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# An Ardent Flame: Witness to Distant Suffering, Human Rights and Unworthy Victims in the Coverage by *The New York Times* and Two Journals of the Religious Left of the 1980s Civil Wars in El Salvador and Nicaragua

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AN ARDENT FLAME:  
WITNESS TO DISTANT SUFFERING, HUMAN RIGHTS  
AND UNWORTHY VICTIMS IN THE COVERAGE  
BY THE *NEW YORK TIMES* AND TWO JOURNALS OF THE RELIGIOUS LEFT  
OF THE 1980'S CIVIL WARS IN EL SALVADOR AND NICARAGUA

by

Charles A. Flowerday

A THESIS

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An Ardent Flame:

Witness to Distant Suffering, Human Rights and Unworthy Victims  
in the Coverage by the *New York Times* and Two Journals of the Religious Left  
of the 1980's Civil Wars in El Salvador and Nicaragua

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University of Nebraska, 2010

Adviser: John Bender

Scholars have investigated witness to distant suffering (WTDS) almost entirely in visual media. This study examines it in print. This form of reporting will be examined in two publications of the religious left as contrasted with the *New York Times*. The thesis is that, more than a given technology, WTDS consists of the journalist's moral commitment and narrative skills and the audience's analytical resources and trust. In the religious journals, liberation theology provides the moral commitment, the writers and editors the narrative skills and trust and the special vision of the newly empowered poor the analytical foundation. In bearing witness to those who have suffered state or guerrilla terrorism in El Salvador and Nicaragua during the 1980s, we will investigate a distinction between "worthy" and "unworthy victims," as articulated by Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky (1988) in *Manufacturing Consent*. This last issue has a special ethical and political significance. Media witnessing to the suffering of strangers can help them become known, and so "worthy." It can help them, and their plight and cause, become better recognized. This is the power of the media.

This thesis is dedicated to my son, Sean Herrin Flowerday, and to those who gave their lives in the struggle for social justice in El Salvador and Nicaragua during the civil wars of the 1980s.

### Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge John Bender, whose support and contributions significantly improved the final product, as well as Charlyne Berens and Joe Starita, also members of my committee.

Brothers and sisters, let us raise the lit torch that is the living symbol of our Christianity, an ardent flame that cleans, purifies and transforms, illuminating the future for humanity.

—from *Via Crucis*, “The Way of the Cross,” a Nicaraguan peasant song that celebrates a 320-kilometer walk from the war zone near Honduras to the capital of Managua, a pilgrimage re-enacting the stations of the cross to protest the *contra* war, *Sojourners*, June 1986

As long as I fed the poor, they called me a saint. When I asked, “Why are there so many poor?” they called me a communist.

—Dom Helder Camara (1909-1999), Archbishop of Recife, Brazil, liberation theologian and a contributor to *Sojourners*, a journal explored herein

Central America is Fantasy Isthmus, a region of the American mind, peopled by our own political demons, where too often expediency rules, and rhetoric substitutes for reality.

—Fred McNeil, retired Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Intelligence, *Washington Post*, March 1, 1987

“We have been kinder to President Reagan than any president I can remember since I’ve been at the *Post*.”

—Ben Bradlee, former executive editor of the *Washington Post*, quoted in the first sentence of Mark Hertsgaard’s *On Bended Knee: The Press and the Reagan Presidency* (1988)

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## **Chapter 1**

**The Issues and Their Consequence:**

**Thinking Critically about Christianity, Human Rights**

**and the Suffering of Strangers—**

**with Notes on Methods and Models**

## What Is at Stake and Why It Matters

### The Privilege of the Poor and the Power of Witness

In the post-World War II era, two religious publications in the United States have shared a strong commitment to championing the rights of the disadvantaged and disinherited as a biblical mandate about social witness. These are *Christianity and Crisis* and *Sojourners*. In this ethic, a traditional, if minority, expression of the social side of Christianity has been revitalized by an application of critical theory to religion in liberation theology. This theological awakening in Latin America and other parts of the developing world has become a source of advocacy for social justice and the full gamut of human rights for disadvantaged populations, not just the civil-political rights we honor in this country but the agreements on social, economic and cultural rights that the United States has not signed (United Nations, 2009; Appendix A).

As a way to translate theory into practice, we want to apply this perspective on social ethics to an emerging area of media studies concerned with those who suffer the most: “witness to distant suffering” (WTDS), sometimes known as *the suffering of strangers*. Being a witness encompasses a rich tradition in media, law and theology and contains much moral, media and discursive complexity. As a form of witness, WTDS looks at social and media issues from the point of view of the most vulnerable or abused, often those who have suffered catastrophic losses due to natural or human-rights disasters. In this thesis, it will provide a discursive window on the journalistic application of a theology that advocates for the downtrodden.

In a key article, communications scholar John Peters (2001) notes, “As a noun, *witness* is intricate. The term involves all three points of a basic communication

triangle: (1) the agent who bears witness, (2) the utterance or text itself, [and] (3) the audience who witnesses” (p. 709). Media theorists Paul Frosh and Amit Pinchevski (2009a), say, as a gerund, witnessing “refers...to the appearance of witnesses in media reports...media themselves bearing witness, and the positioning of media audiences as witnesses to depicted events” (p. 295). So far, it is the topic of a small but increasing amount of scholarship (Ashuri & Pinchevski, 2008). It has been examined almost entirely in visual media, but we will be looking intently at how it works in print. *The main proposition of this thesis is that, more than a given technology—such as film, video or photography—witness to distant suffering consists of the moral commitment and narrative skills of the journalist and the analytical resources and trust of the audience.* In the religious journals examined, the liberation ethic provides the moral commitment, the writers and editors trustworthy narrative skills and the privileged vision of the powerless the analytical foundation.

Critical theory has a number of starting points within social science and philosophy and a few closely related definitions. They converge on the goal of enhancing “human emancipation in circumstances of domination and oppression,” as articulated by Max Horkheimer (1982, p. 244), director of the Frankfurt (Germany) School's Institute for Social Research, an incubator for philosophies of liberation and critical thinking. It can be summarized as an examination of the stated benefits of the status quo relative to actual recipients of actual benefits. It is sometimes called “critical inquiry” and involves both theory and practice:

In light of the practical goal of...overcoming all the circumstances that limit human freedom, [such a] goal could be furthered only through interdisciplinary research that includes psychological, cultural, and social dimensions, as well as

institutional forms of domination...It must explain what is wrong with current social reality, identify the actors to change it, and provide...norms for criticism and...goals for social transformation. (Bohman, 2005)

Another distinguishing characteristic of critical inquiry is that virtually none of its supporters want to emphasize violence as a means of changing social and cultural conditions or roles. With its emphasis on the dynamics of power, however, critical inquiry supplies a vigorous and vibrant method for a theology of the socially and economically marginalized. Liberation theology, in turn, is founded on a first principle adapted from critical theory: “the epistemological privilege of the poor” (Gutierrez, 1973). This refers not to how much the powerless know about the world, but their position in it, their perspective on injustice—on systemic dysfunction, mistreatment and abuse. They have a vantage point on domination and oppression the rest of us lack, so their concerns should be heard in inverse proportion to their social status. It is sometimes called “a preferential option for the poor” (Gutierrez, 1973).

As a vantage point on human rights and undeserved suffering, we will look at liberation theology in the Christian-left journals as an example of religious media *as* alternative media, an innovation in media studies (support for this assertion is explored below). The Christian-left media will also be compared and contrasted with a classic example of the mainstream media, *The New York Times (NYT)*. *The Times* will be used as an indicator, a touchstone, of traditional media.

### **The Dilemma and Its Victims**

When we look at media portrayals of some of the worst things humans are capable of, atrocities and human-rights abuses, we soon see that some victims seem to

count more than others. Some are accorded real identities in histories and in-depth portrayals, and some are merely noted or become statistics, an unfortunate but critical distinction the media often make between “worthy” and “unworthy” victims (as used by Herman and Chomsky, 1988). Yet how can we decide which victims count and which do not? How can we evaluate suffering? These questions have plagued one of the leading theorists in this area, Luc Boltanski, author of *Distant Suffering: Morality, Media and Politics* (1999). He explores the ethical dilemma one confronts when one seeks to cause an intervention in situations of mass suffering. Worthy or not, worldwide, there are too many victims, he says. You cannot help them all. Nor can the media devote all its time or space to the suffering of strangers.

There are no easy or final answers here. But for this study, in examining some of the most devastating and lethal moments in the history of Central America, in bearing witness to those who suffered state or guerilla terrorism during intense civil strife in Nicaragua and El Salvador in the 1980s, we will constrain this task by paying particular attention to human rights. The human-rights agreements that most of the world’s nations have signed holding all peoples to minimum standards of behavior offer a indication of the levels of suffering, deprivation and anonymity that should be most prevented (Appendix A). These standards serve as operational definitions of certain fundamental conditions needed for a nonviolent and habitable human existence. In this thesis, violations of the most basic of these right merit an approach to reporting we have defined as “witness to distant suffering” in print media and as a corollary, because of its depth and specificity, one that honors its victims as “worthy.”

The latter issue has been raised by a pair of progressive scholars looking at bias in mainstream media (Herman & Chomsky, 1998) and has a special ethical and political significance. Witnessing to the suffering of strangers can help them become known, and so “worthy,” can help them become recognized, and so their cause, their passion, also be recognized. They become heroes if they survive torture or incidents of mass killing. They can become part of a symbol that lives on if they do not. Worthy victims are more likely to become emblems, in media and society, of a social commitment to prevent the suffering that afflicted them, and unworthy victims much less so.

This is the power of the media.

Lastly, if the media portrayal of distant suffering is compelling enough, the witness experience extends to the readers and the ethical options they must confront. They too are witnesses, but thousands of miles away in this case, their obligations are not clear and their moral options limited. Still, regarding events chronicled here, many people found such options in public, media-oriented opposition to administration policy via a few social movements concerned with Central American policy. One called “Sanctuary” assisted Salvadoran refugees in their quest to stay in this country. The Reagan administration routinely returned them to their homeland, often imperiling their lives. The other, “Witness for Peace,” placed US volunteers near the Honduran border as a human shield to deter *contra* violence. Fact-finding visits had revealed that when church-related missions put US citizens in combat zones, the *contras* did not attack.

## **Summary of Purpose**

Our analysis will use a theology and philosophy of liberation to provide ethical support for and meaning to a new form of reporting, or really, an old form seen in a new way, the critical characteristic of which is reporting on the “suffering of strangers.” At its most affecting, it has a power to overcome regional, national, ethnic and socio-economic differences and so takes on special ethical significance. Humans are less likely to help strangers than family, friends or neighbors and even less so distant ones. When they do, something extraordinary has happened. When the media assist this process, they have done what they can to bring light into darkness.

In examining how the media treat distant suffering and unworthy victims, we will use cultural and sub-cultural markers, linguistic cues and clues, to determine how competing cultures assign meaning to the suffering and deaths of some people and none to others, consigning them to virtual oblivion. Whenever mass killing takes place, this dilemma takes on a poignancy and ethical urgency that makes great demands on reporters, editors and audiences, and soon enough, on nations. Anonymous victims tend to be forgotten and should not be. Worthy victims leave a greater ethical legacy than unworthy victims. The media have both a special calling and burden when it comes to highlighting some or failing to with others.

## **The Approach: Methods and Models**

First, using basic (non-statistical) quantitative assessments, we will look at bias and emphasis in *The New York Times*, through analyses done by two notable scholars of politics and media in a well-known study of human rights and election fairness,

then through a comparison between *The Times* and the two religious journals regarding the quantity and quality of witness to distant suffering in each.

Next, selections from each publication will be interpreted in light of differences in hermeneutics, the art of interpreting a text. This analysis will look at the way these journals build connections and credibility into a story. Explaining this process, we will use critical inquiry to analyze key rhetorical and discursive issues in selected excerpts from each journal to reveal the social and cultural values at work. Rhetoric is not conventionally associated with news writing, but it simply means persuasive or motivational language. The ethics of that persuasion and the degree of that motivation vary by author, context and audience (Foss, 1989), but it does not depend on lavish prose. A story can be told in relatively disinterested terms and be moving rhetorically.

Discourse analysis comes from a number of disciplines and has various closely related applications (van Dijk, 1988; Blommaert, 2005; Johnstone, 2002/2005). van Dijk (1988) describes it as “a new, interdisciplinary field of study that has emerged from several other disciplines of the humanities and social sciences, such as linguistics, literary studies, anthropology, semiotics, sociology, psychology, and speech communication” (p. 17). While these developments happened around the same time during the late 1960s and early 1970s, during the 1980s, they began to influence one another. This led to a new integrated field of text or discourse studies (1988).

Discourse can mean almost any system of communication or signs. But in this study, as pioneered by Foucault (1972) and others, it means firm but flexible ideological commitments reflected in official language and socially accepted categories of thought. Critical discourse analysis uses critical theory to look at power

relations and social structure encoded in modes of communication, especially those embedded in social, political or cultural relationships (Josselson, 2004).

**The culturist turn.** Assisting this pursuit is a holistic understanding of religious experience and its social ecology called “the culturist turn” in studies of religious media (Hoover, 2002). It uses cultural analysis to deal with specific problems posed by scholarship on religion. Some of these are: a) that it has an experiential dimension, which resists the social-science positivism in which media studies traditionally have been grounded; b) that media scholars have traditionally seen religion as a limited and diminishing part of our social life; c) that secular scholars have trouble capturing conceptually what is by nature a “complex, nuanced, sensitive, paradoxical, and multilayered phenomenon” (p. 29); and d) that religion is at once a social and cultural phenomenon—and a political one, as we will see—one that affects many aspects of our common life at the same time (Hoover, 2002).

Hoover explains that “the turn to culturalism” was articulated early on by Robert White (1983) in the *Journal of Communication*. White, a Jesuit, pointed to various reasons for this trend. Communication and media scholars were abandoning instrumentalist and utilitarian models and were increasingly absorbed in an interdisciplinary dialog that looked to cultural studies and the humanities. They were expanding their interests from specific effects on individuals, small groups and institutions to influences on whole cultures, and, returning the favor, cultural-studies scholars began showing an increasing interest in media and mass communications, looking at production and reception holistically. White also says that the

interdisciplinary nature of cultural studies offered an epistemological promise for the traditionally marginalized:

White (1983)...pointed out two elements of the turn to culturalism that are essential to [cultural studies'] influence on media scholarship: first, that it stresses the *forms of everyday life*, and "*lived cultures*"; second, that it also entailed a methodological turn. Culturalism is known as much for *its advocacy of ethnographic, qualitative, feminist, post-colonial, and interpretive methodologies* as it is for its theoretical commitments (Lindlof, 1987; Lull, 1990; Moores, 1993). Finally, White [said] one of the defining principles of culturalism...[is] that the objective of media scholarship must be to focus on *meaning construction*. (Hoover, 2002, p. 29) [italics added]

He then lays out these methodological first principles:

Therefore, culturalism...means a stress on reception and the moments and contexts of *meaning making*. It means a focus on *everyday lived experience*. It means qualitative as opposed to quantitative methods. It means an interdisciplinarity where the social-scientific sensibilities of communication and media studies encounter cultural studies (in particular, anthropology and folklore<sup>1</sup>) and the humanities. It means a contextual analytic sensibility where systems of representation, meaning, and exchange are *critically analyzed and interpreted*. (p. 29) [italics added]

**Culture wars and realpolitik: Central American and U.S.** Using this approach, of special interest in this study will be how the three publications mediate not just words and pictures, but the competing values of these cultures and subcultures:

- The traditional cultures of El Salvador and Nicaragua, formed under colonialism and neocolonialism, and their leaders among the landed and industrial elite. Under them, a patronal paradigm replaced the sustainable subsistence economies of the indigenous with plantation agriculture growing cash crops for export. The result has been an agribusiness owned by a combination of US and local elites dominating millions of peasants. The latter are increasingly moved off their land

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<sup>1</sup> Including the myths and teaching stories of scripture.

- and migrate to cities, often residing in shanty towns. In addition, an industrial *nouveau riche* has emerged since World War II, sometimes competing, often cooperating with the aristocrats. This cultural alliance has traditionally secured the allegiance of the church as well. Overlaid on this history of Iberian-American domination, the globalization championed by US and world neoconservatives has extended this legacy (Berryman, 1984; Cleary, 1997; Klaiber, 1998).
- The alternative and dissenting cultures of El Salvador and Nicaragua, religious and secular. At least since the early 1960s, running parallel to social-justice movements rife in Latin America, progressives in the Catholic Church have supported a new deal for the poor. The mainstream Protestant denominations have too, but to a lesser degree because of their lesser presence. This movement for social justice has focused on health care, education and land reform but also on a redistribution of wealth and power generally. This rural-urban mix of the disinherited, usually led by better-educated reformers and revolutionaries, is a fixture in Latin America and makes for a very volatile social situation, one that has historically been put down by indiscriminate violence with little regard for human rights (often called “dirty war” or “state terror”). In spite of gruesome repression, this mix of revolutionary idioms and a new reading of Christianity have become a pervasive social-political resistance that has proved more enduring than most elites believed it could (Berryman, 1984; Cleary, 1997; Klaiber, 1998).
  - The traditional-values culture of the United States, not as sacramentally or mythically based than most Latin American culture. More instrumental and pragmatic, it has an enduring foundation in patriotic, quiescent “civil” religion.

- Geopolitically, this culture has been expressed in the Monroe Doctrine, the Reagan Doctrine and, of late, the Bush Doctrine—justifying pre-emptive intervention where we choose—as well as in a more secular quietism expressed in the cultural imperative that "the business of America is business." Allied with this ethos are more traditional fundamentalist, evangelical or mainline Christians who believe, according to the apostle Paul, that they should be subject to the powers that be (Noll, 1990; Smith, 1996; Stoll, 1997; Underwood, 2006).
- US alternative, leftist or counter culture and its media—in this study, expressed in the Christian-left journals. Moving on roads paved by the civil rights and anti-war movements, their values have been informed by critical inquiry and an awareness of the real Central American experience. For progressive church people, the mentality of traditional US culture is problematic. They believe the marketplace, as the solution to social ills, is an idol, a false god. They point out that neither Jesus nor the prophets were comfortable with the court, the temple or the marketplace (Moses freeing his people from slavery; Amos, Isaiah and Jeremiah denouncing the rich and the priesthood; Jesus driving out the money changers and extolling the privileged place of the poor in a new kingdom). These values are made manifest in social activism calling attention to the effects of US interference in former Euro-American colonies (Smith, 1996; Wellman, 2008).

According to US progressives (political definitions appear at the start of Chapter 3), in the name of anti-communism during the 1980s, US intervention became a scourge for most of the poor in these two countries. In the United States and Central

America, most progressives denounced it for supporting a cultural pogrom in El Salvador, one that demonized an insurrection against a patronal government allied with death squads, while it funded another uprising in Nicaragua, one fighting a leftist government duly elected after 1984 (Klaiber, 1998). They spoke out against the newly elected presidency of Ronald Reagan regarding his administration's sponsorship of armed actors who, it was soon found out, had little regard for civilians—most of them the poor or their advocates. Accentuating the Reagan team's determination to root out leftists in Central America, the Nicaraguan regime professed nonalignment but maintained close ties to Cuba and sought help from Moscow, particularly after US attempts to overthrow it intensified.

US progressives said that military intervention in the conflicts of two poor, small nations of minimal threat to the United States had less to do with democracy and more with maintaining US cultural and economic hegemony in the region (Smith, 1996). The Reagan administration and its supporters maintained the United States had the right to do all it could to keep communism at bay, to keep the dominoes from falling through Mexico to Texas (Gwertzman, 1981). That debate played out in many ways and forums across the nation. Because of the deep religious visions surrounding the class violence in these nations, one very revealing way to view them is through the lenses of the leaders of the progressive religious press. This perspective will be checked against the standard-bearer of mainstream journalism, *The New York Times*.

**The hermeneutics of faith and the hermeneutics of suspicion.** As an expression of the traditional and alternative cultures outlined above, the journalistic cultures in

this study can also be understood in terms of a distinction used by Ricoeur (1970).

These are the hermeneutics of “faith” and “suspicion.” In an article of the same name in *Narrative Inquiry*, Ruthellen Josselson (2004), a psychologist at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, wants to limit the polarization of faith and suspicion and instead call them a hermeneutics of “restoration” and “demystification.”

As with other typologies, Josselson (2004) explains this is a dialectic. In both types of texts, meanings are restored and demystified, so these are points of emphasis. She offers these models in the spirit of Ricoeur (1970), she says, who said they could help reveal the “contours of the hermeneutic field” (p. 9). She says the difference is how one gets to the meaning, not that one requires work and the other does not. Josselson explores them as models of narrative psychology, but they also can apply to our readings of *The Times* and the Christian-left publications.

Restoration is aimed at discovering the meaning of a relatively direct but symbolic message. It is typified by a “willingness...to absorb as much as possible of the message in its given form....It respects the symbol [system represented], understood as a cultural mechanism for our apprehension of reality, as a place of revelation” (Josselson, 2004, p. 3).

The interpreter may seek to foreground what has been in the background, make smaller meanings larger, or vice versa, but does not alter the frame. In other words, implicit meanings may become explicit, but they are not at odds with the general tenor of the message. Its central method is one liberation theologians have used from the beginning: the hermeneutical circle. Parts, such as key passages on liberation, inform wholes, such as patterns of domination. Wholes, reexamined, inform parts,

such as new forms of solidarity acquired in small discussion groups called “basic Christian communities,” an evocation of the original disciples, or statements of resistance by a beloved priest.

In this model, issues of race, class and gender are more likely to have been raised but not fleshed out than to have been buried entirely. They may have been identified but a response or remedy is not yet clear, as with a marginalized people passionately seeking an authentic voice in a better government. In this hermeneutic, we want to understand the experience in terms of anthropologist Clifford Geertz’s “thick description” (1973), that is, from the native point of view. This will be our approach to the Christian-left journals.

In contrast, a hermeneutics of demystification sees the text as a disguise. It is characterized by a healthy distrust of the symbolic trappings of the reality represented. Ricoeur (1970) traces this approach through Marx, Nietzsche and Freud. Josselson (2004) explains, “All three of these ‘masters of suspicion’ look upon the contents of consciousness as in some sense ‘false’; all three...transcend this falsity through a reductive interpretation and critique” (p. 3). This hermeneutic also is important in liberation theology. It pursues a different interpretive circle. By becoming aware of suffering, if the discursive community believes there are some ways of using scripture (or the church) that justify egalitarian ends, and other ways that justify individualistic, partial or oppressive ends, it adapts its interpretation of scripture (and reality) based on its new reading of the Bible and its witness to suffering. One’s experience is re-interpreted in light of a liberation-oriented reading of the text after challenging any ideological framework that condones suffering.

This hermeneutic will be used to “demystify” the articles from *The New York Times*. This is not a model imposed on *The Times* but one arrived at inductively after researching *The Times*’ approach to human-rights reporting in these two countries during their civil wars. We will examine whether *The Times*’ status can blind one to a bias or agenda regarding the plight of the poor in a small country half a world away. As the paramount example of disinterested reporting, with better access to decision makers than most media in the country, could it fall prey to its own privilege, its need to maintain that access and that status? Might that cause it to run stories that tell only part of the story? This will become a crucial hermeneutical issue, one that will challenge one’s abilities to analyze a text “objectively” and to perform the rhetorical detective work required of critical thinkers.

### **The Scholarly Landscape and Niche**

**Witness to distant suffering in visual and print media.** As explained, witness to distant suffering in visual media has captured the interest of scholars for fairly obvious and often dramatic reasons. The following documentation offers some basic support for discerning a strong scholarly emphasis on WTDS in visual over print media. These results include articles, abstracts, reviews and presentations to the International Communications Association (ICA). Searching all fields, there were:

- No results in EBSCO’s Communication and Mass Media Complete digital database for “witness to distant suffering” and 1,045 results for “witness” and “distant” and “suffering.” I examined the first 500. The rest were increasingly irrelevant as many were on physiological or psychological suffering or the

judicial meaning of witness. For the latter search, EBSCO's Academic Premier yielded four results. Three were duplicated in Communication and Mass Media Complete; the other was on a human-rights documentary, *A Silent Sky*.

- No results for “mediated suffering” in Communication and Mass Media Complete and 13 for “mediated” and “suffering.”
- No results in Sage's Communication Studies Full-text digital database for “witness to distant suffering” and 37 for “witness” and “distant” and “suffering.”
- No results in Sage's Communication Studies Full-text for “mediated suffering,” 197 for “mediated” and “suffering.” Of those relevant to this study, a large majority from Sage were also in Communication and Mass Media Complete.

The results included articles on nontraditional media or fictional treatments not particularly relevant to this study, such as mobile phone imagery, video games, personal videos and a feature film, *Witness* with Harrison Ford, by Peter Weir. They also included a number of presentations to the ICA in the last few years, a sign of the subject's increasing popularity but as yet unpublished. I downloaded 140 articles or abstracts from these searches for background for this thesis. All of these were examined; not all were read through. These included 19 on the philosophy and ethics of witness or suffering that did not focus on a given medium and five on the topic of trauma and testimonial, also independent of media.

From the searches above, of those that specified media, eight focused on some combination that included but did not emphasize print. These were articles or abstracts on: Doctors Without Borders, in which television dominates but print is

mentioned; bearing witness to a traumatic (group) past, which emphasizes visual media; the new cosmopolitan vision in media and cultural studies, emphasizing visual media; citizen journalism from war zones—particularly online video with some mention of online print; international response to coverage of Hurricane Katrina, emphasizing visual media; incendiary media and human rights in the run-up to war; and reviews of: three books on war correspondence and one on compassion fatigue (one review); a book on war reporting; and a book on compassion fatigue.

Twelve focused solely or mostly on print media. These were articles or abstracts on an AP reporter's witnessing 200 executions in Texas; journalist-philosopher Michael Ignatieff and the reporter as moral witness; the Western news blackout of the East Timor genocide; online citizen reporting on human rights in India; coverage of the great floods of the lower Mississippi in 1927 and 2005 (Katrina); an 18<sup>th</sup>-century anthropologist as travel journalist reporting on an atrocity in Africa; Holocaust trauma and its narratives—fiction and nonfiction; coverage of human rights and unworthy victims in China; what journalism cannot do to stop mass suffering; and reviews of three books on the civil rights movement (one review); a book on reporting war crimes; and a book on reporting the war in Chechnya. Out of the 140 downloaded, 21, or 15%, dealt with or mentioned print media, none specifically as “witness to distant suffering.” Excluding reviews and witnessing of lawful executions, this comes to 12%. Of these, twelve, or 8.5%, focused mostly or solely on print media, none as “witness to distant suffering.” Excluding reviews and witnessing legal executions, they represent 5.7%.

**Religion and media and media of the religious left.** Two traditionally neglected areas of media studies have received increasing scholarly attention in the past two decades: religion and media, along with a general increase in work on religion and society (Hoover, 2002), in response to the rise of the religious right; and alternative media (Gibbs & Hamilton, 2001), along with a dramatic increase in such media, much of it in response to the dominance of corporate media and the political right.

The topic of religion and media has moved from ho-hum obscurity to an emerging if perplexing variable reflecting one of the major events of the post-Vietnam War era, the rift in values breaking along social and political fault lines: the culture wars. Yet as recently as 2002, in the first issue of the *Journal of Media and Religion*, editors Stout and Buddenbaum (2002) said, “An extensive literature review concludes that [the topic of] religion and media is seriously understudied” (p. 5).

Relatively underappreciated, alternative media have been around wherever open societies have spawned them or closed societies required them. But during the 1960s, a US social movement of the New Left and counter culture flared and then flamed out. It created an explosion of alternative journals (Gibbs & Hamilton, 2001). Virtually every large or mid-sized city had one. Many have died, some have survived and others have inspired inheritors, most with an emphasis on politics, arts and culture. In addition, by the 1990s, as it became clear that the benefits of globalization were partial, for the most part deepening divisions between global haves and have-nots, and as the Internet liberated dissenters from the dominance of big media, these media have proliferated (Downing, 2003; Haas, 2004). Scholarly interest in them has also increased dramatically, virtually booming in the 2000s (Rauch, 2007).

Relatively unexplored in US media has been any combination of the two. The following documentation supports this. Searching all fields, there were:

- No results in EBSCO's Communication and Mass Media Complete for "media" and "religious left" or for "media" and "religious" and "left"; also, no results for "media" and "Christian left" or "media" and "Christian" and "left";
- For the latter search, EBSCO's Academic Premier yielded 59 results. All dealt with mainstream media. Only one dealt with issues remotely related to this study. It used *Christianity and Crisis* founder Reinhold Niebuhr's ethics to argue that the "lifeworld" of renowned media and critical theorist Jurgen Habermass is colonized not, as the latter maintains, by the "delinguistified" media of money and power, but by the people who mismanage money and power (Ilup, 2009);
- No results for US media in Sage Communication Studies Full-text out of three listings for "media" and "Christian left." All were on other countries, and none had "media" in title; also, no results on US media out of 15 in the same database for "media" and "Christian" and "left." All were on other countries, mostly Latin America, and none had "media" in the title;
- No results in Communication and Mass Media Complete for "religion" and "alternative media" and two for "religion" and "alternative" and "media"; in the latter search, one was on letters to the editor about an editorial on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict written by a professor at the University of North Carolina (Ogan, Qıpek & Özakça, 2005). The other was on the problems of teaching journalism history. It mentioned alternative and religious media in a list of topics neglected in the instruction of journalism history (Nerone, 1990).

- Out of 74 articles on alternative media downloaded from these databases for this thesis (all were examined; not all were read), none dealt with the Christian left.
- Out of 70 articles on religion and media downloaded from these databases, two dealt with media of the Christian left. Both discuss Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker movement and magazine. In neither is “alternative media” mentioned by name, nor is the magazine treated in such a context. One treats the movement’s protest of the Vietnam War and cited stances against it in the magazine (Jablonski, 2009). The other focuses on Day’s candidacy for sainthood and discusses her work as a leftist journalist before her conversion and its influence on the magazine (Mehltretter, 2009). Another on religious-media consumption and politics never uses “religious left” or “Christian left” (Newman & Smith, 2007).

