforter who understands and feels their suffering and traumatic wounds and helps them feel and see God's presence among them. Romero became their comforter and spiritual guide by empathizing with them and holding their

[213] Sobrino, "Monseñor Romero (1917–1980). Ensayo Ante Dios Con su Pueblo," 20–21.
[214] Martín-Baró, "Monseñor: Una voz para un pueblo pisoteado," 18.

suffering. In such ways, Romero was, above all, the pastor of the people, ordained by God to accompany and guide them to green pastures and quiet waters where their souls could be refreshed (Psalm 3), and where their hope could be renewed. Hope is essential to survive tragedy and trauma because, for people who have nothing, hope means everything.

As explained in Chapter Two, resilience experts recommend that communities respond to collective traumatic experiences by: promoting a sense of safety, promoting tranquility, promoting a sense of self and collective efficacy, promoting connectedness, and promoting hope.[215] Psychologist Ann Masten argues that hope and a sense that life has meaning may be close relatives of resilience. Most resilient people often identify hope and meaning as protective influences in their lives.[216] Furthermore, resilient researchers found that spiritual beliefs and religious faith provide similar protection to that of hope and meaning. Thus, resilience is often associated with hope, optimism, faith, and belief that life has meaning.[217]

As Colón-Emeric notes, Romero understood that liberation must be considered from different but inclusive perspectives: "salvation history, new humanity, and hope."[218] Colón-Emeric explains that for Romero, the identification of the crucified Christ with the

[215] Masten, *Ordinary Magic*, 141.
[216] Masten, *Ordinary Magic*, 135.
[217] Masten, *Ordinary Magic*, 164.
[218] Edgardo Colón-Emeric, *Óscar Romero's Theological Vision: Liberation and the Transfiguration of the Poor* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2018), 180.

crucified people is not a fatalistic sign; it is a hopeful sign.[219] In his homily of March 19, 1978, Romero preaches,

> *Cristo que se ha hecho solidario de todos nosotros y nosotros que sentimos que la suerte de Cristo es nuestra suerte. Sentimos en el Cristo de la Semana Santa con su cruz a cuestas, que es el pueblo que va cargando también su cruz. Sentimos en el Cristo de los brazos abiertos y crucificados, al pueblo crucificado pero que desde Cristo, un pueblo que crucificado y humillado encuentra su esperanza: te he enseñado a dar palabras de consuelo, has aprendido en el dolor a consolar a los demás.*[220]
>
> Christ enters into solidarity with all of us, and we feel that Christ's destiny is our destiny. We feel in the Christ of Holy Week carrying his cross that it is the people who are carrying their cross. We feel in the Christ of wide-open and crucified arms the crucified people, a crucified and humiliated people, who from Christ find their hope: 'I have taught you words of comfort, and through suffering you have learned how to console others.'

Similarly, in a mass organized by the mothers of the disappeared (December 1, 1977), Romero tells the mothers that their disappeared children and them, in their unbearable pain, are continuing on earth Christ's justice that continues saving the world.[221] "*El dolor es inútil cuando se sufre sin Cristo, pero cuando el dolor humano continua el dolor de Cristo es dolor que sigue salvando al mundo, es dolor como el de María, serena, espera la hora de la resurrección*" (Pain is useless when endured without Christ, but when human pain continues Christ's pain, then it is pain that continues to save the world, it is pain like Mary's, serene, pain that awaits the hour of resurrection).[222]

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[219] Colón-Emeric, *Óscar Romero's Theological Vision: Liberation and the Transfiguration of the Poor*, 207.
[220] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2005, 2:333.
[221] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2:45.
[222] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2:45–46.

Thus, for Romero, the mothers' salvific pain is also represented at God's table. He says, "*Este ofertorio, que va a seguir ahora, en que el pan y el vino representan la aflicción, la angustia, el dolor de tantos meses sin saber de sus hijos, se va a convertir en el dolor de Cristo en el calvario, en nuestro altar"* (This offering of bread and wine represents the affliction, the anguish, and the pain of mothers who have gone so many months without knowing the whereabouts of their children. Their anguish and pain will become Christ's pain on the Calvary of our altar).[223] Romero directs the suffering mothers and loved ones of the disappeared to the Eucharist, where they can find the assurance that the days of justice will come, the days in which God will triumph over human iniquity.[224] Two years later, on January 21, 1979, Romero preached at the funeral mass of Father Octavio Ortiz Luna and four young boys, Ángel Morales, Jorge Alberto Gómez, Roberto Antonio Orellana, and David Alberto Caballero, who were assassinated with Father Ortiz. The title of this homily is "An Assassination that Speaks of Resurrection." In this homily, Romero emphasizes that the five dead bodies were preaching a message of hope and resurrection. He says, "*Y esta esperanza y esta participación en la muerte y en la resurrección de Cristo se hacen hoy vivencia dolorosa en torno de esos cadáveres que nos predican, precisamente, el lenguaje de las tres lecturas que hoy acabamos de escuchar*" (This hope and this participation in the death and the resurrection of Christ become painfully real for us today as we gather around these bodies, which proclaim to

[223] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2:45.
[224] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2:45.

us the precise meaning of the three readings we have just heard).[225] Thus, for Romero, Christian hope is found in living a life that continues with Jesus' salvific mission on earth and in the promise of resurrection.

In another homily, Romero assures the people, "*En esta nueva coyuntura, el juicio mío sigue siendo pastoral: animar una esperanza que yo, sinceramente, entreveo; y ha sido mi trabajo siempre mantener la esperanza de mi pueblo. Si hay una chispita de esperanza, alimentarla es mi deber y creo que todo hombre de buena voluntad tiene que alimentarla"* (With this new development my judgment continues to be pastoral. I encourage a spirit of hope because I sincerely believe there is a good reason for it. It has always been my work to maintain the hope of my people. If there is a spark of hope, my duty is to nourish it, and I believe that all people of goodwill must also do the same).[226] Thus, when the people asked, *"¿Dónde está Dios?*" (Where is God?) Romero responded by giving them hope, "*Dios va con nuestra historia. Dios no nos ha abandonado. Dios va sacando partido hasta de las injusticias de los hombres*" (God goes with our history. God has not abandoned us. God is taking advantage even of the injustices of men).[227]

However, Romero did not romanticize hope, for he knew that a hope that does not name and acknowledge the cruel and painful reality the people live in is not true hope. Only by being honest about the trauma and suffering of the people could Romero preach

[225] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2007, 4:184.
[226] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 5:541.
[227] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2009, 6:30.

a true message of hope. Authentic hope is only possible when one acknowledges the severity of our wounds.

By being honest about the sorrow and suffering of the poor people of El Salvador, Romero, practiced in his homilies what psychotherapist Resmaa Menakem later called "clean pain." As described in Chapter One, practicing clean pain means walking into the pain, experiencing it fully, and moving through it, allowing oneself to grow in the process, creating more space in one's nervous system for flow and coherence, and building one's capacity for further growth.[228] Menakem affirms that only by practicing clean pain can one aspire to experience healing. There is no real healing if there is no real acceptance and recognition of the wound.

In Christianity, we call this "lament." As Colón-Emeric says, lament is the school of hope.[229] By naming the names of the people who were killed, disappeared, imprisoned, and tortured and naming, acknowledging, and validating their suffering and the suffering of their families and communities, Romero creates a space for communal lament. In this space people honestly bring their anger, frustration, and suffering before God. Even though it was Romero who shared the traumatic wounds the people were experiencing in his homilies, the people were the ones who gave him the information by writing him letters or coming into his office to talk to him. The people entrusted their cries and lament to Romero, and he brought them before God. Thus, he also used his voice and platform to

[228] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 165.
I address this in Chapter 2.

[229] Edgardo Colón-Emeric's presentation at the Cries of Loss and Hope concert Friday, September 2, 2022.

help people lament in community and denounce the injustices they were suffering. Every time Romero mentions in his homilies a person who was tortured, raped, disappeared, imprisoned, or killed, every time he mentions the anguish and sorrow of their families, Romero is bringing the suffering of the people before God and reminding the victims that they were not alone: God, their Archbishop, and the Body of Christ accompany them in their suffering and lament with them. Knowing that they are not alone in their suffering and fight for liberation and justice must have meant a lot to people with few reasons to hope and to continue fighting for their liberation. Thus, lament or "clean pain" is the first step toward healing and hope.

In his homily on December 24, 1979, in which Romero celebrates the hope we find in the incarnate Jesus, he first laments the suffering and cruel reality of many people in El Salvador. He says,

> *Es hora de mirar hoy al Niño Jesús no en las imágenes bonitas de nuestros pesebres, había que buscarlo entre los niños desnutridos que se han acostado esta noche sin tener qué comer, entre los pobrecitos vendedores de periódicos que dormirán arropados de diarios allá en los portales, entre el pobrecito lustrador que, tal vez, se ha ganado lo necesario para llevar un regalito a su mamá, o, quién sabe, si no logró vender los periódicos, recibir una tremenda reprimenda de su padrastro o de su madrastra. ¡Qué triste es la historia de nuestros niños! Todo eso lo asume Jesús en esta noche. O el joven campesino, obrero, el que no tiene trabajo, el que sufre la enfermedad. En esta noche, no todo es alegría: hay mucho sufrimiento, hay muchos hogares destrozados, hay mucho dolor, hay mucha pobreza.*[230]
>
> If we want to find the child Jesus today, we shouldn't contemplate the lovely figures in our nativity scenes. We should look for him among the malnourished children who went to bed tonight without anything to eat. We should look for him among the poor newspaper boys who will sleep

[230] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2009, 6:106.

> tonight on doorsteps, wrapped in their papers. We should look for him among the poor shoeshine boys who perhaps have earned enough to buy a little gift for their mothers. Or who knows, maybe some of those boys failed to sell all their papers and will be given a tremendous scolding by their stepfather or stepmother. How sad is the situation of our children! All this Jesus takes on himself this very night. Or think of the young *campesino* or worker who has no job or suffers some infirmity. Not all is joy tonight. There is much suffering. There are many broken homes. There is much pain and poverty.

In this same homily, reflecting on Isaiah 62:1–5, Titus 2:11–14, and Luke 2:1–14, Romero gives a message of hope to a people who did not seem to have many reasons to hope. He says,

> *Los felicito, queridos hermanos, no solo porque es Navidad, sino porque son valientes. Mientras mucha gente tiene miedo y cierra sus puertas y hasta muchos de nuestros templos se dejan vencer de la psicosis, la catedral abierta es imagen de una confianza y de una esperanza en el Redentor que nos nace. Ustedes están siendo en esta noche, en esta catedral, la vivencia de lo que debe ser la Navidad. En medio del mundo, y no obstante los peligros, las vicisitudes, la psicosis, los miedos, hay esperanza, hay alegría. Y no es simplemente un fingir como una valentía sin razón y sin sentido, sino que hay la profundidad de una realidad que anida en el corazón de la Iglesia y que debe de ser el motor poderoso de la vida de todo cristiano.*
>
> *Tratando de reflexionar en este hecho maravilloso, tal como nos lo acaban de presentar las lecturas sagradas, yo creo que, en el Evangelio, hay tres ideas que deben ser nuestro mensaje de este año aquí, en El Salvador. En primer lugar, el ángel dice a los pastores: 'Os anuncio una gran noticia: Os ha nacido un Salvador'. Este pensamiento quiere decir: hoy se introduce en la historia un principio de novedad, de renovación, de noticia siempre eterna. En segundo lugar, dicen los ángeles a los pastores: 'Esta será la señal: lo encontraréis envuelto en pañales sobre un pesebre'. Aquí encuentro yo la imagen de un Dios que se envuelve de la miseria humana y le da sentido divino al sufrimiento y al dolor. Y en tercer lugar, la multitud de ángeles que baja cantando: 'Gloria a Dios en los cielos'. Es la invitación que Cristo viene a hacernos, de que el hombre tiene un destino junto a la gloria de Dios y que, por eso, su vida tiene que ser optimista y nunca debe flaquear.*[231]

[231] Cavada Diez, 6:103–4.

> I congratulate you, dear sisters and brothers, not only because it is Christmas but because you are courageous. Many people are frightened and are locking their doors. Many of our churches are giving way to psychosis. But, the wide-open doors of the cathedral are an image of our confidence and hope in the Redeemer who is born to us. Here in the cathedral this evening you are giving a living example of what Christmas should be. Here in the middle of the world— despite the danger, vicissitudes, psychoses, and fears—there is hope and there is joy, and they are not simply feigned. Our hope and joy are not like the courage that has no rhyme or reason; instead, they reveal the profound reality that dwells in the heart of the Church and should be the powerful driving force that enlightens every Christian.
>
> If we try to reflect on the marvelous event presented to us just now in the three sacred readings, I think we'll find three ideas that will serve as our message for this year in El Salvador. First, the angel says to the shepherds, 'I bring you great news: a Savior has been born to you!' (Luke 2:10–11). What this means is that a principle of ever-eternal newness and renewal has been introduced into history. Second, the angels tell the shepherds, 'This will be the sign for you: you will find him wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger' (Luke 2:12). Here I find the image of a God who immerses himself in human misery and infuses our suffering and pain with divine meaning. And third, the multitude of angels sing, 'Glory to God in the heavens' (Luke 2:13–14). This is the great invitation Christ extends to us: our destiny is tied up with the glory of God, which means that we must live brimming with optimism and never flagging.

Romero continued preaching a message of hope and encouragement for the poor, believing a change was coming. He says,

> *Hoy asistimos también, en El Salvador, a una hora de renovación. Mucho se ha comparado al dolor de parto. El país está pariendo una nueva edad y, por eso, hay dolor y angustia, hay sangre y sufrimiento. "Pero como en el parto —dice Cristo—, la mujer que le llega la hora sufre, pero cuando ha nacido el nuevo hombre, ya se olvidó de todos sus dolores". Pasarán estos sufrimientos. La alegría que nos quedará será que, en esta hora de parto, fuimos cristianos, vivimos aferrados a la fe en Cristo, no nos dejó sucumbir el pesimismo.*
>
> *Cómo quisiera gritar yo sobre todos los campos de El Salvador esta noche la gran noticia de los ángeles: "No teman, ha nacido un Salvador". Lo que ahora parece insoluble, callejón sin salida, Dios lo*

está marcando ya con una esperanza. Esta noche es para vivir el optimismo de que no sabemos por dónde, pero Dios sacará a flote nuestra patria y, en la nueva hora, estará siempre brillando la gran noticia de Cristo que "hace nuevas todas las cosas"; y que, cuando envejecen los períodos, las edades, siempre flota la gran noticia, la gran renovación del Espíritu de Cristo, que ya se injertó para siempre desde aquella noche que estamos conmemorando hoy.[232]

Today in El Salvador, we are also experiencing a time of renovation, which has often been compared to childbirth. The nation is giving birth to a new age. This is why there is pain and anguish. This is why there is bloodshed, and suffering. 'When a woman gives birth', Christ says, "she experiences distress, but when the new child is born, she forgets all her pains" (John 16:21). These sufferings will pass, and we'll be left with the joy that at this painful moment of childbirth we remain Christians and that we live holding fast to faith in Christ, who never lets us surrender to pessimism.

I would like tonight to shout out over all the fields of El Salvador the great news of the angels: 'Fear not! A Savior has been born!' (Luke 2:10–11). What now appears hopeless, a dead-end street, is being marked out by God and filled with hope. Tonight is a night for lively optimism. We do not know how, but God will rescue our country. The new age will shine bright with the good news of Christ who 'makes all things new' (Rev 21:5). While the cycles of history grow old, the Good News always remains alive, for the great renewal of the Spirit of Christ was permanently implanted on the night we are commemorating right now.

In his homilies, Romero always seeks to orient the people with hope in the midst of so much confusion and suffering, for he understood this as his pastoral and prophetic mission.[233] Many people responded positively to him. In his homily of May 8, 1977, Romero read an excerpt of a letter he received from the Christian Community from Ciudad Arce, *'Nos sentimos fuertes al escuchar sus mensajes tan llenos de optimismo y que, al mismo tiempo, es la verdad misma. Pedimos a Dios en nuestras comunidades*

[232] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 6:105.
[233] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 1:58–9.

para que siempre se mantenga fortalecido de ese mismo espíritu' ('We are strengthened when we listen to your messages that are filled with optimism and at the same time speak the truth. In our communities we pray that God will continue to strengthen you in this same spirit').[234]

Romero's *sentir con el Magisterio*

Once Romero directly encountered the soul wounds the poor people had inherited and the collective trauma and suffering they were experiencing, he could not read and interpret Scripture and the Magisterium of the Church in the same way he had before. Therefore, Romero let the people's painful reality inform his reading and interpretation of Scripture and the Magisterium of the Church. Thus, in his homilies, Romero places the Roman Catholic Church on the side of the wounded and suffering people.