As indicated, Christians with what we now usually call “progressive” views have a long history in the Western world generally and the United States in particular, but few know of it. For the vast majority of the American public and most church people, Christian media is the sole province of the Christian right. Diane Winston (2007), professor at the University of Southern California’s Annenberg School for Communication and a specialist in religion and media, noted that in a survey of 10 general-interest or consumer magazines and six daily newspapers, between January 2005 and June 2006, 369 pieces mentioned the religious right and 58 (13.5%) mentioned the religious left, religious liberals or religious progressives. Rothenberg (2006) says that while the religious left is an important presence in this country,

particularly regarding peace and social-justice issues, it has limited finances and owns no major media.

Even so, two journals of the Christian left have achieved a distinguished record, have offered venues for many with impressive secular credentials, have supplied views and information to decision makers and opinion leaders and have exhibited decided longevity. These are *Christianity and Crisis (C&C)* and *Sojourners* magazine, journals of advocacy reporting and social commentary. Mark Hulsether (1999), author of *Building a Protestant Left: Christianity and Crisis Magazine*, places these publications in the religious-media landscape and in relation to each other. In a review of *The Fracture of Good Order: Christian Antiliberalism and the Challenge to American Politics* (Bivins, 2003), he (2005) says:

Perhaps because such grassroots action [by the Sojourners intentional community] matches Bivins' categories especially well, he says...little about the most influential aspect of the Sojourners' work...its production of *Sojourners* magazine, which...became (after the 1993 collapse of its more theologically liberal and feminist-friendly competitor, *Christianity and Crisis*) the single most important magazine of the Protestant left. (p. 274)

For context, a third publication worth noting is the *Christian Century*. It was founded in 1908 during Progressive Era optimism about liberal Christians humanizing the worst effects of industrialism. It continues to publish and has a very respectable circulation of about 36,000 (Dart, 2006). However, it will not be examined here because it is generally center-left and focuses more on the United States, whereas *C&C* and *Sojourners* have been farther left and more committed to southern-hemisphere issues. Winston (2007) notes,

As religion's role in culture and society disappeared from mainstream news, the faithful read their own outlets to track the intersection of religion and current

events. Protestants could choose from *Christianity and Crisis's* progressive perspective, the more *mainstream Christian Century*, or the *evangelically oriented Christianity Today*. Catholics had *Commonweal* and *America*; Jews perused *Commentary* or *Jewish Currents*. (p. 974) [italics added]

*The Christian Century* has not ignored discussions of liberation theology, but it has carried fewer on-the-ground reports about liberation advocates in impoverished or troubled regions with human-rights violations, a focus of this study.

### **Liberation Theology, Basic Christian Communities and Human Rights**

Liberation theology was born largely in Latin America during the 1960s and 1970s in response to deep social, political and economic divisions between land-owning, industrial and policy-making elites and a largely agrarian poor, often in semi-feudal arrangements such as sharecropping or tenant farming or as mere hired labor. These peasants are often joined in a quest for social justice by the poorest of the urban poor, residents of shantytowns called *barrios* (neighborhoods), where displaced peasants, moved off their land by the expansion of hacienda- or *latifunda*-style plantations, mechanization or the search for a better life, look for work. Putting up temporary dwellings of corrugated tin, plywood, wood scraps, adobe or other cheap materials, they become residents and begin advocating for better jobs, wages, schools and health care, as well as better water, housing and sanitation facilities. These are also a concern for the rural poor, but their overriding issue is enough land to feed their families, often in doubt (Berryman, 1984; Klaiber, 1998; Cleary, 1997).

A point of ethical parallelism here is that this pattern, moving peasants seen as inferior off their land, is also a first-century biblical paradigm (Crossan, 1991) and a paradigm in world history in general (Robert Hitchcock, personal communication,

September 2001, in the teaching of ecological anthropology). Historically, elites have moved subsistence farmers off the land to create more lucrative and specialized agriculture, and the peasants have alternately mounted resistance or migrated to cities. Progressive scholars now believe the earliest expression of Christianity, the Jesus movement, consisted largely of marginal and displaced peasants (Crossan, 1991). Then it took root in urban centers because that is where the displaced go. In addition, the prophets of the Hebrew scriptures (Old Testament) routinely denounced the rich for oppressing the agrarian poor. In this context, once the biblical message is stripped of its majority-culture gloss, liberation theology has an obvious appeal. When illiterate peasants are taught to read and can study the Bible with an eye toward patterns of dominance and liberation, they find parallels that are empowering (Berryman, 1984; Klaiber, 1998).

The aspirations of the poor in Latin America were aided by the Catholic Church's formation of *comunidades de base*, or basic Christian communities. Usually 12 to 25 members, they meet to share their struggles, read scripture and discuss its meaning for their domestic, social and political lives. Originally designed to deal with a priest shortage, they are often moderated by catechists, or lay leaders, called "Delegates of the Word" (Berryman, 1984; Klaiber, 1998). As these groups reflected on a new interpretation of God's word, one that said they were not poor by divine will but were co-creators of their world who could change it, they became increasingly involved in advocating for the rights and programs above. As the catechists became leaders of these groups, they—along with political priests, nuns, community organizers and leaders of labor, farmworkers' or peasants' unions—became the targets of those who

would deprive them of their rights to life, free speech and the pursuit of a better deal. When this happens, often over decades, the dispossessed and their better-educated leaders become militant and find ways to secure the weapons of war. When that happens, the politically and economically powerful often have ratcheted up their repression to levels of terror that violate common decency, the sanctity of life and human-rights standards worldwide (Cleary, 1997; Koonings & Kruijt, 1999).

### **Human Rights and Media Studies**

A third area in which media studies should prove fruitful but which has produced surprisingly little until lately is human rights (Ovsiovitch, 1993). This too is changing. Ramos, Ron and Thoms (2007) found the median change in use of the term “human rights” by six major Western media<sup>2</sup> from 1986 to 2000 was an increase of 95%. Quickening this interest is the observation that ideological biases still condition human-rights coverage. Brooten (2004, p. 10, citing Thomas, 2000) says,

Human rights reporting is not by any stretch of the imagination interest-free. The inability of the world’s media to see the larger picture of human rights is a tacit acknowledgement that not every life is precious and *worthy* of being safeguarded. [Media] *representation...is always a political act*. It needs to be analyzed within a context in which meanings are linked to real interests, political, economic, civilizational. [italics added]

This study wants to make such connections regarding such real interests.

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<sup>2</sup> *The Economist, Newsweek, The New York Times, The Guardian, Le Monde and Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung.*

## **Chapter 2**

### **Media, Movements, Morality and How We See Them:**

#### **Witness to Distant Suffering and Framing**

### **Witness to Distant Suffering As a Paradigm and Ethical Conundrum**

Before we investigate our centerpiece concept, witness to distant suffering, we should place it in the context of the many understandings of who and what is a witness. This has a compelling history that Peters (2001) turns over and over in “Witnessing,” a seminal essay:

In religious contexts, witness can have a more private meaning as inward conviction of spiritual truth, which in turn may motivate the activity of “witnessing” (evangelizing). In law, literature, history and journalism alike, a witness is an observer or source possessing privileged (raw, authentic) proximity to facts. A witness, in sum, can be an *actor* (one who bears witness), an *act* (the making of a special sort of statement), the semiotic residue of that act (the *statement* as text) or the inward experience that authorizes the statement (the *witnessing* of an event). (p. 709) [italics added]

Peters (2001) calls being a witness “the paradigm case of a medium,” and notes these relationships to communications: a) present in time and space, the prototype; b) present in space, absent in time—historicity: a shrine, memorial, museum or serial mass audience (their visitors); c) present in time, absent in space: a live broadcast; and d) absent in space and time, recorded witness: a tape, film/video, book or article.

He considers the first instance “sacred” and the last “profane,” the most difficult position in witnessing. However, this difficulty may not be as severe as he believes. Trust is always at stake in witnessing, and it, not the medium, supplies the moral infrastructure for credibility and impact, while empathic, often pictorial reporting supplies the vehicle. These can make up for a lack of visual evidence, just as trust can be manipulated in visual media, especially with digital processing. However, in light of the power of visual media to make the suffering of strangers “real,” WTDS has so

far been studied almost entirely in relation to television, video, film or photography (Ellis, 1999; Peters, 2001; Sontag, 2003; Frosh, 2006).

If WTDS consists of the moral commitment and narrative skills of the journalist and the analytical resources and trust of the audience, then it should transcend visual media. It should be just as viable in print. In fact, although Peters (2001) emphasizes visual media, he makes a case for this view when he notes that witnessing became the special burden and searing compulsion of Nazi victims after World War II. The haunted witness and the battered soul of the victim became one as a whole genre of literature grew out the traumatized psyches of the Holocaust. He cites books by Primo Levi, Anne Frank, Victor Klemperer and Eli Wiesel, cultural leaders on bearing witness to atrocity. They threw off the shame of suffering and bore an authentic witness. These accounts were classics long before anyone thought of putting them on the big or little screen. This genre especially established that the cry of the victim makes ethical demands we cannot easily ignore (Peters, 2001). Witnessing, then, becomes the special realm of the victim—or a surrogate such as a journalist if the victim has passed on, a disembodied voice that still speaks truth to power.

Regarding mediated suffering, Lillie Chouliaraki (2008), professor of media at the London School of Economics and author of a book and several key articles on the subject, explains WTDS as “that process by which...*discursive resources*, namely language *and* image, produce *meaning about suffering*, and in doing so, propose to media audiences specific ways of engaging with distant sufferers” (p. 371) [italics added]. She (2008) too ties it to visual media but also extols its broader meaning:

Through...choices of word *and* image, the media not only expose audiences to the spectacles of distant suffering but also...simultaneously expose them to *specific dispositions to feel, think, and act* toward each instance of suffering. (p. 372) [italics original]

She also says the way suffering is portrayed is as critical as what is portrayed:

In the context of the debate on media and cosmopolitan connectivity, it [is] important to specify *which media reports* on suffering may *dispose audiences toward a passive voyeurism of human pain*—as the compassion fatigue argument has it—and *which reports may urge them toward active charity and humanitarian action*. (p. 372) [italics added]

Witness to distant suffering, then, produces a paradoxical response in audiences. They confront a moral responsibility attending the knowledge of said suffering but few resources with which to address it. This can lead to active compassion or to its fatigue, as bystanders flip the emotional equivalent of a circuit breaker as their capacity to witness it overloads, especially in light of a limited ability to redress it.

### **Psychological Responses to Distant Suffering**

**Boltanski and denunciatory, sentimental and aesthetic topics.** Luc Boltanski (1999), a French theorist working in political and moral sociology, has written a foundational treatment of mediated suffering, *Distant Suffering: Morality, Media and Politics*. In it, he proposes three main responses. If WTDS can be construed as something broader than frames but which can be applied to them, these are master frames. (Frames are organizing, highlighting and prioritizing narrative devices commonly used in news and public affairs, discussed in the next section.) He calls them “topics,” meaning a discursive stance framing a rhetorical argument. They are “denunciation,” “sentiment” and “aesthetics.” In the first, what he terms “pity,” or

compassion, is transformed by anger to produce action by the spectator, who looks for a persecutor, ironically (he says) to persecute. Emotion is detached from the “unfortunate,” or victim, and directed at the persecutor, who is denounced. This indignation prompts a journalistic investigation, a distancing that yields the rhetorical posture of the pamphleteer, or investigative journalist. His or her stance is at once emotional and factual (Boltanski, 1999). Still, critics can fault this rhetorical posture for its convenience, aiding the journalist’s career more than the victim, or for not being committed past the next story.

One response to doubts about the sincerity of this view, he says, is the degree to which the speaker is put at risk in publicizing said suffering. Another response to criticism says that as the denunciation shifts from individuals to systems, it becomes more universal, less subject to personal whims or failings. This leads to social criticism. Boltanski says a specific case is Marxism (grading, we might suppose, through democratic socialism into social-welfare democracies). He doesn’t stress it, but we might assume this approach has more in common with liberal and leftist politics than those of conservatives. It points to collective responsibility, but collective accountability is uncertain at best and futile at worst. Also, the search for a persecutor is a persecution itself and can go awry, as when revolutions turn vengeful.

In the “sentimental” topic, analogous to charity in capitalism, one looks for a benefactor. However, even if one can be found, tear-jerking narrative is suspect for being sensationalistic or indulging in sentimentalism and lacking in analysis. “This is the argument Kant employs...when he casts suspicion on impulsive, transient, and capricious emotions and compares them to the principles of a morality of duty...”

(Boltanski, 1999, pp. 100-101). This view has more in common with traditionally conservative approaches to social suffering (my typology, not his). It is rooted in individuals, is voluntary and is committed to event-based, not system-based, solutions. He says it is subject to these critiques: a) it may be narcissistic and seek emotion for its own sake rather than systemic action; b) it offers an illusory picture of the world, of what is in fact a horrible reality; and c) it hides brutal practices and allows the spectator to be manipulated by emotion, dulling his or her critical sense.

In his aesthetic topic, the suffering is regarded neither as unjust, about which one becomes indignant, or touching (sentimental), which prompts a search for a benefactor, but sublime. This can apply to media as well as to art. He (1999) explains:

[The writer's or painter's] primary quality is courage: he dares to cast his eyes on the unfortunate and look evil in the face without immediately turning away towards imaginary benefactors or persecutors. He allows himself to be taken over by the horrific. (p. 116)

In an aesthetic topic, the journalist or artist alone can see and show “*what is relevant about the unfortunate in his misery*” (p. 126) [italics added]. Yet its limits are obvious: “The beauty<sup>3</sup> extracted from the horrific through this process of sublimation...which is ‘able to transform any object whatever into a work of art’ [or prize-winning article], owes nothing therefore to the object [the victim]” (p. 127).

We could associate this perspective with apolitical artists, apolitical members of the intelligentsia or apolitical members of the public generally. They may be sensitive enough to be transfixed by the suffering but insufficiently versed in political critique

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<sup>3</sup> The intensity of the moment, which may be horrific.

or social ethics, or just insufficiently convinced they can have an effect, to become more than aesthetically involved, to become emotionally and ethically involved.

Particularly germane to journalism, Boltanski (1999) also distinguishes between two kinds of relationships with implications for redress of suffering. One is communitarian—local or regional relations for which obligations are spelled out but which take place within a hierarchy of status. These require a “politics of justice,” meaning well-established routines, not broader social justice, so this justice is not impartial, meaning the well-connected count more. He contrasts this with cosmopolitan relationships, which are universal but to which our duties are not clear. This latter relationship requires an ad-hoc “politics of pity” (compassion).

While he believes that an international humanitarian movement is building, one that strives to transcend politics and be truly impartial, with an attendant right to intervene, in general he sees ethical uncertainty pervading every system and action. In that way, Boltanski is post-modern in every sense. However, he does not despair and finally focuses on doing our best to relieve suffering when and where we find it, using both speech and action, regardless of history or ideology. But he does not pretend that this is easy, or even very manageable.

[Any] critical relationship [to] the topics [of suffering] has the effect of revealing in each of them a disguised mode of accusation and a disguised mode of exclusion, which...is in conflict with their claim to universality and the good. This critical unmasking has been a feature of the political use of topics...polarized...between *Left* and *Right*....The tension between the different topics of suffering is politicized in the sense that it has been possible to connect all of them to different ways of selecting...from the ocean of the world’s unfortunates those unfortunates who really matter...to whom it is appropriate to give aid. (p. 155) [italics original]

This tension between various topics of suffering leads to a conflict of great import, one that weighs heavily on the media:

The conflict of beliefs supporting pity thus corresponds to a conflict over... unfortunates...judged to be politically *worthy*. This conflict takes on a *primordial importance*. The central problem confronted by a politics of pity is...the excess of unfortunates. There are too many of them. Not only self-evidently within the domain of action...but also in the domain of representation: *media space is not unlimited and cannot be given over [entirely] to showing misfortune*.

To reveal the partiality of visions of misfortune, and the veiled accusations leveled against [the fact that there are neglected] unfortunates left on one's hands, [we see] the conflict of topics has taken the form of a *reduction to [vested] interests and relations of force*. (1999, p. 155) [italics added]

This is the quintessential conclusion of the post-modernists regarding language, texts and moral discourse, particularly political arguments: It is text all the way down; that is, a partial truth promoted by a part of the body politic, the part that can speak the loudest and best enforce its discourse. It is a variant on “winners write history” and means that social winners determine which victims are worthy. But Boltanski does believe the media have the opportunity to do some good, albeit an uncertain and indirect one:

By recording images of poverty or oppression and diffusing them in the media, journalists ensure a degree of protection to suffering or oppressed populations... Against whom are these populations protected?...Against their own rulers. Publicity given to their violent acts has its effect on rulers of States who martyr the populations, often ethnic minorities, under their control...(p. 183)

The keynote, one we will visit near the end of this study as we look at remedies, is that publicity and pressure from third parties, what one conflict-resolution specialist has called “the third side,” are means of redress that do not rely on force—they can help cause an intervention but have the moral primacy of nonviolence:

But these violent acts are obviously not [often] publicized in the countries where they are committed. The effects of publicity thus presuppose the existence of an international public space. They are produced by...pressure...exerted by other countries on the leaders of States where suffering and atrocities shown by the media are taking place. The effects of media publicity given the suffering of oppressed minorities are [re]produced on other leaders [in other countries]...*A consequence...is that spectators are given a preponderant role, at least in democratic States, in the series of mediations which end or reduce distant suffering.* (p. 184) [italics added]

Ultimately, Boltanski (1999) says some speech has value regarding mass suffering. He distinguishes between “verbal” or ephemeral speech, and “effective” or action-oriented speech. In the latter, the “action” of public opinion can be manifest through any semantically sound means of redress such as editorials, ads, petitions, protests and support for nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), politicians or other champions. These can pressure politicians to act.

**Chouliaraki and adventure, emergency and ecstatic news.** In “The Mediation of Suffering and the Vision of a Cosmopolitan Public,” Chouliaraki (2008) explores Boltanski’s topics, then outlines her own event-based typology. Like most, it is a heuristic map, useful for purposes of discovery. She creates a hierarchy that links stories that invite or deflect action to various responses by viewers. Focused on television, she posits three types of engagement: a) bulletins called “adventure” news, which block feelings of compassion; b) “emergency” news, which alone produces a demand for action; and c) “ecstatic” news, an extraordinary category that brings people together in simultaneous viewing but can impede action. Using BBC coverage, she explains adventure news using shootings in Indonesia, a boat accident in India in which 40 minors drowned and extensive flooding in Bangladesh, all in

spots of less than a minute. The term “adventure” is drawn from Russian literary and communications scholar, M.M. Bakhtin. Like the early Greek romances it refers to, these stories provide no background or context, offering only facts external to those involved. They are broadcast as “random and isolated curiosities” and demand nothing from the spectator emotionally. They “restrict the spectator’s proximity to suffering” and lack a discussion of agency, which limits the victim’s humanity and spectator action (Chouliaraki, 2008, p. 376).

The typology has value, but her terms need to be adapted from a European literary tradition to the disinterested American vein. She uses two terms that have fairly felicitous meanings in US colloquial speech: adventure and ecstatic news. Using more value-neutral language, I would term the first “discrete” or “episodic” news, which I will use unless citing Chouliaraki. In it, minimal narration, detail and context impede compassion. And, she notes, as with the familiar adage, not to decide is to decide:

The interruption of pity is...[also] an ethical option...It construes the sufferer in *discourses of insurmountable cultural difference*, as an Other, and...*frees the spectator from the moral obligation* to engage with the sufferer’s misfortune. (Chouliaraki, 2008, p. 376) [italics added]

This is the communitarian restriction Boltanski talks about. By contrast, so-called cosmopolitan expressions of compassion overcome more than geographical barriers. They also break down emotional, ethnic or class obstacles. Regarding communitarian ethics, anthropologists might talk about the neo-tribal affinities that replace those that traditionally belonged to kin and clan yet still determine our most immediate obligations. This notion is supported by standards of news value: The same event—a bank robbery, a murder-suicide, a large gift to the local university—diminishes in

news value farther from the point of publication. Proximity, of course, is just one standard of newsgathering. Others are magnitude (a 7.8 earthquake matters more than a 4.5), prominence (of person or institution), monetary value, damage or casualties (Neale & Brown, 1976). No doubt these evolved around what readers respond to, not because the industry needed objective values, but they do bring media and social values together. However, they reinforce a parochialism of compassion.

Chouliaraki's (2008) second category is emergency news. Again, I would edit her terms and call this "motivational" or "emotive" news, which I will use unless citing her. Examples include a rescue of African refugees stranded in a Mediterranean storm; a famine in a remote Argentine province with emaciated children; and a sharia-law decree that a Nigerian woman giving birth out of wedlock should face death by stoning, all in prime-time. As opposed to episodic news, they tend to prompt action. They evoke compassion with complex narratives, cultural and historical context and "multiple connections between safety and danger and novel possibilities of action both for the participants...and for the spectator" (2008, p. 376).

Chouliaraki (2008) describes the rescue scene as a high-adrenaline spectacle appealing to the spectator-voyeur, an aesthetic topic, and the Argentine famine as a sentimental story that brings more than a tear of concern. However, the Nigerian conviction "urges the spectator to do something practical, signing an Amnesty International petition against the sharia verdict" (p. 376)—perhaps because the NGO was the source of the story, making this more appropriate journalistically (she does not say). It is a form of "pamphleteering." However, the request might be ethically borderline by mainstream standards in the United States. The story also offers

personal and political history. The latter explains why this medieval mentality has re-emerged. These characteristics make emotive news the best option for redress of suffering within a cosmopolitan frame (2008):

- *The move from visually static and verbally minimal descriptions with low affective power to visually and verbally complex narratives with increasing...affective power.*
- *The move from singular and abstract spacetimes...to concrete, specific, multiple, and mobile spacetimes (chronotopes<sup>4</sup>). Chronotopes place suffering in the context of lived experience and give [it] historical depth and future perspective. Chronotopes may also connect suffering with the spacetime of safety and propose a particular type of action...Only in the...news of the Nigerian convict [is] such connectivity between suffering and safety...established.*
- *The move from non-agency (numerical sufferer,<sup>5</sup> absence of other agents) to conditional agency (active and personalized sufferer, presence of benefactors and persecutors). Conditional agency implies that the sufferer is...active only in a limited and ineffective way, hence the need for external intervention. Yet the very fact of acting<sup>6</sup> endows this sufferer with a quality of humanness we do not [find] in adventure news...It is particularly the Nigerian Amina Lawal who is presented as a fully historical figure...a cultural other and [yet] a human being like us. (p. 377) [italics original]*

We can see why this news offers greater possibilities for a response, especially as Amnesty supplies a petition and a phone number.

Her third category is ecstatic news. She ties it to live-action events, often disasters such as the 2004 South Asian tsunami or the 2001 destruction of the World Trade towers. She calls the latter the prototypical case of this type of news. Other examples, not mentioned, would be Hurricane Katrina in 2005 or the Haitian earthquake in January 2010. Again, Chouliaraki's terminology may make one stumble. "Ecstatic" means when time seems to stop; the root meaning of *ecstasis* is to be beside oneself,

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<sup>4</sup> A Bakhtin coinage meaning essentially experience.

<sup>5</sup> Numbers of victims only, no names.

<sup>6</sup> The media know her story, and her name, requiring some action on her part.

overcome. Unfortunately, rooted in religious rapture and sexuality, it has come to mean intense pleasure, and experiencing this in relation to a horrific event seems perverse. I would call the category “devastating” or “overwhelming” news (and will use the latter unless citing her). This news is predominantly live, so it presents a continuous chain of events and elicits rapt attention, even helpless horror. I will modify this later and make the case that live action is not crucial but undivided attention and a sense of helplessness are.

The distinctions between this and the previous category are (2008):

- *The move from the...the news broadcast to that of live footage...from a conventional news narrative, consisting of single, finite, and unrelated pieces of news to an uninterrupted flow of images and...narrative with various degrees of emotional power. This flow enables the spectator to engage in multiple topics of suffering and so to empathize, to denounce, and to reflect on the suffering.*<sup>7</sup>
- *The move from an emergency chronotope, that is, from concrete, specific, multiple, and mobile spacetimes, to an ecstatic chronotope.* This is a temporality that places suffering both in the order of “lived” experience and in the order of historical rupture [a break in time]...a spatiality that connects this specific suffering to the globe as a whole, making [all of] “humanity” the simultaneous witness of the suffering.
- *The move from conditional agency to sovereign agency.* Sovereign agency construes each actor...as a...humanized and historical being—somebody who feels, reflects, and acts on his or her fate. (p. 378) [italics original]

Again, taken from a European sensibility, the terms seem foreign. Conditional agency means at a distance and so disconnected or only partially connected agency. Sovereign agency creates an identification between spectator and sufferers in which the spectator is involved continuously in a way that includes virtually all victims. This

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<sup>7</sup> All of Boltanski’s topics in the same event.

identification can prompt an outpouring of compassion for massive undeserved suffering, such as 9/11 or Katrina, or, with its fatigue, at some point shut down.

The problem here, as Boltanski (1999) says, is this identification can be ephemeral or beside the point. What can one person do? Short of quitting one's job and volunteering in a disaster or war zone, or donating to a fund, one's options are limited. Ultimately, there are too many victims. Furthermore, how can one prioritize limited resources for giving without seeming arbitrary or capricious?

In the grand debate over the ubiquity of mediated suffering that creates compassion fatigue versus the mediated democratization of space and time that makes humanitarian acts in a global village possible, Chouliaraki (2008) creates a hierarchy in which, at one end, with adventure (episodic) news, the spectator sits at maximal distance from the victim and has little incentive for action. Given what little one learns about the victims, this distance is as much an intellectual or mediated distance as a physical one. It is also a temporal distance, often depending on the time devoted to the reporting. At the other end, with ecstatic (overwhelming) news, the spectator empathizes fully but becomes almost as helpless as the victim. Due to the magnitude of the event, he or she can do little because of its "sovereign" agency (all victims count equally) and physical distance. Episodic news is associated with compassion fatigue, and overwhelming news with "tele-sociality" (Chouliaraki, 2008), the mediated global village McLuhan (1964) introduced that presents the prospect, if not the impossible dream, of a democratization of compassion.

In this framework, only with emergency (emotive) news can the spectator marshal sufficient compassion because it a) makes the victim personal and historical (real); b)

offers background on why the suffering exists, particularly historical and cultural information, and what can be done; and c) uses a voice of global authority, a source such as Amnesty International, to turn the suffering into a cause for action. Her point about ecstatic (overwhelming) news is that, with 9/11, for instance, it did elicit compassion, but with the ethical foreshortening of television, it occurred within a communitarian paradigm. This means that 9/11 was largely a concern for Westerners and a much different matter for Middle Easterners. It does not present the ethical difficulties, and the difficulties overcome, of the cosmopolitan frame, which represents the impartiality Boltanski (1999) finds so elusive.

**The struggle for credibility: Bourdieu and witnessing as a field.** One last model illuminates the texts we will examine: witnessing as a field. It is more flexible than the previous two and avoids some of their reified or static categories. Tamar Ashuri, a lecturer in communication at Ben Gurion University, Beersheba, Israel, and Amit Pinchevski, assistant professor in communication and journalism at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, presented “Witnessing as Field” at the 2008 annual meeting of the International Communication Association. They have published other papers and books, including new titles such as Frosh and Pinchevski’s (2009b) editing of *Media Witnessing* and Ashuri’s (2010) *The Arab-Israeli Conflict in the Media*, but this one as yet is unpublished (as per Communication and Mass Media Complete, Sage Communication Studies Full-text, Academic Premier and Google Scholar).

They make witnessing fully post-modern by bringing critical inquiry and politics into the discussion. In brief, their main points are:

- Witnessing takes place in a finite world of “social-political struggles with relative values.” It is inherently political and subject to contestation and struggle;
- This contestation occurs in what French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1990) calls a “field,” which consists of multiple agents, interests, positions and resources; and
- Witnessing is mostly about trust, the currency in which agents trade and the “goal” for which they compete. These issues mean that witnessing can be construed as a dynamic “game” (using Bourdieu’s adaptation of game theory, with due respect to those who suffer), with many objectives and agents in conflict, in which verisimilitude and trust are constructed, not given (2008).

Ashuri and Pinchevski also highlight the dilemma of the “implicated witness.” In *Seeing Things: Television in the Age of Uncertainty*, John Ellis (1999) says that witnesses to mediated suffering bear a responsibility for what they have seen: They can no longer say they did not know. Yet, as Boltanski and Chouliaraki note, there are ethical and practical problems with this stance. They contrast this with Peters’s (2001) “vicarious witness,” who is less responsible the farther in time or space he or she is from the event. These authors then break down the field of witnessing into eyewitnesses, mediators and audience. Focused on visual media, they emphasize these as primary issues in witnessing: the media personnel as witnesses, presence at the event and a discourse consisting of fidelity of memory, rigorous description and moving rhetoric. Though they don’t say so, these features also can all apply to print.

In a contested field, witnesses use the resources above to build trust. Bourdieu calls these “habitus,” meaning habitual ways of using one’s intellectual, emotional

and symbolic resources to achieve a desired effect on the world. Habitus is a complex but crucial idea in this study and should be further explained:

Habitus enables an agent's collusion within the society of which he/she is a member. [Bourdieu] calls this fit, or the sense of being "at home" in a familiar milieu, an "ontological complicity" between [a subjective] embodied history in the habitus and [an] objectified history in institutional roles. (Scahill, 1993)

It is composed, therefore, both from innate dispositions and learned behavior. Its social outcroppings in mores, norms and institutional codes interact with deep psychic structures receptive to the most efficient ways to achieve goals.

For Bourdieu, habitus refers to socially acquired, embodied systems of dispositions and/or predispositions....It refers not [merely or mostly] to character, morality, or socialization per se, but to "deep structural" classificatory and assessment propensities, socially acquired, and manifested in outlooks [and] opinions... (Scahill, 1993)

Its value is that is it takes up a middle ground between individual agency and institutional causation. Bourdieu says its keynote is its inventive, interactive quality.