Romero's *sentir* with the Magisterium of the Church is also reflected in his homilies. Romero's *sentir* with the Magisterium, as his *sentir* with God and the people, was also at the affective, cognitive, and conative level. However, this *sentir* was not always reciprocated. Furthermore, Romero's relationship with the Magisterium of the Church was more complicated than his relationship with God and the people because, even though he deeply respected the Magisterium of the Church, he did not always agree with the way the magisterial authorities of the Church led the Church, especially during his last three years of ministry.

[234] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 1:58.

Following the Second Vatican Council teachings, in his homilies, as Grande did in his, Romero links sacred Scripture, sacred tradition, and the teaching authorities of the church. For, as the *Dei Verbum* (10), the Second Vatican Council's dogmatics constitution on divine revelation, states, "It is clear, therefore, that sacred tradition, Sacred Scripture and the teaching authority of the Church, in accord with God's most wise design, are so linked and joined together that one cannot stand without the others, and that all together and each in its own way under the action of the one Holy Spirit contribute effectively to the salvation of souls."[235] Therefore, Romero often consulted the rule of faith established by the authority of the Church. In his homilies, Oscar Romero frequently cited word for word the Pope and the Vatican Council II. According to Morozzo, Romero cites Paul VI and John Paul II 373 times, the Vatican II 296 times, Puebla 101 times, and Medellin 85 times. He also cites the popes from Leo XIII to Pius XI. The magisterial documents he preferred are the *Gaudium et espes* and the *Evangelii Nuntiandi*.[236]

Romero quoted the Magisterium of the Church in his homilies even before he became the Archbishop of San Salvador. However, Miguel Cavada Diez notes that after the assassination of Rutilio Grande, Romero adopted a different approach. He put the Magisterium of the Church in relationship to the traumatic and painful reality El Salvador was experiencing. This was evident in the homily that Romero preached at the funeral of

[235] Vatican Council II, "Dei Verbum," accessed December 28, 2021, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html.

[236] Morozzo della Rocca, *Oscar Romero: La Biografía*, 134.

Grande, Manuel Solórzano, and Nelson Rutilio Lemus (March 14, 1977). Romero took the framework for his homily from the *Evangelii nuntiandi*, placing the homily in a deeply ecclesial context, the evangelization of the Church.[237] "*Pero lo más importante es que en esa homilía sentó la pauta de cómo utilizar el magisterio en la predicación. No expuso, simplemente el pensamiento de Pablo IV, sino que lo puso en relación con la realidad, el asesinato de Rutilio*" (But the most important thing is that in that homily he set the standard for how to use the Magisterium in preaching. He did not simply expose the thought of Paul IV, but he was able to do so in relation to reality, the assassination of Rutilio),[238] notes Cavada Diez. Furthermore, from this day forward, Romero demonstrated in his homilies that "*el magisterio no debía ser expuesto en conceptos, sino que debía ser usado para iluminar y cambiar la realidad"* (the Magisterium should not be exposed in concepts but should be used to illuminate and change reality).[239] Romero knew those nice concepts did not fully address the cruel, traumatic, and painful circumstances the poor people experienced. As Sobrino notes, *Monseñor Romero aceptaba los documentos que provenían del Vaticano II y de Medellín sobre la Iglesia, pero era la realidad histórica la que otorgaba un peso incomparable a esos nuevos conceptos de Iglesia* (Monsignor Romero accepted the documents from Vatican II and Medellin, but it was the historical reality that gave incomparable weight to these new concepts of Church).[240]

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[237] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2005, 1:25.
[238] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 1:25.
[239] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 1:25.
[240] Marcouiller and Sobrino, *El Sentir con la Iglesia*, 14–15.

Romero himself explains in his homily of March 23, 1980 why he quotes the Magisterium of the Church in his homilies:

> *Ya se que hay muchos que se escandalizan de esta palabra y quieren acusarla de que ha dejado la predicación del Evangelio para meterse en política; pero no acepto yo esta acusación, sino que hago un esfuerzo para que todo lo que nos ha querido impulsar el Concilio Vaticano II, la reunión de Medellín y de Puebla, no solo lo tengamos en las páginas y lo estudiemos teóricamente, sino que lo vivamos y lo traduzcamos en esta conflictiva realidad de predicar como se debe el Evangelio para nuestro pueblo. Por eso, le pido al Señor, durante toda la semana, mientras voy recogiendo el clamor del pueblo y el dolor de tanto crimen, la ignominia de tanta violencia, que me dé la palabra oportuna para consolar, para denunciar, para llamar al arrepentimiento, y, aunque siga siendo una voz que clama en el desierto, sé que la Iglesia está haciendo el esfuerzo por cumplir con su misión.*[241]
>
> I know that many are scandalized by such speech and claim that it's meddling in politics instead of preaching the Gospel, but I don't accept that accusation. I am trying to communicate everything taught by the Second Vatican Council and the bishops' meetings at Medellín and Puebla. I do this so that we don't just have it on paper and study it theoretically but rather make it a reality and apply it to our reality of conflict. This is how the Gospel must be preached to our people. That is why, as I listen all week to the cries of the people and behold so much horrible crime and such shameful violence, I ask the Lord to give me appropriate words for consoling, for denouncing, and for calling to repentance. Though I continue to be a voice crying out in the desert, I know that the church is trying hard to fulfill her mission.

As Jon Sobrino points out, in all his homilies Romero cites the Catholic social teachings to defend the oppressed people.[242] Romero tried to guide the Church to incarnate those social teachings and to make them come alive in El Salvador. However, it was a

[241] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2009, 6:425.
[242] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2005, 1:16.

challenging thing to do. In his homily of July 16, 1978, Romero shares what he told the Pope regarding this,

> *Santo Padre, acatar la doctrina de la Santa Sede, del magisterio, elogiarlas, alabarlas, defenderlas teóricamente es muy fácil, pero cuando se trata de encarnar esa doctrina y hacerla vida en una diócesis, en una comunidad, y señalar los hechos concretos que están contra esa doctrina, entonces surgen los conflictos.'* [243]
>
> Holy Father, it's very easy to observe the doctrines of the Holy See and the Magisterium, to praise them, to extol them, and to defend them theoretically. But when it's a matter of incarnating that doctrine, making it part of the life of a diocese or a community, and pointing out the concrete deeds that are contrary to this doctrine, this is when conflicts arise.

Romero was willing to face this conflict because he believed that "*la verdad solamente existe en comunión con el magisterio de la iglesia, la verdad revelada por Dios*"[244] (the truth always exists in communion with the Magisterium of the Church, the truth revealed by God). As the *Dei Verbum* (10) teaches, Romero believed that the task of authentically interpreting the word of God "has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church." However, Romero understood that, as the *Dei Verbum (10)* states, neither the Magisterium nor the hierarchy of the Church is above the Word of God, but rather they are at the service of the Word of God.

Most significantly, Romero believed that "the Holy Spirit, through whom the living voice of the Gospel resounds in the Church, and through her, in the world, leads unto all truth those who believe and makes the word of Christ dwell abundantly in them"

[243] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2006, 3:105.
[244] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2005, 2:128.

(*Dei Verbum* 8). Therefore, Romero continued looking for God and listening to the Word of God in history, specifically in what *Gaudium Et Spes* (4) calls the *signs of the times,* authentic signs of God's presence and God's purpose for humanity (GES 11). To this end, Romero sought to do what the *Gaudium Et Spes* recommends, namely to recognize and understand the world in which he and the people he had been called to serve lived, its explanations, its longings, and its often dramatic characteristics (*GES* 4). Therefore, as Jon Sobrino notes, "*Romero buscó a Dios en la historia concreta que le tocó vivir, y en ella encontró un Dios insospechadamente nuevo*." (Romero looked for God in the concrete history that he had to live, and in it, he found an unexpectedly new God).[245]

Consulting the rule of faith established by the Church's authority was not a novelty, for it has been the Catholic and Protestant tradition for centuries. In fact, some theologians and homileticians, among them Calvinist theologian Karl Barth, believed that to understand Scripture people need to follow a course set for them by dogmatics, ancient and modern. However, Barth argues that preachers should not introduce dogmas into a sermon word for word because, by doing so, preachers show off their learning.[246] Contrary to this teaching, Romero often cites the Church's dogmatics word for word in his homilies. However, he does not do this to show off his knowledge; instead, he wants to follow particular guidelines to protect himself against running aground through ignorance and negligence. Also, in the difficult situation that El Salvador was experiencing at that time, Romero wanted to demonstrate that what he was saying in his

[245] Marcouiller and Sobrino, *El Sentir con la Iglesia*, 13.
[246] Karl Barth, *Homiletics*, 1st Edition (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991), 106.

homilies was in accordance with the doctrines and teachings of the Church.

In addition, Romero used the homily form to teach the people about the Church's doctrines and principles. For instance, in his sermon of January 27, 1980, Romero cites the *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 52, from the Second Vatican Council to teach about the role of the homily in mass. Similarly, in the Sermon of December 25, 1977, Romero cites the *Dei Verbum* from the Second Vatican Council to teach that God reveals Godself to humanity through Christ. He says,

> *Por eso, hermanos, yo les agradezco cuando en solidaridad con la Iglesia dicen: 'Estamos pidiéndole al Espíritu Santo que le ilumine, que diga lo que hay que decir'. Y cuando sentimos que en el pueblo hay un consenso, hay una alegría, hay un amor, hay una unidad, decimos nosotros: esto no puede ser otra cosa que la palabra de Dios que habla, Cristo que vive en su pueblo. Este es el gran misterio de ese Cristo que es Palabra, que es vida de Dios y ha venido a traernos su verdad, su vida, como dice el Concilio, que el misterio del Padre y del amor suyo se revela en Cristo.*[247]
>
> Therefore, my sisters and brothers, I am grateful to you for your solidarity with the Church when you say: 'We are asking the Holy Spirit to illuminate you so that you say what must be said.' When we feel that there is a consensus among people, when we feel that there is joy, love, and unity, we say: This must be the Word of God that is speaking because Christ lives in his people. This is the great mystery of Christ who is the life of God and has come to share with us God's truth and God's life. The Council states: The mystery of the Father and his love is revealed in Christ.

God answered the people's prayer, for Romero said what must be said. His honesty about people's traumatic wounds and their exposure to continuous traumatic stress created a sense of community among the people and united their pain to the pain of Christ, the revelation of God.

[247] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2005, 2:145.

Romero's *sentir* with the Church, hierarchical and magisterial, was not blind. As Jon Sobrino points out, for Romero, *sentir* with the Church as a hierarchy did not imply authoritarianism, prepotency, absolutism, or control of people's wills and lives, for all this is contrary to the heart of Jesús.[248] On the contrary, for Romero, *sentir* with the Church must be experienced in community: God, the poor, and the Church, all together. In this community, the ultimate authority is not the hierarchy of the Church, but God and the poor.[249] Therefore, Romero did not hesitate to criticize the authorities of the Church when he saw that they did nothing to stop the government and the oligarchy from oppressing the poor; in some cases, they even contributed to this oppression. In his homily of October 8, 1978, Romero reflects on Matthew 21:33–43 and compares the Priests, Pharisees, and rulers of Jerusalem with the religious and public authorities of El Salvador. He preaches,

> *El reino de Dios está en crisis en este momento del Evangelio de San Mateo. Las parábolas de Cristo reflejan esa crisis. La parábola de hoy es tremenda. Los mismos dirigentes de Israel mencionados hoy en el Evangelio: los sumos sacerdotes, los senadores; que traducido al lenguaje de hoy podíamos decir: los obispos, los diputados, los ministros, los gobernantes, los sacerdotes, los dirigentes del pueblo, la clase del capital, los que tienen la potencia del dinero, a estos se está enfrentando Cristo en su tiempo y con estos es el conflicto que se desata en la parábola de la viña.*[250]
>
> At this moment in the Gospel of Saint Matthew the kingdom of God is in crisis, and this crisis is reflected in the parables of Christ. Today's parable is tremendous. The leaders of Israel mentioned in today's gospel were the high priests and the senators, which, translated into today's language, would be the bishops, the legislators, the government ministers, the

[248] Marcouiller and Sobrino, *El Sentir con la Iglesia*, 17.
[249] Marcouiller and Sobrino, 17.
[250] Cavada Diez, *Homilías: Monseñor Óscar A. Romero*, 2006, 3:313–14.

> priests, the leaders of the people, the capitalist class, those who have the power of wealth—these are the ones Christ is confronting in his own time, and they are also the ones who caused the conflict in the parable of the vine.

Romero understood that the Magisterium of the Church had a lot to offer to the liberation of the poor. He also knew that the religious and civil Christian authorities who were supposed to practice these teachings were far from doing it. Therefore, as Jon Sobrino notes, for Romero, the "*autoridad última, más allá de la cual no se puede ir, es 'la autoridad de los que sufren,' la autoridad de los pobres y víctimas*" (the ultimate authority, beyond which you cannot go, is 'the authority of those who suffer', the authority of the poor and the victims).[251] *Sentir* with the Church was for Romero not only about feeling with the Magisterium, but above all feeling with God and feeling with the people. As Romero explained in Puebla, the Church should be "*Una Iglesia sentida no sólo en cuanto a magisterio, sino cuanto a pueblo*. *Pueblo que pone en esa Iglesia su esperanza; pueblo que es él mismo Iglesia. Un Cristo encarnado en una Iglesia latinoamericana de pobres, de oprimidos, de sufridos"* (A Church felt not only in terms of the Magisterium, but as a people. People who put their hope in that Church; people who are themselves the Church. An incarnated Christ in a Latin American Church of the poor, the oppressed, and the suffering).[252] Romero noted that "*esa es la eclesiología. El 'sentir con la Iglesia' de San Ignacio sería ese sentir con la Iglesia encarnada en este*

[251] Marcouiller and Sobrino, *El Sentir con la Iglesia*, 17.

[252] Óscar A. Romero, "Los Ejercicios Espirituales Hoy En América Latina," ed. José Magaña, *Centro Ignaciano de Centroamérica*, 1980, http://repositorio.uca.edu.ni/3478/1/Los%20ejercicios%20espirituales%20hoy%20en%20Am%C3%A9rica%20Latina.pdf.

pueblo necesitado de liberación" (that is the ecclesiology. The 'feeling with the Church' of Saint Ignatius would be the feeling with the Church incarnated in this people in need of liberation).[253]

Romero desired to feel with a Church that feels with God and the people. Therefore, even though Romero was faithful to the hierarchy of the Church until his death, if he had had to choose between the hierarchy of the Church and the poor, oppressed, and marginalized, he would have chosen the poor, oppressed, and marginalized, for they are el "*cuerpo de Cristo encarnado en la historia"* (The Body of Christ incarnated in history).[254] Thus, As Sobrino notes, Romero's greatest *sentir* was with the people. He felt their sufferings, traumatic wounds, and hopes, and this *sentir* was accompanied by the *sentir* with the Magisterium of the Church. Thus, Romero's *sentir* with the crucified people, the presence of Christ in history, is what gives meaning to his *sentir* with the Magisterium.[255]

Conclusion

This long chapter has explored the deep theological, hermeneutical, and pastoral roots of Romero being a "voice of the people's trauma." Romero's powerful homilies were created in a process that included Romero's *sentir* or feeling with God, the people,

[253] Romero, "Los ejercicios espirituales hoy en América Latina".

[254] Óscar A. Romero, "Los ejercicios espirituales hoy en América Latina," ed. José Magaña, *Centro Ignaciano de Centroamérica*, 1980, http://repositorio.uca.edu.ni/3478/1/Los%20ejercicios%20espirituales%20hoy%20en%20Am%C3%A9rica%20Latina.pdf.

[255] Marcouiller and Sobrino, *El Sentir con la Iglesia*, 22.

and the Magisterium of the Church at the affective, cognitive, and conative levels. This *sentir* was possible because of Romero's ability to recognize the presence of God in the people and by his willingness to listen attentively to the Word of God in Scripture and in the life of the people. As Jon Sobrino says in his introduction to *Homilías* "*Con la palabra de Dios en sus manos y con los ojos puestos en los rostros concretos de los pobres, su palabra cobraba la fuerza de los antiguos profetas y de Jesús*" (With the word of God in his hands and with his eyes fixed on the faces of the poor, his word took on the force of the ancient prophets and of Jesus).[256] Like the prophets and Jesus, Romero preached a liberating, healing, empowering, and transforming message.

Romero's homilies responded to the collective trauma the people of El Salvador were experiencing by naming, acknowledging, and validating their suffering and oppression, challenging the systems and powers that hurt and oppressed them, helping them encounter God amid their suffering, helping them edit their stories and find their worth in God, encouraging them to work together in seeking a better society for themselves and their children, and offering a word of consolation and hope.[257] In other words, through his homilies, Romero provides pastoral care to wounded people.

One could therefore argue that Romero was for the people what Hungarian-Canadian physician and author Gabor Maté, inspired by Peter Levine's work, identifies as an *empathetic witness*.[258] Recall from Chapter two that Maté says that the power of

[256] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 1:13.

[257] An earlier version of this argument appears in an article of mine in *Duke Divinity Magazine*, vol. 19, no.1 (Fall 2019).

[258] Gabor Maté, in the foreword to Peter Levine's book *In an Unspoken Voice*, describes the compassionate human presence who helped Levine unlock his healing potential as an empathetic witness.

goodness—in this case, the organism's innate capacity to restore itself to health and balance—is encouraged by an *empathetic witness* who helps to prevent trauma by embodying kindness and acceptance.[259] This *empathetic witness* helps "to create an environment of *relative* safety, an atmosphere that conveys refuge, hope, and possibility."[260] One could say that, in Romero's homilies, the poor people who had and continued experiencing traumatic wounds found in Romero an *empathetic witness*, who through his preaching embodies kindness and acceptance and created a space of *relative safety* for them, an atmosphere that conveyed refuge, hope, and possibility. By doing so, Romero helped the people strengthen their individual and collective resilience and to access their *self-healing force*.[261]

In his homilies, by embodying his *sentir* with God, the people, and the Magisterium, Romero created a "blanket of compassion" [262] for the suffering people of El Salvador. Romero's loving, calm, centered, and Spited-guided presence gave the people a slight glimmer of hope that things might turn out alright. As psychologist Peter Levine argues, for traumatized individuals, this can be a very delicate task.[263]

María López Vigil ends her book *Piezas para un retrato* by sharing the testimony of Regina Basaigoita, who had a conversation with a poor man who was cleaning Romero's tomb. She remembers,

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Peter A. Levine, *In an Unspoken Voice*, xi. Emphasis my own.

[259] Peter A. Levine, *In an Unspoken Voice*, xi. Emphasis my own.

[260] Levine, *In an Unspoken Voice*, 75.

[261] From Chapter Two of this dissertation.

[262] Levine, *In an Unspoken Voice*, 75.

[263] Levine, *In an Unspoken Voice*, 75.

Una mañana de invierno, el cielo cerrado en agua, un hombre harapiento, pelo encolochado por el polvo, camisa de hoyos, limpia con esmero esa tumba, valiéndose de uno de sus harapos. Apenas amanece pero él ya está activo y despierto. Y aunque el harapo está sucio de grasa y tiempo, va dejando brillante la lápida. Al terminar, sonríe satisfecho. A aquella hora temprana no ha visto a nadie. Tampoco nadie lo ha visto. Yo sí lo vi.

Cuando sale a la calle, necesité hablar con él.

—Y usted, ¿por qué hace eso?

—¿El qué hago...?

—Eso, limpiar la tumba a Monseñor.

—Porque él era mi padre.

—¿Cómo así?

—Es que yo no soy más que un pobre, pues. A veces acarreo en el mercado

con un carretón, otras veces pido limosna y en veces me lo gasto todo en licor y paso la cruda botado en la calle... Pero siempre me animo: ¡son babosadas, yo tuve un padre! Me hizo sentir gente. Porque a los como yo él nos quería y no nos tenía asco. Nos hablaba, nos tocaba, nos preguntaba. Nos confiaba. Se le echaba de ver el cariño que me tenía. Como quieren los padres. Por eso yo le limpio su tumba. Como hacen los hijos, pues.[264]

One winter morning, the sky closed in water, a ragged man, hair matted by dust, shirt with holes, carefully cleans that tomb, using one of his rags. It's barely dawn but he's already awake and active. And although the rag is dirty with grease and time, it leaves the tombstone shiny. When finished, he smiles satisfied. At that early hour he has seen no one. Nobody has seen him either. I did see him.

When he goes outside, I needed to talk to him.

—“And you, why do you do that?"

—“What do I do...?"

—“That's right, cleaning Monsignor's tomb.”

—“Because he was my father.”

—“How come?”

—“Well, I'm just a poor man. Sometimes I carry in the market

with a cart, other times I ask for alms and sometimes I spend it all on liquor and

I spend the hangover thrown in the street... But I always cheer up: this is nonsense, I had a father! He made me feel like a person. Because he loved people like me and he wasn’t disgusted by us. He talked to us,

[264] Vigil, *Piezas para un Retrato*, 398.

> touched us, asked us questions. He trusted us. I could see the love he had for me. He loved me as a father loves. That's why I clean his grave. As children do for their parents. He made me *feel like a person*, said that grateful man."

In his sermon of September 23, 1979, as he remembered one of the priests who had been assassinated, Romero asked, "*¿Porqué se mata?"* (Why do they kill?) and he answered, "*se mata porque se estorba*" (They kill those who interfere with their plans).[265] Romero interfered with the plans of the idolaters of power and money, and he was killed for that. However, they were not able to eliminate his message of love, hope, restoration, and liberation for the poor and oppressed. To this day, he continues guiding, comforting, and proclaiming liberation through his homilies.

In one of his homilies, Romero shares an analogy that a *campesino* shared with him, "'*Monseñor, cuando uno mete la mano en una olla de agua con sal, si la mano está sana no le sucede nada, pero si tiene una heridita, ¡ah!, allí duele'* " ('Monsignor, when you place your hand in a bowl of salt water, if the hand is well, nothing happens. But if the hand is cut or wounded... ah! It hurts!').[266] Reflecting on Matthew 5:13, Romero continues preaching, "*La Iglesia es la sal del mundo y naturalmente que donde hay heridas tiene que arder esa sal"* (The church is the salt of the world, and naturally where there are wounds, the salt stings).[267] Romero uncovered these open wounds and for three

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[265] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2008, 5:354.

[266] This is a nice image of "clean pain," acknowledging and paying attention to open traumatic wounds.

Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2005, 1:117.

[267] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 1:117.

years accompanied the poor people on their traumatic and painful journey, defending them and planting seeds of faith and hope within them.

Even though Romero can no longer accompany them physically, his words still do. He says in one of his homilies, *"La palabra queda y este es el gran consuelo del que predica: mi voz desaparecerá pero mi palabra, que es Cristo, quedará en los corazones que lo hayan querido recoger."* (The word remains, and this is the great consolation of those who preach: my voice will disappear, but my word, which is Christ, will remain in the hearts that have wanted to receive it).[268] Even many years after his assassination, this word continues to nurture faith and hope in the hearts of those who treasure it.[269]

Therefore, if God asks now, "Is there no doctor in El Salvador, is there no balm for my suffering people?" The answer would be, yes, there is a balm in El Salvador, for though his body was killed, his memory and words continue soothing the people's pain and giving hope that one day they will fully live into their identity of transfigured people of God (Jeremiah 8:22). Romero's words continue soothing the pain of the people's soul wounds, like a balm whose fragrance and healing effect have not faded, and they inspire us preachers to do the same in our own contexts.[270] Even more significantly, Romero has

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[268] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2007, 4:65.

[269] Miguel Cavada Diez says regarding Romero's homilies, "*Efectivamente, estas homilías no solamente son importante para estudiar la historia de la Iglesia y del país, sino que siguen siendo, para muchas personas, lectura habitual que inspira y guía, cuestiona y anima. Estas homilías no son palabra muerta, sino palabra siempre viva que nos sigue dando esperanza*" (Indeed, these homilies are not only important for studying the history of the Church and the country, but they continue to be, for many people, habitual readings that inspires and guides, questions, and encourages. These homilies are not a dead word, but an ever-living word that continues to give us hope). Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 5:18.

[270] My friends from El Salvador who lived during Romero's time and suffered unimaginable violence say that Romero's words continue giving them hope and strength. Their faces light up when they talk about their dear pastor.

left us a theological, hermeneutical, and pastoral framework for preaching to marginalized and oppressed communities exposed to continuous traumatic stress.

The question now for us preachers is: How through our sermons can we care for our communities that have inherited, have suffered, and are continually re-exposed to the suffering of traumatic wounds? How can our homilies be a balm in Gilead for their open wounds? I will explore the answers to these questions in the next chapter.

Chapter 6

Liberating and Healing Sermons:

Being a Balm in Gilead among Undocumented Hispanic/Latinx Communities

In his homily of January 21, 1979, Romero shares that he had received *cien colonos* and a letter from a Salvadoran man who had had to flee to the U.S. The letter says, '*Es una pequeña ayuda para la gente que este más necesitada en estos momentos de mi país; con todo cariño y ganado con mi esfuerzo, pues, para poder sobrevivir, he tenido que alejarme de mis seres queridos y de mi patria, que es lo que menos quisiera en esta Navidad*' (This is a small donation for the neediest people in my country at this time. With great affection, I send what I've earned through my labor because, in order to survive, I had to leave my loved ones and my country, which is what I want least during this Christmas season).[1] Like this man, more than 1 million men, women, and children fled El Salvador from the mid-1970s to the early 1990s, seeking refuge from extreme poverty, natural disasters, extreme levels of state violence, and sustained terror.[2] They sought refuge in Central American countries, México, the United States, Canada, and

[1] Miguel Cavada Diez, ed., *Homilías: Monseñor Óscar A. Romero*, First, vol. 5 (San Salvador: UCA editores, 2008), 184.

[2] Cecilia Cervantes Menjívar and Andra Gómez Cervantes, "El Salvador: Civil War, Natural Disasters, and Gang Violence Drive Migration," migrationpolicy.org, August 27, 2018, https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/el-salvador-civil-war-natural-disasters-and-gang-violence-drive-migration.

Australia. However, most fled to the U.S.[3] Though far away from their land and loved ones, they continued fighting for justice and liberation for their people by supporting, from their meager incomes, their relatives and other poor people who stayed in El Salvador.[4]

The sanctuary movement, which still exists and is still needed today, started in the 1980s when hundreds of thousands of Salvadorans fleeing the violence of El Salvador found refuge in churches in the United States. Salvadoran theologian Leo Guardado argues that the sanctuary movement in the United States is an extension of the practice of the poor, marginalized, and oppressed people seeking protection in the Cathedral of San Salvador from the violence of the armed forces.[5] "Óscar Romero essentially became the patron saint of sanctuary churches, for on March 24, 1982, and on his anniversary in the following years, various churches across the United States publicly declared themselves a place of refuge for Central Americans so that U.S. immigration would not deport them back to war," notes Guardado.[6] The United States now faces "a different yet related phenomenon of using churches as a sanctuary for the refuge and protection of 'unauthorized' persons persecuted by the state."[7]

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[3] Ironically, they sought refuge in the US—the very country that fueled the violence in El Salvador by providing unprecedented levels of military aid, military training, arms, and advisors to the government in power.

Cervantes Menjívar and Gómez Cervantes, "El Salvador."

[4] Ignacio Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, ed. Adrianne Aron and Shawn Corne (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 7.

[5] Leo Guardado, "Occupying the Cathedral of the Poor: Óscar Romero, the Grammar of Occupations, and the Protection of the Persecuted" (Online, 2020).

[6] Guardado, "Occupying the Cathedral of the Poor."

[7] Leo Guardado, an online presentation titled Occupying the Cathedral of the Poor: *Óscar Romero, the Grammar of Occupations, and the Protection of the Persecuted, 12/09/2020.*

Today El Salvador continues experiencing the consequences and effects of the soul wounds its people have experienced and passed down from generation to generation. Currently, levels of violence are even higher than during that war and affect entire communities. The majority of the victims are poor, working-class Salvadorans who live and/or work in some of the most dangerous areas of El Salvador.[8] These poor people continue fleeing from El Salvador. Currently, more than two million immigrants from El Salvador live in the U.S., the second largest Latin American group in the United States, after Mexicans.[9] Their precarious legal status has left them susceptible to the effects of changes in U.S. immigration policies—changes that often occur with each shift in government administration.[10] In recent years, Salvadorans and migrants from Honduras and Guatemala have been highly represented among families and unaccompanied minors arriving at the Southwest border.

Like in El Salvador, the poor people in Honduras, Guatemala, and most Latin American countries are experiencing the effects and consequences of the soul wounds that have not been effectively treated for many generations. They are experiencing excruciating poverty and debilitating violence. Therefore, many of them venture to the U.S. seeking refuge and hoping to stay alive and earn enough money to help mitigate the suffering of their loved ones both in the U.S. and back in their home countries, and thereby to provide them with a better life. For many of them, the U.S. is their only option

[8] Cervantes Menjívar and Gómez Cervantes, “El Salvador.”

[9] “B03001: HISPANIC OR LATINO ORIGIN BY SPECIFIC ORIGIN - Census Bureau Table,” accessed November 1, 2022, https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=B03001&tid=ACSDT1Y2021.B03001.

[10] Cervantes Menjívar and Gómez Cervantes, "El Salvador.”

to survive.[11] Others venture to the U.S. seeking reunification with relatives and loved ones, believing that in their presence and under their protection they will find the soul and body peace for which they are searching. However, the first thing that most of them encounter in their quest for peace and survival is more trauma.

Unfortunately, the exodus of people to the US will only increase in coming years due to the even more significant economic disparities which human-caused climate change is prompting. As with every catastrophe, the poor are the ones most affected. Pastoral leaders and churches do well to prepare to receive them and respond to their physical, emotional, and spiritual needs.

Romero teaches us that our sermons can foster healing and transformation of wounded communities. He teaches that by *sentir con la Iglesia—empathizing* with God, the people, and the teaching authorities of the Church at the affective, cognitive, and conative levels—we can contribute to and foster people's healing and be a balm in Gilead for their open wounds. This includes listening carefully to the voice of God in Scripture and the people's concrete circumstances and letting them illuminate each other. It also includes helping people practice *clean pain* by naming, acknowledging, and validating their wounds and sufferings. With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Romero heard and discerned God's voice in both Scripture and the people's concrete circumstances and put them in conversation.

[11] Cervantes Menjívar and Gómez Cervantes, "El Salvador."

With that in mind, in this chapter I argue that Romero's practice gives us a theological, hermeneutical, and pastoral framework for preaching to wounded and hurting communities, especially to the wounded community of undocumented immigrants in the U.S. This framework fosters resilience, healing, liberation, and transformation. To that end, in what follows, I first name and acknowledge the effects and consequences of soul wounds that most Hispanic/Latinx undocumented immigrants have inherited, the individual and collective trauma they have experienced in their countries of origin and on their journeys to the U.S, and the continuous traumatic stress to which they are exposed while living in the U.S. Second, I remind Hispanic/Latinx pastors to be aware of their own wounds and to treat them so that they can help their community in their healing process. Third, applying Romero's *sentir* with the Church to the context of Hispanic/Latinx immigrants in the U.S., I analyze how sermons can foster resilience and healing for undocumented Hispanic/Latinx communities in the U.S. and be a balm *in Gilead* for their open wounds.

I do not intend to provide a "how-to" list for preaching in the midst of trauma. Rather, I will highlight the ways in which Romero's theological, hermeneutical, and pastoral framework can inform sermons that speak to suffering and traumatized people. I will also argue that the church itself, like the cathedral in San Salvador, can become a safe place of sanctuary for suffering people.

Traumatic Wounds of Hispanic/Latinx Undocumented Immigrants in the U.S.

Most Latin American countries have experienced similar histories of oppression and violence. Therefore, the same observations about soul wounds and collective trauma discussed in chapter three regarding El Salvador also apply to them. Many migrants from those countries seek refuge in the United States. However, they bring their wounded selves with them. Even though they are a long distance away from their countries of origin, they are still strongly connected to them through the loved ones they have left behind and the traumatic wounds their bodies still remember.

Even though hundreds or many thousands of miles away from where their bodies experienced the traumatic wounds, many such former migrants continue experiencing the effects and consequences of those wounds. Many still experience the disconnection from self, God, others, and God's creation that their traumatic wounds caused.

Through the Duke Divinity School Hispanic-Latino/a Preaching Initiative, I have the opportunity to teach courses in Spanish to Hispanic/Latinx pastors and lay leaders pursuing theological and ministerial training. Our conversations often include aspects of their lives before coming to the U.S. or on their way to the U.S. It does not matter what class I teach or what subject I address, my students often talk about the reasons why they left their home countries, the loved ones they left behind, and their often perilous journeys to the U.S. They usually share with me their experiences of extreme poverty, domestic violence, gang violence, corruption, abandonment, and collective trauma caused by natural disasters and the violence, oppression, marginalization, and exploitation their people experience in their countries of origin.