The notion of habitus has been used [many] times...by authors [such] as Hegel, Husserl, Weber, Durkheim, and (Marcel) Mauss, all of whom used it in a more or less [methodological] way....I wanted to insist on the *generative capacities* of dispositions, it being understood that these are acquired, socially constituted dispositions....I wanted to emphasize that this "creative," active, inventive capacity was not that of a transcendental subject in the idealist tradition, but that of an active agent. (1990, pp. 12-13) [italics original]

Habitus, therefore, refers to a set of "go-to" responses built up through a relationship to a certain field, that is, a history of interaction and all others' interactions with social institutions. It allows for an economical use of limited psychic energy as one confronts institutional and ideological systems that are greater than oneself, that must be negotiated to achieve individual and group goals and that can

themselves react innovatively to rebuff or reward one's efforts. Habitus is both a deep-seated yet creative capacity for generating action and a more lasting set of learned responses. Also, while habitus is relatively durable, a drastic change in personal or social conditions, a teachable moment, can alter it and transform one's attitudes (Scahill, 1993).

Regarding witnessing as a field, one's proximity or relevance to the event and stature or credibility are all major resources. But most significant is a knowledge base, a rhetorical posture consisting of discourse-based schemas—not frames but the stuff of which frames are made ("Schema" here means an organizing mental structure codified as a response to a given set of stimuli). Witnesses use their habitus to manipulate social, intellectual and symbolic capital (capacity) to build trust with mediators, and mediators use them to build trust with audiences, respectively.

Representing reporting agents and agencies, mediators most fundamentally broker trust between witnesses and audiences. It follows, then, that the following connections have implications for print: Mediators compile credibility-building schemas that provide the social infrastructure (narrative fidelity, cultural values) and social media (reporters, reports) that support the technical media, whether based in printer's ink or electrons. I would add that sometimes we place trust in reporters but mostly it resides in organizations, particularly as they build trust over time, as with CBS, *The New York Times* or CNN. *C&C* and *Sojourners* have done this also.

In general, mediators assign genres, create narratives, manage technology and determine who qualifies as a witness, endorsing that person's credibility with their own (Ashuri & Pinchevski, 2008). They encode messages with cues for a given

audience, markers of trust in a field with an implicit or explicit ideology. This corroborates the rhetoric, reinforces an authentic discourse and affords them a privileged position with a given audience.

Reporters are a species of eyewitness but function mostly as an extension, or “delegates,” of mediators. They also are an extension of witnesses, or “witnesses of the witnesses,” Ashuri and Pinchevski (2008) say. (Better would be “secondary witnesses.”) They occupy the creative space between witnesses and mediators. We could also call them ambassadors from the culture of the media to that of the sources, acting as ombudspersons to represent the concerns of their sources to the media bureaucracy and the public. But if they become too aggressive in representing concerns of the marginalized over and against the desires of editors or producers, they can be at odds with their organization and outside its graces. This means that they have to negotiate the field carefully and may be pressured to report selectively or self-censor. If they do, they can compromise the victims’ stories and their credibility as delegates, as well as that of their organization. Yet, in this contested field, the news organization may need to preserve its credibility with the public and the powers that be by doing selective or distorted reporting.

This dilemma becomes more pointed as we examine *The Times* and its challenges reporting on Central America during the 1980s. From an analytical standpoint, one less dazzled by technology, we see that reporters still supply the social technology crucial to the process. They create access based on the integrity of their reporting, the stature and resources of their organization and their institutional credibility as the

Fourth Estate. Along with their organizations, they represent the social media driving the technical media, the fulcrum in any leveraging of distant suffering for social aims.

Audience dynamics might seem self-evident and largely passive to some, but Ashuri and Pinchevski (2008) see them as more complex than the mostly static constructions of Boltanski and Chouliaraki. Audiences function as judges. They react to the testimony of witnesses and the cultural productions of mediators, or fail to, screening out narratives they think irrelevant or inaccurate, lacking in empirical credibility or morally or ideologically suspect. Ashuri and Pinchevski (2008) then use Boltanski's audience-based and Chouliaraki's event-based typologies to match audiences with events, but these seem over-determined, at odds with the rest of their model. In fact, the audience is just the other side of the equation, an extremely dynamic complex in which every negotiation through media and event is unique. The equals sign between "victims x mediators" and "audience x mediated event" is trust, and the pressures on that negotiation of trust are exogenous and endogenous, multiple and various. In the contested field of the political hurly-burly, familiar, persuasive narratives and symbols encoding deeply held values generate the strongest response.

The issue then becomes the ways available to tell a convincing narrative and the means with which to respond ethically and practically to suffering. While decision makers have the apparatus of government with which to promote a policy, social movements often have overtaxed volunteers, a skeletal staff and a few media tools with which to create alternatives. This means their witnesses must have more credibility, tell more compelling stories and use more evocative symbols if their media and movements are to have a chance.

**What is witness to distant suffering in print media?** It is tempting to ground WTDS in visual media, but this view reflects a narrow epistemology and overlooks key counter-examples. One might be that alleged video documentation of Sasquatch does not produce generally accepted evidence of his existence. The same is true for video of unidentified flying objects. In fact, any documentary or video can use selective footage, computer graphics or elliptical narrative to ignore parts of the story.

What WTDS in print does need, though, is visually engaging narrative and a compelling moral purpose. A classic example is the reporting on the Indian independence movement and its famous Salt March, popularized by the reporter played by Martin Sheen in the movie *Gandhi*. Playing the role of United Press correspondent Webb Miller (under the name Vince Walker), Sheen recreates an indelible moment in history when he calls in a story on the Indian liberation movement. Miller (1994) reported on the *Dharasana Satyagraha*, a march to the sea to protest the British monopoly on salt making. With Gandhi in jail, a retired judge and Gandhi's wife led the march. When the British arrested both, Sarojini Naidu, a female liberation advocate, led it, urging the protesters not to resist the beatings that were surely coming (Jack, 1994). Miller brought the protest to an international audience using only his prose. The only reporter there, he wrote:

Suddenly, at a word of command, scores of native police rushed upon the advancing marchers and rained blows on their heads with their steel-shod [clubs]. Not one of the marchers even raised an arm to fend off the blows. They went down like ten-pins. From where I stood I heard the sickening whacks of the clubs on unprotected skulls. The waiting crowd of watchers groaned and sucked in their breaths in sympathetic pain at every blow.

Those struck down fell sprawling, unconscious or writhing in pain with fractured skulls or broken shoulders. In two or three minutes the ground was

quilted with bodies. Great patches of blood widened on their white clothes. The survivors without breaking ranks silently and doggedly marched on until struck down. (Miller, 1994)

The British tried to censor Miller's story, but it ran in more than 1,300 papers worldwide and was even read into the record of the US Senate. As an empire, the British never recovered in world or national opinion (Jack, 1994).

The immortalization of this event in prose is paradigmatic for witness to distant suffering in print. The emphasis is on plain, pictorial English. In the absence of a camera, the reader most needs dense description and an empathic but not emotional writer. The writer needs a keen sense of the right detail. Literary gifts pertain of course, but verbal wizardry alone will not suffice. Better by far is a good eye and a clean, clear voice—the old-school reporter's tool kit of simple, declarative prose, the best of word pictures and an unflinching gaze.

Another archetypical example is in the description of the "Children's Crusade" of the US civil-rights movement. Covering it, an Associated Press (AP) reporter captured in a single phrase the disproportionate power commissioner Bull Connor's police and fire fighters used to put down this march. The media were becoming dulled to adults protesting, and law enforcement, learning not to over-react, refused to jail them. So leaders of the movement gambled on the lives of children. On May 2, 1963, more than 1,000 black children marched through downtown Birmingham. With children filling up the jail, the next day, hundreds marched again. Connor had fire fighters blast them with fire hoses turned up to twice the normal pressure, knocking some unconscious, as the police loosed German shepherds. The report sent around the

world told of hoses turned on the children with such force that they blasted the bark off the trees the children hid behind. The film reports left indelible memories. But the written report is used in beginning news-writing classes as a classic example of evocative, fact-based prose, the kind that changed lives and turned public opinion in favor of the movement.

Witness to distant suffering in prose, then, requires the immediate, slice-of-life context to make it as “live” as possible, socio-economic details and the poignancy of the self-consciousness of the vulnerable. This means not just statistics but the pain and pathos of these victims of social or natural forces. Conveying the awareness they have of their situation is crucial to making them fully human. It should portray the constraints life imposes of them and the lengths they go to transcend those constraints. This context includes everything from small items or gestures that supply a life with dignity and hope, such as family pictures, religious icons and community awards, or feasts, dances and worship services, to symbolic action on a world stage, such as the silent gravity of the Salt Marchers or civil-rights demonstrators. It reveals the indignities their powerlessness forces upon them and their struggle for dignity in the midst of suffering and subjugation. Such reporting can seem like advocacy to those opposed to the moves the powerless make to seek justice, but it mostly consists of the full force of the social and political facts and the human dilemma they reveal.

### **Framing and Its Social, Political and Media Studies Uses**

A concept of growing utility in social science and media studies is framing, applied to social movements by Benford and Snow (2000) as “collective-action

frames.” They note that citations of three core articles on framing (Snow, Rochford, Worden & Benford, 1986; Snow & Benford 1988, 1992) increased from seven in 1990 to 106 in 1998 and that more than half of 500-some came after 1995. Goffman (1974) introduced frames as “schemata of interpretation” that allow people to label, locate and make meaningful people, institutions and events so they can guide their actions. Collective-action frames mobilize by selecting salient facts and symbols to create a narrative that movements can steer by. “Thus,” say Benford and Snow (2000), “frames are action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organization [SMO]” (p. 614). They lay out core framing tasks that are “diagnostic,” “prognostic,” and “motivational.” The first two foster a shared vision; the latter mobilizes, often against an injustice. They note a frame’s value depends on its cultural resonance, in turn dependent on its empirical credibility and its narrative fidelity, the latter a symbolic connection to deeply held beliefs and values.

### **Reagan Administration Framing of the Central American Conflict**

For the Reagan administration, arguably one the most media-savvy in modern history, the conflicts in Central America were measures of America’s moral and political resolve, a test of national mettle and a matter of near-religious conviction. Communists were not only totalitarian; they were godless. They were not only godless; they hated freedom, especially the free market, and so opportunity. Not content to embody these characteristics, they spread them in a program of world conquest, especially wherever vulnerable populations can be deceived. These were

the background for the core frames that the Reagan team communicated to the nation and the world (Smith, 1996). The frame of good-versus-evil, East-West conflict dominated, and the mainstream media often followed the administration's lead. Severin and Tankard (2001), hardly ideologues and authors of a well-known textbook on media theory, call this a classic example:

For instance, during the Reagan administration, much of the news from Latin America was framed in terms of a communist threat to the United States. Certainly [it] could have been framed in other ways—for instance, that these were developing nations in which many people were leading lives of hardship.... *Examination of much coverage of international events for the 40 years after World War II suggests that the Cold War often provided an overriding frame.* (p. 278) [italics added]

Other frames, such as North versus South, or development versus dependency, were never considered. Nor was insurgency understood as a national liberation movement empowered by a strong religious vision facing off against a domestic elite in the sway of a foreign power. Or, if these scenarios were taken seriously, they may have been by foreign-service professionals but not by the inner White House circle. In fact, it aided this vision by cleaning out most of the long-term diplomatic corps and replacing them with those experienced in anti-communism but not in Latin America (Smith, 1996). Other frames could not make it easily into mainstream media and required an alternative press. In their most idealized form, these frames included the countervailing discourse of long-suffering, abused poor people finding champions among the leftist and communitarian leaders of a larger movement to create a more just world, debatable too, but polarizing and effective with dissenting audiences.

The key to the frames and their alternatives is that each contains a partial truth promoted as the whole truth. Humans are drawn to bi-polar interpretations, but reality

is never so clean. Most of the time, competing interpretations are interwoven. But to “sell” policies and costly programs that choose winners and losers requires a dramatic conflict, a plot structure and a moral that raw information lacks (Benford & Snow, 2000; Smith 1996). These connect information and motivation, the cognitive and affective, facts and values. This is what frames supply, why political leaders and social movements need them and why media use them.

In *Resisting Reagan: The U.S. Central America Peace Movement*, Christian Smith (1996) outlines frames the Reagan administration used regarding Central America. The most extreme is the “viral Soviet-aggression frame,” condensed below:

**Diagnosis:** Soviet aggression, channeled through Cuba, has penetrated America’s backyard. The Sandinistas are committed communists who have established a beachhead in Nicaragua and are spreading Marxism to El Salvador. Their viral politics will spread to other Central American countries and Mexico, which will fall like dominos (a Vietnam metaphor).

**Prognosis:** We have the opportunity to stop this aggression, but only if the United States blocks the Soviet grab for control. US troops are not required if we give the *contras* and the Salvadoran military the technical and financial support they need.

**Motivation:** Soviet control in Central America threatens vital US security interests. We are the world’s only moral superpower. We sacrifice our credibility if we don’t confront aggression in our own hemisphere. It is in our interest and the only morally responsible choice. We must champion freedom by aiding the *contras* and the Salvadoran security forces.

The Soviet-aggression frame was a bit starkly drawn, but with a certain segment of the population, it had high cultural resonance. Since the collapse of the Soviet bloc, many have forgotten that 35 years of a Soviet threat had conditioned many people to reflexively fear the spread of communism and that containment was the only strategy we had. Examples with “experiential credibility” were China in 1953, Cuba in 1959 and Angola and Vietnam in 1975, as well as containing or defeating perceived threats in Korea, 1950-1953, Eastern Europe, 1946-1949, Greece, 1946-1949, Berlin, 1961, the Dominican Republic, 1964, and Grenada, 1983 (Smith, 1996). However, a new generation had grown up with another worldview and made it known in opposition to the Vietnam War. There, the right was vindicated in that the North did take over South Vietnam, but the left was also vindicated in that communism did not spread through Southeast Asia. A key counter-frame was the potential for US troops to get bogged down in a quagmire, as in Vietnam or the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.

The administration also used a less war-ready frame, likely to engage moderates and swing voters, especially in Congress. Smith (1996) calls it the “fragile-democracy” frame. In condensed form, it said:

**Diagnosis:** In Central America, fragile democratic movements are struggling valiantly against extremists of the left and right that do not respect human rights. They also are struggling to redress underdevelopment without resort to oppressive planned economies.

**Prognosis:** If the United States helps these movements, the “freedom fighters” in Nicaragua (Reagan’s view of the *contras*) and the centrist Christian Democrats in El Salvador, they can defeat both authoritarian (right) and totalitarian (left) governments.

**Motivation:** We must seize the opportunity to help the “moral equivalent of the founding fathers” in Nicaragua (also Reagan on the *contras*) and the democrats in El Salvador when they call on us for assistance. We must also help neighboring countries become or remain democratic.

Its vulnerability to counter-frames lay mostly in the record of atrocities increasingly tied to the *contras* and the Salvadoran military (Smith, 1996). An alternative interpretation fostered by the Reagan team was that the Sandinistas would impersonate *contras* and kill innocent civilians, but it was never widely believed. The *contras*' obvious ties to the former National Guard gave the lie to this frame. The Salvadoran government at times used a similar frame to blame their atrocities on rebels dressed up as regular army or national police. There, the notion that death squads were outside the control of the military was increasingly punctured by the media and outside legal investigations. The inviolable role of the military in most Latin American countries and the reluctance of the Salvadoran junta to prosecute those responsible for human-rights abuse also put holes in this frame. Even with their limitations, the Soviet-aggression and fragile-democracy frames served the White House well with many right-wing and center-right voters and crucial parts of Congress. Smith (1996) sums up the effect of these frames, often adopted by the traditional-values culture:

The two frames tapped some of America's *most dearly cherished cultural values*: individual freedom, anti-communism, democracy, and the resolute defense of national security. And politically, the two frames had the...potential to assemble a majority coalition in Congress, with the Soviet-aggression frame appealing especially to congressional conservatives and the fragile-democracy frame to congressional moderates.<sup>8</sup> (p. 241) [italics added]

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<sup>8</sup> Congressional liberals, as with liberals nationally, were in retreat at the time.

### **The Central America Peace Movement's Framing of the Conflict**

To engage in a vigorous rhetorical and discursive battle with the Reagan administration about our commitment to Central America, the peace movement had to devise convincing counter-frames. Probably the most salient of these was the “another-Vietnam” frame. Having demonstrated how the diagnosis-prognosis-motivation discourse works, I will forgo it as I review this counter-frame.

Condensed, it said: An overly anti-communist and war-happy administration could get the nation mired in a lengthy entanglement in the civil war of a third-world country. We have seen this in Vietnam. Once we commit advisers and equipment, it will not be long before we send troops, bringing deep domestic divisions, costing billions and damaging our reputation for peace (Smith, 1996). Another part of this frame might have been that we would be fighting two wars in difficult, unfamiliar country, jungles and mountains. The Salvadoran guerillas (or Sandinistas) would have an advantage and the support of the populace, an echo of Vietnam.

Six years after the fall of Saigon, this frame had high cultural resonance. Since World War II, the tradition of American isolationism had been reversed, but the Korean conflict had ended in stalemate and Vietnam in defeat. The Soviet Union was getting bogged down in Afghanistan. All three provided credibility for the hazard of superpowers mired in wars of occupation. To the occupied nation, they become wars of attrition. The occupying force expends increasing amounts of men, money and political capital pursuing an elusive victory or messy exit. The recent US experience

in Iraq and Afghanistan makes this counter-frame salient again. These frames appealed mostly to the cultural or political left—the alternative culture and its media.

Another critical component of the prominence and “marketability” of frames becomes their visual properties. In the Soviet-aggression frame, photographs of Castro in Managua or Ortega in Havana are classic examples. In the fragile-democracy frame, junta leader Napoleon Duarte’s campaigning and peasants lining up to vote in El Salvador or *contras* fighting Sandinistas in Nicaragua had high visual salience (Smith, 1996). Images of casualties caused by buildings or buses bombed by rebels would also be compelling. Such properties become important as we examine WTDS and its motivational capacity. In WTDS in print, support with photos can be important, of course, but we will explore the crucial value of pictorial prose as well.

The protest movement’s second counter-frame was the “botched-diplomacy” frame, a less catastrophic discursive device. It countered the “fragile-democracy” frame by being more measured and rational (Smith, 1996).

Paraphrased, it said: The United States has an important role to play in nursing emerging democracies to health, but it is making more enemies than friends by funding murderers, mining harbors, blocking trade and ignoring the World Court. It is inflaming the situation, making it harder for deeply divided societies to meet in the middle. It should aid negotiations and development, not war.

Another was the related “wayward-America frame” (condensed): The United States has a unique role to play on the world stage. It should be a benevolent force in international affairs, promoting peace, democracy, freedom, economic development and social welfare. These values are being undone by present policies (Smith, 1996).

These last two frames were vulnerable to the same closely related counter-arguments: They are sentimental readings of world history; the Soviet bloc will stop at nothing to see its system triumph; covert or overt aggression is the same; and the only thing communists understand is force. They worked best with the liberal mainstream and moderates, running along ideological lines parallel to the way *C&C* began, and were often promoted to swing voters the left and right competed for, especially those in Congress. The fourth was the “imperial-America” frame. Although it had a strong historical basis, its rhetoric was more strident, so it was lower in cultural resonance because of the defense mechanisms of national pride or vanity. In paraphrase, it said: Instead of merely blundering or straying from benevolent roots, the United States was acting out of a legacy of neocolonialism that is part of a long and ugly history in Central America. The Sandinistas and Salvadoran rebels have tried to throw off this yoke, a double oppression by US multinationals and domestic business interests, but the Reagan administration seeks to punish social-justice movements to send a message to the third world (Smith, 1996).

This frame had the most appeal among those farthest left. For those who had done historical research, or those predisposed to mistrust superpowers generally, it had strong resonance and credibility. But to most Americans, it was a hard sell, appealing poorly to moderates (Smith, 1996). It was vulnerable to counter-frames that said the United States was interested in seeing other countries succeed as it had, through hard work, ingenuity and freedom of enterprise, association and expression.

These frames are not the only ways to understand the dynamics between the Central American actors and their North American counterparts, but like most good

typologies, they articulate a spectrum on which other perspectives can be located. If additional arguments arose, such as the expense or morality of fighting a war by proxy, they usually fit within one of these, such as the wayward-America frame. With their nose for social conflict and sensitivity to dramatic narratives, the media made heavy use of such frames.

### **Sub-Movements of the Central America Peace Movement**

Out of the peace movement, three prominent sub-movements emerged, largely from religious opposition to the wars, and were well chronicled in *C&C* and *Sojourners*. One of these was the Sanctuary project, which sought safety for Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugees in North American churches. This program invoked the medieval tradition that offered fugitives sanctuary from prosecution in a church as long as they stayed there. The Reagan administration denied virtually all applications for legal immigration to these people on the grounds that they were economic, not political, refugees. Granting such status would have meant admitting that US policies were implicated in the repression that created the refugees. Smith (1996) recounts the experience of a Tucson rancher, Quaker Jim Corbett, a Sanctuary founder who discovered that the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) had deported a Salvadoran refugee right after he had filed an application for immigrant status for the harried, terrified young man.

Corbett was stunned—he had been hoodwinked by...his own government. This was not a bureaucratic confusion, he fumed, but a deliberate effort to deprive refugees of their legal rights and deport them as swiftly as possible to what he considered a likely death. (p. 62) ...

Another problem was that Central Americans applying for political asylum were being...discriminated against by the INS....Asylum implicitly acknowledged the existence of gross violations of human and political rights by regimes and forces supported by the U.S. Since this embarrassed the Reagan administration, political asylum for Central Americans was almost always denied. (p. 64)

Virtually all were returned home to face persecution or death. Activists contended these deportations ran counter to US and international law. The law said refugees with a reasonable fear of persecution, harm or death upon repatriation should be granted asylum (Smith, 1996).

The other two movements were the Pledge of Resistance and Witness for Peace (WFP) programs, related to Nicaraguan policy. The Pledge eventually secured nearly 80,000 signatures of people committed to civil disobedience or demonstrations if the United States invaded Nicaragua (Smith, 1996). Witness for Peace put US citizens on the line in the war zone hoping to stop *contra* violence. These witnesses involved a few long-term members staying six months to a year guiding short-term witnesses staying two to three weeks (Griffin-Nolan, 1991). Both religious publications championed these movements, through appeals as well as reporting and commentary. This study will feature Witness and Sanctuary as they are more closely related to witness to distant suffering and generated more copy in the two journals. All the movements transcended the Christian left but were mostly the products of religious visions, were well-supported by progressive Christians and had clear and convincing characteristics of SMOs, including the use of collective-action frames.

Also, as an aspect of WTDS and a link to the distinctive coverage of rights violations in these two publications, I want to look at so-called “native” reporting, a

key characteristic of alternative media (Atton, 2002). This journalistic adaptation of participant-observation is an important part of WTDS in print. Such reporting has advantages and disadvantages (see “Baptism of Fire,” p. 181) and will be contrasted selectively with the “disinterested” reporting of the mainstream media. Other examples of WTDS in print will be explored too, but this writing is foundational.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Past Is Prologue:**

#### **Political Economy and Human Rights**

#### **in El Salvador and Nicaragua—**

#### **With Notes on Political Terminology**

## Political Characterizations and Conditions

### Political Definitions

In light of the political nature of the analysis in this study, we should examine a few basic terms related to the political spectrum. Given that all generalizations are somewhat suspect, these are overdrawn, but they point to basic distinctions. Terms of the theological spectrum are explored before the analysis of the religious journals.

The meaning of liberalism has changed from its roots in 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century movements in Europe born as mercantile interests championed the rights of laissez-faire capitalism over the hereditary monopolies of the aristocracy. “Liberal” comes from the same root as “liberty” and originally meant supporting the free market and the civil and economic liberties of the individual. It emphasized a limited role for the state, including at the time a much-diminished monarchy (Gaus & Courtland, 2007; Moseley, 2005). In Europe, the term still retains much of this meaning, and in Latin America, the political spectrum tends to more closely resemble the European model.

In the United States in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially since the Great Depression and the presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt, “liberal” has come to mean a similar outlook on civil liberties but much more emphasis on social, political and cultural equality. Accompanying this was the establishment of an economic safety net and the belief that government should do much more to ensure these values, yet not embrace socialism (Gaus & Courtland, 2007; Johnson, 2005a). Their European and Latin American counterparts are more likely to call themselves “social democrats.” But in this study, the US meaning of liberal will be used.

Until the election of Ronald Reagan, this type of social-welfare state, begun by FDR and expanded under the presidency of Lyndon Johnson, was supported more or less by every administration (Hamby, 1992; Rutland, 1995). Since Reagan, even under Democrat Bill Clinton, an emphasis on deregulation and privatization took place, and liberals often split over the degree that was desirable. Faced with a financial crisis, a health-care dilemma and energy challenges, the Obama administration has re-established the government as a source of social and economic solutions. Still, most American liberals generally believe that business should not be run by government, only regulated, and that it is not possible to redress all social or economic ills with politics. In the main, they also seek greater social, political and economic inclusiveness through policies supporting marginalized groups such as women, children, minorities, gays and lesbians (Hamby, 1992; Rutland, 1995).

Since the Vietnam War, they also have tended to be skeptical of military solutions to geopolitical problems. But this perspective has gone through a few changes since 9/11. Right afterward, most liberals were inclined to support armed intervention to destroy Al-Qaeda, in Afghanistan at least. With the invasion of Iraq, and especially during the long, difficult prosecution of both wars, increasingly liberals have favored withdrawal from both countries as soon as possible. In the religious sector, nearly all the mainline Protestant denominations (most of which are theologically liberal) took public stances against the war in Iraq (Religion News Service, 2003).

Leftists, sometimes called “radicals” (though there are radicals of the right) generally do not trust human nature to establish socio-economic justice, for them a primary value, and so believe that a good deal of government intervention or even

nationalization is needed. Depending on the source, the term can apply to a range of views from communism or socialism, even a strong social-welfare democracy. Most oppose the current level of socio-economic inequality. They tend to support remedies that loosen property rights, involve much more regulation (or nationalization) of major businesses, greater taxation of the rich and upper-middle class and more or better services for the poor (Johnson, 2005b).

Related to this category but not identical with it are progressives. They can be roughly positioned between liberals and leftists and in the United States generally are not socialists, preferring to reform, not replace capitalism. The term's history can be traced to 16<sup>th</sup>-century Reformation England, when it reflected anti-Catholic and anti-monarchical views not unlike those of that period's liberals. In the very late 19th and early 20th centuries, US progressives created a political movement in response to the social issues of industrialization. They sought laws to protect workers, establish female suffrage and regulate child labor. Formed in 1912 by Theodore Roosevelt, the Progressive Party wanted to free government from the power of businesses larger than ever before. Historically, it has been used by those affiliated with Republicans or Democrats but in general, currently it refers to those on the left. Presidents seeking to govern along various progressive principles were Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt and Lyndon Johnson (Huds, 2010).

This has been the preferred nomenclature for the left wing of the Democratic Party during the presidential campaign of Barack Obama. Two present political organizations are named accordingly. One is the Progressive Democrats of America. It says it seeks "to build a party and government controlled by citizens, not corporate

elites—with policies that serve the broad public interest, not just private interests.” It operates as a political action committee inside the Democratic Party and outside it in movements for peace and justice, according to its Web site. It says it focuses on these issues: ending war and occupations and redirecting defense funding; health care for all; economic and social justice; clean, fair, transparent elections; stopping global warming and other environmental issues; and political accountability and justice (Progressive Democrats of America, 2010).

Others have sought to keep progressive politics outside the party system. The Independent Progressive Politics Network says that it “is composed of organizations and individuals committed to the achievement of a national, non-sectarian, independent progressive political party, or an alliance of such parties, as an alternative to the corporate-controlled, Democratic/Republican system.” It aims to transform the country by unifying people opposed to “racism, sexism, homophobia, economic class exploitation, age discrimination and all other forms of oppression and discrimination” (Independent Progressive Politics Network, 2008).

In this study, progressive politics will generally refer to those whose views most closely resemble the PDA over the IPPN, but both approaches should be considered a part of the dissenting movements opposed to Reagan administration policies in Central America during the period in this thesis. During that time, as the notion was much criticized and discredited, “liberal” developed negative connotations. Many on the left struggled with an identity and a name for their politics. Some might have called themselves “progressives,” though the term was not as popular then as now, others “populists.” Some would have continued to refer to themselves as liberals,

others leftists. For the most part, the social movements fighting administration policy were not doctrinaire and accepted help from those willing to give it. Focus and tactics were much debated, but political labels as such were not a big issue (Smith, 1996). In this study, “progressive” will be used for those who felt the Reagan administration’s neglect of social-welfare democracy (in this country or elsewhere) and its military intervention did not reflect the best American values and needed to be stopped.

Political conservatives generally support the socio-economic status quo and oppose policies that redistribute income or opportunity. They tend to believe that those with wealth and power have earned them and that attempts to alter the economic system will mostly damage social order and economic effectiveness. Many base their attitudes on religious values and traditional morality (Johnson, 2005c). Most believe a strong military is needed to achieve geopolitical stability, often construed in terms of US dominance. In addition, many have tended to support hierarchical values in other areas, such as, more historically than recently, men over women, straight over gay or northern hemisphere over southern (Grigsby, 2001/2008). These attitudes are changing but in general more slowly than with liberals. Regarding Central America in the 1980s, we can assume that most, though not all, conservatives were initially more supportive of the Reagan administration’s intervention in El Salvador and Nicaragua. As the media, mainstream and alternative, made more information about these situations available, some conservatives began to doubt the wisdom of this intervention. Most did not.

### **The Geopolitical Situation in the United States and Central America in the 1980s**

The conflict in the two nations under study begs to be taken as a whole because of the Reagan administration's insistence that Nicaragua was channeling arms to leftist guerillas in El Salvador, trying to reproduce its revolution (Klaiber, 1998; Smith, 1996). Soviet-bloc nations, especially Cuba, were allegedly sending weapons to Nicaragua for the Salvadoran rebels. This put the administration on high alert for another Latin American regime change. Salvadoran leftists, on the other hand, believed a revolt was justified because the ruling junta was an economically and politically unjust (oppressive) and rights-abusing (repressive) regime with lethal enforcers (Klaiber, 1998). Arms were sent to El Salvador through Nicaragua, but virtually all independent sources said that the Soviet Union was not involved and that after the rebels' failed offensive in 1981, the arms flow decreased substantially, probably in response to US pressure (Smith, 1996).