In a biblical interpretation class, for instance, one of these pastors shared that he had been a teacher in his beloved El Salvador. One day his colleagues and he decided to travel to Guatemala to celebrate the end of the school year. Unfortunately, on their way to Guatemala they were intercepted by gang members who beat them and raped the five women in the group. With teary eyes and a broken voice, he said, "*No pude hacer nada para defender a mis amigas y colegas*" (I could not do anything to defend my friends and colleagues). "*No pude continuar enseñando. Tampoco pude continuar viviendo allá*" (I could not continue teaching nor living there), he continued saying.

In addition, the separation from their loved ones and their homeland can be traumatic in itself for such migrants, including my students. In 2003, five months after my husband and I arrived in the U.S., we started serving as lay United Methodist missioners in a Hispanic/Latinx faith community in a rural town in North Carolina. Most of the people who joined our faith community were undocumented immigrants. One of the first women I met in this town shared with me that she was a victim of domestic violence. She fled Mexico, putting distance between her and her abuser. However, the same distance that separated her from her abuser separated her from the people she most loved, namely her son, parents, and twin sister. "*Como y bebo porque tengo que comer y beber, pero nada me sabe, pastora*," (Pastor, I eat and drink because I have to eat and drink, but nothing tastes anymore), she said. It took me some time to understand fully what she meant.

Years later, when I was serving as the associate pastor of a Hispanic/Latinx ministry in another town, I received a call from a church member early in the morning.

She told me that her father had died in Mexico and that she was leaving for Mexico immediately to be at his funeral. “What about your husband and kids?” I asked. “Ellos se quedan pastora, porque yo voy a regresar,” she said. She did not want them to go with her because coming back would be even more complex, and staying in Mexico was not even an option for them. I was very concerned. I knew she was undocumented in this country. Therefore, “coming back” for her meant embarking on a perilous journey. “I am going to your house right now,” I said. As I was leaving my home, her friends also called me. They asked me to please convince her not to go back to Mexico. They named the atrocities that people experienced trying to cross the border. They named the friends, cousins, and neighbors who had died or were incapacitated trying to cross the border. Consequently, I went to her house convinced that it was better for her to stay here with her husband and kids. It would be too dangerous for her to try to cross the border again. Once I got to her home, I hugged her and sat next to her. She told me again that she was getting ready to go to Mexico for her father’s funeral. As her spiritual mentor and friend, I did what I believed I had to do. I reminded her of the dangers of crossing the border without legal documentation. “Things at the border are not as when you came,” I said. “They are a lot more dangerous. You are risking too much.” She looked me in the eye and said, “*Lo sé, pastora, pero no puedo seguir viviendo así. No he visto a mi papá en diez años, y ahora lo veré en un ataúd. Sé que está muerto, pero mi madre y mi hermana no. No quiero que les pase lo mismo. Necesito verlos ahora que están vivos, y sobre todo ahora que estamos viviendo el peor momento de nuestras vidas*” (I know, *pastora*, but I cannot continue living like this. I have not seen my dad in ten years, and now I will see

him in a casket. I know he is dead, but my mom and sister are not. I don't want the same to happen to them. I need to see them now while they are still alive, especially when we are experiencing the worst moment in our lives). I looked into her eyes, and I finally understood what that other woman had told me years ago. I understood that part of her heart had always been with her parents and sister.

Undocumented immigrants try to cope with the pain of being separated from their loved ones, but their hearts are not complete. Like these two women, many people continue working, attending church, celebrating birthdays and holidays, marrying, and giving their children in marriage, but nothing tastes and feels the same as it once did. They cannot fully enjoy it because part of their heart is in their home country. They are resilient, but it does not mean that they are fulfilled and healed.

"No se preocupe pastora, Dios va conmigo y Dios me va a traer de regreso. Yo sé que no será fácil, pero también sé que Dios va a estar conmigo y me va acompañar en mi camino de regreso. Dios me va a cuidar. Dios va a cruzar el desierto conmigo. Yo tengo fe" (Don't worry pastor, God is going with me and God is going to bring me back. I know that it will not be easy, but I also know that God will be with me and will accompany me on my way back. God will take care of me. God is going to cross the desert with me. I have faith), my friend said confidently. What else could I say or do but hug her, pray for her, and assure her that her church family would be covering her with prayers on her journey to her home in Mexico and back to her home in North Carolina?

This hole in people's hearts is even more visible when talking to a mother or father who has left his or her kids behind to give them a better life. "*Mire pastora, mis*

princesas" (Look pastor, my princesses), a woman in her late thirties told me while showing me a picture of her two beautiful young daughters. "*La mayor ya casi va a ir a la Universidad. Le tengo que enviar dinero para la colegiatura y tengo que juntar para una computadora porque la va a ocupar"* (The oldest will go to college soon. I have to send her money for tuition. I also have to save money to buy her a computer because she will need it), she continued saying. This young single mother left Honduras when her daughters were little girls. She had not seen them in more than ten years. She was not there to hug them when they were sick or when they fell while riding their bicycles. She was not there for their birthdays or their first days of school. She was not there to see them grow and become the beautiful young ladies they are now.

The children also suffer the absence of their parents. Their suffering is worst when they live in unhealthy and abusive environments. For a long time, a young mom from my church resented her mom for leaving her and her baby brother behind to suffer the abuse of family members. "*Ella vino aquí y tuvo otro hijo mientras nosotros estábamos allá sufriendo. Por eso, lo único que quería hacer cuando llegué aquí era hacerla sufrir por lo que nos hizo"* (She came here and had another kid while we were there suffering. For this reason, the only thing I wanted to do when I came here was to make her suffer for what she did to us), she said. "*Yo no quería estudiar. Me negaba a obedecerla. Me negaba a respectarla. Me fui con mi novio cuando tenía dieciséis años porque yo sabía que eso la iba hacer sufrir*" (I did not want to study. I refused to obey her. I refused to respect her. I left with my boyfriend when I was sixteen because I knew this was going to make her suffer), she continued. After she paused for a moment, she

continued saying, *"Todavía sufro cuando recuerdo lo sola que me sentía, pero ahora que tengo mis propios hijos, entiendo que si fuera una madre soltera y no tuviera dinero para alimentar a mis hijos, también tal vez dejaría a mis hijos para poder mandar dinero para alimentarlos. O tal vez yo sí los hubiera traído conmigo. No sé. Cruzar la frontera es tan peligroso"* (I still suffer when I remember how lonely I felt growing up, but now that I have my own kids, I understand that if I were a single mom and did not have money to buy food for my kids, I might also have left my kids to earn money to feed them. Or maybe I would have brought them with me. I don't know. Crossing the border is very dangerous).

As the daughter of an absent father, I understood how the young mother felt. I, too, resented my father for coming to the U.S. and leaving my mom alone to care for their eight kids. My father was not there for the important moments in our lives, and when he was finally able to be present, he was almost always drinking alcohol. I could not understand why he did it. However, when I came to the U.S., I witnessed how men living here without their families live and understood why my dad often drank. Many men in such situations turn to alcohol. The alcohol helps mitigate the pain of missing their kids, wives, and/or parents. They are busy working in the fields, construction, or other heavy jobs all week, and when they have free time, they drink to cope with their loneliness and the pain caused by the hole in their hearts. My dad lived like this for many years, and when he was back home, he did not know how to live differently. Or perhaps he could not.

The young mom from my church was right: migrants' route to the U.S. is extremely dangerous. They must travel long distances by land, and many must cross multiple international borders. For instance, many migrants, mainly from Haiti and Venezuela, cross the dangerous Darien Gap between South America and Central America.[12] Independent journalists Nadja Drost and Bruno Federico have recently documented the perilous journey migrants undertake through the dangerous jungle of the Darien Gap. Panama's authorities make it illegal to cross the border without a visa, and paying for smugglers to bring them to the other side by boat is too expensive for most. Thus, most migrants' only choice is to find clandestine routes through the Darien Gap.[13] Those routes take them through an unforgiving jungle where migrants are left without guides, with little or no food to find along the way, and under the constant threat of being robbed by bandits, raped, or killed.[14] It is a desperate journey, but one that many desperate migrants are willing to undertake. "Whether you make it migration legal or illegal, however dangerous you make it, migrants, when they are forced out of their countries, are going to do whatever it takes to reach safer ground," Drost says. Unfortunately, few migrants make it to the other side of the Darien Gap unharmed.

In addition, they and Central American migrants have to face the ferocious teeth of *La Bestia* (the beast), also known as *El Tren de la Muerte* (the train of death). *La*

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[12] "These Journalists Traveled Through Panama's Jungle With U.S.-Bound Migrants | Duke University Center for International and Global Studies," accessed March 11, 2021, https://igs.duke.edu/news/these-journalists-traveled-through-panamas-jungle-us-bound-migrants.

[13] "These Journalists Traveled Through Panama's Jungle With U.S.-Bound Migrants | Duke University Center for International and Global Studies."

[14] "These Journalists Traveled Through Panama's Jungle With U.S.-Bound Migrants | Duke University Center for International and Global Studies."

Bestia is a freight train that starts its route in Chiapas, Mexico, located on the border with Guatemala. They call it La Bestia because it has killed and mutilated many migrants who fall prey to its "teeth."[15] La Bestia and organized crime cartels make crossing Mexico by land one of the most dangerous migration undertakings in the world. "Central Americans fleeing the civil wars of the 1980s referred to the dangers of the Mexico passage as 'trial by fire.'"[16] Many migrants are robbed, kidnapped, sex trafficked, raped, mutilated, and killed on their way to the U.S. border. In 2010, Mexico's National Human Rights Commission reported that 1,600 migrants (mostly Central Americans) were kidnapped daily, and approximately 10 percent of the 140,000 who crossed Mexico annually perished on the journey.[17] Migrant women and girls face particularly great dangers while traveling to the U.S. border through Mexico. Many of them experience sexual abuse. The numbers are difficult to estimate because many are afraid to speak up or have never been given the opportunity to speak.[18] Many women take birth control before traveling north, anticipating the sexual violence they may encounter. Some of these women and girls are fleeing domestic violence, forced marriage, sexual exploitation, or sex trafficking in their

[15] For more information about *La Bestia* and its danger to Central American migrants, watch "Which Way Home," a documental directed by Rebecca Cammisa.
"Watch Which Way Home | Prime Video," accessed November 2, 2022, https://www.amazon.com/Which-Way-Home-Fito/dp/B017UJC3RG/ref=sr_1_1?crid=3B4ESP342SVIQ&keywords=which+way+home+documentary&qid=1667402116&qu=eyJxc2MiOiIwLjM0IiwicXNhIjoiMC4yNCIsInFzcCI6IjEuMDAifQ%3D%3D&sprefix=which+way+home+documentary%2Caps%2C96&sr=8-1.

[16] Cervantes Menjívar and Gómez Cervantes, "El Salvador."

[17] Cervantes Menjívar and Gómez Cervantes, "El Salvador."

[18] "Analysis | No, Amnesty International Does Not Say 60 Percent of Migrant Women in Mexico Have Been Raped," *Washington Post*, accessed November 1, 2022, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/02/01/no-amnesty-international-does-not-say-percent-migrant-women-mexico-have-been-raped/.

home countries, only to face more of the same abuse and violence on their journey to "safety." The number of migrants embarking on this hazardous journey to the U.S. has increased exponentially in recent years, and so have the instances of kidnapping, rape, injury, and death.

In addition, many migrants have drowned crossing the mischievous Rio Grande River, irrigation canals, or other bodies of water. Many others have died walking through the merciless desert. The most common causes of desert deaths are dehydration, heat exhaustion, or exposure at night in deserts and dry brushland. In addition, the number of migrant people killed or badly injured trying to climb segments of the thirty-foot-high border wall installed during the Trump administration is increasing.[19]

Moreover, such injuries, deaths, and disappearances of migrants undertaking this dangerous journey to the U.S. seeking a better life has stark repercussions on others. They usually leave their families and loved ones back home grieving their death, in debt, and without protection.

Furthermore, for the asylum seekers who have to wait in Mexico to be interviewed by a Customs and Border Protection agent who decides whether to grant them asylum or not, the journey is even longer. I visited the U.S.-Mexico border with a

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[19] WOLA, "Migrant Deaths, Buses from Texas, Smugglers and Social Media."

In 2020 fiscal year (October 2020 to September 2021), the United States Border Patrol reported 247 deaths along the Southwest border sectors (the U.S. side of the U.S.-Mexican border).[19] In 2021, Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) reported a record number of deaths—556. From October 2021 to July 2022, the CBP found 605 remains of migrants, an unprecedented number.[19] However, many migrants' remains are never found.

U.S. Border Patrol Fiscal Year Southwest Border Sector Deaths (FY 1998–FY 2020) | U.S. Customs and Border Protection," accessed November 1, 2022, https://www.cbp.gov/document/stats/us-border-patrol-fiscal-year-southwest-border-sector-deaths-fy-1998-fy-2020.

group of Duke Divinity School students and colleagues during spring break in 2022. During this trip, we visited a *plaza*, a park, in Reynosa, on the Mexican side of the Rio Grande (Bravo). In this place, more than two thousand men, women, and children, mainly from Central America, Haiti, and the South of Mexico, are living in tents, waiting in hopes of being granted asylum in the U.S. They have fled from human traffickers, domestic violence, organized crime, gang violence, and extreme poverty.

At that tent city, we met a group of women who by then had lived in this unsafe "asylum seekers camp" with their children for more than eight months. They had left their homes and loved ones because of the violence and extreme poverty they were experiencing there. Even though deep in their hearts they might desire to be able to go back to their homes, to their loved ones, to their country, to their land, they cannot go back. They cannot take their children back where they have experienced so much suffering and pain. Most have therefore opted to wait in this dangerous plaza in Reynosa, on the other side of the river. We learned that many of the women cannot sleep because they and their children are exposed to so many dangers. Members of organized crime groups have kidnapped women and children from the camp. "*Escuchamos los gritos, pero no podemos hacer nada*" (We hear the screams, but we cannot do anything), said one of the women.

One woman in this the group was with the youngest of her three kids. The other two, a fifteen-year-old daughter and a twelve-year-old son, stayed in their village in Guatemala. She showed us their picture and told us that her teenage daughter wants to be a nurse, but they do not have money to pay for her education. "*No tenemos dinero para*

darles educación a nuestros hijos" (We don't have money to provide education for our children), she said. This determined woman embarked on the journey to the U.S., hoping to find a job and send her kids money to be able to study. However, she has been in this limbo for nine months, unable to send them money, so her children have had to leave school and work to buy food.

In addition, asylum seekers under the custody of Border Patrol agents are usually sent to detention centers where they experience more trauma. Women, children, and youth have reported being victims of violence and rape in detention centers; in many cases, the perpetrators are the same people whom the government pays to take care of them.[20]

Things became worse for asylum seekers at the Southwest border during Trump's zero-tolerance policy in the spring of 2018. The "zero tolerance" policy for immigration offenses allowed the U.S. government to separate thousands of children from their parents. "Under the policy, adults who entered the U.S. from the southern border were prosecuted for illegal entry. Children can't be imprisoned with parents and other family members, so young kids were taken into federal custody — resulting in more than 3,000 children being separated from their families"[21] and put into cages in detention centers. However, the Department of Homeland Security, responsible for detaining the parents, and the Department of Health and Human Services, tasked with caring for

[20] https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/03/us/border-rapes-migrant-women.html

[21] Jaclyn Diaz, "Justice Department Rescinds Trump's 'Zero Tolerance' Immigration Policy," *NPR*, January 27, 2021, sec. Politics, https://www.npr.org/2021/01/27/961048895/justice-department-rescinds-trumps-zero-tolerance-immigration-policy.

unaccompanied minors, did not have a clear plan or resources to reunite parents with their kids. Some parents were deported leaving their children still in the U.S., and once in their home country, some of them could not be located to reunite them with their children.[22]

President Biden accurately describes this inhumane policy, "'What happened? Parents were ripped — their kids were ripped from their arms and separated and now they cannot find over 500 sets of those parents and those kids are alone. Nowhere to go. Nowhere to go. It's criminal. It's criminal.'"[23] Little children were caged as animals in a zoo. Officials ignored their desperate cries for *mamá, papá, abuela, abuelo, hermana, hermano, tío o tía,* causing traumatic wounds that might have devastating effects on their development. Recall Psychology Ann Masten's argument that "The resilience in children is 'interconnected with the resilience of families, communities, governments, economies, and ecologies.'"[24] Masten argues that most resilient children have ordinary human resources and protective factors.[25] Their resilience arises naturally from "ordinary magic" that originates from the power of the basic adaptive systems that foster and protect human development.[26] Therefore, experts recommend keeping families together whenever possible and reuniting families that have been separated as soon as possible to protect,

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[22] Diaz, "Justice Department Rescinds Trump's 'Zero Tolerance' Immigration Policy."

[23] "'Kids in Cages': It's True That Obama Built the Cages at the Border. But Trump's 'Zero Tolerance' Immigration Policy Had No Precedent.," *Washington Post*, accessed November 1, 2022, https://www.washingtonpost.com/immigration/kids-in-cages-debate-trump-obama/2020/10/23/8ff96f3c-1532-11eb-82af-864652063d61_story.html.

[24] Ann S. Masten, *Ordinary Magic: Resilience in Development*, Reprint edition (New York: The Guilford Press, 2015), vii.

[25] Masten, *Ordinary Magic*, 8.

[26] Masten, *Ordinary Magic*. 8.

support, and restore the most fundamental adaptive systems believed to generate the capacity for resilience.[27] This is precisely the opposite of Trump's "zero tolerance" policy.

Despite all these many dangers, children continue coming to the U.S., fleeing extreme poverty, natural disasters, the adverse effects of climate change, and sustained terror caused by violence in their home countries, or to reunite with family members hoping to have a safer and more promising future.[28] Those whose abusers are their own families and do not have relatives in the U.S. who can receive them are left in detention centers. They are in limbo.[29]

Those who make it to the U.S. continue experiencing hardships and being exposed to traumatic stress. Even though they might now be in a country where they are not being preyed upon *to the same extent*, they are still exposed to continuous traumatic stress caused by the racism, persecution, marginalization, oppression, fear of detention and deportation many of them experienced and the pain of being far away from their loved ones. Researchers argue that racism, poverty, exposure to community violence,

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[27] Masten, *Ordinary Magic*, 141.

[28] In the fiscal year October 2020 to September 2021, the United States Border Patrol reported taking into custody 26,284 accompanied juveniles (0 to 17 years of age) and 30,614 unaccompanied juveniles at the Southwest border.

"U.S. Border Patrol Fiscal Year 2020 Sector Profile (508).Pdf," accessed November 1, 2022, https://www.cbp.gov/sites/default/files/assets/documents/2021-Aug/U.S.%20Border%20Patrol%20Fiscal%20Year%202020%20Sector%20Profile%20%28508%29.pdf.

[29] In 2020, the CBP and its Border Patrol component took into custody, at least briefly, more migrants than in any prior fiscal year. "**The agency reported encountering 1,734,686 undocumented people between October 2020 and September 2021.** Of that number, 1,659,206 were encountered between official ports of entry by Border Patrol. That narrowly exceeds the 1,643,679 migrant apprehensions Border Patrol logged in 2000."

Isaac Villegas, "A Liturgy in the Borderlands," The Christian Century, accessed November 1, 2022, https://www.christiancentury.org/article/features/liturgy-borderlands.

ethnocentrism, nativism, isolation, and fear of detention and deportation threaten undocumented immigrants' physical and psychological well-being.[30] As pastor Isaac Villegas notes, in the U.S., immigration laws have created a caste system, rendering some people "deportable, disposable, alien to the protections of the law."[31] Undocumented immigrants contribute significantly to the U.S. economy; however, they are treated as disposable—cheap labor easy to be replaced.

Undocumented immigrants live with uncertainty. They never know when Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) will start doing raids and deporting people *en masse*, as has often happened. Its tactics include workplace raids, checkpoints, and house arrests, creating a widespread fear of detention and deportation among undocumented Latinx immigrants, their families, and communities. In North Carolina, we have experienced ICE raids quite often. When ICE comes to a community and detains people in their homes, factories, companies, and construction sites or driving to work or their kids' school, a heavy cloud settles on the community. This cloud makes breathing almost impossible for the families affected, their neighbors, community members, and those trying to help. Life becomes chaotic, painful, and traumatic. ICE does raids periodically to remind people that they do not belong here and that the government controls their lives and families.[32]

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[30] Chavez-Dueñas et al., "Healing Ethno-Racial Trauma in Latinx Immigrant Communities."

[31] Isaac Villegas, "A Liturgy in the Borderlands," The Christian Century, accessed November 1, 2022, https://www.christiancentury.org/article/features/liturgy-borderlands.

[32] Hispanic/Latinx people make up the largest ethnic minority and immigrant group in the U.S. In 2018, Hispanic/Latinx people accounted for 18% (60 million) of the population in the U.S.

M. Pinedo et al., "A Qualitative View of Migration-Related Stressors on the Mental Health of Latinx Americans in the Current Sociopolitical Climate of Hostility Towards Migrants," *Journal of*

On a Tuesday morning in 2009, I received a call from a church member. She was crying. I could barely understand what she was saying. As she tried to talk without crying, her five-year-old daughter took the phone and screamed, "!*Se llevaron a mi papito, pastora!*" (Pastor, they came for my *papito*!). Previously I had known the child only as a very gentle and quiet kid in Sunday school. I had to work hard to get her to participate in class. However, that day she was frantic with worry. She was screaming and crying simultaneously.

Years later, in 2018, I was sitting on my living room carpet holding the hand of a young adult who was likewise crying, "*¡Se llevaron a mi papá, Alma, y no pude hacer nada!*" (They took my dad, Alma, and I could not do anything!). It does not matter the age. Family separation wounds children. In the fiscal year 2017 alone, more than 27,000 parents of U.S. citizen children were detained or deported.[33] The uncertainty and unpredictability created by policies supporting heightened immigration enforcement and the anti-immigrant rhetoric are connected "to anticipatory anxiety symptoms described by children of immigrants."[34] Studies indicate that among Latino children, the mere threat of parental detention or deportation is associated with poorer physical health outcomes, academic challenges, and decreased use of social service programs.[35] Furthermore,

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Immigrant and Minority Health 23, no. 5 (October 1, 2021): 1054, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10903-021-01207-6.

[33] Lisseth Rojas-Flores and Jennifer Medina Vaughn, "Determinants of Health and Well-Being for Children of Immigrants: Moving From Evidence to Action," *Foundation for Child Development*, 2019, 7.

[34] Rojas-Flores and Medina Vaughn, "Determinants of Health and Well-Being for Children of Immigrants," 6.

[35] Rojas-Flores and Medina Vaughn, "Determinants of Health and Well-Being for Children of Immigrants," 7.

psychologists Lisseth Rojas-Flores and Jennifer Medina Vaughn explain that "parental detentions—whether they result in deportation or not—have unintended adverse consequences, creating potentially traumatic experiences for children," which might lead to diagnoses of PTSD.[36]

As of 2017, more than 18 million children in the United States were living with at least one immigrant parent.[37] Moreover, approximately 5.5 million Latinx children have at least one undocumented parent.[38] Unfortunately, current social, economic, and sociopolitical conditions in the United States create, maintain, and perpetuate unprecedented challenges for this growing young population, resulting in short- and long-term negative developmental outcomes.[39]

According to recent research, "the precarious legal immigration status of a parent is a determinant of mental health and physical health for children and youth of immigrant ancestry."[40] Their physical and mental health is affected to a great extent "by local, state, and federal policies and the overall sociopolitical context of a nation."[41] The current anti-immigrant climate, derogatory rhetoric, marginalization, discriminatory messages and policies, heightened immigration enforcement, and the established and proposed policies

[36] Rojas-Flores and Medina Vaughn, "Determinants of Health and Well-Being for Children of Immigrants," 8.

[37] Rojas-Flores and Medina Vaughn, "Determinants of Health and Well-Being for Children of Immigrants," 1.

[38] Chavez-Dueñas et al., "Healing Ethno-Racial Trauma in Latinx Immigrant Communities," 51.

[39] Rojas-Flores and Medina Vaughn, "Determinants of Health and Well-Being for Children of Immigrants," 1.

[40] Rojas-Flores and Medina Vaughn, "Determinants of Health and Well-Being for Children of Immigrants," 4.

[41] Rojas-Flores and Medina Vaughn, "Determinants of Health and Well-Being for Children of Immigrant," 4.

that threaten immigrants' access to public safety net services create a climate of fear exposing parents and, consequently, children to continuous traumatic stress that can affect their mental and physical health.[42] By contrast, children of immigrant parents who have been granted Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA) experience less fear and stress, resulting in better mental and physical health.[43] These children and their parents still live with uncertainty but with considerably less fear and stress.

In addition, researchers argue that "children of immigrants, especially Latino citizen children, may associate their own immigrant status with illegality or criminality, negatively impacting their ethnic identity formation. Experiences of discrimination by peers, for example, may weaken a child's ethnic identity because they no longer want to be associated with their ethnic group, or in other cases, may be associated with reduced identification as 'American.'"[44] Moreover, experiences of interpersonal discrimination and institutional discrimination contribute to their "experiences of emotional distress, social isolation, and internalized oppression."[45] For these children, the "ordinary magic" that their ethnic identity provides them seems to weaken.

In addition, undocumented immigrant families are at higher risk of experiencing poverty and food insecurity.[46] Thus, many children in low-income immigrant families

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[42] Rojas-Flores and Medina Vaughn, "Determinants of Health and Well-Being for Children of Immigrants," 1.

[43] Rojas-Flores and Medina Vaughn, "Determinants of Health and Well-Being for Children of Immigrants,"19.

[44] Rojas-Flores and Medina Vaughn, "Determinants of Health and Well-Being for Children of immigrants," 6.

[45] Rojas-Flores and Medina Vaughn, "Determinants of Health and Well-Being for Children of Immigrants," 6.

[46] According to the 2021 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), "about 1 in 3 (34.8%) Hispanic and about 1 in 4 (24.3%) non-Hispanic people in the United States lived in a household

live in segregated and disadvantaged neighborhoods with many social problems, such as community violence, poverty, and resource deficiency.[47] These conditions might affect the children's risk of developing traumatic stress and their access to effective help to address it. [48] Indeed, according to researchers, "structural conditions within the neighborhood might provide a stronger influence than child or parent characteristics."[49] Recall from Chapter One psychiatrist Bessel van der Kolk's argument that "Your ZIP code, even more than your genetic code, determines whether you will lead a safe and healthy life."[50] Van der Kolk argues that "poverty, unemployment, inferior schools, social isolation, widespread availability of guns, and substandard housing all are breeding grounds for trauma."[51]

Furthermore, in 2019, Latinx scholars Nayeli Y. Chavez-Dueñas, Hector Y. Adames, Jessica G. Perez-Chavez, and Silvia P. Salas published an article titled "Healing Ethno-Racial Trauma in Latinx Immigrant Communities: Cultivating Hope, Resistance, and Action." In this article, they note that Latinx immigrants living in the United States may experience ethno-racial trauma. They define ethno-racial trauma "as the individual

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that experienced material hardship in 2020."[46] (The Hispanic group that most experiences food hardship is Salvadorans).

US Census Bureau, "Half of People of Dominican and Salvadoran Origin Experienced Material Hardship in 2020," Census.gov, accessed November 1, 2022, https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2022/09/hardships-wealth-disparities-across-hispanic-groups.html.

[47] Rojas-Flores and Medina Vaughn, "Determinants of Health and Well-Being for Children of Immigrants," 22.

[48] Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*, Illustrated edition (New York: Penguin Books, 2015), 350.

[49] Rojas-Flores and Medina Vaughn, "Determinants of Health and Well-Being for Children of Immigrants," 22.

[50] van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 350.

[51] van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 350.

and/or collective psychological distress and fear of danger that results from experiencing or witnessing discrimination, threats of harm, violence, and intimidation directed at ethno-racial minority groups."[52] Ethno-racial trauma stems from a heritage of soul wounds caused by oppression and rejection that has extended to the creation of oppressive laws, policies, and practices.[53] Reactions to racism or ethnoviolence may threaten people's psychological and physical health. This might be 'as psychologically debilitating as reactions to natural disasters or other types of physical or psychological engagements.'[54] Recall from Chapter One Resmaa Menakem's argument that "trauma can also be the body's response to a long sequence of smaller wounds."[55] Furthermore, ethno-racial trauma extends beyond individuals and families, affecting Latinx immigrant communities.

Thus, the exposure to individual and collective traumatic events in their countries of origin and on their journey to the U.S., the high levels of stress related to poverty, community violence, isolation, the lack of job opportunities, and the high levels of stress related to racism, ethnocentrism, and nativism Latinx undocumented immigrants experience affects immigrants' physical and mental health as well as their everyday functioning. However, systems of oppression affect not only the individual but also her/his family and community. Recall from Chapter One Jesuit priest and social psychologist Ignacio Martín-Baró's argument that trauma is never only experienced

[52] Chavez-Dueñas et al., "Healing Ethno-Racial Trauma in Latinx Immigrant Communities," 49.
[53] Chavez-Dueñas et al., "Healing Ethno-Racial Trauma in Latinx Immigrant Communities," 52.
[54] Chavez-Dueñas et al., "Healing Ethno-Racial Trauma in Latinx Immigrant Communities," 50.
[55] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 14.

individually. Individuals experience trauma collectively because it touches the lives of those close to the person and extends to the community. Thus, their healing process also includes the collective. Helping a wounded person heal includes helping him/her reconnect with self, God, others, and creation.

When preaching in immigrant communities, pastors inevitably must speak to congregations dealing with deep individual, collective, generational, and ethno-racial trauma. It is a daunting challenge.

Traumatic Wounds Latinx/Hispanic pastors experience themselves

What of the pastors? In addition to trauma experienced by their congregations, many Hispanic/Latinx pastors have also inherited soul wounds' effects and consequences and have experienced exposure to traumatic events before and during their journey to the U.S. Moreover, merely by living in the U.S., many of them are exposed to continuous traumatic stress as members of their communities. Furthermore, they are also vulnerable to experiencing ethno-racial trauma resulting from witnessing or experiencing discrimination, threats of harm, violence, or intimidation directed at them or members of their community. Thus, healing their own traumatic wounds and helping their community heal requires "cultivating and promoting self-determination which fosters hope and resistance."[56]

[56] Chavez-Dueñas et al., "Healing Ethno-Racial Trauma in Latinx Immigrant Communities," 55.

In 2016, a group of about thirty Hispanic/Latinx youth from The United Methodist North Carolina Conference went to Pilgrimage, a weekend conference for youth from the North Carolina Conference. For three years, the Hispanic/Latinx youth participated in leadership training led by Hispanic/Latinx pastors and lay leaders. Thus, they were very excited to join the larger UMC youth community at this event. It had been a tradition in Pilgrimage to write Bible verses and encouraging messages on wooden clothespins. However, that year, the messages on the clothespins were different. When our youth arrived at the convention center, they were received by white youth who eagerly clipped a clothespin on their t-shirts. Soon after receiving the clothespin, one of the undocumented youths read the message and could not believe what it said. All their clothes pins had messages like: "Build the wall" and "Make America great again." The event's organizers asked the Hispanic youth, pastors, and lay leaders to get on the platform in front of everyone and address and condemn the issue themselves. While they were still speaking, many white youth, their pastors, and leaders got up and left.

A weekend the Hispanic/Latinx youth thought would be fun and refreshing became traumatic for them, their pastors, and lay leaders. I was in Mexico for the weekend when this happened. I remember receiving desperate texts from the pastors who accompanied our youth to Pilgrimage, texts describing the traumatic event they had experienced. This was the brutal unveiling of hatred and racism against the Hispanic/Latinx community within The UMC. For the next couple of months, a Hispanic/Latinx, and DACA recipient, seminary student who spoke from the platform and condemned the hateful actions experienced persecution through social media. She

received many angry, racist, and threatening messages. For months, the Hispanic/Latinx pastors communicated through texts and emails, and we often met to accompany our youth and help them process this painful and traumatic situation. However, after some months of dealing with this, it was clear that we, the pastors, were exhausted and overwhelmed. Besides, for some of us, this experience triggered and re-opened our own wounds that we thought had healed. I realized how affected we were when members of one of the Hispanic ministries told me, "*Estamos muy agotados. Nuestro pastor ha hablado por meses en sus sermones con resentimiento y dolor sobre lo que paso en Pilgrimage. Nuestros jóvenes y el resto de la congregación están agotados. Y es obvio que nuestro pastor también necesita un descanso*" (We are exhausted. Our pastor has spoken for months in his sermons with resentment and pain about what happened at Pilgrimage. Our youth and the rest of the congregation are exhausted. And it's evident that our pastor needs a break too). We, pastors, needed to stop and address our woundedness; only then could we preach healing and transforming messages to our hurting youth and community. As healing facilitators, preachers need to do their own work of trauma integration and healing, committing to regular contemplative awareness practices and attending diligently to their personal health and well-being.