During this time, the Reagan team also supported the counterrevolutionaries (or *contras*) in Nicaragua, many of whose leaders came from the brutal National Guard of deposed dictator Anastasio Somoza. It justified this violation of US and international law in the name of a morally murky symmetry: If it could not stop the supply of arms to El Salvador, it would harass the Nicaraguan government into dysfunction and overthrow by the methods it opposed in El Salvador (Parry, 1992; Smith, 1996). If evaluated in terms of stated aims, the *contras* were probably doing more harm than good because a) they were an illegal attempt to overthrow a foreign government; b) they used indiscriminate violence; and c) along with a US economic blockade and other harassment such as military maneuvers in Honduras and the

mining of harbors, they were driving the Sandinistas farther into the arms of Soviet-bloc nations (Smith, 1996; Klaiber, 1998). But the overt objectives may not have been the main ones. The result was the sometime suspension of civil liberties for national security and a hijacking of public-sector funds to fight the *contras*. US intimidation subverted the aims of the revolution sufficiently that the Sandinistas were voted out in 1990, a major goal of the Reagan administration (Smith, 1996).

The United States supplied more than a million dollars a day in economic and military aid, most of it military, to the Salvadoran government. This virtually equaled the money spent on the Vietnam War, and for the same duration, a little more than a decade (Smith, 1996). In this effort, thousands of civilians died annually, in numbers well documented by human-rights organizations. About 80,000 of a total population of 5 million died in El Salvador from 1980, just before the Reagan administration began pouring arms into the country, until a peace accord in January 1992. The United Nations (UN) Truth Commission said 85% were killed by government forces or death squads (Public Broadcasting System [PBS], 2001). Another 15,000-20,000 civilians in Nicaragua died during the *contra* war, as many as two-thirds killed by the *contras* (Klaiber, 1998). This killing took place after the revolution in late 1979 until a year or so after the leftists were voted out in 1990. The *contras* disbanded slowly and fighting continued for more than a year after a peace accord.

The unsettling realization is that, while unrolling slowly, this is genocidal by almost any measure and few in politics or media called it. In a Lexis-Nexis search for “El Salvador” and “human rights,” of 1,000 articles from *The New York Times* for the period in question, only one uses the term “genocide,” a Reuters story. It quotes the

president of Pax Christi International, Bishop Luigi Bettazzi, who said the peoples of El Salvador and Guatemala were victims of “a deliberate policy of genocide” by their governments (Reuters, 1982). Of 1,000 articles containing “Nicaragua” and “human rights” in a similar search of *The Times*, “genocide” comes up twice, in accusations by the Reagan administration about Sandinista actions regarding the Miskito Indians (New York Times, 1982; Bonner, 1982a).

It is easy to forget that only eight years after the end of the Vietnam War, the U.S. government bought into a nearly identical counter-insurgency paradigm in another third-world nation of doubtful strategic value. The federal government poured more than \$6 billion into El Salvador alone (PBS, 2001), equal to \$24.2 billion as a share of GDP in 2010 (Williamson, 2010). This expensive intervention in the affairs of two geopolitical bantamweights occasioned a great deal of debate in this country. It revolved around whether the situation would turn into “another Vietnam,” on one hand, or whether the United States would become “a helpless giant,” too timid to intervene in smaller countries turning leftist because it suffered from “the Vietnam syndrome” (Smith, 1996), on the other. The media didn't want to miss the unfolding of the story, as they had in Vietnam, and covered it thoroughly through the 1980s.

Smith (1996) documents that *The Times* ran an average of 3.4 news and op-ed articles a day on Central America for the span of the Reagan presidency. It went from publishing fewer than 100 articles in 1976 to more than 1,500 in 1982 and 1983. Broadcast coverage went from 11 stories on Nicaragua and El Salvador for all of 1975-77 to 550 network stories per year for Reagan's term in office.

## **A Brief Political and Economic History of El Salvador**

About the size of Massachusetts, El Salvador supported tribes mostly related to the Mayans and some to the Aztecs. The most dominant were the Pipil, a subgroup of the Nahuatl who had been in Central America for five millennia (US State Department, 2010a). Once the Spanish found little in precious metals, they began to commandeer Indian land for plantation agriculture and intermarried to create a mestizo (called “ladino”) country. Diseases for which the native population had little resistance and overwork from slave labor killed off large numbers of Indians (Smith, 1996). The Spanish cultivated cacao for chocolate, indigo for dye and by the mid-19th century, coffee. Other major exports have been bananas, beef and cotton. Indigenous people lost most of their land to coffee-growing estates controlled by a few families, and deep social divisions followed as peasants were kicked off estates and their communal lands outlawed (Berryman, 1984). Landless workers then could be hired cheaply with little regard for their health, safety or pensions (Klaiber, 1998).

When coffee prices and wages dropped precipitously in the world depression of the 1930s and growers furloughed workers, the dispossessed *campesinos* (peasants) tried to organize under reformers and revolutionaries such as Agustín Farabundo Martí, namesake of the 1980s rebels. Martí led a rebellion of the rural poor in 1932. The military ultimately put it down by murdering 30,000 people nationwide in an event still known as *La Matanza*, the massacre (Smith, 1996). The army killed mostly people in traditional clothing or speaking Indian languages. Out of this rebellion, Salvadoran political parties finally emerged. Elite response was to ensure that every president for 50 years was a military officer and that land reform was dead

(Klaiber, 1998). In the 1960s, the Kennedy administration became concerned about a repeat of the 1959 revolution in Cuba and created a regional development program, the Alliance for Progress. It advocated a full spectrum of political parties and redistribution of land. The oligarchy and the military fought both (Klaiber, 1998). Guerilla groups formed but were not very effective. When a center-left alliance won the presidential elections in 1972, the government nullified them and named a colonel the winner. As both right and left became stronger politically and better armed by the United States or the Soviet bloc, repression escalated. Death squads began to prey on rural villages, and security forces massacred protesters. Dissidents were abducted, many tortured and the military rigged elections (Klaiber, 1998).

Another election in 1977 was subverted by military coup, which inflamed the populace. At a protest, the military killed a beloved progressive priest, Father Rutilio Grande. Oscar Romero, a moderate conservative installed as Archbishop of San Salvador in 1977, changed his outlook when he saw the brutality with which the security forces operated (Klaiber, 1998). He demanded investigations of the priest's death and other murders and disappearances, advocated protest and became an immediate icon of the Salvadoran resistance. Under President Jimmy Carter, the United States gave the strife-torn nation \$5 million in military aid as part of a \$50-million assistance package. Romero implored Carter to withhold money for the military. He spoke out against the repression one last time, urging soldiers as a religious act to refuse to shoot their own people, and was assassinated giving Mass the next day (Berryman, 1984). Six months later, the bloodiest civil war in Latin America, as a percentage of population killed, began. Death squads would sometimes

enter villages and begin to murder every man, woman and child they could find, killing 500 to 1,000 in some cases, the UN Truth Commission said (PBS, 2001).

Upon Romero's death, Arturo Rivera y Damas was appointed Archbishop of San Salvador, and he too found his majority-culture views changed. He never declared as complete a solidarity as Romero, but he worked persistently to mediate between the government and the guerillas, while periodically denouncing the government's deadly campaign (Klaiber, 1998). In December 1980, three American nuns and a lay worker were murdered. This mobilized progressives in the United States and the world, who protested the civilian-military junta that in late 1979 had replaced the military government that took power in the stolen election of 1977 (Klaiber, 1998).

In 1989, in an event that signaled the beginning of the end of the war, six Jesuit professors at the major school in the region, the University of Central America, were brutally assassinated by one of the most notorious, US-trained death squads. A conviction emerged about calling the armed actors to account (PBS, 2001). Newly elected President Alfredo Cristiani of the ARENA party, a far-right coalition tied to death squads, said the military was responsible, and for the first time, senior officers were charged with human-rights violations. The conflict tended toward negotiations, and the nation began to create a space for less polarized politics (Klaiber, 1998).

Archbishop Rivera y Damas, in the tradition of Legal Aid, a human-rights arm of the church founded by Romero, formed Legal Defense, which helped organize human-rights groups and a commission of peace and justice. In 1988, he also convened and moderated the National Debate for Peace, a multilateral discussion by under-represented groups. He invited peasant and industrial unions, cultural

associations and university faculty but not the military or the rebels. The main evangelical association, coffee growers and national chamber of commerce were invited but boycotted. When surveyed, 82% said the war was a poor solution to the nation's problems (Klaiber, 1998), and the belligerents lost their moral façade.

The war did lasting damage, not just to people's psyches and trust, but to the nation's physical and social infrastructure, economic development and environmental quality. The country is still being rebuilt 20 years later. Gangs and drug running by Latin mafias are major social problems, a legacy of the war and historic racism. A proliferation of weapons, another result of the war, has killed more people per year than during the 1980s (PBS, 2001).

Noteworthy are the Peace Accords of 1992, brokered by the United Nations, which also created the Truth Commission, roles the Catholic Church had performed in other Latin countries but which it readily handed over. Thousands of insurgents laid down their arms, and, while amnesty prevailed, the commission named more than 100 officers involved in state terror. They were dismissed, reassigned or retired. The agreements have lasted and are thought to be among the United Nation's most successfully moderated peace deals (PBS, 2001).

### **A Brief Political and Economic History of Nicaragua**

Prior to Spanish occupation, two different classes of Indians occupied Nicaragua. Tribes related to Mexican peoples came from the north to settle in the central and western parts of the country. Others from the south, probably present Colombia, lived in the eastern lowlands (US State Department, 2010b). The Spanish colonized the

peoples of the west and center and decimated their populations through disease and slavery. They left alone the Atlantic-coast Indians, supported by the British who competed for dominance. The British preferred to trade with rather than indenture the Miskito or mixed-blood Indians, formed from intermarriage with African-descended former slaves (Berryman, 1984; Smith, 1996). Nicaragua became independent in 1838. Mostly the aristocrats benefited, as the semi-feudal social system was yoked to the economies of Great Britain and the United States. Subsistence peasant economies were replaced with cash crops for export, especially coffee. Other important exports became bananas, cotton, sugar, beef and seafood (Smith, 1996).

During fighting between liberals favoring free trade and conservatives seeking monopolies, in 1855 a liberal faction asked American military adventurer and freebooter (land-loving pirate) William Walker to help their cause. But Walker took control of the army and tried to rule the nation as a slave colony. The British recaptured it in 1865 and handed Walker over to Nicaragua for execution. In 1912, after persistent conflict between liberals and conservatives and a dispute over the failure to obtain what became the Panama Canal, conservatives asked the United States to quell an uprising. US armed forces remained an occupying force, and in 1926, when conflict erupted again, the Marines were called in. In 1933 Augusto César Sandino, for whom the 1970s rebels were named, led a revolt that drove out US forces (Berryman, 1984; Klaiber, 1998).

Against this revolt, General Anastasio Somoza led a national guard set up by the US armed forces. With the US military gone, he invited Sandino to dinner, killed him and with the support of Franklin Roosevelt, made himself dictator. Somoza's corrupt

and rights-abusing ways brought about his assassination in 1956, but his son, Luis Somoza Debayle, became president, and then, upon his death in 1967, his brother, Anastasio Somoza Debayle, continued an oppressive rule (Berryman, 1984). All the Somozas monopolized the best businesses and looted the country. When an earthquake devastated Managua in 1972, killing 5,000 of the city's 400,000, leaving 20,000 injured and 250,000 homeless, the nation appealed for international aid. Somoza kept the aid money and sold the supplies, after which the country mobilized around a rebel group, the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN). Despite strong talk of human rights early on, the Carter White House, committed to anti-communism, supported the dictatorship over this revolt (Klaiber, 1998).

Noam Chomsky (1992/2006) has a decidedly left-of-center perspective but also a reputation for keeping track of inconvenient facts. He says that while Somoza's Guard was bombing residential neighbourhoods in Managua, killing tens of thousands, "the US ambassador sent a cable to the White House saying it would be "ill-advised" to tell the Guard to call off the bombing, because that might interfere with the policy of keeping them in power and the Sandinistas out."

After seven years of difficult fighting, the rebels overthrew Somoza in 1979, and a civilian-military junta took over, with Daniel Ortega at its helm. The Sandinistas nationalized key industries, instituted land reform and began ambitious health and literacy campaigns—illiteracy had averaged 60%, nearly 80% in some parts (Smith, 1996). Promising political pluralism, a mixed economy and prompt elections, the Marxist-leaning government soon alienated the aristocracy and foreign donors, fostering capital flight and brain drain as technicians, intellectuals and business

people fled (Berryman, 1984; Cleary, 1997). Alienated by the ideological tenor of the new government, centrists in the junta began to resign. Believing that educating the poor and rebuilding the nation came first, the junta delayed elections. This further aggravated relations with the Reagan administration (Smith, 1996; Klaiber, 1998).

In the midst of a debt crisis, a mostly illiterate countryside, a treasury looted by Somoza and his guard, a business class voting with its feet and a center-left coalition breaking up, its most bedeviling problem remained the insurrection led by former officers of the National Guard. They operated out of bases in Honduras and began to benefit from increasing amounts of CIA money, equipment and advisers. Along with former guardsmen of various rank, few of whom came from high social station (as the well-to-do never need such avenues for advancement), peasants and workers also made up their rank and file. They included small-holding farmers and small-business owners whose dreams of upward mobility appeared blocked (Dodds, 2001).

Aggravating the situation, the Sandinistas moved Miskitos off their homeland, to get them out of the line of fire, they said, at one point killing several hundred in a much-publicized atrocity that damaged their international reputation early on (Klaiber, 1998). Many Miskitos resisted and joined the *contras*, making common cause but not a cultural bond. The *contras* hid on Miskito lands or in Honduras, supported by the United States (Klaiber, 1998; Dodds, 2001). Except for the fighting of the revolution, the guard had not faced real resistance, adding to the potential for a human-rights disaster, as they had never learned the tactics of a professional army (Klaiber, 1998).

The Carter administration was ambivalent about both sides, but the Reagan administration experienced no such confusion. In 1981, passionate about stopping the

spread of communism, it began to assist the rebels. This policy was driven by zealous anti-communists, particularly former general and Secretary of State Al Haig (succeeded by George Schultz in mid-1982 when he was seen as too outspoken), Assistant Secretary of State Thomas Enders and William Casey, director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Casey was Reagan's campaign manager and a cold warrior from the Office of Strategic Services, precursor to the CIA. National Security Adviser William Clark and UN Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick, a former Georgetown professor of political science, were also key advisers (Smith, 1996).

Besides the war, a US economic boycott and a US-led blocking of loans from international lending agencies began to badly damage the economy. Shortages were common, the black market flourished and inflation raged between a few hundred and a few thousand percent. Ultimately, the Sandinistas were using more than 60% of their budget to fight the war and could not fund the social changes they pledged. Chomsky (1992/2006) said, "One of the most respected Central America correspondents, Julia Preston ([of] the *Boston Globe*), reported that 'Administration officials said they are content to see the *contras* debilitate the Sandinistas by forcing them to divert scarce resources toward the war and away from social programs.'"

The United States also blocked peace deals sought by the Sandinistas by refusing to negotiate and continuing to fund a rebellion that lacked support in the countryside. It feigned interest in but refused to support other such deals brokered by third parties such as Mexico and Venezuela, or Costa Rica, the one that carried the day (Smith, 1996). In 1989, independent of the United States, an agreement was made to disband the *contras* but took nearly two years to take full effect (Klaiber, 1998).

During the 1980s, the United States provided a billion dollars to destabilize the new regime. The effort included the mining of the main harbor in violation of US and international law and featured a scheme to sell arms, including high-powered missiles, to Iran and use the money for the *contras*. Known as Iran-*contra*, this scandal produced a congressional investigation, focused both on an illegal attempt to overthrow a foreign government and the sales of weapons to an enemy on a terrorist list—with which we allegedly did not make deals—but no convictions. (Appendix B contains much more detail on Iran-*contra*, especially its domestic side, the public diplomacy program, the Reagan administration's broadside assault on U.S. media in support of a controversial Central American policy.) During this period, a Democratic Congress curbed and renewed funding for the *contras* sporadically (Smith, 1996).

Shortly after the election of President George H. W. Bush, the fall of the Soviet Union made proxy wars a fading priority. Soon thereafter, the United National Organization (UNO), under Violeta Chamorro, widow of publisher Pedro Chamorro, a popular member of a leading family killed fighting Somoza, defeated Ortega in the 1990 presidential campaign. Chamorro negotiated a peace accord with amnesty for *contras* who laid down arms and development zones for *contras* and Miskitos, who had sought an autonomous zone (Smith, 1996; Klaiber, 1998).

**Chapter 4**

**Papering over Dirty War  
at the Nation's Newspaper:**

**Two Progressive Scholars  
on the Marginalization of Religious Victims of State Terror  
and Distortion of Elections  
at *The New York Times***

### **Manufacturing a Consensus About Worthy Victims and Legitimate Elections**

In looking for leadership in print media, one looks to *The New York Times*. It is widely considered the industry standard and the national “paper of record.” It serves as an emblem of mainstream media and supplies a vantage point on others because many take their cue from it. As much as an authority to be lauded or dethroned, it will be contrasted with the religious media to establish a relativity of all rhetorical stances. Still, significant missteps will be subjected to scrutiny. During this period, *The Times* had different concerns from those of the Christian-left publications. It was writing for the broadest possible audience and was steeped in the traditions of omniscient narration and objective reporting. (This is defined as the use of third-person subjects, avoidance of emotional language and value judgments, emphasis on observable facts and official statistics and a commitment to portraying at least two sides of every conflict.) But in key cases, it failed to live up to its disinterested aims and apparently bent to administration or more general cultural pressure to distort coverage or failed to make enough of an effort to document the ugliest facts.

In a controversial study of media bias, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, Edward Herman, professor emeritus of media and economics at the University of Pennsylvania Wharton School of Business, and Noam Chomsky, political theorist and professor emeritus of linguistics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (1988), look at the treatment by major media of the civil conflicts in Nicaragua, Guatemala and El Salvador in the late 1970s and 1980s. In two chapters, “Worthy and Unworthy Victims” and “Legitimizing Versus Meaningless Third World Elections,” they assert that media bias pervaded the

coverage of US client states over those of Soviet-bloc nations (a bias shifting to Islamic enemy nations). They believe it is not proactive but an indirect result of

- capitalism's concentration of ownership, such as media conglomerates;
- advertising as the primary source of income;
- mainstream media's heavy dependence on information provided by big government, big business and "experts" funded by these "agents of power" (p. 2);
- flak, a colloquialism meaning a barrage of counter-information to neutralize stories that contradict a given story line or frame; and
- during the Cold War, with its polarizing frames, anti-communism as a "national religion and control mechanism" (1988, p. 2).

They examine *The New York Times*, *Time*, *Newsweek* and CBS News, looking at coverage of human-rights violations, and in particular, extrajudicial killings of many clergy in El Salvador and one in Poland during this period. Major US media, they say, framed this coverage in terms of worthy or unworthy victims. They also examine coverage of elections in El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua, framed as legitimizing or meaningless. Looking closely at coverage of victims, they make a startling comparison: the reporting on the 1984 murder of a pro-Solidarity priest, Jerzy Popieluszko, by the Polish national police versus the murders of 100 religious workers in El Salvador and Guatemala during the 1970s and 1980s. Besides the greater quantity of coverage given the murder of one activist priest in Communist Poland than the murders of 100 activist priests and religious workers in Guatemala and El Salvador (mostly Salvadoran), they also note the superior quality of the

coverage, the depth and specificity in descriptions of Popieluszko's murder. They contrast this with the 1980 murder of three US nuns and a lay worker and the murder of Archbishop Romero in El Salvador.

The finding of Popieluszko's body was front-page news for *The New York Times*—in fact, the initial *failure* to find his body made the front page—and in all the media publications analyzed here; the details of his seizure, the disposition of his body, and the nature of his wounds were recounted extensively [emotive news]....These details were also repeated at every opportunity (and, most notably, at the trial). The finding of the bodies of the four [US church] women...was a back-page item in *The Times*, and in all four of the media...in our sample [and] the accounts of the violence done to the four murdered women were very succinct, omitted many details, and were not repeated after the initial disclosure. No attempt was made to reconstruct the scene with its...brutal violence, so that the drama conveyed in the accounts of Popieluszko's murder was entirely missing. The murder of the four churchwomen was made remote and impersonal [episodic news]. (p. 61) [italics original]

The lack of emphasis on the depraved nature of the murders (churchwomen raped, beaten and killed) or their outrageousness (an archbishop) established the Polish victim as worthy and the Salvadorans as unworthy. In this analysis, the authors shed a light on distant suffering in print media. They argue that this difference is no accident. It happens because the media elite have a close but indirect relationship with other managerial elites and are much more willing to write for them and, by selective sourcing, to let them speak. These preferences result in a negative framing of dissenters in US client states and the opposite for those in enemy states. The authors (1988) have both critical quantitative and qualitative analysis (Tables 4-1 and 4-2).

I show a little later that this coverage by the exemplar of US mainstream media is not quite as unilaterally biased as they suggest —its opinion-editorial record is much different—but the framing in its reportage mostly leaves First World or client-state

Table 4-1. *New York Times*' Coverage of Worthy and Unworthy Victims: A  
Murdered Polish Priest Versus One Hundred Murdered Religious in Latin America

[76 victims only listed here; 24 Guatemalans omitted]

(Herman & Chomsky, 1988, pp. 40-41, excerpts from Table 2-1 in original).

<i>Victims</i>	<b>Articles<sup>1</sup></b> No.; % of row 1	<b>Column inches</b> No.; % of row 1	<b>Front-page articles</b> No.; % of row 1	<b>Editorials</b> No.; % of row 1
Jerzy Popieluszko, murdered on Oct. 19, 1984	78 (100)	1183 (100)	10 (100)	3 (100)
72 religious victims in Latin America, 1964-78 <sup>2</sup>	8 (10.3)	117.5 (9.9)	1 (10)	--
Oscar Romero, murdered Mar. 18, 1980	16 (20.5)	219 (18.5)	4 (40)	--
U.S. religious women, murdered in El Salvador, Dec. 2, 1980	26 (33.3)	201.5 (17)	3 (30)	--

1. The media coverage is for an 18-month period from the time of the first report of the victim's disappearance or murder.

2. Listed in Penny Lernoux, *Cry of the People* (New York: Doubleday, 1980), pp. 464-65. We [Herman and Chomsky] have omitted the names of seven martyrs who had joined the guerillas. Lernoux points out that her list is far from complete, and is composed of only the better-known victims.

Table. 4-2. The Savageries Inflicted on Worthy and Unworthy Victims,  
as Depicted in *The New York Times*  
(Herman & Chomsky, 1988, pp. 45-46; Table 2-2 in original).

#### WORTHY VICTIMS

##### ***Jerzy Popieluszko, a Polish priest, murdered on October 19, 1984.***

- (1) Account at finding body: “The sources who saw the priest’s body on Tuesday said it was badly bruised, indicating he had been beaten after he was kidnapped on a highway near the town of Torun. The autopsy also showed that Father Popieluszko had been gagged at the mouth and apparently tied with a rope from neck to feet so that if he struggled he would strangle himself, they said. The sources said they could not confirm reports quoting members of the slain priest’s family as saying he had suffered injuries to his jaw and skull” (Dec. 29, 1984).
  
- (2) Account at trial of murderers: “The film showed clearly that the priest’s bent legs were tied to a noose around his neck in such a way that if he straightened them he would be strangled. The rope binding his hands had evidently come loose in the water. Several gags had also worked free and lay covering his clerical collar and the front of his cassock. From his legs hung a sack of rocks that, according to earlier testimony, had been carried all over Poland for the week that the three assailants were pursuing the priest. When the cameras were trained on the priest’s face, the narration by a police officer at the reservoir declared that ‘there are clear signs of a beating.’ This was confirmed by medical evidence offered Thursday by Dr. Maria Byrdy, a pathologist, who said Father Popieluszko had been struck more than a dozen times with a club” (Jan. 26, 1985).

Table. 4-2. The Savageries Inflicted on Worthy and Unworthy Victims,  
as Depicted in *The New York Times* (Continued).

UNWORTHY VICTIMS

[Salvadoran only; Chilean and Guatemalan omitted]

*Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero,*

**murdered in El Salvador on March 24, 1980:**

“Archbishop Romero was killed by a sniper who got out of a red car, apparently stood just inside the door of the Chapel of the Divine Providence Hospital, fired a single shot at the prelate and fled. The bullet struck the archbishop in the heart, according to a doctor at the hospital where the prelate was taken” (Mar. 25, 1980). *Note:* There was no arrest or trial.<sup>9</sup>

*Jean Donovan, Ita Ford, Dorothy Kazel, and Maura Clarke,*

**four American women murdered in El Salvador, December 4, 1980:**

(1) Account at the finding of the bodies:

“Witnesses who found the grave said it was about five feet deep. One woman had been shot in the face, another in the breast. Two of the women were found with their blood-stained underpants around their ankles” (Dec. 5, 1980).

(2) Account at the trial of the murderers:

No description was given, although medical testimony was presented to the court.

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<sup>9</sup> And so there was no coverage of the arrest or trial.

decision-makers in control of the master narrative. And in stories on human-rights abuses, it keeps the full horror of the story at bay, thereby neutralizing its moral urgency. In terms of social ethics, it places the responsibility of US policy makers and, by extension, the American public, in the background.

### ***The Times'* Reporting on the Salvadoran and Nicaraguan Elections**

The second major glaring deviation from disinterested coverage is *The Times'* election reporting, Herman and Chomsky contend (1988). As the United States has not signed the UN agreements on social, economic and cultural rights, free and fair elections are among the human rights most honored in this country, the civil and political rights, so US media should be expected to take them seriously. In addition, scholars have shown that state terror and genocide rarely occur in countries with press freedom and free and fair elections (Robert Hitchcock, personal communication, March 2004, in the teaching of human rights anthropology).

Among various deficiencies, Herman and Chomsky (1988) note that in El Salvador *The Times* reported the likelihood of guerillas disrupting voting and threats of violence against voters many times. Yet little disruption occurred, and fighting in general was low. In fact, two previous elections were stolen by the military, and leftist leaders and sympathizers were assassinated. It also failed to report that the political arm of the rebel coalition, the Revolutionary Democratic Front (FDR), was not allowed to participate. In addition, the Salvadoran government criminalized a failure to vote, declaring it treasonous in two major papers. Instead, *The Times* emphasized long lines waiting to vote, a high turnout and the victory by the Christian

Democrats as a triumph of moderation. Ironically, this moderation did not include ending the war by negotiation because no party that wanted to negotiate could campaign. In fact, the only parties in the election actually stood for more war (Herman & Chomsky, 1988).

In general, the coverage omitted the climate of fear surrounding the elections. This included publication in a Salvadoran paper in March 1981, a year before the elections, of a list of 138 so-called “traitors”—the most prominent leftist and center-left politicians. The threat to these leaders and their exclusion from the elections was acknowledged by the Reagan administration in its straight-faced suggestion that the FDR could campaign from outside the country by using videotapes (Herman & Chomsky, 1988). The 1982 election also occurred after two years in which military and death-squads killings averaged 700 civilians a month, according to a 1985 report by Americas Watch, a subsidiary of Human Rights Watch. Yet *The Times*’ reports emphasized the military’s pledge to protect voters from violence and to respect the outcome (Herman & Chomsky, 1988, p. 109).

They contrast this with the reporting on the 1984 Nicaraguan election. First, this election was scrutinized by 450 observers, making it one of the most transparent elections ever. Second, the Nicaraguan literacy campaign was lauded by the Irish observers and by the Latin American Studies Association, leading Latin American experts (Latin American Studies Association [LASA], 2010).<sup>10</sup> As noted, the Sandinistas deferred elections for five years after the revolution, to ensure an

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<sup>10</sup> “The Latin American Studies Association (LASA) is the largest professional association in the world for individuals and institutions involved in the study of Latin America. It brings together experts from all disciplines and diverse occupations across the globe (LASA, 2010).

informed electorate could vote. *The Times* ignored these facts (Herman & Chomsky, 1988). Instead, it gave voice to persistent Reagan administration criticism of the delay and its prediction the elections would be unfair. Generally, Herman and Chomsky show that the major media's approach to Nicaragua's elections was nearly the opposite of El Salvador's. The turnout, a larger percentage of the people than El Salvador, was credited to government coercion. In fact, unlike El Salvador, no one was required to vote. They also explain that the threat of rebel disruptions and their actuality were not reported as a "challenge" to the large turnout, cited as offering evidence of the election's validity in coverage of El Salvador (1988).

Regarding such "challenges" in Nicaragua, the Irish observers said that the business-dominated Democratic Coordinating Committee called for a boycott of voter registration and that the *contras* shut down 11 polling places. LASA said the main opposition also called for a voter boycott and that radio broadcasts said the *contras* would kill voters. In contrast to El Salvador, *The Times* also failed to point out the absence of mass killings of the opposition and did not mention that there were no transparent ballot boxes, no ID cards to be stamped (required of all citizens as a way of weeding out the rebels and sympathizers) and no legal requirement to vote (1988). The Irish and Dutch government delegations said that, compared to El Salvador, the Nicaraguan elections allowed a greater percentage of the people to vote, never threatened the opposition with murder and elected incumbents fairly (1988). Lastly, comparing intimidation of the press in each country as it related to "election quality," Herman and Chomsky (1988) note that all four US media highlighted the temporary

shutdown of the pro-*contra* paper *La Prensa*,<sup>11</sup> accused of urging a revolt, yet ignored the bombing of two Salvadoran papers and the murder of Salvadoran journalists. LASA had reservations about press freedom in Nicaragua, but they said, “The opposition could and did get its message out” (p. 26 in LASA report, cited in Herman & Chomsky, 1988, p. 131). LASA ultimately said that the Nicaraguan election “by Latin American standards was a model of probity and fairness” (p. 32 in LASA report, cited in Herman & Chomsky, 1988, p. 131).