What Duran says regarding the healers in the African American community is true also of preachers who want to care for people's wounded souls, "Your own soul must be healed so that you can attend to the patient who is presenting with a wounded

soul. You cannot do for others what you haven't done for yourself."[57] Duran explains that the healer must be constantly aware of his/her own soul's healing process.[58] Duran does not say that the healer needs to be completely healed before helping someone experience healing. Instead, he acknowledges that it is a process. The healer needs to be aware of his/her wounds and take the time to care for them. Like the healer in the Native American tradition, preachers need to name, acknowledge and validate the pain of their own open traumatic wounds. They need to be aware of their healing process. Priest and theologian Henri Nouwen shares a story in his book *The Wounded Healer* that explains how this process could work for ministers:

> Rabbi Yoshua ben Levi came upon Elijah the prophet while he was standing at the entrance of Rabbi Simeron ben Yohai's cave …He asked Elijah, 'When will the Messiah come?'
>
> Elijah replied, 'Go and ask him yourself.'
>
> 'Where is he?'
>
> 'Sitting at the gates of the city.'
>
> 'How shall I know him?'
>
> 'He is sitting among the poor covered with wounds. The others unbind all their wounds at the same time and bind them up again, But he unbinds one at a time and binds it up again, saying to himself, 'Perhaps I shall be needed: If so I must always be ready so as not to delay for a moment.'[59]

Like the Messiah, preachers and ministers need to take care of their wounds and, at the same time, be prepared to help others in their healing process.[60] We are

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[57] Eduardo Duran, *Healing the Soul Wound: Trauma-Informed Counseling for Indigenous Communities*, 2nd edition (New York: Teachers College Press, 2019), 46.

[58] Duran, *Healing the Soul Wound*, 56.

[59] Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society*, 1st edition (New York: Image, 1979), 87–88.

[60] Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*, 88.

interconnected individuals, and can transmit both our woundedness and our healing to those around us.

As homiletician Jerusha Neal argues in her book *The Over Shadowed Preacher*, "Robust theologies of proclamation attend to the bodies of preachers, for it is in and through those bodies that Jesus is witnessed. They bear his marks by the Spirit's power."[61] Through the power of the Spirit, the Word is delivered, and Jesus manifests among the community, but the preacher remains who they are. The preacher does not fade away. Therefore, preachers need to be aware of what they bring to the preaching event. For our thoughts, feelings, and emotions may also influence the dialogue we are trying to facilitate. In addition, we need to be aware that if we have untreated wounds, they might bleed over the community. Therefore, to be able to be fully present for others and accompany them in their healing journey, we need to be fully present for ourselves first and be aware of our own unhealed open wounds. Thus, when the preacher says "yes" to God's calling to preach, the preacher needs to be willing to enter into a life-long journey of self-reflection and be open to keep evolving in his/her faith and experiencing transformation. This includes awareness of soul wounds we might have inherited, individual and collective wounds we might have experienced, and the exposure to continuous traumatic stress.

For instance, we all have a genealogy. Some of us may not know it, but that does not mean that, whether we like it or not, it somehow influences who we are now. We

[61] Jerusha Matsen Neal, *The Overshadowed Preacher: Mary, the Spirit, and the Labor of Proclamation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2020), 41.

have inherited gifts and talents from our genealogy, but most likely also wounds. Jesus is no exception. The genealogy of Jesus found in Matthew 1:1–25 and Luke 3:23–38 reminds us that Jesus, the Son of God, is human and came from an imperfect family like most of us. In his genealogy, we find resilient people who survived slavery in Egypt, cunning as Tamar, brave as Rahab, faithful as Ruth and Boaz, wise as Solomon, after the heart of God as David, humble as Joseph, and prophetic as Mary. However, it still was not a perfect family.

In the genealogy of Jesus, intergenerational wounds are passed from generation to generation. Some of them are the idolatry of their ancestors who, while in the desert after God delivered them from slavery, doubted the faithfulness of God, complained about the food God provided them, and created idols of gold to worship. Judah's hunger for power led him to envy his brother Joseph and to get rid of him. David's ego and lust led him to rape Bathsheba and kill her husband to cover his sin. Solomon, the son of David and Bathsheba, inherited David's lust. Solomon had 700 queens and 300 concubines, many of whom were from idolator nations, and they led him to worship false gods. These are just a few things we know about the ancestors of Jesus. Indeed, as in most families, some things were not even discussed. However, not acknowledging the wounds does not make them less severe or heal them. On the contrary, wounds that are not named, acknowledged, and validated do not receive the care needed to be healed and are passed down from generation to generation, causing new and even deeper wounds. Jesus knew his history. He knew where he came from, and he knew that, in his genealogy, there were wounds that needed to be healed.

The order in which Luke presents the genealogy of Jesus and the temptations he experienced before beginning his ministry are interesting. The temptations Jesus experienced in the desert were the process of healing the wounds he had inherited from his ancestors. Recall Luke 4:1–13:

> *Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tested by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over he was famished. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'"*
>
> *Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. 6 And the devil said to him, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." 8 Jesus answered him, "It is written,*
>
> *'Worship the Lord your God,*
> *and serve only him.'"*
>
> *Then the devil led him to Jerusalem and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written,*
>
> *'He will command his angels concerning you,*
> *to protect you,'*
>
> *and*
>
> *'On their hands, they will bear you up,*
> *so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'"*
>
> *Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.*

By saying no to the devil's offers, Jesus was healing the wounds he, in his humanity, inherited from them. By saying no to the devil's offer to satiate his hunger by

commanding the stone to turn into bread, Jesus was healing the wounds inherited from his ancestors who doubted God's faithfulness and complained about not being able to eat what they wanted in the desert. *'One does not live by bread alone.'*

By not falling into the temptation of the devil, who took him to a high place and offered him *everything* he looked at, he was healing the wounds resulting from Judah's desire for power and King David's lust and abuse of power.

David climbed up to the top of his palace and took possession of *everything* he saw in his kingdom. Abusing his power, he took possession of Bathsheba's body (2 Samuel 11). It was not enough for him with all the women he had; he wanted more. In his arrogance and idolatry of the god of power, he considered himself to be the owner of everything, even human beings.[62] *'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'*

In the third temptation, Jesus is healing the wounds' inherited from King Solomon's idolatrous behavior. King Solomon had affairs with many Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, all of them foreign women, who came from nations of which the Lord had said to the Israelites, 'Do not join them, nor they you, because they will surely turn your hearts away to follow other gods.' Salomon did not listen to the Lord, and when Solomon grew old, he followed other gods and was not faithful to the LORD his God (1 Kings 11). *'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'*

[62] For Romero, by resisting the temptations Jesus is resisting idolatry to the gods of power and money. Similarly, Charles Campbell understands Jesus triumph over the devil's temptations as Jesus' resistance to the powers and principalities of this world.

After this passage, Luke describes Jesus' first sermon in the synagogue, the one marking the beginning of his ministry. This makes Jesus' healing and transforming experience in the desert even more significant. It makes it indispensable for Jesus' ministry. Jesus had to experience this healing and transformation in his own life before beginning his ministry of bringing good news to the poor, proclaiming release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, setting free those who are oppressed, and proclaiming the year of the Lord's savior.

Likewise, to be fully present for others and continue with Jesus' salvific ministry of liberation and healing, preachers today do well to discern their own open wounds in need of healing and be willing to start the healing process with the help of the Holy Spirit and their community of faith. As pastoral theologian Emmanuel Y. Lartey says, "Pastoral practitioners need to develop their abilities of sensitivity and empathy through attention to their own feelings of hurt and pain, sorrow and sadness that they can begin to approach the pain of others. Moreover, feelings of pleasure and joy, arousal and elation may also put carers in touch with those they care for in the rich variety of the emotional tapestry of life."[63]

One of Romero's greatest fears was becoming an obstacle in Jesus' ministry of liberation, healing, and transformation and the dialogue between God and the people. Therefore, he attentively listened to them both. Romero attuned his ears to the voice of God through prayer, reading of Scripture, and listening to the poor, marginalized, and

[63] Lartey, *In Living Color*, 75.

oppressed people's concrete circumstances. As indicated in Chapter Four, he often practiced Ignatius of Loyola *examen*. The examen led him to: acknowledge God's presence in his life; reflect on the things for which he was grateful; reflect on the ways God manifested to him and loved him through other people and God's creation; acknowledge and repent from his sins; and acknowledge and bring before God his feelings—joy, hope, gratitude, sorrow, fear, suffering, and anxiety. In addition, in his periodical retreats, guided by Saint Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises, Romero more deeply examined his fears, pains, sorrows, and anxieties, which he recorded in his notes on "Ejercicios Espirituales." Romero believed that to be present for others, he and pastors like him first need to be aware of our own struggles in life and seek renewal and transformation. However, he insisted that the renewal and transformation the person experiences must not stay at the individual level. It must free the person to work for the common good.

To be fully present to others and contribute to their healing, liberation, and transformation, preachers need to work first on their own healing, liberation, and transformation. They need to be aware of their open wounds and the way in which the effects and consequences of those wounds might manifest in their lives. In other words, for preachers to be available for healthy relationships with their community, they must remain accountable to their independent contemplative and spiritual practices. The healing process requires us to be more available to ourselves and more willing to feel and stay with the authentic emotions resulting from our experiences in life. Engaging without spiritually bypassing the work required by trauma can help us develop and strengthen the

interior resources that allow us not only to cope with the effects of trauma but to thrive, and to integrate and transcend them. In other words, engaging in contemplative and spiritual practices, such as Saint Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises, can help us become aware of the effects and consequences of trauma, including dissociation, suppression, and disconnection from ourselves, others, God's creation, and even from God. This can help us be in a better place to help others in their healing process. Only when we know our woundedness well can we be present with the woundedness of others.

Ministry with oppressed and marginalized communities might affect preachers' spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being. Thus, embarking on a life-long journey of self-awareness can help us discern when we need to step away from our particular "multitudes" again, as Jesus and Romero did periodically. Prayer is not the only hygiene practice that preachers can engage. Other things like counseling, yoga, meditation, and mindfulness also help one be fully present for ourselves, others, and God's creation.

Unfortunately, many of us preachers have been formed in Christian traditions that treat faith as an amulet. These traditions taught us: "If you have true faith, you will be healed;" "If you have true faith, everything will be fine." Thus, in these traditions, naming and acknowledging our open wounds is like acknowledging that we do not have faith or that our faith is weak.

Faith is not an amulet that protects us from experiencing suffering and trauma. As Romero teaches us, faith is believing in and experiencing God's presence in the midst of suffering; faith is believing that God works within us and through us; faith is believing that we have been called to continue with Jesus's salvific mission on earth, even when

responding to this calling is challenging or painful; faith is believing that, in Christ, we can experience healing on this earth even when we do not experience a cure.

In our fear of being seen as people of weak or no faith, we cover our wounds with bandages that have biblical verses written all over them: "I can do all things through him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13); "If God is for us, who is against us?" (Romans 8:31); "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; look, new things have come into being!" (2 Corinthians 5:17), as if taking care of our open wounds goes against God's promises for us. However, by caring for our wounds, we prepare ourselves to embrace God's promises for us and live as transfigured people. As Nouwen says,

> When we become aware that we do not have to escape our pains, but that we can mobilize them into a common search for life, those very pains are transformed from expressions of despair into signs of hope…A Christian community is therefore a healing community, not because wounds are cured and pains are alleviated, but because wounds and pains become openings or occasions for a new vision. Mutual confession then becomes a mutual deepening of hope, and shared weakness becomes a reminder to one and all of the coming strength.[64]

By contrast, we are disguising denial as resilience if we cover our wounds with bandages and convince ourselves they will go away if we keep reciting these Bible verses. Recall that Menakem argues that in order to experience real healing, wounded people need to practice what he calls "clean pain." Clean pain entails walking into the pain, experiencing it fully, and moving through it, allowing oneself to grow in the

[64] Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*, 100.

process, creating more space in one's nervous system for flow and coherence, and building one's capacity for further growth.[65] This is also a process necessary to experience to help others heal. Nouwen explains, "But once the pain is accepted and understood, denial is no longer necessary, and ministry can become a healing service."[66] The healing ministry does not take away the pain of others but invites them to recognize their woundedness at a level that can be shared.[67] "Therefore ministry is a very confrontational service. It does not allow people to live with illusions of immortality and wholeness. It keeps reminding others that they are mortal and broken, but also that with the recognition of this condition, liberation starts."[68] Therefore, people need to feel free and comfortable coming to the preacher/minister to talk about their woundedness and to have the confidence that their wounds will be understood and felt—that they will not be dismissed as a sign of weak or no faith.

The task of preachers is to be agents of grace and empathy who help Hispanic/Latinx undocumented people recognize God's presence among them and within them and provide the support needed to access their self-healing power. However, in order to do this, we preachers need to care for our own wounds first. Naming, acknowledging, and caring for our wounds together frees us to help our communities in their liberating and healing process. Only then can we be the medicine that psychologist Christina Bethell argues we can be. As described in Chapter Two, Bethell says that we

[65] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 165.
[66] Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*, 94.
[67] Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*, 98.
[68] Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*, 99.

can be active participants in our own healing process and, most importantly, that we have the capacity to be our own, and others' medicine.[69] She believes that "*we are the human medicine*," because to heal traumatic wounds we need healthy relationships with ourselves and with others. Thus, Bethell's "we are the medicine" approach is all about these healthy relationships and about how we are making meaning of our experiences.[70] As Nouwen argues, and Romero believed, "Since God has become human, it is human beings who have the power to lead their fellows to freedom."[71]

Sentir con Dios

At the heart of preaching is the preacher's understanding of and faith in God. More important than any homiletical tactics is a theology that orients the preacher to the wound of the people. Romero's preaching suggests the shape of this kind of theology, as well as the ways this theology shapes the preacher's hermeneutical approach to Scripture.

Romero understood that God and the poor and suffering people are intrinsically united. He knew that poverty touches the heart of God, and, conversely, that the glory of God is the poor people fully alive.[72] Therefore, for Romero, *sentir* with God means *feeling*, *thinking*, and *acting* with the empathetic God who suffers with God's people—the God who cries out of their painful reality. Thus, *sentir* with God means *feeling*, *understanding*, and *acting* according to what God wants for the poor, suffering, and

[69] Stanford, *Christina Bethell*, 2016.
[70] Stanford, *Christina Bethell*.
[71] Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*, 76.
[72] Miguel Cavada Diez and Jon Sobrino, *El Evangelio de Monseñor Romero*, 5th ed. (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 2006), 6.

wounded people. In other words, *sentir* with God means participating in God's salvific plan for humanity by proclaiming a message of liberation and healing and actively seeking its realization.

Through his homilies, Romero invites us to *sentir* with the God who lives within and among the poor, traumatized, and suffering people, not the controlling and dominating god the colonizers imposed nor the condemning god the evangelists try to convince us to accept. Such a god is a false god of power and control. However, the true God emptied himself, taking the form of an enslaved person, assuming human likeness (Philippians 2:7). This God is not selfish. This God is like the mothers and fathers who are willing to undergo a perilous journey to take their children to safety or to provide for their basic needs back home. As God does among all wounded and suffering people, God is grieving and weeping among the wounded and suffering undocumented immigrants. God cries out, "'Is there no balm in Gilead?' Is there no healing ointment, no physician, no way for the 'daughter of my people' to be become healthy again?"[73] In this context, *sentir* with God is *sentir* with the undocumented immigrants who have experienced traumatic wounds and are exposed to continuous traumatic stress.

This theological understanding of God will shape the preacher's hermeneutical approach to Scripture, as it did for Romero. The preacher will read Scripture in relation to the cries of the poor and suffering, and that will shape her preaching among traumatized and wounded people.

[73] O'Connor, *Jeremiah: Pain and Promise*, 64.

When my husband and I moved to the United States in 2003, we served a Spanish-speaking United Methodist congregation in a rural town in N.C. Having moved recently to the U.S., my husband and I spoke very little English and understood nothing about the system. An older white pastor took my husband under his wing and met with him weekly to check on him and guide him. He was a lovely and self-giving person toward my husband until my husband forwarded him an email asking for signatures supporting the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act. In response, this white pastor sent an angry email to my husband, accusing him of being a traitor and ungrateful to the country that had welcomed us and given us the documentation necessary to live here and serve in the Church. "Don't you know Romans 13:1–7?" He asked. "Those who do not subject themselves to the governing authorities disobey God."

> *Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of him who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval,*
> *4 for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain; he is the servant of God to execute his wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be subject, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay all of them their dues, taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due.* (Romans 13:1–7, NRSV).

My husband knew Romans 13 very well. However, he also knew the life stories of the youth from our Church and many others like them who were desperate for an

opportunity to obtain legal documentation to live, study, and work in this country that they loved and considered theirs and, in many cases, the only country they knew. In most cases, their parents came to this country fleeing extreme poverty and domestic and/or national violence, which was, in some cases, fueled by the United States' hunger for control, as was the case of El Salvador's civil war. These parents brought their kids here because they did not want them to suffer what they had suffered. In addition, many of these kids had suffered family separation because they had to stay in their countries for months or years waiting to reunite with their parents. This has caused deep wounds in their souls.

Furthermore, they are exposed to continuous traumatic stress due to the impact of racism, ethnocentrism, nativism, and United States citizens' unwillingness to welcome them as legal residents of the only country they know as home. Many of these unhospitable people are Christians who "obey" God's Word in Romans 13:1–7, disregarding any human need. They are Christians who subject humanity to their legalistic and oppressive understanding of Scripture.

We experienced a similar situation in 2017 when our friend Samuel Oliver Bruno needed to enter sanctuary in the church at which we worshiped because he had received a deportation order. The temporary permit under which he had been working in the United States for more than three years was not renewed due to the Trump administration's policy changes. Wanting to remain close to his wife, Julia, who is seriously ill with lupus, and his son, Daniel, a U.S. citizen, Samuel reached out to me. He was looking for a church that would offer him sanctuary. I called my pastors, shared with them Samuel's

situation, and asked whether our church would be willing to offer sanctuary to Samuel. They both were compelled by Scripture and their faith to offer sanctuary, but they needed the congregation's support and the blessing of our Latino neighbors. Therefore, we started a very focused process of listening to both our congregation and the people from the neighborhood. One of the questions members of our congregation frequently asked was: How can a church faithfully break the law? People who asked this question usually had in mind passages like Romans 13:1–7. People usually use this text "to prove" that Christians are obliged to obey the law. However, they fail to consider several instances reported in the gospels in which Jesus himself broke the law and the rules established by the rulers and authorities of his time. He always did it for the sake of those who were suffering. Jesus broke the Sabbath law by healing a man's hand on the Sabbath (Mark 3:1–6). Jesus broke the law by touching a leper (Matthew 8:1–3). And Jesus broke the law by eating with sinners (Luke 15:2). Jesus always chose love, grace, mercy, compassion, and justice over simple obedience to the law or the will of rulers and authorities.

Furthermore, theologian T.L. Carter explains in his article titled "The Irony of Romans 13" that Paul meant Romans 13:1-7 ironically. If God appointed these authorities, Paul is saying, "they cannot but be subject to the God who has appointed them"[74]— the God who places love, grace, mercy, and compassion over obedience to the law. Furthermore, because of the persecution and violence that Jesus, Paul himself, other

[74] T.L. Carter, "The Irony of Romans 13," *Novum Testament* 46, no. 3 (2004): 219, https://www.jstor.org/stable/1561585.

Christians, and poor people in general had experienced at the hand of the rulers and authorities, Carter argues that it is clear that Paul was using irony in his commendation of the state in Romans 13:1–7. Carter notes that "if the letter's original readers shared with the author an experience of oppression at the hands of the authorities, that shared experience would have paved the way for the reader's understanding of Paul's use of irony, by rendering the surface meaning of Paul's commendation of the authorities blatantly implausible to them."[75] Thus, only those who had suffered the oppression and violence of the authorities and rulers could fully understand the irony in Paul's message. It is the same for contemporary readers: only those who have experienced injustice, oppression, and persecution at the hands of the authorities and rulers can fully understand the intended irony of Romans 13:1–7.

Soon, most of the people from our congregation and neighborhood supported our church's decision to become a sanctuary for Samuel. Nevertheless, after my church announced this decision publicly, the pastors and church members received many hateful letters from "Christians," accusing the church of not obeying God's Word and being unfaithful to God. One of the biblical texts that Christians who opposed the sanctuary movement often quoted in their letters was of course precisely Romans 13:1–7. They knew this text well but did not know the suffering Samuel, Julia, Daniel, and many other undocumented immigrants and their families were experiencing. It is difficult to

[75] T.L. Carter, "The Irony of Romans 13," *Novum Testament* 46, no. 3 (2004): 215, https://www.jstor.org/stable/1561585.

recognize Paul's irony in Roman's 13 if one belongs to a privileged group that has never experienced violence and persecution at the hands of the rulers and authorities.

What to do about such lack of empathy? Nouwen reminds us that we might recognize the Messiah among us if we look up from our Bibles and into people's eyes.[76] Uniting his theological and hermeneutical convictions, Romero looked up from his Bible and saw God in the eyes of the poor, suffering, and wounded people. Then, he looked back to the Bible and read it anew. If people keep their heads down and only look at the Bible, they miss the opportunity to see, hear and *sentir* with God. Consequently, they cannot *feel*, *understand*, and *act* according to what God wants for the poor, suffering, and wounded people. They are unable to see that God always places such people's needs first.

The preacher's theological and hermeneutical convictions provide the essential foundation and framework for speaking to and in the midst of wounded and traumatized communities.

Sentir con el Pueblo

Romero's theological convictions not only shaped his approach to Scripture, but also grounded his empathetic pastoral work. Here too he can serve as a model for preachers in wounded and traumatized communities.

Romero became the great prophetic and pastoral preacher whom many people admire today because of his capacity to *sentir* with God and the people, at the affective,

[76] Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*, 30.

cognitive, and conative levels, and his ability to communicate this *sentir* in his homilies. His *sentir* with God and the people could not have existed in isolation. God pointed him to the people, and the people pointed him to God. Thus, his homilies' preparation process included praying, studying Scripture, and listening to God through the people's voices and concrete circumstances and letting this guide our reading and interpretation of Scripture. Romero teaches that, by doing this, preachers can speak not only for God but also on behalf of the people.

As the Catholic Bishops Committee articulated in a publication on "The Homily in the Sunday Assembly," preachers need to be listeners first in order to be qualified to speak. Only then will the preacher be able to illuminate the gospel with the people's concrete circumstances.[77] They argue,

> Listening is not an isolated moment. It is a way of life. It means openness to the Lord's voice not only in the Scriptures but in the events of our daily lives and in the experience of our brothers and sisters. It is not just my listening but our listening together for the Lord's word to the community. We listen to the Scriptures, we listen to the people, and we ask, "What are they saying to one another? What are they asking of one another?" And out of that dialogue between the Word of God in the Scriptures and the Word of God in the lives of his people, the Word of God in preaching begins to take shape.[78]

Preachers, as facilitators of the dialogue between God and the people, find themselves in what Charles Campbell and Johan H. Cilliers in their book *Preaching Fools: The Gospel as a Rhetoric of Folly* call *the liminal space*. In this minimal space,

[77] Bishop's Committee on Priestly Life and Ministry United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Fulfilled in Your Hearing: The Homily in the Sunday Assembly*, 10.

[78] Bishop's Committee on Priestly Life and Ministry United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Fulfilled in Your Hearing*, 10.

"the Spirit blows freely, forming and re-forming Christian identity and community."[79] With the help of the Holy Spirit, preachers discern the voice of God in Scripture and the people's concrete circumstances and let Scripture and the people's concrete circumstances illuminate each other, "for God's will is not locked up in the Bible, theology, or tradition, as in an archive of certainties."[80] God's will must be sought in the community of believers with their divergent opinions and diverse experiences.[81] God's will is also revealed in people's lives and experiences.

Those close to Romero talk about Romero's constant need to ask others' opinions on almost every decision he needed to make. He asked the lawyers, doctors, educators, scientists, seminary professors, religious people, and especially the poor, marginalized, and oppressed people. Some people understood this as a weakness of character or insecurity. I suggest instead that Romero was in the liminal space about which Campbell and Cilliers talk, desperately seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the guidance of the people God called him to serve. As someone who believes that God continues revealing Godself in history, he sought to hear the voice of God in Scripture and the people's concrete circumstances. Romero *felt* with God and the people and was willing and open to be transformed by them.

By listening to the people, we can learn to *sentir* with them. By listening to the people, we can develop our ability to empathize with them at the affective, cognitive, and

[79] Charles L. Campbell and Johan H. Cilliers, *Preaching Fools: The Gospel as a Rhetoric of Folly* (Waco, Tex: Baylor University Press, 2012), 42–43.

[80] Campbell and Cilliers, *Preaching Fools,* 53.

[81] Campbell and Cilliers, *Preaching Fools,* 53.

conative level—to *feel*, *think*, and *act* with them. In his book *In Living Color*, Lartey quotes Carl Rogers's classic and technical definition of empathy: "The ability to perceive the internal frame of reference of another with accuracy and with the emotional components and meanings which pertain thereto, as if one were the other person, but without ever losing the 'as if' condition."[82] Thus, empathy entails "entering into another person's thought patterns, inner feelings, and ways of understanding the world,"[83] without losing our own thought patterns, inner feelings, and ways of understanding the world. In other words, empathy "is a way of *being* with other people, which enters into how it *feels* to be who they are."[84] Thus, empathy allows us to *feel* and *understand* the wounds and suffering that many undocumented Latinx immigrants experience in the U.S.

Non-Hispanic/Latinx preachers who serve among Hispanic/Latinx immigrant communities might find it more challenging to *sentir* with them than does a Hispanic/Latinx preacher. What they need in this cross-cultural situation is what Augsburger termed *interpathy. "Interpathy* is an intentional cognitive envisioning and affective experiencing of another's thoughts and feelings, even though the thoughts [a]rise from another process of knowing, the values grow from another frame of moral reasoning, and the feelings spring from another basis of assumptions,"[85] explains Augsburger. Thus, *interpathy* requires non-Hispanic-Latinx preachers to 'bracket' their "own beliefs and values and temporarily enter a very different world of beliefs and

[82] Lartey, *In Living Color*, 92.
[83] Lartey, *In Living Color*, 92.
[84] Lartey, *In Living Color*, 92. Emphasis on "feels" is my own.
[85] Lartey, *In Living Color*, 93.

values."[86] The premise of *empathy* and *interpathy* is that the person inhabiting the world we are entering is equally human.

However, *empathy* and *interpathy* usually do not happen magically. They require intentionality, specifically spending time *being* with and *listening* to the people. As Lartey says, "Listening is a core skill in any form of caring."[87] Therefore, a preacher does not need to be from the same ethnic group or to have experienced the same struggles in life as his/her community to *understand* and *feel* their joys, ideologies, values, struggles, suffering, faith, wounds, and hope. For instance, a pastor who is not an undocumented Hispanic/Latinx immigrant can nonetheless empathize with undocumented immigrants in his community by listening to them and learning about their joys, hopes, dreams, pains, suffering, wounds, and struggles and by entering into their world of beliefs and values. However, as homiletician Charles Campbell notes in his book *The Scandal of the Gospel*, empathy alone is not enough. Empathy must lead to confession and resistance.[88] Putting it in Lartey's language, one could say that empathy at the affective level is not enough. Empathy should move individuals to *feel* with the suffering and wounded people and to *think* and *act* for their liberation and healing.

Therefore, to preach a liberating, healing, and transforming message to wounded undocumented immigrants, preachers not only need pastoral empathy but pastoral

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[86] Lartey, *In Living Color*, 93.
[87] Lartey, *In Living Color*, 72.
[88] Campbell L. Charles, *The Scandal of the Gospel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2021), 30–31.

competence. They need to develop an in-depth *understanding* of the traumatic wounds many undocumented Hispanic/Latinx immigrants have experienced and the continuous traumatic stresses to which they are exposed due to racism, ethnocentrism, nativism, and additional forms of othering on individuals, families, and communities, and the fear of detention and deportation. Furthermore, they need to *feel* with the people and *engage* in strategies of resistance to the powers that oppress them and insist on dehumanizing them. This enables preachers through their sermons to provide pastoral care to this wounded community. One way churches engage in strategies of resistance is by becoming "sanctuary churches" where immigrants at risk of deportation can find refuge. Some churches provide scholarships and internships to undocumented students, ESL classes, and/or after-school programs for children, youth, and parents.

Chavez-Dueñas, Adames, Perez-Chavez, and Salas argue that healing for Latinx immigrants can take place in "sanctuary" spaces. Recall that the word and concept "sanctuary" derive directly from the persecuted people of El Salvador. "Sanctuary" describes a place in which fearful, wounded, and suffering people find protection, affirmation, and validation,[89] much like the place Romero provided to the poor and oppressed people in the Cathedral of San Salvador. For Hispanic/Latinx immigrants, "'Sanctuary' evokes the sense of coping with hate on a community level."[90] Sanctuary spaces allow for Hispanic/Latinxs immigrants "to (a) authentically express themselves,

[89] Chavez-Dueñas et al., "Healing Ethno-Racial Trauma in Latinx Immigrant Communities," 55–56.

[90] Chavez-Dueñas et al., "Healing Ethno-Racial Trauma in Latinx Immigrant Communities," 55–56.

be affirmed, and acknowledged; (b) reprocess and mourn the losses associated with ethno-racial trauma; (c) integrate experiences of ethno-racial trauma and connect to cultural elements and practices that heal; and (d) create strategies for protecting, liberating, resisting, and organizing for social action."[91]

However, as Chavez-Dueñas, Adames, Perez-Chavez, and Salas explain, trauma experts argue that care providers working with trauma survivors must understand that recovery from a traumatic experience cannot occur "'without sufficient stability to be able to remember the past without becoming overwhelmed by it and thus retraumatized.'"[92] Trauma-informed care also describes physical and emotional safety as a central component in the treatment of trauma survivors.[93] Nevertheless, "sufficient stability" and "physical safety" may not be attainable for Hispanic/Latinx immigrants exposed to continuous traumatic stress caused by insidious and ongoing attacks on their personhood. For instance, developing a sense of "sufficient stability" and "physical safety" is complicated, and perhaps even impossible, for undocumented Hispanic/Latinx immigrants, and their families, who live in fear of detention and deportation.[94] As Chavez-Dueñas, Adames, Perez-Chavez, and Salas explain, while creating a sense of physical and emotional safety in society may not be attainable in such a context, a sanctuary space can be created by promoting an environment in which the experiences

[91] Chavez-Dueñas et al., "Healing Ethno-Racial Trauma in Latinx Immigrant Communities," 56.
[92] Chavez-Dueñas et al., "Healing Ethno-Racial Trauma in Latinx Immigrant Communities," 56–57.
[93] Chavez-Dueñas et al., "Healing Ethno-Racial Trauma in Latinx Immigrant Communities," 56–57.
[94] Chavez-Dueñas et al., "Healing Ethno-Racial Trauma in Latinx Immigrant Communities," 57.

and stories of Latinx immigrants are *respected*, *validated*, and *affirmed*. In this kind of environment, "focusing on assisting individuals, families, and communities gain immediate relief from the effects of psychological distress caused by ethno-racial trauma is possible."[95] Therefore, As Romero does through his homilies, preachers in Hispanic/Latinx communities can create an environment of "*relative safety*," an atmosphere that conveys refuge, hope, and possibility, and that consequently contributes to strengthening the community's resilience.[96]

The therapy, ministry, social action, empowerment, and personal interaction pastoral care models that Lartey describes and that take place in Romero's homilies can help create this kind of sanctuary space that conveys refuge, hope, and possibility and that strengthens individuals' and communities' resilience. As described in Chapter Five, in the pastoral care as therapy model, the pastoral healer allows the wounded person to express her/his distress, suffering, and anxieties, listens deeply to them, and directs them to the presence of the divine. In the pastoral care as ministry model, the pastoral care provider acts as an agent or intermediary between the wounded people and the Source of Healing; this model engages pastoral care activities such as proclamation, service, fellowship, administration, and worship. In the pastoral care as social action model, the pastoral care provider "speaks truth to power;" he/she is involved in social and cultural action for personal and communal liberation.[97] In the pastoral care as an empowerment

[95] Chavez-Dueñas et al., "Healing Ethno-Racial Trauma in Latinx Immigrant Communities," 57.

[96] Peter A. Levine, *In an Unspoken Voice: How the Body Releases Trauma and Restores Goodness*, 1st edition (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2010), 75.