The major US media did not agree, and about this, Herman and Chomsky (1988) observe that “the media can denounce restrictions on freedom of the press in Nicaragua after having totally ignored the question in El Salvador, where restrictions were far more severe” (p. 131). They criticize *The Times* in particular, at one point saying that *Times* writer Warren Hoge must have been unaware of his own discursive contradictions. In one article, Hoge says the choices are “clear” in El Salvador: the “moderate” Christian Democrats or extremists of the left and right. But in Nicaragua, it is “murky” whether the Sandinistas will give up control if they are voted out. Whether the Salvadoran army and the United States will give up control or the government its refusal to negotiate is never raised (Herman & Chomsky, 1988).

Herman and Chomsky (1988) also look at various topics *The Times* included or excluded in covering the 1984 elections in both countries (most of these related to the discussions above), judging them “compatible” or “incompatible” with the US agenda for that country. I have summarized these below (Table 4-3). (“Compatible” means

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<sup>11</sup> This was a pale, ideological version of the anti-Somoza, pre-revolutionary *La Prensa*. It was instead a conservative mouthpiece for the *contras* and conservatives that the CIA propped up with nearly a million dollars of subsidies (Parry, 1992).

supporting the Reagan administration's frames for elections in that country, and "incompatible" means contradicting those frames.)

Table 4-3. Averages of *New York Times*' Stories "Compatible" or "Incompatible" with the U.S. Agenda for February 1 to March 30, Before the Salvadoran Elections, and September 5 to November 6, Before the Nicaraguan Elections, 1984 (Herman & Chomsky, 1988).

El Salvador

- Average number of articles per topic *compatible* with the US agenda: 8.9.  
Average percentage of *compatible* articles on a given topic: 31.6.
- Average number of articles per topic *incompatible* with the US agenda: 0.85.  
Average percentage of *incompatible* articles on a given topic: 3.6.

Nicaragua

- Average number of articles per topic *compatible* with the US agenda: 1.9.  
Average percentage of *compatible* articles on a given topic: 11.8.
- Average of articles per topic *incompatible* with the US agenda: 4.19.  
Average percentage of *incompatible* articles on a given topic: 31.1.

For the Salvadoran elections, the figures support the argument that *The Times* published more articles on topics supporting Reagan-administration frames and many fewer that ran counter to that agenda. In Nicaragua, this pattern is reversed: *The Times* reinforced the Reagan team's jaundiced view of the Sandinista-run elections. Without much question, Herman and Chomsky (1988) reveal real distortions in *The Times*' election coverage in both countries.

What does this assessment lead us to conclude? On a general level, *The Times* was a leader among US media at this time, so it set a tone for many others. That alone is disturbing. But glossing over state terror that intimidated voters and the press in one country's elections, while distorting their integrity and fairness in another, goes

beyond audience-based priorities. It demonstrates a lack of commitment to what most of the people in most of each country experienced. It speaks to a selective approach to the truth. (The emphasis on Popieluszko's death also may have reflected a national fascination with cracks in the political foundation of the Soviet bloc, the first since Czechoslovakia in 1968. Nevertheless, the disparity in coverage is striking and the distortion in election coverage troubling.)

We will examine later the newsroom climate that conditioned this selectivity, a formal cause. I also explore it in terms of government secrecy and rogue governments in Appendix B, an efficient cause. Summarized near the start of this chapter, Herman and Chomsky (1988) lay out their argument from political economy, a final cause (as per Aquinas, 1947). Biased reporting by the nation's newspaper on these elections supports a hypothesis regarding a discursive stance—an often implicit, sometimes explicit, collaboration of media and government that yields biased reporting. Herman and Chomsky explain the implicit collusion. In Appendix B and the analysis of Ray Bonner's reporting for *The Times*, I explore the evidence for explicit collusion. Both are morally irresponsible for an organization of the stature of *The Times*.

In the interests of balance, we should note that the mitigating factors regarding *The Times*' overall coverage are its op-ed record and its commitment to letting high-placed sources in this country, mostly Democratic and NGO leaders, speak out against the terror in El Salvador and the destabilization of Nicaragua. These are not inconsiderable, but the whole picture is perplexing at best and irresponsible at worst.

To be as fair as possible, we should acknowledge that *Manufacturing Consent* (1988) looks at only two aspects of *The Times*' reporting on the countries in question.

And it does so to support a given argument—Boltanski (1999) would recognize its partiality—so before we look at individual texts in depth, we should dispassionately, quantitatively, to see what the bulk of the articles in the national paper of record reflect regarding our primary topics: WTDS, human rights and unworthy victims.

**Chapter 5**

**Adding It Up and Breaking It Down (I):**

**Incidence of Distant Suffering in  
and a Textual Analysis of  
*The New York Times*' Coverage  
of El Salvador**

### **Numbers Tell Part of the Story: *The Times*' Coverage of El Salvador**

Partly, but not entirely, supporting Herman and Chomsky (1988), an examination of more than 2,500 *New York Times* articles regarding WTDS and human rights in both countries during the 1980s reveals a good deal of coverage, particularly editorials and commentaries, that were critical of US policy toward the Salvadoran government or were tolerant of the Sandinistas or opposed to *contra* aid. But it also reveals very few articles that featured detailed prose depicting human-rights violations, of the kind proposed here as typifying WTDS in print and that Herman and Chomsky say is critical to portraying a worthy victim. Heuristic criteria involved articles on atrocities with at least two (journalistic) paragraphs describing abuses in some detail, attributed to common people who were subjected to or witnessed atrocities or church-workers who did or were closely involved with witnesses.

For both countries, this includes 2,502 total articles and 2,335 total reports (subtracting opinions, columns and editorials) from Lexis-Nexis while searching for the country name alone or the country name plus "human rights." For "El Salvador" only, more than 3,000 articles were found, of which the search engine selected the first 1,000 by relevance, the most uses of the keyword in an article. For "Nicaragua" alone, more than 1,500 articles were found, scaled down to 1,000 by relevance. Virtually all of these dealt with the civil wars in some way, the reason US media in general and *The Times* in particular paid such attention. They were then re-sorted in chronological order. A second search involving the country name and "human rights" also produced more than 1,000 for each country. A thousand were selected by relevance, then re-sorted by chronology. The following were removed: indexical

news summaries (many); letters to the editor (also many); book, movie or video reviews; texts of speeches or talks; incidental mention of the country in a story about another country; and stories not related to the wars or human rights, such as articles on travel or natural disasters. Stories by the AP, United Press International and Reuters were included if they were two paragraphs or more, but these were a bare minority. When duplication was eliminated, these searches outlined two ways of determining the nature and placement of coverage involving WTDS and worthy victims. The search for country name alone was designed to see human-rights coverage in the broadest possible geopolitical context, and the search for country name plus “human rights” to locate articles noting human rights explicitly. Human rights was not the focus of most of the latter but did come up by name. Many articles on the fighting, politics, economics, elections, religious or social-justice work or other aspects of policy spoke to conditions surrounding the violence or rights abuses, but did not mention human rights by name, so the broader search was useful that way. It also provided a way to assess WTDS against the full panorama of political coverage for that country (computed as a ratio of WTDS over other types of coverage, below).

The time frame involved stories dated after the inauguration of Ronald Reagan as president on January 20, 1981, when US policy in the region turned aggressively anti-communist, and before early January 1992 in El Salvador, when the last details of the peace accord were finalized, or early February 1992 in Nicaragua. This date marks the disarming of the last band of *contras*. (Only one story was selected on Nicaragua in 1992; it was on Washington’s ambivalence about Chamorro’s compromises with the Sandinistas and had no overt human-rights implications.) One exception on the

other end was an article in the December 1980 issue of *Sojourners*. It was published just after Reagan's election and at the time of the murders of the US nuns and lay worker; it would have been read just before and just after his inauguration. It was included for its extraordinary WTDS qualities. It captures the repression of the clergy through an exiled priest, a moving example of "native" reporting. In Nicaragua, the peace accord was finalized soon after Chamorro defeated Ortega in late 1990, but sporadic fighting continued through 1991 and early 1992. This allows similar time frames and events for comparison.

### **Prominence of Display**

For both countries, these stories include 1,067 run on pages one, two or three of any section of *The Times*—the vast majority of which were in section A on weekdays and section 1 on Sundays, sections devoted to international and national news. The assumption was that these would be seen at a glance by anyone with more than a cursory interest in the paper—anyone turning the first page of a given section, most often the first page of the paper. With duplication eliminated, they represent 44.2% of the total reports from the four searches (without the op-ed and irrelevant items).

**Data on prominence for El Salvador.** Of the searches for "El Salvador" plus "human rights," 41% of all articles (including opinion and editorials) and 49% of all reports ran on pages one, two or three. In examining these figures, one should bear in mind that none of the editorials or opinion pieces would fall on those pages, so the total-reports figure is more representative. By page, when searching for country name

and “human rights,” for El Salvador, 19% of all reports ran on page one, 8% on page two and 21% on page three.

### **Reports Meeting the Heuristic Criteria for Witness to Distant Suffering**

For *New York Times* articles on El Salvador, from the search involving “human rights,” only 10 articles featured the minimum level defined here as witness to distant suffering. The search for the term “El Salvador” alone produced two more stories. One focuses mostly on life in a rebel stronghold but contains a one-sentence paragraph quoting a peasant on army killings of civilians. Another short paragraph introduces it noting peasant reports of burned and bombed buildings and the number killed in them. Including stories about refugees who have fled or witnessed atrocities and those featuring church people reporting on killings, torture or disappearances, four more stories qualify. Using these criteria, 16 of 1,290, or 1.2%, of all articles, and 16 of 1,129 all reports, or 1.4%, meet our criteria for WTDS, defined as analogous to the detail Herman and Chomsky (1988) cite for worthy victims.

Given that 44% of these stories appeared on pages one, two or three, this is an remarkably high level of prominence for what previously would have been considered by most of the public and policy makers to be stories about countries of little general or US strategic interest. The stories with detailed descriptions of gross human-rights violations are just as remarkably low given that these were conflicts known for extrajudicial killings. The sad fact is that in both countries this was a slow-motion genocide, sometimes called “politicide” and characteristic of dirty war, but no

one at the paper of national record said so or covered it in detail. This means mostly that very few *Times* reporters sought out witnesses to such killings or other abuses.

### **The Counter-Trend of the Op-Ed Record and Human-Rights Reports**

Ultimately, though, it is hard to agree completely with Herman and Chomsky because of the *Time*'s record on editorials, opinion pieces and commentary, overwhelmingly critical of Reagan administration policy in both countries. For the search for "El Salvador" plus "human rights," out of 101 opinions or editorials, 10 were positive toward US policy (10%), 75 negative (74%) and 17 of a mixed, moderate or independent perspective (17%). Searching for "El Salvador" alone, of 58 op-ed pieces, eight were positive (14%), 42 negative (72%), and eight mixed or independent (14%). These evaluations are solely the assessment of the author, but op-ed pieces are easy to judge. If there was any equivocation or bivalent interpretation, they were put in the mixed, moderate or independent category. In addition, many *Times* articles featured sources explicitly critical of White House support for the Salvadoran junta or the *contras*.

These included many articles on rights assessments by human-rights groups, by the US or Salvadoran Catholic Churches or by congressional committees or on congressional investigations citing these reports. In this vein, a useful index is coverage of reports by human-rights organizations. In the search for "El Salvador" and "human rights," Amnesty International is featured or cited in 34 articles, Americas Watch in 56. For both countries, of 1,117 articles with the term "human rights," including op-ed pieces, 154, or nearly 14%, cite reports from these major

human-rights groups. Virtually all were at odds with the administration's line on human-rights conditions. A few articles a year cited human-rights data compiled by the Catholic Church, also very critical. To determine the proportion and valence of articles with pro-administration frames and those against would require a content analysis beyond the aims of this study. But the tallies above support the objective, to illuminate incidence of witness to distant suffering and human-rights abuse in *The Times*' coverage.

In light of the harsh criticism of *The Times* above regarding its relative lack of WTDS writing (and portrayal of worthy victims), and to reinforce a commitment to as much balance as possible, frankly missing in Herman and Chomsky, we should appreciate that the reporting in *The Times* devoted a decent, a not-inconsiderable, amount of copy to political deliberations and statements countering the Reagan team's frames. Most of this came from congressional Democrats, the Catholic Church or NGOs. And it could have been criticized by conservatives for a skewed op-ed policy. What it did not do was afford unworthy victims detailed coverage equal to their agony, relative innocence and need for advocacy, nor was it proportional to the coverage these victims would have received had they been in the cosmopolitan frame of dissidents in regimes with which we were in conflict.

As the main intent of this thesis is not just a thumbs up or down on content related to wholesale suffering, in *The Times* or the other two journals, but to establish what WTDS consists of in print, and compare its treatment in alternative and mainstream media, next we need to look at how such writing achieves its results. To do this, we will seek a nuanced textual analysis of selected articles with an eye toward how the

language reveals and conceals, includes and excludes. In other words, as poet William Carlos Williams (1954) once said of the poem, we want to see how each article functions as a “machine made of words.”

One reason for doing so is allied with what truth commissions do, to offer the only approximation of justice left, to make a full accounting of the tragedy in the interest of honoring the victim’s memory and preventing something similar in the future. We also want to see which writing honored the victims’ full humanity and so lent a moral urgency at that time. Another purpose is to allow others to learn from such writing, or improve on it, if they are writers, or to comment, laud or criticize, to deconstruct and reconstruct it, if they are scholars. And in the interest of fairness, in some articles, we will look at how the reporting fails to respect the victims fully and papers over the repression by letting elites sidetrack the discussion, distort it or lie.

### **Rhetorical and Critical-Discourse Analyses of *The Times*’ Reports**

The reporting on these events in *The Times* presents some challenges because it embodies a discursive frame and rhetorical stance so much a part of journalistic culture that we take it for granted: “objectivity” couched in omniscient narration. Most lay people experience it as such a normative discourse they are initially hard-pressed to see how it could be otherwise and still be quality journalism. This could be a discursive frame *par excellence*, one that maintains *The Times*’ position as the leading source of detailed political information for a general, educated audience. Or it could be political sleight-of-hand and stealth commercialism. As we have just seen, the canons of objectivity and balance can mask a darker picture while seeming to give

voice to all the necessary points of view. This posture often produces frames that offend the fewest, appeal to the broadest audience and feature the most authoritative sources, while letting the “average” person speak often enough not to be obviously elitist (Herman & Chomsky, 1988). In putting out *The Times* every day, its writers and editors negotiate some the most contested and difficult of Bourdieu’s (1986; 1990) fields but usually with a well-defined map of where the mines are located. The mediators must make sure it is cutting-edge enough to maintain a reputation for breaking news, discerning trends and exposing wrongdoing but can assure opinion leaders and “just folks” alike that it is not too far from the mainstream (Halberstam, 1979). To preserve its position, it also must remain the trusted mouthpiece of political, economic and cultural leaders, whose interests may run counter to more culturally critical voices. These dynamics are discussed below. Selections in italics highlight descriptions of WTDS or human-rights violations.

This first excerpt is instructive because it begins with a partial example of WTDS in print, a fairly limited event in *The Times*. On page one, it paints an unvarnished and haunting picture—that something heinous and abusive of all human-rights standards has just happened, perpetrated by a “Government patrol” no less. Yet from what our narrative “eyes” can’t help but see, it veers to an assurance by a high church official, in fairly antiseptic terms, that the government’s atrocity production is down while that of the rebels is up.

## El Salvador Struggles to Reduce Its Noncombat Killings

By Edward Schumacher, Special to *The New York Times*

LA BERMUDA, El Salvador, Feb. 22 [1981]—*The old woman described watching the soldiers shoot her husband in the head. She regretted that they had taken the time to go back for the mattresses.*

Bernaldina Alvarez broke into quiet tears as she told how she and her 67-year-old husband abandoned their farmhouse early one morning last week because of the fighting between the Government and leftist guerrillas. They might never have met the Government patrol if they had not gone back to get their bedding.

*Mrs. Alvarez's husband had been walking well ahead of her on the dirt road to a refugee center, she said, when she saw him on the ground with a rifle pointed at his head. He was telling four soldiers that he was not a Communist. About half a dozen armed men emerged from a nearby treeline and told the soldiers that he was a Communist.*

*"Finish him off," one said. She watched in horror as the soldiers kicked in his side and shot him several times. They then beat her and left her unconscious in the dirt, she said.*

It is clear from the many peasants interviewed in remote areas in the last two weeks—and from the...dead bodies that show up in cities and towns each morning—that noncombatant killings continue in El Salvador, reflecting what high Government and military officials say is their frustration in trying to control their own troops without destroying morale in...a guerrilla war.

Archbishop Arturo Rivera y Damas, a critic of the Government, said...today, however, that while killing by Marxist guerrillas appeared to be increasing, killing by Government forces was decreasing. He attributed the decline to the Government's efforts to curb its security forces.

"The whole history of this country is filled with abuse of authority," said Jose Napoleon Duarte, President of the junta. "[The junta] cannot solve that in one day, but we are trying. The problem is that we have obtained a Government at a most difficult moment."... (sec. A, p. 1)

One might wonder if the reporter is unaware of how much doublethink is expressed here. More likely, he, as with Hoge in the election story, is responding by reflex to journalistic routines of adequate sourcing, of weaving a complex narrative while placating as many interests as possible, especially the Salvadoran regime and the new, anti-communist true believers in Washington.

Also relevant is that Ray Bonner, a new stringer for *The Times* in Central America, had just arrived in San Salvador because Alan Riding, the veteran correspondent for Central America stationed in Mexico City, would not enter the country due to death threats against him (Bonner, 1984a). If lives and, as we will see, jobs were at stake for reporters questioning anti-communist rhetoric, that may mitigate some of Herman and Chomsky's (1988) critique, offering individual reporters some slack, that is, while still challenging a trusted organization on skewed coverage. Even so, the bumpy ride through this narrative poses many questions about journalistic integrity, rhetorical invention and discursive obfuscation.

We are first confronted with a tear-jerking narrative that includes literal tears and could hardly be any more damning of the government patrol. (Is it the army? Or the more deadly national police, treasury police or national guard?) Then we find, at the end of the third paragraph, a group of unidentified "armed men" has accused Mr. Alvarez of being a communist. Perhaps, we think, we might gain some insight into how lethal prejudice works in this environment. But he quickly becomes a generic victim and any explanation of on-the-ground political forces is eclipsed by abstract moralizing on how baffled military and government officials are that this sort of thing keeps happening. There are limits to how much information can be safely gathered in such a situation, but this accusation by the "armed men" prompts more questions than it answers. Were these a community defense team, vigilantes that usually defended towns against armed rebels? Were they other government soldiers? Were they death-squad members engaging in the common practice of working with the military to select candidates for assassination? Later, the author cites peasants who say that it is

death squads who point out alleged communists based on whim, prejudice or revenge, but he does not connect such behavior to this accusation:

...In the countryside, few of the peasants who have gathered in the refugee camps say they hold a grudge against the army. What they hate are the paramilitary organizations.

One of these groups is the Orden,<sup>12</sup> armed civilians whose job it was to point out insurgents. One of the junta's first acts was to abolish the organization by decree, but in isolated areas it continues to operate in informal arrangements with local units and the Government has quietly reactivated some of the civilians as militia support.

*Most members of these groups are scruffy young men in straw hats, and all carry holstered pistols and rifles. The peasants say they accuse people of being Communists on the basis of rumor, whim or vengeance.*<sup>13</sup>... (sec. A, p. 1)

After a three-sentence paragraph in which an unidentified armed man tells the soldiers to “finish off” the old man, we shift to the broader discussion of civilian deaths, the subject of the headline, but just as quickly fade to the archbishop’s report on terror. One purpose served by the shift away from any more details about the victim is to deliver us into the presence of the crocodile-tear regrets of “high Government and military officials,” who are trying to stop the army from killing “noncombatants”—itself sanitizing rhetoric but a long-standing part of military discourse used uncritically throughout *The Times*’ coverage. This is a bureaucratic way of saying “relatively innocent peasants.” It is a borrowed from conventional warfare between nations but is a poor fit for an indigenous insurrection. In war between nation-states, it covers the regrettable but inevitable “collateral damage” when civilians get caught in the crossfire, not a systematic attempt to target them to dry up support for rebels in-country.

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<sup>12</sup> ORDEN stands for “Organizacion Democratica Nacionalista,” sometimes spelled in initial capital and lowercase. In 1963, the U.S. government sent 10 Green Berets to El Salvador to help Gen. Jose Alberto Medrano set it up, the first paramilitary unit and death squad in that country (Kirsch, 1990).

<sup>13</sup> And so consign them to death.

It also creates the segue into the abstractions of official-speak, in which Rivera y Damas is called a “critic” of the government, then offers his analysis of the latest trends in the murder market. The truth is that he was critical of the government only at certain times, and in a much more limited way than Romero (Smith, 1996). In general, he sought to mediate between the two extremes. Calling him a government critic enhances the credibility of his assessment of the rebels’ murder rate going up and the government’s going down. If this happened briefly, it was never close to long-term, not even a one-year trend (Cleary, 1997; Klaiber, 1998). Finally, Duarte portrays his government as persisting valiantly against great odds in fighting a long but morally aberrant tradition. Another reading might be that he is throwing up his hands. Both meanings buy him time and continue to make the inexcusable excusable.

At this time, the death squads had never been controlled, and stopping them quickly would have been difficult, so there is truth to his statement, but it diverts attention from the real issue: that all of El Salvador knew that the military controlled the death squads—certainly Duarte, whose only choices may have been to be a puppet, corpse or exile. The US embassy even discussed it with him, more as an inconvenience they all had to work around than a moral issue. In addition, US military advisers trained many of them. Bonner’s (1984a) well-researched book on US Salvadoran policy lays out both of these facts explicitly.

One last bit of duplicity remains before the story moves into less turbid waters and tells us mostly directly, albeit abstractly, what can be supposed about the death squads (not reproduced here). Duarte says that the security forces, especially the national guard, treasury police and national police, are at fault. The army is called

“the least tainted,” though this is highly debatable. Later that year, it is accused of killing many hundreds of civilians in at least three massacres and of using white phosphorous bombs in one of them (Bonner, 1982b; Clemens, 1981). (White phosphorus results in painful chemical burns. It creates deep wounds that continue to burn unless deprived of oxygen [Global Security, 2010]). This last obfuscation conceals the irony that the urgency about reducing civilian deaths was largely driven by Reagan administration concerns that congressional opinion could turn and stop further economic and military aid, the latter soon to become 80% of all aid (Smith, 1996). The main reason to curb the killing of innocent people, in other words, was to get more money to keep doing it. While the Carter administration had nominally tied aid to progress on human rights (Bonner, 1984a), this linkage was abandoned by the Reagan team early on, until Congress legislated it a year later, again nominally. After that, the White House was allowed to investigate on its own and tell Congress biannually that El Salvador was “making progress” curbing rights abuses (until Reagan vetoed a bill with such a provision in 1983). Congress was at odds over this, but the connection was still obvious: How do you justify more arms if the military mostly uses them against its own people? Since the Vietnam War, media had brought such conundrums to light in client states, so the Reagan administration had every interest in hiding the real uses of this aid. Here, *The Times* is buying the administration’s fragile-democracy frame and leaving the US and Salvadoran governments off the hook.

Finally, we can say that this is an example of episodic news that produces the sentimental response of Boltanski (1999). We are given the name of one victim only,

the merest of details about the couple's life and nothing about family, village or social setting, nor how they came to be in the army's way. Our instincts toward denunciation are mitigated by the limited amount of detail and the assurances by spiritual and temporal authorities that the abuses are waning; and we are given no options with which to help the situation.

\* \* \*

### **Reagan's Moves on Salvador Meet with Mixed Reception**

Analysis by Bernard Gwertzman

WASHINGTON, Feb. 25 [1981]—The Reagan Administration's first major international endeavor, to expose what it calls "a textbook case of indirect armed aggression by Communist powers" in El Salvador, has so far seemed to have produced mixed results.

Foreign governments have, by and large, given a sympathetic reception to the missions from Washington touring Europe and Latin America with dossiers about Soviet-bloc aid to the Salvadoran insurgents.

But the European and Latin American support has been muted, State Department officials said today, by concern that the new Administration might be too concerned about the military aspects of the problem, too interested in forcing the issue with Moscow and Havana and not committed enough to curbing violent acts by the Salvadoran right wing and to seeking a political solution.

Foreign Minister Jean Francois-Poncet of France, for instance, whose Government is strongly opposed to Soviet-backed subversion, nevertheless combined his public concern over the "external interference" in El Salvador with a statement that the problem there could not be solved "by purely military means."

"I think everyone recognizes that reforms have to be introduced," he said the other day. "Everyone recognizes that a political reconciliation must be sought."

Similar emphasis on nonmilitary assistance has been made by the El Salvador junta's top officials as well. They have said that while they welcome American efforts to cut Communist aid to the rebels, extensive economic support, the need to accelerate social changes in the country, are more important to them than military aid.

Probably in response to such expressions of concern, not only from the allies but from many members of Congress, Secretary of State Alexander M. Haig Jr. has in recent days begun to justify the American policy in terms of insuring "social justice" in El Salvador.

"We Americans believe external intervention and involvement will jeopardize the achievement of social justice, which must be determined internally within the resources of the Salvadoran people themselves," Mr. Haig said after talking with Mr. Francois-Poncet on Monday.

But Mr. Haig acknowledges that the motivation for the unprecedented dispatch abroad of so-called "truth squads" and the publication of a "white paper" to dramatize the Soviet-bloc involvement, flowed less from humanitarian concerns than from an early desire by the Administration to call attention to Soviet and Cuban "risk taking" around the world and to stop it.... (sec. A, p. 6)

This article covers the White House circulation of a white paper to European allies, some of whom had expressed guarded support for the Nicaraguan revolution. The administration says the document lays out a "convincing case" that the Soviet Union and allies were using Nicaragua to channel large amounts of arms to rebels in El Salvador. In this instance and many like it, it seems problematic to accuse the mediators of conscious rhetorical strategies but perhaps legitimate to ask about unconscious sanitizing under the guise of objectivity. Some journalistic courage was required to run an analysis article that challenged an administration in its honeymoon phase on its foreign-policy centerpiece, aggressively fighting communist expansion "at the doorstep of the United States" (a phrase later in the article, not reproduced here). But certain elements stand out, mostly discursive assumptions that go unnoticed unless subjected to critical scrutiny.

The tour is "unprecedented." It is the administration's "first major international endeavor," one claiming an overriding need to stop communist aggression "heavily influenced by Cuba with the active support of the Soviet Union, East Germany, Vietnam and other Communist states" (de Onis, 1981a). However, we are not told why the administration feels compelled to shop around its diagnosis of this festering infection in Central America to allies in Europe. Why is it asking for support when, given a renewed Cold-War discourse and line-in-the-sand foreign policy, it has already proceeded with such bravado, going it alone sending military aid and

advisers? And if this diplomacy is a formality, couldn't a source be found to say so, even anonymously? In addition, *The Times* ran the article on the white paper on page one, while this on the "muted" reaction ran on page six, as if it protecting the White House from embarrassment.

Liberal governments in Europe viewed the takeover by the Salvadoran junta less favorably than the Carter or Reagan administrations, especially as the military soon came to dominate, because they believed it had not stopped rights abuses and had not really tried to address the unjust economic conditions. Some were fairly sympathetic to the guerillas' cause for this reason. A *Times*' story about a week earlier on this initiative mentioned the administration's reaction to this support. After the Swedish foreign minister met with two rebel leaders, the White House registered a protest with their ambassador, but it was not noted here as background (de Onis, 1981b).

Also, with a newly elected socialist government in France, Social Democrats in power in Germany, whose chairman, Willy Brandt, was head of the Socialist International, a liberal tradition in the Netherlands and real Christian Democrats in power in Belgium and Italy, only Thatcher's Conservatives in England were likely fully receptive. One wonders if "mixed reception" does justice to the response. This is used in the headline and lead, but in the third paragraph, the reaction is described as "muted," which likely means it mostly fell flat. Yes, "foreign governments [did], by and large, [offer] a sympathetic reception to the missions from Washington," we are told, but they are just getting to know a new government, want the goodwill of the United States if at all possible and are steeped in the protocol of diplomacy, so that should be read as rhetorical code for not being refused access. During Mitterrand's

presidency, his socialist government sparred with the Soviet Union over the role of socialism worldwide, so it is not unusual its foreign minister makes a veiled reference to its rival by citing their opposition to “external interference”—which also voices implied criticism of the United States. In the same sentence, he explicitly states that his government opposes a military solution.

In addition, in a story three days earlier, a week after the White House said it had evidence of Soviet interference, *The Times* noted that West Germany’s Christian Democrats, with the consent of the ruling Social Democrats, had publicly entertained the idea of inviting Duarte to Brussels for a meeting of the Christian Democratic World Union. They would have then taken him to Bonn to discuss negotiations with the rebels. Given that the Reagan team said that its white paper held indisputable evidence of armed aggression by Communist powers, this reception was surely less than it had hoped. In fact, the evidence was disputed two weeks later by unnamed sources at State (New York Times, 1981). Even if nothing more than “mixed reception” was to explain this policy fizzle, one would think that some of the European context just recounted could be offered as background. Conscious or unconscious, such omissions are part of a discursive strategy nonetheless.

These are perhaps minor quibbles, examples of a valor-conserving discretion required by a paper more interested in preserving its political capital and access to well-placed sources than in purely pleasing a new administration. Also, honeymoons are an enduring part of political culture, and decorum among elites may require them. That said, there are two overriding reasons for examining this excerpt: a) it typifies the nature of *The Times*’ coverage of these issues; while human-rights atrocities hover

in the background and should have a critical bearing on policy, especially in light of the administration's obsession with rights violations in the Soviet bloc, international and domestic politics dominate the discussion; and b) it features an innovation in rhetoric dramatically at odds with official discourse, a discursive dead end, as it were, one crying out for explanation: Al Haig's vision of social justice.

*The Times'* segue includes the concerns of the French foreign minister and then Congress. Haig apparently addresses these with a novel rhetorical ploy that implies that if the guerrillas win, it sets back the cause of social justice. He also affirms that the preferred future is "the achievement of social justice, which must be determined internally within the resources of the Salvadoran people." *The Times* lets this bit of Orwellian Newspeak stand, forgoing a response by someone with a more analytical appraisal. In its defense, it does run a response after Haig was apparently pressed to clarify priorities, and by implication to explain the "social justice" comment: that the administration's real intention is to stop Soviet and Cuban adventurism. In his own maladroit way, he may have meant the land-reform program. The junta had begun a land-reform project, but the three-phase program was in its first phase and would soon stall out and terror by the security forces was the junta initiative most often cited by those seeking social justice as the one most affecting them (Smith, 1996). If Haig meant land-reform, it should have been noted as context and some critique of its effects to date offered.

In an assertion two paragraphs later, the article belies any notion that the paper is just letting decision makers speak and allowing the public to make up its mind. It makes a rare, but odd, attempt at poking holes in the administration's logic, asserting

there is a paradox in White House policy. This apparent contradiction is that, when the arms flow was at its peak, in January, its rhetoric was not so bellicose, but it has picked up just as it has claimed its pressure on Nicaragua has slowed the flow of weapons, by late February. This is more likely a lag in a new administration getting its program in gear (or faulty coordination among spokespeople) than conscious duplicity. The article also deconstructs the White House claims regarding Soviet support for the Salvadoran rebels, finding the involvement of client states likely but the superpower itself lacking interest. And yet the absurdity of this facile assertion about the White House's newfound interest in social justice goes unchallenged. It is not even balanced by other sources on Salvadoran social conditions.

Still, the main point with this article is that it represents *The Times'* approach to the Central American question, emphasizing in this excerpt geopolitical issues, in the next domestic politics. Nowhere does it explain why the European leaders reserve judgment: largely because of gross economic inequity and lethal force used against those seeking its redress. Nor does it try to deconstruct Haig on social justice by explaining the real struggle for such justice and what it often costs—one's life. Referring back to the totals on *Times'* reports of Salvadoran WTDS, we are reminded that more than 98% looked away from the most horrific suffering, and most reflected the discourse of highly placed policy makers. We might argue that this is *The New York Times*, after all, and it has an obligation to cover domestic and world politics extensively. But the frames Herman and Chomsky (1988) highlight make its discursive priorities plain: The murder of a Polish priest resulted in 78 articles and 1,183 column inches; the murders of 100 religious workers in Central America

generated 50 articles filled 403 column inches (Table 4-1). And these figures don't touch on thousands of civilians killed each year, most by government-related forces.

\* \* \*

### **President Terms Aid for Salvador a Help to Rights**

By Juan de Onis, Special to *The New York Times*

WASHINGTON, March 6 [1981]—President Reagan defended increased military aid to El Salvador today, saying that the United States was “helping the forces that are supporting human rights in El Salvador” against left-wing “terrorists.”

Answering five questions on El Salvador at a news conference, Mr. Reagan said that the United States would view with “the gravest concern” any right-wing attempt to overthrow the Government headed by President Jose Napoleon Duarte.

But Mr. Reagan declined to say whether such a right-wing takeover would result in a complete suspension of United States military and economic aid. And he said that guerrillas who “boast of having killed somewhere above 6,000 people in the last year” were the principal human rights violators in El Salvador.

*Liberal Democrats in Congress and the United States Catholic Conference, which represents American Catholic Bishops, have blamed the Salvadoran security forces for most of the thousands of political killings in El Salvador in the last year, including the deaths last December of three American nuns and two American labor officials. Those deaths led to a temporary suspension of American military aid.*

Today, Senator Edward M. Kennedy and Senator Paul Tsongas, Democrats of Massachusetts, announced that they would present legislation next week halting all American military aid to El Salvador until an investigation of the Americans' murders is completed.

Mr. Reagan said that “we realize that there is a risk and a danger” that the military advisers in El Salvador or en route would be targets for the guerrillas there. But he said that the Administration did “not foresee the need for American troops” to protect the advisers. The Administration is sending an additional 26 advisers, above the 19 sent by President Carter.

He said that the military aid had been sent at the request of a “friendly country” and was a continuation of aid given by the previous Administration.

Mr. Reagan's declaration of support for the Salvadoran Government followed similar statements yesterday by Secretary of State Alexander M. Haig Jr. and other officials. These statements came in answer to rumors that right-wing officers were planning a coup to oust President Duarte.

“What we're all intending to say is that we could have to view very seriously such an attempt and such a coup,” said Mr. Reagan. “We're there at the request of the Government. We're supporting a Government which we believe has an intention of improving the society there, for the benefit of the people, and we're opposed to terrorism of the right or left. It would be of the gravest concern to us if there were such a thing.”... (sec. 1, p. 1)

This article is telling because of its bifurcated quality. It presents at least some critical thinking about the administration's "big lie" claims about those committing the most human-rights abuses in El Salvador. But unfortunately, in the second half of the article, not reproduced here, it swallows whole statements about progress toward free and fair elections that Herman and Chomsky (1988) have already perforated. It also presents some of the typical conflicts between the White House and Congress regarding Salvadoran policy and who constitutes a worthy victim.

Mostly, it takes at face value Reagan's outrageous claim that not only have the Salvadoran rebels killed 6,000 people in the last year but they have bragged about it. This is preposterous because more than anything, the rebels wanted positive world opinion; they did not want to play up their skills as killers (Smith, 1996). But the reality check is that extralegal killings documented by reliable sources, such as Americas Watch or the Legal Defense office, amounted to about 8,000-10,000 per year during the 1980-1981 period (Cleary, 1997; Klaiber, 1998). The low end of this estimate would approximate the average of 700 per month that Americas Watch said occurred between 1980 and 1985. The best data didn't come out until after the war, but no human-rights groups nor the legal-defense office attributed more than 10-20% to the guerrillas. This is supported by the 15% figure of the Truth Commission (PBS, 2001), making the rebels perhaps responsible for 1,200-1,500 victims that year.

This statement came at a press conference no less. It was not an off-hand "Reaganism" at the end of an interview, and so it gives one serious pause. This, we hope, is the largely unconscious rhetorical strategy of a person inhabiting a fantasy,

language perhaps fed him by others living in the same delusional zone. To anyone with real knowledge of the situation, it would be preposterous to the left, questionable to the middle and exaggerated to moderate conservatives. As a rhetorical innovation, it would surely backfire with most informed audiences, but in this era, it fit seamlessly with the administration's stridently anti-communist rhetoric. This was part of a general plan to say certain things "loud enough long enough" that people believe them, as the adage goes (Hertsgaard, 1988; Parry, 1992; Smith, 1996). In general this rhetoric played well with conservatives and moderates swinging right who believed that US stature on the world stage had been compromised by the "loss" of South Vietnam, two oil shocks and the Iranian hostage crisis. Backed by CIA Director Casey and the State Department, UN Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick had just articulated the new policy frame in human rights: that the greatest threat to human rights comes from totalitarian (communist), not authoritarian (dictatorial) regimes. This logic said the latter could be changed, using a new, unspecified "quiet diplomacy," but the former could not. The frame is the viral threat of communist expansion. Then we are told that military aid, rather than aiding rights abuses, is preventing them by stopping a takeover by left-wing "terrorists." Interestingly, and ironically, one of the classic examples used to explain critical discourse analysis is that one side's freedom fighters are another side's terrorists.

Just before, news had leaked of a plot led by right-winger Robert D' Abuisson to remove Duarte by coup or assassination. D' Abuisson was a cashiered colonel who had set up ORDEN and who considered Duarte an appeaser and virtual communist (Bonner, 1984a). Reagan is responding to this leak and seems to be trying to turn the

human-rights frame on its head. To its credit, *The Times* redirects the discussion by citing the human-rights claims of the US Catholic Conference (US bishops), yet only with an imprecise “thousands.” By doing so, it partially rebuts this contention, but more concrete figures would have been better and available from Salvadoran Legal Defense or human-rights agencies. Apparently, the writer did not know or trust these sources. Next, it reports on the efforts of Senators Kennedy and Tsongas to draft a bill halting military aid to El Salvador until the murders of the nuns and lay worker are investigated. This indirect counter-discursive move only partly undermines, by redirection, not rebuttal, the claim of 6,000 killed by leftists.

Reagan then engages with the another-Vietnam counter-frame by offering what became a mantra on the hazards of foreign intervention: Sending advisers will not lead to sending troops. Even though Duarte made public statements that the rebels were not a threat to take over and that economic assistance was much more important than military, Reagan pulls out the old saw about being asked to help a friendly government, creating an ethical predicate and rhetorical pretext for supplying more killing machinery to a nation consumed by civil war.

After this, the article veers into comments introduced by the State Department before the press conference (not reproduced here): Duarte’s announcement of a national commission to plan the election of a constitutional assembly the next year and national elections in 1983. As this was a major announcement by State, *The Times* had to report it. The bromides surrounding it, however, that it would lead to a peaceful, democratic solution to the war, might have been tempered with some critical inquiry. The writer could have noted that the military had subverted two

previous elections or let someone with a critical view comment. Such a source might have assessed the likelihood that the rebel political arm could be involved without fear of assassination or that left-leaning elements of the population would be comfortable voting.

Last it says that, besides more military advisers, the White House has supplemented \$10.4 million in military aid with \$25 million more (also not reproduced here). It is also mulling an economic aid package that Duarte has said is critical to countering the revolt. There is no critique of how much military aid will be enough and when it becomes good money after bad. The frame of viral communism has morphed into the more comforting, more palatable fragile-democracy frame.

***Ray Bonner and the victims of the El Mozote massacre.*** *The Times* reporter who did the most to witness to the suffering and articulate the fate of unworthy victims was Ray Bonner—until he was re-assigned to the business desk by executive editor A.M. Rosenthal. Bonner soon took a leave and began working on a book, *Weakness and Deceit: U.S. Policy and El Salvador* (1984a). He returned to *The Times* but resigned in 1984. He then freelanced for *The New Yorker* before again working for *The Times* as a contract writer and then a Washington reporter. Bonner, a Stanford law graduate, was a former Marine, assistant district attorney and public-interest lawyer, one of (Ralph) Nader's Raiders. He then decided on a career in journalism and, after freelancing in Bolivia, was hired by *The Times*. He worked for the metro desk but was generally on loan to the foreign desk for Central America.

Bonner had sent out feelers about visiting a rebel stronghold, and the guerillas had invited him, then had him wait because one of the army's best battalions was launching a major offensive in the province. They re-invited him a month later and took him to the site of a massacre of nearly 1,000 civilians near the village of El Mozote. Of all *The Times*' reporters in El Salvador, Bonner probably did the best job of conveying that the real story was the dynamics of terror and the inroads made against them. He said later his lack of experience was an asset (an inverted habitus), because he didn't self-censor nor understand the political pressure on *The Times*.

The background to the Mozote massacre story is well documented by Stanley Meisler (2003), former foreign correspondent for the *Los Angeles Times*, in a chapter for a book on journalistic ethics, also used in a class at the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism (2001). It reveals direct pressure applied to the editors working with the two reporters who broke the Mozote story, Bonner and Alma Guillermoprieto, a stringer for *The Washington Post*. Not long after her story was published, Guillermoprieto was also reassigned, to cover suburban Maryland, an assignment the bilingual former stringer for the *Guardian*, raised in Mexico City, described as a "mismatch." She left the *Post* after two years, wrote a book, worked for *Newsweek* and then became a staff writer for *The New Yorker* (Meisler, 2003).

The UN's Truth Commission vindicated the two reporters in 1993. It oversaw a team of anthropologists and doctors that combed the area, unearthing skulls, bones and charred remains along with US-made guns and munitions, calling it "a serious violation of international humanitarian law and international human rights law" (Meisler, 2003). Besides being a study in a class in journalistic ethics, the massacre

has been the subject of a few books (Binford, 1996; Danner, 1994; Grandin, 2004); a chapter in a book about journalistic ethics (Meisler, 2003); presentations to professional societies (Parker, 1998; Kirch, 2004) and a *CJR* article (Hoyt, 1993).

### **Massacre of Hundreds Reported in Salvador Village**

By Raymond Bonner, Special to *The New York Times*

MOZOTE, El Salvador, Jan. 27 [1982]—From interviews with people who live in this small mountain village and surrounding hamlets, it is clear that a massacre of major proportions occurred here last month.

*In some 20 mud brick huts here, this reporter saw the charred skulls and bones of dozens of bodies buried under burned-out roofs, beams and shattered tiles. There were more along the trail leading through the hills into the village, and at the edge of a nearby cornfield were the remains of 14 young men, women and children.*

In...interviews during a two-week period in the rebel-controlled northern part of Morazan Province, 13 peasants said that all these, their relatives and friends, had been killed by Government soldiers of the Atlacatl Battalion in a sweep in December.

*The villagers have compiled a list of the names, ages and villages of 733 peasants, mostly children, women and old people, who they say were murdered by the Government soldiers. The Human Rights Commission of El Salvador, which works with the Roman Catholic Church, puts the number at 926.*

A spokesman for the Salvadoran armed forces, Col. Alfonso Cotto, called the reports about "hundreds of civilians" being killed by Government soldiers "totally false." Those reports were fabricated by "subversives," he said.

It is not possible for an observer who was not present at the time of the massacre to determine independently how many people died or who killed them. In the interviews, the peasants said uniformed soldiers, some swooping in by helicopters, did the shooting. The rebels in this zone are not known to wear uniforms or use helicopters.

*"It was a great massacre," 38-year-old Rufina Amaya told a visitor who traveled through the area with those who are fighting against the junta that now rules El Salvador. "They left nothing."*

*Somewhere amid the carnage were Mrs. Amaya's husband, who was blind, her 9-year-old son and three daughters, ages 5 years, 3 years and 8 months.*

*Mrs. Amaya said she heard her son scream: "Mama, they're killing me. They've killed my sister. They're going to kill me." She said that when the soldiers began gathering the women into a group, she escaped and hid behind some trees in back of the houses.*

From Dec. 8 to Dec. 21, according to Salvadoran newspapers, soldiers from the Atlacatl Battalion took part in a sweep through Mozote and the surrounding mountain villages as part of one of the largest search-and-destroy operations of the war against the leftist guerrillas who are fighting to overthrow the United States-supported junta. According to the villagers, no Americans accompanied the troops on the sweep.

Asked whether the Atlacatl Battalion had been involved in an operation in the northern mountainous region of Morazan in December, Col. Cotto said he could not provide specific details about military operations.

"We have been at war since 1979 against the subversives," he said. As part of that war, he said, air force and army units, including the Atlacatl Battalion, are continually conducting operations throughout the country.

*In Mozote, 280 of the 482 peasants killed, according to the list the villagers have prepared, were children under 14 years old. In Capilla, villagers say the soldiers murdered a father and his nine children, a mother and her five; in Cerro Pando, 87 adults and 62 children.*

*The Human Rights Commission has at other times also charged the army with killing large numbers of civilians during its operations. According to the commission, more than 100 were killed in the northern part of the province of Cabanas in November; 143, including 99 children under 16 years old, were said to have been killed in San Vicente in October, and about 300 in Usulután in September.*

*Under banana trees at the edge of a cornfield near this village were 14 bodies. A child of about 5 or 6 years old was among the heap. Spent M-16 cartridges littered the dirt about 15 to 20 feet from the bodies. The rebels do have some M-16 rifles captured from army units, and they are standard issue for the Atlacatl Battalion.*

A few peasants, handkerchiefs or oranges pressed against their noses to help block the stench, poked among the rubble for anything salvageable.

Up the mountain trail a short distance, 12 recently cut wood planks about 10 inches by three-eighths of an inch by 12 feet were propped against the trees. *On the patio of the adobe hut, saws and crude home-made machetes and hammers were stained with blood.*

*Inside, five skulls were strewn among the smashed tiles. The men were carpenters, according to a boy who was working among beehives behind the mud hovel.*

Mrs. Amaya said the first column of soldiers arrived in Mozote on foot about 6 P.M. Three times during the next 24 hours, she said, helicopters landed with more soldiers.

*She said the soldiers told the villagers they were from the Atlacatl Battalion. "They said they wanted our weapons. But we said we didn't have any. That made them angry, and they started killing us."*

Many of the peasants were shot while in their homes, but the soldiers dragged others from their houses and the church and put them in lines, women in one, men in another, Mrs. Amaya said. It was during this confusion that she managed to escape, she said.

She said about 25 young girls were separated from the other women and taken to the edge of the tiny village. She said she heard them screaming.

"We trusted the army," Mrs. Amaya said when asked why the villagers had not fled. She said that from October 1980 to August 1981, there had been a regular contingent of soldiers in Mozote, often from the National Guard. She said that they had not abused the peasants and that the villagers often fed them.

Rebel leaders in this region said Mozote was not considered a pro-rebel village. But the guerrillas did say that 3,000 of their supporters had fled the area when the army came in.

When the soldiers and helicopters began arriving in the village of La Joya, the older boys and men fled, said 46-year-old Cesar Martinez.

*"We didn't think they would kill children, women and old people, so they remained," he explained. But, he said, the soldiers killed his mother, his sister and his sister's two children, ages 5 and 8 years. He said that among the others the soldiers killed were a 70-year-old woman and another woman and her 3-day-old baby.*

*On the wall of one house, Mr. Martinez said the soldiers scrawled "the Atlacatl Battallion will return to kill the rest." Sitting next to Mr. Martinez as he talked was 15-year-old Julio. Julio said his mother, father, 9-year-old brother and two sisters, ages 7 and 5 years, had been killed by the soldiers in La Joya. He said that when he heard the first shooting, he ran and hid in a gully.*

Julio said that he has returned to his village once since the massacre, to bury his family and two of his friends, ages 7 and 10 years.

Julio has never been to school, and unlike many boys his age in this area, he had not been involved in the revolutionary movement. Now he is confused: He doesn't know whether to attend the school for children that is operated by the guerrillas or learn to use a rifle so "I can fight against the enemy," he said.

*Another La Joya peasant, 39-year-old Gumersindo Lucas, said that before he fled with his wife, children and other relatives, he took his 62-year-old mother, who was too sick to walk, to a neighbor's house and hid her under some blankets. He said the soldiers shot her there and then burned the house.*

Holding his half-naked chubby-cheeked 4-month-old daughter, who was wearing a red T-shirt and a tiny red bracelet, Mr. Lucas said that he had not sympathized with the rebels. Now, he said, "I want my wife and children to go to Honduras, but I am going to stay and fight."

Mrs. Amaya said she has not been able to return to Mozote since the massacre. "If I return, I will hear my children crying." [end] (sec. A, p. 1)

This selection includes the whole article because it is well-known, creating a fair amount of controversy; it is the best example of WTDS in *The Times*; and it demonstrates WTDS throughout most of the story, unlike most of *The Times*' articles with such writing. Although he got to El Mozote about a month after the incident, Bonner talked to eyewitnesses and did not "look away" from the evidence (Boltanski, 1999). He also provides important social context on the consequences of a "scorched earth" genocidal policy: two witnesses, the boy Julio and a Mr. Lucas, who had been neutral, will now join the guerillas, or likely will, because of what they have seen.

Julio is weighing a decision between attending the guerillas' school or fighting, and a commitment to fight after such an atrocity is well documented in dirty war.

The consequences of Bonner's commitment to WTDS are considerable. They provide a classic case of the "contestation" process Bourdieu highlights (Ashuri & Pinchevski, 2008). The key rhetorical and discursive issues are worth noting. Even though he was a month late, Bonner offers almost cinematic physical and social detail, the broader political context and some of the unintended consequences: The army went public about the offensive; the villagers had trusted the army, and two more rebels arose from previously neutral peasants. Criticism of the report tended to say he had only one eyewitness, but in fact, he had three, one from a neighboring village, and he talked to 13 villagers in the area. Looking critically at the text, before consulting any background, we notice that peasant sources on-site seem to count less than official sources in the capital. Bonner later said the story needed editing, so some of the following concerns may have resulted from the edit.

Whether editorial change or not, the lead seems unorthodox. It starts with attribution when normal practice is to end with it. This blunts it somewhat and raises the issue of credibility right away instead of assuming it by running attribution after the fact. It also contains an aside that shows up nowhere else in more than 2,500 stories examined for this study: "It is not possible for an observer who was not present at the time of the massacre to determine independently how many people died or who killed them." Never mind such an observer might be dead, the statement dilutes the testimony of the witnesses and was never used with official sources, even though there was good reason to doubt Salvadoran officials. Even if Bonner included

these equivocations, editorial procedure would be to re-order or delete them. Also, unlike other stories of the Atlacatl Battalion, we are not told that the US military trained this elite group. If Bonner neglected it, an editor could have corrected the oversight. (While this group was trained in-country, a move developed because it was cheaper, it was during this period that more Americans than ever before learned of the history of U.S.-sponsored dirty-war training at the School of the Americas at Ft. Benning, Georgia. Under the Bush administration, it was renamed the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation to refurbish its image.)

All in all, however, this is a remarkable piece of reporting and a classic example of WTDS in mainstream print journalism. Except that the immediate danger has passed, it contains elements of Chouliaraki's (2008) ecstatic (overwhelming) category. This is not live footage, obviously, but we have enough details that we can imagine the worst in real time, and Chouliaraki's (2008) main point about this category is its transfixing effect. It does, however, fulfill virtually all the criteria for her emergency (emotive) news, reviewed here for convenience:

1) The move from visually static and verbally minimal descriptions with low affective power to visually and verbally complex narratives with increasing degrees of affective power; 2) the move from singular and abstract spacetimes...to concrete, specific, multiple, and mobile spacetimes; and 3) the move from non-agency (numerical sufferer, absence of other agents) to conditional agency (active and personalized sufferer, presence of benefactors and persecutors). (p. 377) [italics removed]

The narrative is complex enough that it has high affective power. It features concrete, multiple and diverse space-times (experiences). It highlights an active and personalized sufferer, Rufina Amaya, who tells us, in Mark Danner's (1993) chilling reconstruction for *The New Yorker*, that she promised God that if she lived, she would

tell the world what happened.<sup>14</sup> It also features benefactors such as the Catholic Church and human-rights groups, who worked persistently to document the story and prevent similar catastrophes, and of course, never far away, persecutors: the military and paramilitaries, virtual latter-day horsemen of the apocalypse. But it also entails characteristics of her third category, the ecstatic (overwhelming), which is about being “beside oneself,” generally with horror. To recap, these are (2008):

1) The move...from a conventional news narrative... to an uninterrupted flow of images and...narrative with various degrees of emotional power. This flow enables the spectator to engage in multiple topics of suffering and so to empathize, to denounce, and to reflect on the suffering; 2) the move from an emergency [space-time]...to an ecstatic [space-time]. This...places suffering...in the order of historical rupture, and...connects this specific suffering to the globe as a whole, making [all of] “humanity” the simultaneous witness of the suffering; and...3) the move from conditional agency to sovereign agency. Sovereign agency construes each actor...as a thoroughly humanized and historical being—somebody who feels, reflects, and acts on his or her fate (p. 378; italics removed).

In Bonner’s report, we have a fairly constant flow of images, including Amaya’s soul-searing reflections. They make time stop, for an instant at least. We recognize that if anything is right with the world, this sort of event should make all of humanity come together and take notice, not to mention end such things. As noted, sovereign agency is a complex concept, but it produces such intense identification with the victim that one steps out of one’s life for a moment, an experience out of time. This report mostly fits Boltanski’s denunciation category but also contains some of the aesthetic—which has little enough to do with beauty but, like Chouliaraki’s ecstatic

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<sup>14</sup> “Then I heard one of my children crying. My son, Cristino, was crying, ‘Mama Rufina, help me! They’re killing me! They killed my sister! They’re killing me! Help me!’ I didn’t know what to do. They were killing my children. I knew that if I went back there to help my children I would be cut to pieces. But I couldn’t stand to hear it, I couldn’t bear it. I was afraid that I would cry out, that I would scream, that I would go crazy. I couldn’t stand it, and I prayed to God to help me. I promised God that if He helped me I would tell the world what happened here” (Danner, 1994).

(overwhelming) category, means a scene that transfixes. This may ultimately produce distancing or a profound contemplation of the suffering.

In place of video footage, Bonner uses straightforward language and a reporting repertoire that notes in exacting detail the physical grammar of atrocity, along with a rhetoric unafraid of naked emotion (“Mama, they’re killing me!”), one of shock and horror become mourning (“If I return, I will hear my children crying”). He looks “evil in the face” without looking away and “allows himself to be taken over by the horrific.” What is “relevant” to Bonner about “the victims in their misery” is that they be allowed to speak of their pain as “thoroughly humanized and historical beings” (Chouliaraki, 2008) who “feel, reflect and act” on their suffering in a mediated space, a safe house made only of their words and the stature of *The New York Times*.

It is a bit disjointed compared to some stories in *The Times*, but it is a dispatch from a war zone, not an essay or depth report. Most important, in contrast to the vast majority of *The Times*’ coverage of the war, the specific, gruesome evidence of the atrocity dominates. The ending adds a mournful but lyrical touch that is almost a rhetorical move of its own, perhaps enough to make ardent anti-communists accuse him of sensationalism but well within the psychological facts. Bonner’s last quotation from Rufina Amaya explaining why she cannot return—“If I return, I will hear my children crying”—evokes Matthew 2:18. This is itself a recapitulation of Jeremiah 31:15: “Thus says the Lord, ‘A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children. She refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more’” (International Standard Version). The verse from Matthew refers to Herod’s killing every male born in Judea when he hears that a

boy had been born who is to be King of the Jews (called “The Slaughter of the Innocents”). As a mythopoetic reinforcement of the significance of Jesus’ birth, it links that event to prophecy in the Hebrew scriptures (Old Testament) (Crossan, 1991). As many reporters end their stories with a poignant quotation, Bonner probably chose it at face value. But if he grew up in a church-going family, as most baby boomers did, he could have heard the scripture at least once a year, at Christmas. Whether from conscious or unconscious motives, it creates a cultural resonance for those with basic biblical literacy.

The story shows, among other things, that *The Times* was capable of getting a reporter in place to gather such news, was courageous enough to run it prominently (section A, page 1) and was ethical enough not to edit it out of existence. If so, why did it not do more? Because the political consequences were another matter. The explanation below sheds considerable light on why *The Times* reported the war as it did and why it didn’t run more of this type of reporting.

***The slaughter of the innocents: The backstory behind the El Mozote report.***

Because of the importance of this article, the information available and how it speaks to WTDS and unworthy victims, we should examine the story behind the story of the El Mozote massacre. Bonner believed that the Mozote story was “the beginning of the end of my career at *The New York Times*,” or so he told the *CJR* (Hoyt, 1993).

There was plenty of evidence that the Salvadoran security forces regularly committed indiscriminate murder—US nuns and church worker killed a year earlier, Romero nine months before that and countless dead civilians and body parts turning

up in the ravines of the countryside and the gullies and dumps of the cities. But both *The Washington Post* and *The Times* held the stories until they could confirm the evidence, delaying publication by several days. The *Post*'s ran in the first edition of January 27, 1982. This propelled *The Times* to act, which ran it in the final edition that day. According to Meisler (2003):

Craig Whitney, then deputy foreign editor of *The Times*, edited the series [on life with the guerillas]....He worked on the massacre story and then, much like [assistant managing editor Jim] Hoagland and [foreign editor Karen] De Young at the *Post*, set it aside, assuming he could talk with Bonner about it the next day. "*The reporting was there,*" he recalls. "The next step was making sure by asking the obvious questions. How do you know it happened? What is the evidence? How do we know how many people were killed?" But Whitney received a call at home that evening informing him that Guillermoprieto's story had appeared on the front page of the first edition of the *Post*. "I said run the story," says Whitney. "I edited it and talked with Ray on the phone, and it ran. It ran on Page 1. *There was never any doubt that he had the basic facts.*" (p. 118) [italics added]

Not only did it document what Danner (1994) says is arguably the worst massacre in one place in Latin American history, the story ran the day before the White House was to tell Congress that El Salvador was making progress on human rights in order to send it more military aid. Given these stakes, the administration flew into damage control, trying to dissemble on the facts and paint Bonner as politically motivated. Bonner had already written stories critical of the Salvadoran power structure and the administration's Central American policy. These included a report that the military had tortured two teens before killing them and that American advisers were present. The US Embassy denied this, portraying Bonner as sloppy, committing factual errors and writing what no one else would touch because it could not be corroborated (Meisler, 2003). The Mozote story ran two weeks later, and, as with the torture story,

US Ambassador Deane Hinton cabled the State Department quickly to deny it. He confirmed the sweep designed to remove the guerillas from the province of Morazán, but said no one could prove that Salvadoran forces had committed the massacre. Assistant Secretary Elliot Abrams testified before the Senate that the story was politically motivated, designed to embarrass the administration before the certification, and that 700 to 900 people could not have died because only 300 lived in El Mozote. This contention dismissed the fact that more than one village was involved, which both Bonner and Guillermprieto reported. Much later, Bonner said the civilians had to have been massacred. “It was clear it didn't happen in combat,” he said. “[People] don't die like that in combat” (Meisler, 2001).

Bonner later wrote a story countering the Reagan administration frame on the elections, reporting on a study by Central American University that questioned the 1.5 million the government said had voted. Published in *Central American Studies*, the article said that probably no more than 800,000 people could have voted, based on the time it took to vote. He also wrote that the land-reform program had stalled and that government forces were afraid to fight, two themes from Vietnam (Bonner, 1984a). Hinton began publicly calling him an advocacy journalist, and six months after the Mozote story, he was transferred to the business desk. Rosenthal said it was to hone his skills as a writer and learn more about how *The Times* worked (Meisler, 2003).