[97] Lartey, *In Living Color*, 58.

model, the pastoral care provider seeks to identify and build on preexisting strengths and resources within and around people and communities. Using this model, the pastoral care provider helps people gain "conscientization" of their situation, helping them become more aware of their situation and of their resources to respond to and change it.[98] In the pastoral interaction model, the pastoral care provider employs skills to help people cope more effectively with unwanted thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.[99]

By employing aspects of these pastoral care models in their sermons, preachers can offer undocumented Hispanic/Latinx immigrants a word of comfort, a word of repudiation of violence, a word of support for their just claims, and a word of hope as Romero offered to the poor, marginalized, and oppressed people of El Salvador.[100] Through their homilies, preachers can denounce and unmask the oppression this community experiences, give voice to their trauma, help them encounter God amid their suffering, help them "edit" or "re-author" negative internalized stories and identities they might have embraced, and envision and work with them for a better future. Furthermore, by incorporating elements of pastoral care, the sermon aims at preventing, relieving, or facilitating undocumented Hispanic/Latinx immigrants coping with anxiety.[101] This type of sermon cares for the well-being of the whole person and becomes an environment of

[98] Lartey, *In Living Color*, 58–59.
[99] Lartey, *In Living Color*, 59.
[100] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2005, 1:423–24.
[101] Lartey, *In Living Color*, 30–31.

"relative safety" where God's people can hear and hold each other's suffering and strengthen their resilience.[102]

Furthermore, Romero challenges preachers doing ministry with wounded, oppressed, and marginalized communities to become the voice of their trauma by naming, acknowledging, and validating their painful reality. Psychiatrist Judith Herman notes that public acknowledgment of the traumatic event is the first step in restoring the breach between the traumatized person and the community.[103] Similarly, theologian Nancy Ramsay notes that "effective preaching needs to acknowledge that we are born not into Eden's paradise but into a milieu of suffering."[104] In addition, she argues that by not acknowledging and naming the suffering and violence that many people experience, the church becomes complicit in the abuse of power and the invisibilization of the victims.[105] By naming, acknowledging, and validating the painful and traumatic experiences and stories of wounded people, preachers "unmask the dehumanizing systems and reveal the humanity" of those who have been dehumanized.[106] By doing this, preachers are better

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[102] However, preachers doing ministry with undocumented Hispanic/Latinx immigrants need to name and acknowledge that Hispanic/Latinx communities are resilient by nature. Despite being colonized, dehumanized, and oppressed for generations and generations, they have developed strategies to survive, cope with difficulties, resist, and thrive. However, their resilience can be strengthened by their connectedness to others.

[103] Judith Herman, *The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (Basic Books: New York, 1997), 70.

[104] John S. McClure and Nancy J. Ramsay, eds., *Telling the Truth: Preaching About Sexual and Domestic Violence* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 1999), 60.

[105] McClure and Ramsay, *Telling the Truth,* 60.

[106] Campbell reflecting on Demetria Martinez' poem "Upon Waking" notes that the first step to resisting the weaponized grotesque "is to declare, 'No stop!' to the weaponized grotesque. Then we attend to the histories and stories that unmask dehumanizing systems and reveal the humanity of those who have been turned into animals or things."

Campbell, *The Scandal of the Gospel*, 23.

Chavez-Dueñas et al., "Healing Ethno-Racial Trauma in Latinx Immigrant Communities," 57.

able to speak a word of hope.[107]

However, as Campbell warns us, "[I]t is very dangerous, even inappropriate, to tell another person's story. There is the danger of false patterns, the danger of misrepresentation. There is the hubris of presuming to speak for someone else—much less for another *group*. There is the problem of individualistic or sentimental sympathy that *ends* with tears."[108] In other words, Campbell warns us of "the problem of telling another person's story from our own perspective."[109] Nevertheless, telling people's stories is an effective way to resist dehumanizing systems. Therefore, Campbell explains, we can be careful in sharing others' stories. We can get to know the people and listen to their stories carefully. In addition, we can invite them to edit and approve the stories we tell and how we use them.[110] Furthermore, "we can be self-critical about the ways in which our perspective inevitably colors the stories we tell."[111] I would also add that when sharing others' stories, we need to be aware of the ways our own wounds might stain the stories we tell. Campbell also highlights the importance of, at times, turning over our pulpits to others so they can tell their own stories.[112] This is something Romero practiced regularly, either by letting people speak from the pulpit or by reading their letters in his homilies.

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[107] Serena Jones, *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), xi.
[108] Campbell, *The Scandal of the Gospel*, 32.
[109] Charles, *The Scandal of the Gospel*, 32.
[110] Charles, *The Scandal of the Gospel*, 35.
[111] Charles, *The Scandal of the Gospel*, 35.
[112] Charles, *The Scandal of the Gospel*, 35.

Another aspect of *feeling* with the people is understanding where our community stands. It includes understanding what our community wants to hear, needs to hear, and is able to hear.[113] Preachers need to listen with empathy not only to their community's sufferings and wounds but also to their prejudices, hatred, colorism, sexism, homophobia, etc. This will help preachers understand what the community needs to hear, wants to hear, and is able to hear.[114] Preaching prophetic and pastoral sermons includes accompanying our communities in their healing and transforming process. This could mean that sometimes we will care for them by helping them face the reality of their own oppressive and hurting behavior and understanding their need to heal and experience transformation.

This also applies to preachers who do not serve in Hispanic/Latinx communities but want to help their communities understand the painful reality of undocumented immigrants and encourage them to help alleviate their pain. The Hispanic House of Studies at the Duke Divinity School does this by leading immersion trips to the US-Mexico border for students and pastors. For many participants, it is a moment of confrontation with the harm the U.S .policies cause not only to people who live in the U.S. but also, and oftentimes even more, to people from underdeveloped Latin American countries. After seeing the suffering of men, women, and children seeking asylum at the US-Mexico border, pastors tend to return to North Carolina infuriated not only by the

[113] Bishop's Committee on Priestly Life and Ministry United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Fulfilled in Your Hearing: The Homily in the Sunday Assembly*.

[114] Bishops Committee on Priestly Life and Ministry, *Fulfill in Your Hearing* (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops: Washington, 1979), 4

suffering they have witnessed but also by becoming aware that the Church is doing very little to help.

One of these pastors preached a "prophetic sermon" the first Sunday after returning from one of these trips and confronted his white middle-class congregation with their complicity in the oppression, persecution, and violence against asylum seekers and undocumented immigrants. Even though he preached the truth, because the people from his congregation were not ready to hear this kind of message, the message did more harm than good. His congregants reacted negatively. Some got upset and left the church, some justified their actions and blamed the asylum seekers for their own suffering, and some asked the pastor to leave.

In such a circumstance, *sentir* with the people means discerning, with the help of the Holy Spirit, what the congregation wants to hear, needs to hear, and is able to hear. Some preachers might be in situations where they will have to take the risk and say what the Church needs to hear even when that means risking their jobs or lives, as Romero did. After all, as Romero preached, "*Una Iglesia que no provoca crisis, un Evangelio que no inquieta, una palabra de Dios que no levanta roncha —como decimos vulgarmente—, una palabra de Dios que no toca el pecado concreto de la sociedad en que está anunciándose, ¿qué Evangelio es ese?*" (A Church that doesn't provoke any crises, a gospel that doesn't unsettle, a word of God that doesn't get under anyone's skin, a word of God that doesn't touch the real sin of the society in which it is being proclaimed—

what gospel is that?).[115] However, whenever the circumstances permit it, the preacher needs to accompany the congregation in a process of transformation and healing that includes little by little helping them identify, name, and acknowledge their complicity in the oppression, persecution, and violence committed against undocumented immigrants in this country.

Sentir con el Migisterio de la Iglesia

The people's reality influenced Romero's reading and interpretation of Scripture, and he was guided by the same hermeneutic in relation to the Magisterium of the Church. But this was a gradual process, one precipitated by Grande's death, as a result of which Romero experienced his own desert experience: the "temptation" either to continue obediently serving the hierarchy of the Church, which he respected deeply, and maintain the status quo of his archdiocese, or to evolve in his faith and stand with and defend the poor, marginalized, and oppressed people whom the hierarchy of the Church had abandoned. Guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit, he decided to do the latter. Therefore, he started a three-year process of redeeming his mother Church, which had influenced and educated him since he was fourteen. Romero redeemed mother Church by teaching in his homilies and living according to the liberating and healing doctrines documented in the Magisterium of the Church but rarely practiced.

[115] Cavada Diez, *Homilías*, 2005, 2:416–17.

However, even though Romero made an effort to make the worship experience (and particularly the sermon) a liberating and healing experience, for the poor, wounded, and suffering people there are aspects of the Roman Catholic Church's theology and doctrine that remain oppressive. For instance, even though in his last homily he acknowledged that Christ has affirmed the greatness of women and that men and women should have equal opportunities,[116] he served in a Christian tradition which excludes women from ordination. Another aspect of the Roman Catholic theology and doctrine that could be oppressive and even harmful is the Eucharist.

During a worship service in my United Methodist congregation—while my husband was officiating the Lord's Supper—a dear member of the congregation came to me in tears. "*No puedo recibir la Comunión porque no me lo merezco*" (I cannot partake of Holy Communion because I am not worthy), she told me. In her previous Catholic Church, she was told she was a sinner because she and her husband of more than forty years had never been married by the Church. "*Nunca he recibido el cuerpo de Cristo*" (I have never received the Body of Christ), she continued, "*y yo creo que nunca lo voy a recibir*" (and I don't think I will ever do it). When she was fourteen years old, she was kidnaped by her now husband. She did not have a say in this. She did not understand what was happening. She only knew that now she had to obey this man in everything. Wanting to be accepted and welcome by the Church she loved, she wanted to marry him in the Church, but he never agreed to doing so. Sadly, the Church disregarded her

[116] Miguel Cavada Diez, *Homilías: Monseñor Óscar A. Romero*, First, vol. 6 (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 2009), 423.

traumatic experience and negated her opportunity to feel loved and accepted and potentially experience healing.

I told her that in The United Methodist Church, every person who answers in faith the invitation to the Lord's Table— "Christ our Lord invites to his table all who love him, who earnestly repent of their sins and seek to live in peace with one another"[117] —is worthy through Jesus Christ to partake of Holy Communion. I explained that even if she had reasons to feel unworthy, which was not the case, she was welcome to God's table because access depends not on our worthiness but on God's grace. We do it because God has offered us God's forgiveness and healing.[118] My words gave her the confidence she needed to partake of the Lord's Supper. When she ate the body and drank the blood of Christ for the first time, she started crying even harder. This time, however, her tears were tears of joy and assurance of being a beloved child of God. I will never forget how proud and happy she looked as she walked back to her seat after Communion.

Not all preachers serve in the Roman Catholic Church, but most serve in religious institutions with their own theologies, doctrines, and traditions. Some of them are liberating and healing, and some are harmful and oppressive. Thus, *sentir* with the people and *sentir* with our religious tradition includes celebrating and practicing the healing, liberating, and grace-full teachings, doctrines, and practices of our Christian traditions. It also includes redeeming those teachings and practices that are oppressive and harmful.

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[117] *The United Methodist Hymnal*, 12.

[118] Gayle Carlton Felton, *This Holy Mystery: A United Methodist Understanding of Holy Communion*, Illustrated edition (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 2005), 30.

However, no institution is perfect. The United Methodist pastors, youth, and lay leaders who were wearing MAGA hats and who pinned hateful messages on the Latinx youths' clothes at the Pilgrimage event ignored the United Methodist principle that states,

> We affirm all persons as equally valuable in the sight of God. We, therefore, work toward societies in which each person's value is recognized, maintained, and strengthened. We support the basic rights of all persons to equal access to housing, education, communication, employment, medical care, legal redress for grievances, and physical protection. We deplore acts of hate or violence against groups or persons based on race, color, national origin, ethnicity, age, gender, disability, status, economic condition, sexual orientation, gender identity, or religious affiliation. Our respect for the inherent dignity of all persons leads us to call for the recognition, protection, and implementation of the principles of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights so that communities and individuals may claim and enjoy their universal, indivisible, and inalienable rights.[119]

In this case, the problem is not that healthy teachings and principles do not exist but that some Methodists refuse to respect and practice them. Here, s*entir* with the United Methodist equivalent of the Catholic "Magisterium" means to promote this social principle within the Church and to condemn racists and oppressive behaviors publicly. Furthermore, it means challenging the Church to speak a word of moral orientation when politics touches the altar and harms people. Sentir with the Magisterium of the Church means to challenge the Church to continue the path of Jesus' salvific mission on earth, to be a faithful continuation of Jesus' homily.

[119] "Social Principles: The Social Community," The United Methodist Church, accessed November 6, 2022, https://www.umc.org/en/content/social-principles-the-social-community.

In summary, *sentir* with our Christian traditions means challenging them to be in solidarity with. and engage in practices that foster liberation and healing for wounded and suffering people.

Conclusion

As I have shown in this dissertation, Romero's sermons, shaped by his theological, hermeneutical, and pastoral convictions, provide guidance for pastors who preach among people suffering from individual, collective, and generational trauma.

Romero teaches us that to preach prophetic and pastoral sermons that speak for God and on behalf of the poor, suffering, and wounded people, preachers need to listen to the voice of God through Scripture and to the people's painful reality and to let them illuminate each other. In other words, with the help of the Holy Spirit, preachers need to listen to the painful reality of the suffering and wounded people and let this reality guide their reading, understanding, and interpretation of Scripture. Similarly, preachers need to let the people's painful reality guide their reading, understanding, and interpretation of their Christian tradition's theology, doctrines, and practices.

As discussed in this chapter, sermons alone cannot provide "sufficient stability" and "physical safety" for communities exposed to continuous traumatic stress, such as the community of undocumented immigrants in the U.S. However, as Romero did, preachers can through their sermons create "sanctuary spaces" or, as Peter Levine calls it, an environment of "relative safety," an atmosphere that conveys refuge, hope, and

possibility for suffering and wounded people.[120] A preacher can do this by being empathetic with and fully present for the suffering and wounded people, naming, acknowledging, validating their suffering and wounds, and helping them encounter God amid their suffering. Sermons that provide this "sanctuary space" could help people cope with continuous traumatic stress and access their self-healing force. In other words, these kinds of sermons could be Balm in Gilead for suffering and wounded people.

Recall the conversation with the member of my congregation that I shared in the introduction to this dissertation. In that conversation, she told me that she and many other members of our Hispanic/Latinx community participated in non-traditional support groups, which were growing exponentially, because they found honesty and empathy in these groups. "*Estos grupos son espacios seguros donde podemos ser honestas y honestos acerca de nuestros traumas, sufrimiento, y luchas*" (These groups are safe spaces where we can be honest about our traumas, suffering, and struggles)," she said. "*Mire pastora*," (Look pastor) she continued, *"Me encanta venir a la iglesia y alabar a Dios y escuchar la palabra de Dios, pero la mayoría de los domingos salgo de la iglesia sintiéndome igual que cuando entré, y a veces incluso más frustrada porque los que predican no reconocen la dolorosa realidad que nosotros enfrentamos todos los días"* (I love coming to church and praising God and listening to the word of God, but most Sundays I leave church feeling the same way I was feeling when I came in, and

[120] Peter A. Levine, *In an Unspoken Voice: How the Body Releases Trauma and Restores Goodness*, 1st edition (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2010), 75.

sometimes even more frustrated because the preachers do not acknowledge the painful reality that we experience every day).

By engaging Romero's theological, hermeneutical, and pastoral framework, preachers can help to change this woman's experience. Through *sentir* with God, with the people, and with the Church, preachers can validate suffering by giving voice to people's trauma, and they can help create a sanctuary space that supports people in their healing process. Sermons can become not ways to avoid trauma, but one means of providing refuge, hope, and possibility.

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Biography

Alma Delia Tinoco Ruiz was born in Mexicali, Baja California, Mexico, in January 1980. She holds a B.S. degree in Industrial Engineering from Sonora Estate University (2002), a Math Teaching Certification from North Carolina State University (2008), and an M.Div. from Duke Divinity School (2013). Her publications include essays in the *International Journal of Homiletics*, *Predicación con Impacto: Preparación y Presentación de Mensajes Bíblicos*, *The Christian Century*, and Duke Divinity School's *DIVINITY* magazine. Professor Tinoco Ruiz was awarded the Denman Fellow of the Foundation for Evangelism (FFE) in 2016, the Forum for Theological Exploration (FTE) Doctoral Fellowship in 2019, the Hispanic Theological Initiative (HTI)/Lilly fellowship in 2020, and the Foundation for Evangelism's (FFE) Raising Up Gospel Leaders Grant in 2021. She is an ordained elder in the United Methodist Church. Tinoco Ruiz currently lives in Durham, N.C., with her husband, Ismael Ruiz-Millan, and her two children, Alec Ismael and Sheccid Estrella. She works at Duke Divinity School as an Assistant Professor of the Practice of Homiletics and Evangelism and Director of the Hispanic House of Studies.