Soon, the *Wall Street Journal* and *Accuracy In Media* (AIM), a conservative watchdog that monitors what it believes to be liberal bias in the media, joined the campaign against Bonner and Guillermprieto. A *Journal* editorial cited a note the *Post* put in its story that the rebels invited Guillermprieto as evidence that the whole

event had been a propaganda exercise. In the same editorial, it accused much of the US press of a Vietnam-style reporting that gave communists greater credibility than the Salvadoran or US governments. These accusations were then repeated by an AIM editor on the McNeil-Lehrer Report, who said that Bonner had an ideological ax to grind. In July, the *AIM Report* devoted a whole issue to Bonner's alleged perfidy. A Reagan team official also wrote the *Post* to accuse Guillermprieto of having worked for a communist paper in Mexico. She told editor Ben Bradlee she had never worked for any paper in Mexico (she had freelanced for the liberal British paper, the *Guardian*). She added:

The price I paid, and that all reporters in El Salvador in those critical and brutal years of the war paid, was a loss of confidence in themselves, and the besieged feeling of always having it be our word against the State Department. (Hoyt, 1993, p. 31)

But mostly the attacks focused on Bonner. Meisler (2003) recounts:

The attacks were too furious to be ignored in *The Times* newsroom. "*There were all kinds of aspersions on Ray as a person and as a reporter,*" recalls Whitney, soon promoted to foreign editor.... "They (the administration) and their friends were really vicious about Ray and quite unfair. We probably applied more rigorous standards to his stories after then." (p. 121) [italics added]

The counter-discursive damage was done, the administration's counter-frame was in place and the chilling effect of reassigning Bonner was real. Rosenthal flew to El Salvador to assess the situation himself and met with Hinton in April 1982. Hinton made his feelings known. Rosenthal steadfastly maintained that White House pressure had nothing to do with Bonner's new role, but evidence to contrary exists beyond the circumstantial.

In an interview with Mark Hertsgaard (1988), author of *On Bended Knee: The Press and the Reagan Presidency*, Rosenthal denied that *The Times* had caved in to the State Department pressure. But Robert Parry (1992), a former investigative reporter for the AP and author of *Fooling America: How Washington Insiders Twist the Truth and Manufacture the Conventional Wisdom*, was in El Salvador in the spring, after the controversy erupted. During lunch with staff of the political affairs office of the US Embassy, he said they had bragged about goading Rosenthal to take action against Bonner. Parry (1992) said: “‘We finally got the son-of-a-bitch,’ they said, and at that time his removal had not yet been announced, so it was very interesting to hear that they knew what was about to happen” (p. 209).

While some reporters had concerns about Bonner’s sympathy for the guerillas, Meisler (2003) said, his transfer affected coverage of the war. One said the reassignment made all the reporters take note that the embassy was “capable of playing hardball...If they can kick out *The Times* correspondent, you've got to be careful" (Meisler, 2003, p. 122).

In an address to Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (a liberal response to Accuracy in Media), Parry (1993) said:

So the message was...*when you tried to tell the American people what was happening, you put your career at risk*, which may not seem like a lot to some people, but...reporters are like everybody else...they have mortgages and families and so forth and they don't really want to lose their jobs. [italics added]

If one wonders whether the opinion of a fellow reporter might be swayed by professional solidarity, consider the analysis of Howie Lane, spokesperson for the US

Embassy until 1982. He said the media neglected the most important stories once

Bonner was transferred. In 1983, he told the *CJR*:

People are still getting killed, but it seems that editors are trying not to concentrate on the errors of our “friends.” [But] our friends are doing things every day that would embarrass any civilized country. Reporters have to keep telling the truth about what's happening. (Kirch, 2004, p. 42, citing Massing [1983])

Rosenthal—an old-school liberal but a strong anti-communist—said he had reservations about Bonner’s reporting but had the same concerns about most of the press in Central America. Still, Shirley Christian of the *Miami Herald* published an article in *The Washington Journalism Review* critical of US reporters in Nicaragua for favoring the Sandinistas, and soon after, Rosenthal hired her to cover Central America (Hertsgaard, 1988).

Hertsgaard (1988) says that during public talks on El Salvador, Bonner would be asked about whether the Reagan administration caused his reassignment. He explains:

“I always say, very lawyerlike, ‘I don’t think I got transferred from El Salvador because of administration pressure,’” Bonner recalled. What Bonner did not say in public was that “the administration didn’t like it, but I think the real problem was that my reporting didn’t fit the tenor of the times, or of *The Times* under Abe Rosenthal.” (p. 202)

According to Meisler (2003), Bonner said he doesn’t think he was reassigned because the White House leaned on *The Times* but because Rosenthal saw communism as a much greater threat than authoritarian regimes (though he may have not wanted to burn bridges, as he later returned to *The Times*). Bonner said Rosenthal may have been more angry about his Nicaragua coverage, since three of those stories never ran (Meisler, 2003). Regardless, *Times* reporters subsequently pursued many fewer enterprise stories, relying heavily on official sources.

On the subject of Bonner's reporting not fitting with *The Times*' culture or priorities during that period, Hertsgaard (1988) continues:

Bonner was not alone in this conclusion: numerous Times reporters and editors, some quite senior at the paper, privately expressed the same opinion to me. When I asked Mr. Rosenthal about these suspicions—that Bonner had been recalled because his reporting did not comport with Rosenthal's alleged anti-Communism—the former executive editor seemed impatient. "Let's go on to something else. This is ridiculous. The answer is no. Nonsense.... What do you think, I'm some kind of nut? That if somebody reports the right-wing death squads are shooting people in El Salvador I'm going to pull the guy out because I'm against the Communists? I'm not an anti-Communist, I'm anti-everything [later explaining he is against all dictators]..."

At the same time, the coincidence of events is striking. An inexperienced but undeniably gifted reporter was filing stories that put *The Times* well ahead of the competition on the hottest foreign policy story of the moment. Because those stories contradicted the official truths proclaimed back in Washington, the Reagan administration and its political allies responded by attacking the reporting as biased and the reporter as a Communist sympathizer. Although the reporter's superior's had confidence in his work, he is transferred off the beat within six months. In his place were installed a succession of reporters experienced in the ways of *The New York Times* but largely ignorant of the realities of El Salvador. These replacements proved themselves far more willing to convey the official U.S. view of the war. From a journalistic standpoint, the reporting suffered, even as foreign editor Whitney, who supervised it, later conceded: "It did," he said. "Not intentionally. It's unfortunate. Ray did a fine job and I think the paper has nothing to be ashamed of for what he did in that period." (p. 202)

In a presentation to the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, "Raymond Bonner and the Salvadoran Civil War, 1980 to 1983," John Kirch (2004) observed:

When stories about torture and brutality were written during this period, they lacked the human element that was so evident in Bonner's pieces....

More disturbing is that many of the human rights stories...in 1983 were framed in strictly political rather than human terms. On April 24, 1983, for instance, [Linda] Chavez wrote, "Human rights abuses not only alienate the population, but make it increasingly difficult for the Reagan administration to convince Congress to grant more military aid." The use of the word "alienate" to describe the effects of military brutality...whitewashed the true effects of the murders and rapes then being committed against the peasants. Moreover, the issue of human rights was placed in the political context of Washington,

focusing more on the impact such abuses have on the administration's policy rather than on the suffering of the Salvadoran people.

Guillermoprieto later said there was a “a ring of mistrust” around her as a result of her reporting and subsequent assaults on her integrity by the administration, Meisler (2003) said. He noted:

The *Post* in those days was subject to a continual barrage of criticism from the White House. “There was tremendous pressure on us during the Reagan Administration,” says De Young, the foreign editor. “*People in the White House would complain to high executives at the Post about the correspondents covering Central America. That led to an air of mistrust. You know, if you call someone a leftist often enough, some of it sticks. But, having said that, I cannot think of a single time that a story was changed or dropped because of pressure from the White House.*”<sup>15</sup> (p. 122)

In a similar description of the newsroom atmosphere, Hoagland, the assistant managing editor, said it was not unusual for some editors to feel suspicious about the reporting of a correspondent in the field.

*It was sort of like what happened in newsrooms during the Vietnam War, ” he says. “There is a difference between the Washington view, based on what editors hear from officials, and the view of reporters in the field who see the problems and failures of U.S. policy.” (Meisler, 2003, p. 123) [italics added]*

***Witnessing as a field, zones of contention and habitus vs. knowledge-power (ideology).*** Compared to most concepts in media studies, “witnessing appears as exceptionally pristine a term, possessing purity and wholesomeness incompatible with critical thinking, owing perhaps to its theological roots,” Ashuri and Pinchevski (2008) say. They are only partly right. Peters (2001) critiques it based on the history of moral and judicial doubts about the reliability of witnesses, as well as distance

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<sup>15</sup> But this dodges the issue of Guillermoprieto’s reassignment.

from the event, and Boltanski (1999) deconstructs it in terms of the vagaries of psychology. But as a new concept with deep ethical aims and powerful social implications, witnessing has been couched so far in heuristic typologies and relatively unquestioned assumptions.

While possessing a tradition in the West that borders on the sacred, and well it might given the consequences riding on certain testimonies, they note correctly that once submitted to critical inquiry, witnessing always takes place within a struggle for credibility and power. This means that no such event is intellectually or morally uncomplicated (Boltanski would agree). Nor does any instance take place outside of a host of contextual variables, political, historical and discursive/ideological. The story of Bonner and the Mozote massacre provides a classic case.

The first issue that jumps out is Bonner's lack of habitus in this environment. Sometimes working with, sometimes against this is a grid of what Ashuri and Pinchevski (2008) call "ideology," similar to what Foucault (1972) and his inheritors have termed "knowledge-power." The latter term emphasizes that social control also consists of power concretized in institutions and behavioral controls, in addition to consisting of knowledge and ideas. *The Times* was steeped in mainstream ideology, a source of stature, but that stature had always depended on being far enough ahead of the social curve to be a leader but not so far as to seem kooky or unpatriotic.

Complicating matters, the advent of the Reagan administration had just moved that curve farther to the right than any administration since Hoover. Moreover, more than any previous one, this administration enforced its hold on power by aggressively managing the media (Appendix B). Within those narrowing cultural boundaries,

Rosenthal sought to preserve his status within his organization (Bourdieu's symbolic capital) and the symbolic and social capital of *The Times*, by reining in Bonner.

Bonner was at a distinct disadvantage by being a novice reporter, by being new to *The Times* besides and by once working for an arch-liberal, Nader.

Yet Bonner's probable liberal sympathies served him well in sniffing out the vagaries of the Salvadoran government and the armed forces: articles on torture and atrocities, fraudulent voting totals and denial about the army's reluctance to fight. Those stories probably earned him credibility with the guerillas, a habitus and symbolic capital that worked well in the knowledge-power "field" of the Salvadoran left but ultimately got him excluded from Central American reporting for the leading paper in the most powerful country in the world.

This reflects what Ashuri and Pinchevski (2008) say about the political and ideological risks of being a witness, or a mediator of one.

Agents utilize the capital available...as well as their habitual schemas...to operate within the field of witnessing with the aim of gaining the trust of those whom they seek to address. A preliminary condition for playing this game is...being admitted into the field. Yet a corollary...is there will always be those who...remain—or are kept—outside the field...*Their exclusion is no less a political act*, for in such cases someone is divested of the means to bear witness. *Being outside the field of witnessing means being relegated to silence...* (p. 6) [italics added]

Bonner's naiveté, idealism and courage, evident in his risk-taking in exposing gratuitous suffering, were a habitus that served him well in the field of Salvadoran civil chaos. Then the geopolitical field expanded, the stakes were raised and the polarity of the knowledge-power grid reversed. And he was silenced, as were any other victims whose witness he might chronicle.

Ashuri and Pinchevski (2008) tell us that “witnessing is always ad-hoc and case-specific.” They also note that in the “game” of witnessing, when someone acquires trust, someone else can lose it. For Bonner to gain the trust of the rebels meant that he ultimately lost the confidence of Rosenthal and sacrificed some of his editors’ trust. The editors too were thrust into a contested field in which knowledge-power, habitual schemas and trust were unstable as isotopes. These involved the challenge to the reputation of *The Times*, Rosenthal’s ire and their jobs if the story was false (knowledge-power and trust); vetting the story (habitual schemas and trust—at the *Post*, Hoagland grilled Guillermprieto for an hour); and the risk of being scooped, which *The Times* was when Whitney waited until he could reach Bonner (knowledge-power versus trust).

Ashuri and Pinchevski (2008) also say witnessing is often the special province of victims, who can turn their status into political and symbolic capital in the media:

The identity of the individual bearing witness is important, particularly when witnesses are survivors of a manmade catastrophe....[Then] witnessing seems to be the lot of victims. This means that insofar as the field of witnessing is concerned, being a victim might count as a resource, a form of capital in producing testimony (p. 7).

While it might be a form of capital, being a witness is not an unalloyed good. In explaining the ideological dynamics of witnessing, the two scholars transform the trinity of witnessing Peters (2001) sets forth—the witness, the statement and the audience—into “zones of contention” consisting of the struggles to achieve agency, obtain a voice and find a receptive audience. For the El Mozote witnesses, these played out as follows:

- The survivors' struggle to achieve agency is a death-defying horror: a 3-in-1,000 chance (three witnesses out of 1,000 victims) impeded by the terror of reprisal if they spoke out and complicated by their trauma: Amaya hid and cried for days in the jungle, had to be coaxed out, cleaned up and nursed back to mental health before she could witness (see Danner [1994] footnote on p. 125);
- The following embody the struggle to find a voice: a) the serendipity of Bonner's becoming a *Times* reporter soon after a momentous career change; b) then finding himself in a geopolitical hot spot of page-one consequence no less, one that could turn life-threatening—if rightists threatened Riding, they would surely threaten him; Guillermprieto's predecessor, too, had been threatened; c) his assignment and journalistic field becoming nearly career-ending, with his credibility on the line; and d) the odds against the few Mozote survivors (and the rebels aiding them) finding a US reporter with the status of *The Times* and courage of Bonner;
- The difficulties connecting with an audience were represented in: a) the “casting-bread-on-the-waters” nature of any such witness finding a cultural resonance and courage of conviction among citizens of the North; b) repression and denials by some of the highest offices in the land once the story hit the United States; and c) the uphill battle to spark a social movement that might ultimately militate against US support for a death-dealing government.

All of it gives one pause and makes “zones of contention” seem like a sanitization. In this case, “arenas of brutally contested power and credibility with career- or life-threatening consequences might be adequate.” If we want to think in terms of

storylines and storytellers we trust and those we don't, then we could say we encounter narratives of "conductance" and those of "resistance" (analogous to a hermeneutics of faith and suspicion). Wherever there is a gap in the narrative, in consciousness, there are nodes of conductance and resistance: in the suffering-causing event, in the victims, in the reporter, and in the organization, the text and the audience. Any might be discredited or marginalized at any time. Any might lose its courage and fold. Witnessing is indeed a struggle, and its beneficial effects are never assured. Ask any whistleblower, rape victim or genocide survivor.

In addition, witnesses are useful to the media for a time, but not forever: The employment of witnesses in the media is a practice that serves certain goals in certain situations...The mediators...determine who qualifies as a witness. Their choice has to do with technical, professional, circumstantial and ideological considerations, which may differ from one report to another.

A crude example is the BBC reporter in the Belgian Congo who wandered through a refugee camp yelling: "*Anyone here been raped and speaks English?*" ...Thus the witnesses...are the result of a selection process...*contingent on the specific event [that] bespeaks the dominant codes of the mediators....* [Those] we see or hear are those whose profiles (that is, competence plus circumstance) meet the requirements of the media at a given time. *Other potential witnesses, who for whatever reason are deemed unwanted by the mediators, remain outside the field...* (Ashuri & Pinchevski, 2008, p. 8) [italics added]

*The Times'* view of who was a valid witness was affected by White House pressure and shifted after Bonner was reassigned. These manipulations also then determined, the vast majority of the time, who qualified as a worthy victim and who did not.

Lastly, a few comments on the nature of audiences in WTDS are in order. Against their own analysis, Ashuri and Pinchevski (2008) resort to a binary typology when they say that the proximity of witnesses annihilates perspective and remoteness prompts reflection. This would belie their contention that all spaces and positions in witnessing are interpenetrating, hedged and subject to struggle. Still, the aim of

witnessing is to get an audience to reflect, make a judgment and act. The authors review Boltanski's typology of responses, then maintain that the relative remove of an audience means that it can inhabit a reflective space in which its members can respond to suffering "beyond their immediate context," making it, in Boltanski's terms, cosmopolitan, not communitarian compassion. Ultimately, however, they (2008) reject the ontological distinctions of Ellis (1999), the implicated witness, always responsible for what is seen, or Peters, the vicarious witness, always mediated and at varying degrees of remove, at risk for compassion fatigue and psychic numbing, the ultimate in remoteness. Instead, they see proximity and remoteness as crucial variables in the field, the nexus of negotiation for the mediators, a complex dialectic of physical and psychic resources, proximity and distance, to be used adroitly by mediators to produce trust. Proximity produces immediacy and authenticity, but it can compromise objectivity. Remoteness produces the long view but can create indifference (2008). Yet surely this is not just a binary relationship. In the more dynamic paradigm these authors otherwise hold to, it is surely possible for a witness to be physically close but psychically distant, perhaps due to trauma or numbing. A distant spectator could also be empathically near due to his or her habitus, knowledge base and compassion, as in emotive news.

In the latter case, though, the individual faces the dilemma Boltanski and Chouliaraki point to as paradigmatic for WTDS audiences: how to mitigate or stop the suffering, especially in the face of burnout or compassion fatigue. Except for ads, *The Times'* ethics and business model prevented it from promoting organizations or causes devoted to the redress of suffering. But advocacy journals are not so restricted.

They face other issues regarding the contestation of power and credibility. They have nothing like the influence of *The Times*. But they can openly promote preferred solutions without being ethically compromised.

As this is a study of religious media *as* alternative media, we should be mindful that the intent here is to tell the truth about *The Times*' reporting, of course, and what it indicates about the mainstream media generally during this period (Hertsgaard, 1988). But more importantly, the point is to show how the greater latitude of advocacy journals allows them to serve various purposes closely related to witness to distant suffering and, crucially, *its redress* in disaster situations that are politicized. We will revisit this issue a little later.

**Chapter 6**

**Adding It Up and Breaking It Down (II):**

**Incidence of Distant Suffering in  
and a Textual Analysis of  
*The New York Times*' Coverage  
of Nicaragua**

## Numbers Tell Part of the Story: *The Times*' Coverage of Nicaragua

### Reports Meeting the Heuristic Criteria for Witness to Distant Suffering

Regarding *The Times*' coverage of Nicaragua, as with El Salvador, my analysis also reveals very few articles that featured detailed prose depicting human-rights abuses—of the sort that characterizes WTDS in print and that Herman and Chomsky (1988) believe best honors a worthy victim.

For “Nicaragua” and “human rights,” five reports meet the criteria stated earlier. One of these involved the *contras* killing Ben Linder, an American working for the Nicaragua Appropriate Technology Project—a US NGO for development loosely affiliated with Witness for Peace (Kinzer, 1987). While he is a US citizen, not Nicaraguan, his story should count, but it represents only one victim. Another story that might be considered borderline, but was counted, is of two nuns driving on a remote highway murdered in a *contra* ambush without being ordered to stop. Americas Watch's judgment was that they were not killed for their religious work but randomly; horrible, yes, but an accidental not intentional atrocity.

If Sandinista human-rights violations are included, there are five more stories. But one of these involved a press conference on a former prisoner brought to the United States by the *contras* to decry torture in a Sandinista prison (not inconsequential but passive reporting, not indicative of enterprise work, something we associate with WTDS), and two involved sub-lethal assaults on *campesino* youth trying to avoid the draft or on their families—beatings and destruction of homes or outbuildings. When the search for “Nicaragua” alone is included, two more qualify, one on *contra* atrocities and one on the discovery of the site of a probable Sandinista massacre of 40

to 80 people in Bijagua. (Villagers said Sandinista soldiers impersonating *contras* sought recruits and massacred any who showed up. Townspeople reported the *contras* then joined the fight. The Sandinistas said all the civilians were killed in the firefight (Christian, 1991). Including these, we have 10 of 1,212, or 0.08%, of all articles and 10 of 1,106, or 0.09%, of all reports.

### **Prominence of Display**

Regarding prominence, for the search including “Nicaragua” and “human rights,” 39% of all articles and nearly 50% of all reports ran on pages one, two or three. Again, we should note that the total-reports figure is more representative. Broken down by page, this search revealed 24% of all reports ran on page one, 14% on page two and 12% on page three. As with El Salvador, this is an remarkably high level of prominence for stories about countries previously thought to be of little or no consequence. As with El Salvador, the stories that detail WTDS and human-rights abuses are equally and remarkably low.

### **The Op-Ed Record and Reports on Human-Rights Groups**

As with El Salvador, the record on op-ed pieces runs counter to that on reporting. Searching for “Nicaragua” plus “human rights,” out of 137 opinion-editorials, 22 were positive (16%), 94 negative (69%) and 22 mixed, moderate or independent (15%). For “Nicaragua” alone, of 66 op-ed articles, five were positive (8%), 51 were negative (77%) and 10 were mixed or independent (15%). The op-ed record for both countries probably reflects the freedom of expression traditionally afforded the editorial pages and the greater scrutiny given the paper’s reporting. Apparently, while

executive editor, Rosenthal let the editor of the editorial page and its writers have most of the control over the editorial pages.

In addition, many *Times* articles featured sources explicitly critical of White House support for the *contras*. These included many articles on human-rights assessments by rights groups, by the Catholic Church here or there, by congressional committees or on investigations by Congress citing such reports. For “Nicaragua” and “human rights,” Amnesty is featured or cited in 20 articles and Americas Watch in 44. For both countries, of 1,117 articles containing “human rights,” including op-ed pieces, 154, or nearly 14%, cite reports from these major human-rights groups. Virtually all were critical of the administration’s position on human rights.

### **Rhetorical and Critical-Discourse Analyses of *The Times*’ Reports**

The following are not representative of most of *The Times*’ coverage of Nicaragua. As noted, most of it focuses on policy and political debate. These stories were chosen for the opposite reason. They feature rare examples of human-rights reporting and limited examples of WTDS. As with El Salvador, they show that *The Times* could do this kind of reporting but mostly did not.

We will look at them and then further explore why not.

#### **On Nicaraguan Border Raiders Fan Fires of War**

By Marlise Simons, Special to *The New York Times*

SANTO TOMAS DEL NORTE, Nicaragua, Dec. 14 [1982]—The church bells clanged furiously and the villagers came running through the trenches cut across the town square. Within five minutes, some 60 peasant women, teenagers and men of nondescript age who formed the “first alarm” section of the local militia were standing in formation like trained soldiers, clasping World War II Czech rifles.

Although this "test of readiness" was staged for the benefit of visitors, the new bullet holes in the walls of this small border village, 125 miles north of Managua, offered evidence that such alarms were also part of real life.

[About] half a mile away, the...Guasaule River marks the Nicaragua-Honduras border. This frontier, running from the Pacific to the Atlantic coast, is the scene of fighting that the Nicaraguans say has rapidly increased over the past two months.

The Sandinist Government of Nicaragua, charging that exiles in armed opposition have increased incursions and terrorist actions over the past months, has stepped up the militarization of the northern frontier. On Nov. 4 all five border provinces were declared a "military emergency zone" and placed under direct military rule. In a landscape of low hills that climb into high, wooded mountains, the inhabitants of a string of villages are preparing for full-scale war.

Ostensibly, the border fighting rages between the Nicaraguans who support the Sandinist Government and those who want to overthrow it. But on another level, the conflict also involves the United States and Honduras on one side and Nicaragua and Cuba on the other.

The paramilitary bands of exiled Nicaraguans have been getting some indirect help from the United States, according to American intelligence officials. And although Honduras has repeatedly declared its neutrality, the Nicaraguan Government says it has proof that Honduran troops have provided backup and logistic support during the exiles' raids.

The Sandinists on this side of the border, who were fighting in these same mountains less than four years ago against the dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza Debayle, now have East European weapons and perhaps as many as 2,000 Cuban military and security advisers.

*Virtually every day, Government officials said, paramilitary groups crossing the border or already deeper inland carry out hit-and-run actions against farms, bridges, vehicles and patrols in the northeast. The purpose of the raids, as stated by militant anti-Sandinists, is both to harass the Government and to draw on discontent and ignite an internal uprising.*

*The efforts of the rebels to gain support are complicated, according to missionaries working in the area, because they are causing civilian deaths and because their reportedly brutal methods remind Nicaraguans of the national guardsmen under the overthrown Somoza regime.*

While the most militant anti-Sandinists, based in southern Florida, include exiled businessmen as well as political and military supporters of the Somoza regime, many of the men fighting along the border are former members of the defeated national guard, which became feared and hated for its cruelty and assassinations.

*American Roman Catholic missionaries who frequently visit this border region said the raiders had lately been torturing and mutilating captured peasants or Sandinist sympathizers, creating the same terror as in the past.*

*In nearby San Francisco del Norte, where 15 peasants were reported killed on July 24, many of the bodies were severely mutilated, according to the missionaries. A young seminarian from a border village reported the raiders had raped his mother and sister*

*before killing his father. A rebel radio station broadcasting from Honduras has read names of people on "death lists."*

*Some of the actions are accompanied by religious, anti-Communist messages. On Oct. 28, Ricardo Blandon, a 56-year old Catholic lay preacher and his four sons were killed by an exile group in El Jicaro. The killers used machetes to carve...the cross into the chests of two of the victims and before fleeing they left written messages saying, "With God, without Communism," the missionaries said.*

Such accounts, which are widely reported by the pro-Government Nicaraguan news outlets, hurt the anti-Sandinist cause.

"You can give the guardsmen expensive American equipment and new uniforms," said a businessman opposed to the Government, "but they still behave like guardsmen. You ask people to choose between Sandinists and Somocists and they can't choose the guard."

But the Government clampdown against...counterrevolutionaries is also creating fear in the countryside, where most of the recent...arrests have been made.

In a recent interview, Sergio Ramirez Mercado, a member of the governing junta, confirmed that in the north of the country and in the capital people are regularly detained. "We have to have control operations," he said.

While he had no figures available, he said: "We are going to publish the names and details of all the prisoners. There is nothing our opponents would rather do than prove there are massive human rights violations here."

At a news conference in November, the chief of state security, Lenin Cerna, said that between August and October, 180 rebels had been captured while the exiles had "kidnapped" 47 Nicaraguans and taken them to Honduras.

The Nicaraguan Human Rights Commission said it had a list of 280 people arrested by the Government for supposed counterrevolutionary activities between March and October 1982. An accurate list is difficult to keep, according to a commission member, because when people are first detained they are frequently kept incommunicado for a time. No one detained had been killed for counterrevolutionary activities, the commission member said.

But more than 550 people have reportedly been killed this year on both sides of the war. Here on the border in Santo Tomas del Norte the walls are daubed with the slogan "They will not enter," but according to an army spokesman, the number of small groups of rebels infiltrating the countryside has grown. In the past five months, the army says, it has destroyed three rebel camps of more than 100 people each in the thick forests northeast of here. Since then, the army...said, the rebels have not succeeded in establishing any significant base or beachhead within Nicaragua. [end] (sec. A, p. 2)

The first two sentences draw us in with a novelistic scene setting. I have called this immediate (or slice-of-life) detail, but in this case, it carries the urgency of war and the poignancy of one fought by a citizen militia, not a professional army. The

peasant militia is humanizing, for some, that is. For those who believe the virulent-communism frame, it may mean that revolutions produce militarized societies. Part of the context here is that *The Times*, along with most of mainstream media, had accepted the discursive premise that limited counter-revolutionary skirmishes were being fought, but mostly by a small band of disgruntled former guardsmen.

However, in the fall of 1982, *Newsweek* broke the extent of US involvement in a cover story, and major media had to follow (Smith, 1996). This is *The Times*' first on-site story about the *contras* that chronicles atrocities. We are told the *contras* are getting "indirect" help from the United States but not how much or what kind. We are then informed that the residents are preparing for "full-scale war." The war isn't really a civil matter but capitalism and communism facing off, with Honduras allied with the United States and Cuba a proxy for the Soviet Union. Similar to Reagan-team denials that the militarization of Honduras was to destabilize Nicaragua, the Sandinistas consistently minimized the influence of Soviet-bloc military assistance. The *Newsweek* story marks the beginning of this controversy full-blown.

Just below the "test of readiness" section, we are introduced to the *contras* and their reputation as human-rights violators, driven home by descriptions of specific atrocities, psychological terror using both airwaves and bodies as media, and the conventional wisdom about their tendency to violate the Geneva Convention: that they are the products of the old, amoral system, not that they are using the traditional means of dirty war as trained by US advisers. The cross carved into the chests of the victims and the *contra* graffiti make plain an ideological ultimatum often needed to justify atrocity, God's vengeance on the ungodly. In contrast, the Sandinistas explain

their position on human rights and emphasize their desire not to alienate the international community with their wartime policy on detentions.

In the next paragraph, we get numbers captured or detained. The *contras*' prisoners are described by the Sandinista security chief as "kidnapped" in quotation marks, a way to take less than full credit for a characterization. Presumably, this is Sandinista discourse, but we are encouraged by *The Times* to discount it for some reason—because the mediators think some opponents of the regime join the *contras* willingly? That is one implication. Lastly, the Nicaraguan Human Rights Commission, tracking *contras* and sympathizers detained, tells us that none have been killed while in custody. The last paragraph says 550 people have been killed on both sides. It signals a regret we all must feel for the waste of war, but we are not told how many on either side, or who supplied the figures. Probably, as the only official source, the Sandinistas did. The final point is they are mounting as rebel incursions increase and civilians on each side of the border increasingly live in a war zone.

While this witnessing comes from first-hand reporting, the article is as distinctive for what it does not say as for what it does. It is the earliest story in *The Times* with any WTDS related to the *contras*. The tenor is relatively sympathetic to a new society struggling to be born. It is not just being harassed by a group with an ugly past but one pursuing genocidal intimidation in the present. We see the citizen militia in action fairly sympathetically and the *contras*' grotesque violations are laid bare for the world to witness. The snippets are small but evocative. Except to say, "The Government clampdown against suspected counterrevolutionaries is also creating fear in the countryside," and to have a junta member confirm that suspected rebels are regularly

detained, it does not much discredit the Sandinistas on the subject of civil rights. Later, as they struggle to wrest a new society from an illiterate, debt-ridden wreck and fight off an insurgency on two fronts funded by the richest country on the planet, they stumble and become more repressive, and *The Times*' coverage becomes less gracious. In essence, at this point, it is fairly evenhanded, befitting a mainstream journalistic ethic, while still conveying the horror of the situation.

This same restraint leaves some holes, however: the grotesque irony of a Catholic seminarian and lay preacher whose relatives were subjected to such horror in the name of God. These are not anomalies. They represent deep-seated, iceberg-like conflicts with far-reaching social, psychological and anthropological implications, the depths of which most reporters, at the time anyway, would have been hard-pressed to plumb. An explanation of the religious and class divisions, and how they create solidarity, on one hand, and alienation, on the other, would have offered a window on the social and political rift between traditional and non-traditional religious cultures.

We have here an example of the cultural and sub-cultural issues that plague any attempt to translate the whole story, to render it meaningful across all four sub-cultural zones, all contested. Clearly, the traditional culture of Nicaragua (represented by the *contras*) was more repressive than its parallel in the United States, and so, does not easily "translate," generate much sympathy or understanding in a mainstream US audience. It would take a briefing on the history of class violence in Nicaragua to make sense of this barbarity. Nor does the alternative culture in Nicaragua really translate effectively, not here or in most of *The Times*—especially in its bureaucratic form in the Sandinista regime as they attempt to order a new society, one increasingly

blocked by internal and external obstacles. The report gives us a few basic facts. We are left with multiple questions about their meaning.

\* \* \*

### **Nicaragua Rebels Accused of Abuses**

By Larry Rohter, Special to *The New York Times*

ESTELI, Nicaragua, March 5 [1985]—*A new report by a private group asserts that over the last three years, rebels from one of the organizations seeking to overthrow the Nicaraguan Government have engaged in a pattern of attacks and atrocities against civilian targets.*

*A preliminary draft copy, made available here, gives details of 28 incidents that it says "have resulted in assassination, torture, rape, kidnapping and mutilation of civilians."*

Four of the 28 incidents were chosen at random and witnesses were independently interviewed by The New York Times. These interviews seemed to verify some of the details in the report.

The new report, prepared by a three-member team headed by Reed Brody, a former New York State Assistant Attorney General, is based on interviews conducted in Nicaragua between September 1984 and January 1985. It is to be officially released in Washington on Thursday.

The findings are similar to those in a report issued today in Washington by Americas Watch, a private, non-political organization that monitors human rights in the Western Hemisphere. At the same time, the Americas Watch study cited human rights abuses by the other side, noting that there had been violations by the Nicaraguan Army. But it said that there had been a "sharp decline" in such abuses by the Government since 1982.

The reports are being released in advance of what is expected to be a heated debate in Congress over United States financing for the anti-Sandinista rebels prior to a vote later this month. President Reagan has asked Congress to renew \$14 million in financing to the insurgents, whom he has described as "freedom fighters" who are the "moral equal of our Founding Fathers."

The allegations of killing, rape and kidnapping described in the Brody report seem to apply only to the Nicaraguan Democratic Force, which is based in Honduras and is most active in the northern part of Nicaragua. No charges of atrocities were made by witnesses against the other main anti-Sandinista military force, the [southern] Democratic Revolutionary Alliance, which is dominated by disgruntled former officials of the Sandinista Government.

With the help of the Washington law firm of Reichler and Appelbaum, which is representing Nicaragua in its lawsuit against the United States in the International Court of Justice [World Court], Mr. Brody's group was able to obtain...interviews with victims of rebel violence.

The follow-up interviews of the witnesses were conducted by *The Times* in Spanish, in the presence of relatives. No Nicaraguan police, army or other Government officials were present, and none of the interviews were arranged through official channels.

Although Mr. Brody says he disagrees with Reagan Administration policies in Nicaragua, he says he undertook the project out of personal, not political, interest. At the same time, he acknowledges that the release of his report during the debate over renewed aid to the rebels "is not unintentional."

Reichler and Appelbaum, the law firm, originally proposed an independent study and arranged for Mr. Brody's participation.

One of the witnesses, who was quoted in the report and later was questioned by *The Times*, described an early morning attack that he said came as he was on his way to pick coffee at a cooperative farm north of here.

Along with about 30 other volunteers, the witness, Santos Roger Briones, 16 years old, said he was traveling in a Government-owned truck early last December. Nearly a kilometer ahead was a pickup truck carrying armed soldiers who had been supposed to protect the unarmed civilians from rebel attack.

*Suddenly, Mr. Briones recalled, the dump truck was peppered with rifle, machine-gun, grenade and rocket fire. Many in the truck were wounded. Those who could jumped down and ran for their lives.*

*"I was hit in the foot and was covered with blood, so I lay on the ground, pretending to be dead," said Mr. Briones. He said he remained motionless as men in blue uniforms robbed him of his boots and wallet. "Then the contras came and cut the throats of the people who stayed on the truck," he said, using a Spanish term for the rebels.*

*"When they were finished, they set the truck on fire," he added. "From where I was lying, I could hear the groans and the screams of those who were being burned alive."*

*All told, 21 civilians ranging in age from five to 60 were killed, 8 wounded and one kidnapped in that incident, which is discussed in the Brody report.*

Both the interviews with *The Times* and the report itself indicate that the distinction between combatants and noncombatants is not always clear in Nicaragua. Civilian vehicles sometimes offer rides to hitchhiking soldiers in uniform, and farmers, workers and students in civilian dress often carry arms for what they say is self-defense.

*Unarmed victims of the guerrilla attacks said in each case that they shouted that they were civilians as soon as the firing started. In some instances the shooting stopped, they said, but in other cases it continued.*

The witnesses interviewed by *The Times* described several patterns that they said enabled them to identify their attackers as rebels. There were constant references, for example, to blue uniforms with shoulder patches reading "F.D.N.," the Spanish initials for the Nicaraguan Democratic Force, as well as repeated mentions of Chinese-made AK-47 machine guns and a type of Belgian-made rifle that the Nicaraguan Democratic Force uses.

Witnesses also spoke of tents, knapsacks, and boots with "U.S.A." printed on them, which they took as proof that their captors were rebel forces and not Sandinista troops trying to pass themselves off as insurgents. Another characteristic, the witnesses said,

was the constant use of a word meaning 'rabid dog' that the [FDN] uses to refer to Sandinistas and their supporters.

Each of these patterns was mentioned by Digna Barreda de Ubeda, 29, who told of an ordeal at the hands of the Nicaraguan Democratic Force that began in May 1983 with a visit to her uncle in Sapote, north of here. *She and her husband were abducted at gunpoint by men claiming to be officials of the Ministry of the Interior investigating counterrevolutionary activities.*

*Once outside of the town, however, the men identified themselves as members of the Nicaraguan Democratic Force and began to beat her 50-year-old husband, she said. The couple was marched to an encampment commanded, Mrs. Barreda says, by men called "Poison" and "The Vulture."*

Mrs. Barreda said she made no effort to hide her pro-Sandinista sympathies. She is a member of a Christian peasant self-help group that works closely with Sandinista groups and also belongs to the official Nicaraguan Women's Association; her husband fought with the Sandinistas during the insurrection in 1979 that ousted Gen. Anastasio Somoza Debayle.

*"There were 50 or 60 of them in the group, and over five days they took turns raping me until each had had his chance," said Mrs. Barreda.*

*While she was being raped, said Mrs. Barreda, other soldiers standing by stabbed her with bayonets in the legs and side. During some episodes, she says, her husband was forced to watch.*

*Mrs. Barreda said that during her five days as a captive she witnessed the torture and murder of a peasant acquaintance who had been kidnapped by the Nicaraguan Democratic Force in a separate incident.*

"They asked him if he loved the revolution," she recalled. "He said, 'Yes, I love the revolution, because it has given me land, which is more than Somoza ever did.'

*"So they started to gouge out his eyes with a spoon," she said. "Then they bayoneted him through the neck. "They finished him off with a burst of machine gun fire," she said.*

*Mrs. Barreda said the soldier who was told to set her free raped her again. She said her husband was released shortly afterward. [end] (sec. A, p. 1)*

Any analysis of human rights in Nicaragua encounters the same moral murkiness found in El Salvador for this period: evidence of transgressions on both sides. But uncomfortably for US citizens, US-backed forces accounted for the worst of them by more than a 3-to-1 ratio in El Salvador (PBS, 2001) and, while figures are harder to come by for Nicaragua, it was generally considered at least a 2-to-1 ratio (Klaiber, 1998). The public relations of the Reagan team, aided by the *contras* with funding

from expatriates in southern Florida, did its best to conceal *contra* violations. These were mostly indiscriminate violence: deaths, rapes and disappearances, as well as destruction of livelihoods, such as livestock and crops, and communal buildings—they also destroyed co-ops, day care centers and cooperative health care facilities, anything representing a new social order. The Sandinistas' were mostly illegal detentions, beatings in custody and lower level torture, such as sensory deprivation and water-gun assaults, as well as some deaths and disappearances. The latter diminished as the international community criticized its human-rights record and it professionalized its security forces and justice system. In general, the Sandinistas were guilty of the low end of violations of civil-political rights, including censoring a few newspapers and radio stations and silencing or deporting a few conservative priests. But the *contras* were guilty of the grisly fare of dirty war: terrorizing civilians with indiscriminate bombings and killings and “conscripting” young men in a manner indistinguishable from kidnapping, often killing them if they refused. The discovery of a CIA training manual detailing psychological operations, as well as how to torture and murder, made news about 18 months after the *Newsweek* cover story, and then had to be disowned by the Reagan administration (Parry, 1992).

However, because the Reagan team was fixated on the Sandinista threat and had many ways to focus attention on the regime's violations, the mainstream media's record is different for Nicaragua. It often gave more attention to the civil-political violations of the government than the indiscriminate murder of the rebels. This is also because the Sandinistas were more willing to admit mistakes, as they did with the Miskitos, than the Salvadoran rebels or government. The resource-poor realities of

guerilla war and the burden of taking prisoners on any rebel operation also compromised the records of both insurgencies.

Having said that, we come to another rare example of WTDS in *The Times*, one that merits attention both because of its brief but compelling WTDS and rights-abuse passages and because of the particular, and peculiar, use of *The Times*' investigative resources. As one of the earliest extensive documentation of *contra* abuses to make mainstream news, this story is often used in books and articles on coverage of *contra* abuses. Most interesting is that it spends ten-and-a-half paragraphs qualifying its fundamental content: *contras* overrunning villages and abducting, raping and killing civilians. We are told that three separate investigations confirm the details of the atrocities: a) the report by Reed Brody (1985), a lawyer affiliated with the law firm preparing the World Court case doing his own investigation, the main data profiled; b) an Americas Watch report with findings implicating the *contras*; and c) the independent investigation by *The Times* to corroborate the Brody report. We are told these results are being released in advance of congressional debate on *contra* funding. And we are told which *contra* force it concerned and something about method and are given an aside about potential vested interests: why the firm did the interviews, for Nicaragua's case with the World Court.

Most of this would be attribution as afterthought if it were not news "incompatible with US interests" (Herman and Chomsky, 1988). Even in a beginning news-writing class designed to expunge the worst sensationalistic excess, one fails to see how this would qualify as ten paragraphs of A+ prose. This is not the novelistic, *in-medias-res* ("in the middle of things") lead you could create out of this material.

Given what we have already seen was a newsroom atmosphere in which Sandinista behavior was suspect, given Rosenthal's concerns and Reagan-team pressure, the writer apparently believed he needed this much qualification when discussing *contra* abuses. To its credit, in an arena of doubt within and without the newsroom, and probably because of such contestation, *The Times* did corroborating interviews, a practice, oddly, that shows up nowhere else in its stories about human rights. Perhaps because the study was a personal follow-up to a public investigation, it felt a special need to verify Brody's work. It was, in which case, a way to use its editorial habitus to confront the knowledge-power of the majority culture, unusually so.

After the vignette about Santos Briones, we have four more paragraphs of qualifying and contextual material, much of it on the veracity of the victims' claims that the *contras* attacked them. Then there is another chilling WTDS account of one Digna Barreda and her husband. This is the only account of rape in *The Times* material examined, another oddity, as *contra* rapes were routinely reported by human-rights groups and rape is common in dirty war. We are also told Americas Watch reported Sandinista abuses and that they are declining but not what they are.

Regardless of anomalies, this is a fairly courageous and responsible piece of work given the uncertainties surrounding both *contra* and Sandinista abuses. It shows us a way to deal with the contestation process in the fields of Central American politics. It verges on habitus overkill, but that is an indication of the ideological/discursive pressures operating on *The Times* during this rebirth of conservatism. The main curiosity, a moral one, is that these two articles, and the one that follows, represent the bulk of enterprise reporting on *contra* atrocities by *New York Times* reporters.

\* \* \*

## How Contras Recruit: The Kidnapping Way

By James Lemoyne, Special to *The New York Times*

MANAGUA, Nicaragua, June 22 [1987]—*The rebel unit flagged down the local bus in northern Nicaragua and summarily ordered the male passengers to get out.*

*Then, without further explanation, the guerrillas gave the order: the men would follow the rebels to a contra camp.* The women were told to get on their way, according to several witnesses and human-rights officials.

*The mass kidnapping two months ago near the town of Siuna is one of several reports of forced recruitment of civilians by the American-backed rebels, known as contras, in recent months. It is a politically damaging practice that Reagan Administration and rebel officials have repeatedly pledged to stop.*

*Most of the 15 to 20 men taken from the bus escaped in the following nights during a forced march through the jungle. But for Omar Navas, who says he was too slow and too afraid to escape—and also for his family—the kidnapping on April 27 was the beginning of a miserable experience that has not yet ended.*

Mr. Navas told his story to this reporter in a rebel camp on the Honduran-Nicaraguan border last month. The reporter then traveled to Nicaragua, where he found Mr. Navas's parents, who had believed their son to be dead. They celebrated the news that he had been seen alive, and they spoke of their experience with a conflict that has destroyed their lives.

Their story offers a human measure of the unsought war and bitterly contested revolution in Nicaragua that have split communities, killed tens of thousands, and wrecked the lives of countless people like the Navas family.

"Can you help me?" Mr. Navas quietly asked as Sandinista rockets exploded near a contra border camp during a major attack last month. "I want to go home."

*Mr. Navas, 35 years old, could not walk. His bandaged feet were swollen like grotesque melons to twice their normal size because of a congenital problem with walking and cuts that became infected after a 21-day march with his contra kidnapers in the San Jacinto regional task force.*

A former schoolteacher, Mr. Navas recently became an accountant in a state-owned lumber yard, a job he took to earn more money for his family. He seemed an unsuitable candidate for guerrilla war: in addition to his inability to walk properly, he is in poor physical shape and has a young family, and he appears to have no strong political views.

"I am not at all political, and I told them when they took me that I could not walk properly," Mr. Navas said, breaking into slow tears. "I have a wife, I have two young daughters—what will happen to them without me?"

Three weeks later, Mr. Navas's aging parents expressed reactions that were as deeply felt in their impoverished home in a working class neighborhood of Managua.

*The elder Mr. Navas, 78, had just come home after being hospitalized for an acute nervous disorder brought on, his wife said, by his anxiety at losing Omar, his eldest son and the family's breadwinner. They had heard nothing of him since the rebel patrol took him away.*

"God brought this news to us," cried Mrs. Navas, 57, as she held her husband, Aristides. "All of us have prayed for him these weeks to be alive, but we didn't know. God gave Omar back to us—he knows nothing about war."

The contras also kidnapped Antonio Rodriguez from the same bus traveling between the villages of Siuna and Rosita, according to his family and human-rights officials. Mr. Rodriguez was not seen by a reporter, but people in a rebel camp said he is also being held in a border base near the Bocay and Coco rivers.

*Human-rights officials estimate that at least 400 Nicaraguan families have, like the Navas family, had a relative kidnapped by the American-backed rebels. The practice now appears to be on the rise again as rebel units infiltrate Nicaragua anew and look for new recruits.*

A State Department official, asked by telephone to comment on the practice, said, "We oppose kidnapping people, and we've made that clear to the rebels."

The official appeared not to have been informed of the contra kidnappings reported to be occurring in Nicaragua despite a \$3 million United States human-rights monitoring program for the rebels.

A senior rebel commander, Mike Lima, was asked why his men were still seizing people. The question was especially pointed as 30 peasants had just walked into the border camp in what appeared to be a genuinely voluntary decision to fight the Sandinistas they said they oppose.

In response, Mr. Lima described the kidnapping as "an error," in which a young patrol commander had made the mistake of taking Mr. Navas and others to a secret rebel camp. There, he said, the senior commander ordered that the kidnapped men be held, rather than release them and risk disclosure of the rebels' location.

But Mr. Navas's feet were soon in such bad shape—a condition he says kept him from being drafted into the Sandinista army—that the rebels had to carry him in a sling for the last four days of a march to a...base on the border, [said] Mr. Lima.

The effect of the kidnapping on Mr. Navas's family and their community offers a sharp example of how the tactic of forcing people to fight hurts guerrillas in wars that depend on popular support.

*The Navas family had already suffered at the hands of the Sandinistas because of the contra war. The family ran the village store in San Carlos on the Coco river until 1981, when the Sandinistas decided to destroy the town and remove its inhabitants, suspected of supporting Miskito Indian rebels.*

*Mr. and Mrs. Navas say they lost almost everything they owned. Mr. Navas, then 72, spent eight days in a State Security cell until the Sandinistas decided that he was not a contra.*

The Sandinistas then put the couple into a grim relocation camp where, the Navases said, their children persuaded officials to let them take [them] to Managua.

The Sandinistas, who destroyed the couple's means of earning a living, have given them no assistance, Mrs. Navas said. She and her husband live off their children, eating beans and rice and wearing threadbare clothes and worn tennis shoes without laces.

Then, after so much ill fortune, the contras seized their son.

*"We are old people, and there is nowhere left for us to go," Mrs. Navas said. "The Government moved us, and now the contras have taken Omar. There has been so much*

*suffering." Their kidnapped son's wife and two children still live in Siuna, in the northern war zone. The family now worries that with their son's continuing absence, his family will soon have little to live on.*

*According to a number of witnesses, the effort at forced recruitment by the contras has done nothing to improve their already tarnished reputation in Siuna, where a rebel unit slit the throats of two agricultural consultants in 1985, according to a resident.*

Contra commanders told a reporter that Mr. Navas would be free to return to Nicaragua if he chooses, and a rebel human-rights official said there "is an effort being made" to see that Mr. Navas goes home. United States officials are aware of the case and are reportedly seeking Mr. Navas's release as well. But so far he has not appeared.

The last time a reporter saw him, Mr. Navas was sitting with bandaged feet in a small rebel base with almost 3,000 Sandinista troops preparing to attack. If the base was overrun, he would not have been able to flee. He had waved goodbye as a reporter left the base.

*Mr. and Mrs. Navas have asked international relief officials for help, but they are very worried and say they do not know what to do next. Their plight is shared by hundreds of Nicaraguan families and will be shared by more in a war in which there appears to be no clearly defined mechanism for returning prisoners or refugees from guerrilla control.*

The Sandinistas refuse to grant even minimal official recognition to the contras, making any exchange of prisoners or refugees in guerrilla hands especially difficult. [end] (sec. A, p. 1)

This WTDS account focuses on lesser but significant human-rights violations by the *contras*. They are nearly as tragic as those in the previous stories but were sub-lethal at the time. It offers a specific lens on how the innocent suffer, how close-knit peasant families are, how they rely on each other intimately, and how, without these bonds, they are often bereft emotionally and destitute economically. It also shows the complicity of the Sandinistas, who will not negotiate with the *contras* to exchange prisoners. The writer supplies limited physical detail but excellent social detail: how the mechanics of the kidnapping take cruel advantage of what normalcy exists; the effects of Omar Navas' kidnapping on his wife, daughters and parents; the parents' previous livelihood destroyed by war, making them dependent on their children; and

particularly, how both armies had preyed on this family, accounts combining social, political and military details.

The story is telling in that, while the *contras* are the featured villains, the Sandinistas are subjected to equal, albeit more implied, criticism. Its understated WTDS rhetoric—a social-context-laden look at the interlocking facts of depredation and degradation—offers another window on emotive news. But because of *The Times*' commitment to disinterested reporting, of which it does a creditable job here, the story allows no options for reader action. It is superlative in showing how clearly both sides contribute to war as hell and how, when their armies are in the thick of it, neither is much concerned with the poor and vulnerable. It also demonstrates (again) that *The Times* was capable of this kind of enterprise reporting but rarely did so. (“Special to the...*Times*” tells us that this was a stringer.) Given the effort here, one can easily imagine the degree of contestation and fields of resistance involved.

The dateline is Managua, where Omar's parents live in a home of the poor in a working-class neighborhood, but the reporter has been to a secret rebel camp on the Honduran border, where he interviews Omar, then back to Managua to find the parents. He also cites events in Siuna, the northeastern province where the *contras* liked to operate. As a montage, this geographical ranging reminds us of Chouliaraki's (2008) emergency (emotive) news: “The move from singular and abstract spacetimes...to concrete, specific, multiple, and mobile spacetimes” (p. 377).

Negotiating the contestation of the editorial field means chasing down pieces of a family rent by war, researching their former lives and those they left behind and balancing the depredations of the *contras* with those of the Sandinistas. The reporter's

habitus produces shoe-leather enterprise in finding someone like Omar, then tracking down his parents, and in making his WTDS more palatable to a newsroom in the thrall of Reagan-team pressure by exchanging coin-of-the-realm Sandinista repression for the currency of *contra* human-rights violations. In this case, the frame that couches the conflict and US involvement in terms of extremes of left and right works in the writer's favor as he negotiates the contested field of his own newsroom and the skeptical US public. As with emotive news, the victim is made personal and historical and placed in a near-term social context. The writer does not stint on why this suffering exists and offers relevant cultural background.

The story is distinctive in that the violence of both sides is given significant billing, the best example of this in *The Times*' reporting on either country. One critical comment emerges. Eloquent regarding the commonplace that war mangles lives, the writer misses the fact that kidnapping has a long and perverse history in dirty war. Pressed into military service, low-value captives provide cannon fodder, and those of high value supply operating capital via ransoms. This context would have portrayed the victims in full historical relief and a more poignant humanity.

As it is, the *contras*' calling the kidnapping "an error" and the Reagan administration's rhetoric of avuncular correction brings to mind the tragic-comic bungling of Shakespearean mechanics, played by the *contras*, and Hannah Arendt's (1964) famous dictum about the banality of evil, the Reagan-team cold warriors. Arendt coined the phrase in an analysis of the trial of Adolph Eichmann. It meant that the Nazis were not so much sociopaths or deranged zealots as ordinary people who obeyed orders and bent to the authority of mass aggression and herd instinct without

critically reflecting on their actions. Both statements demonstrate either how naïve or cynical, or both, the speakers were. They also speak of the entrenched behavior and unexamined momentum of civil war: The Sandinistas are increasingly driving people to join the *contras*, but the *contras* continue to kidnap.

This is when Bourdieu's well-mannered notions of habitus and its contestation in institutional venues break down into a helter-skelter civil chaos made less of knowledge-power borne of discourse and more of ethical ignorance and spiritual impotence borne of the barrel of a gun. This is not a field of symbolically or intellectually contested social capital but a randomly situated political-military minefield sewn for peasants and common folk by those with a fixation on annihilation and intimidation as power, not knowledge. Habitus becomes supersaturated with violence, and knowledge-power is dominated by whoever controls what turf at which time, the perpetually shifting sands of counter-insurgency. Popular support, while sometimes legitimizing, has little to do with it under these circumstances. In Ashuri and Pinchevski's "social-political struggles with relative values," the relative values become an absolute rhetoric of gunpowder and the social-political struggles the tortured discourse of the crucified poor. No matter how secular the medium, witnessing becomes a sacred social trust in a profane political maelstrom.

**Chapter 7**

**Sacramental Narrative as Prophetic Witness:**

**Incidence of Distant Suffering in**

**and a Textual Analysis of**

*Sojourners*—

**With Notes on Theological Terminology**

## ***Sojourners: Theology, History and Politics***

### **Definitions of *Evangelical* and *Fundamentalist***

In the early part of the 20th century, there was little difference between fundamentalists and evangelicals. Both terms had yet to emerge and their theology was generally called “orthodox.” Fundamentalism was born in the 1910s and 1920s in opposition to liberal theology with its biblical relativism and world-reforming mindset (Marsden, 1980). This happened because the rise of an urban, industrial society in the late 1800s had created a division in Protestantism. Confronting apparent decadence and squalor in the cities, evangelicals gave up on a goal they had shared with liberals: cleaning it up through social reforms to create a worldwide Christian civilization. With their attempt to create a utopian era called “the millennium” stymied, they began to count on “dispensationalism.” This referred to a special dispensation for genuine Christians, whom Jesus could take into heaven at any time, after which he would deal harshly with a rebellious world by visiting on it a variety of social and natural disasters (Eskridge, 1995).

Fundamentalism emerged between 1910 and 1915 with the publication of a 12-volume set of essays called *The Fundamentals* (Marsden, 1991). They set down five tenets of the faith: the literal truth of the Bible, the virgin birth, Jesus' death as atonement for sin and his bodily resurrection, the reality of miracles, and dispensationalism. These formed the basis for pitched doctrinal battles with "modernists," or liberals (Marsden, 1980).

After World War II, evangelicals became concerned about the fundamentalists' anti-intellectualism and hostile rejection of “the world.” In 1947 a theologian used the

term “neo-evangelical” for a less militant, less separatist movement within fundamentalism that wanted to be positively involved in dialogue with the unbelieving world. It also sought a more intellectual approach to scripture, tolerating some metaphorical constructions of its meaning, and sought to apply the gospel to social, political and economic issues. Fundamentalists encouraged this separation and shortened the label to “evangelicals,” whom they viewed as preoccupied with acceptance and befriending a tainted and doomed world (Eskridge, 1995).

Evangelicals focused on four keynotes: conversion—one’s life should change at depth; activism—the gospel should bear fruit in works; biblical centrism—the Bible as inspired Word of God and final authority; and crucicentrism—the absolute meaning of Christ’s sacrificial death for salvation (Marsden, 1991). Both groups should be considered theological conservatives because they adhere to traditional binary, propositional tests for belonging to the fold, especially atonement theology, and maintain a “two-world” or dualistic epistemology.

Both groups also tend to be socially conservative in opposing same-sex marriage, abortion and pre- or extra-marital sex. Evangelicals, however, do not usually try to impose their cultural values in laws about what others do in private. Most evangelicals tend toward political and economic conservatism in their high regard for property rights and free enterprise and believe any social safety net ought to be voluntary and administered by churches (Marsden, 1991).

Unknown to most people, there is an evangelical left, emerging mostly since the early 1970s. Most of its members believe God has a special concern for the poor, oppose the death penalty and favor gun control. Most oppose all violence, including

war, and some favor legalizing same-sex marriage and abortion while remaining personally opposed. Evolving steadily since the early 1970s, it is sometimes called the "emergent church" or "post-evangelical" movement (Eskridge, 1995).

A 2007 survey put evangelicals at 28.6% of the US population, Roman Catholics at 24.5% and mainline (generally theologically liberal) Protestants at 13.9% (US Census Bureau, 2007). Evangelicals belong to denominations as varied as African-American Baptists, Dutch Reformed, Mennonites, Pentecostals, charismatic Catholics and the most dominant, Southern Baptists (Eskridge, 1995).

### ***Sojourners' History and Theology***

Within this landscape, *Sojourners* magazine is evangelical, not fundamentalist. This distinction also generally emphasizes healthy relationships over dogma and forgiveness over judgment and sin (Wellman, 2008). It is theologically traditional, but it is liberal politically. The main exception is abortion, to which it is publicly opposed in keeping with its "pro-life" views, including opposition to the death penalty.

Labels are tricky things, and some might say that much of *Sojourners'* content has been politically radical (or leftist). An outgrowth of discussions about the ethics of the Vietnam War, it was born in 1971 as the *Post-American* at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Ill. In the early 1970s, it moved to inner-city Washington, D.C., and became *Sojourners*, taking the name of the intentional community around it (Hollyday, 1989). Its founder and intellectual leader is Jim Wallis, a Trinity graduate and author of many books. His latest are *God's Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It* (2005), a *New York Times*

best seller, and *The Great Awakening: Reviving Faith and Politics in a Post-Religious Right America* (2008). It came out every other month until the early 1980s, then 11 times a year. It publishes 40 to 60, 8½-by-11-inch pages with ample graphics. It went from one color to color covers and four-color throughout by the late 1990s.

Theologically, the Sojourners community believes, as evangelicals do, in atonement theology. This means their ultimate focus is on the sacrifice Jesus, as the Son of God, made when he died on the cross for human sin—usually defined not in terms of congenital evil but as a broken relationship with God, self and others (Wellman, 2008). Through this sacrifice he has redeemed the life of anyone willing to accept this saving grace. In this process, a rebirth of the spirit is believed to take place. It is expected to yield behavioral changes, including, for the evangelical left, a deeper commitment to one's fellows and particularly the disadvantaged.

In contrast to *C&C*, which never made it into the digital age, *Sojourners* claims a combined print and electronic readership of more than 250,000. Its paid circulation, as of 2006, was nearly 50,000 (Dart, 2006). Digital readers get a free “teaser” digest with complete text only of editorials from the “God’s Politics” blog. *Sojourners* publishes advocacy reporting and comment on national and international politics and Christian living with a focus on peacemaking and social justice. It also publishes books and monographs on political and spiritual issues.

*Sojourners* has featured many prominent contributors. Contributing editors have been Franciscan priest and inspirational speaker Richard Rohr; anti-war and -nuclear activist, former Jesuit and poet Daniel Berrigan and popular author on race, social

ethics and political theology Cornel West (*Race Matters*, 1993, a *New York Times* best seller, and *Democracy Matters*, 2004). The latter two also have written for *C&C*.

It also has featured: writing by (chronologically since 1971) British historian Arnold Toynbee; historian, columnist and former Jesuit Gary Wills; Harvard child psychiatrist Robert Coles (also in *C&C*); social philosopher and critic Lewis Mumford (also in *C&C*); French social philosopher Jacques Ellul; Harvard-educated poor people's attorney, lay theologian and social critic William Stringfellow (also in *C&C*); liberal Republican US Senator Mark Hatfield; founder of the biracial intentional community Koinonia Farms of Americus, Georgia, and co-founder of Habitat for Humanity, Clarence Jordan; Brazilian liberation theologian and "bishop of the poor" Dom Helder Camara; Trappist monk, poet and social critic Thomas Merton (also in *C&C*); former Yale and Harvard Divinity professor of pastoral psychology Henri Nouwen; noted Union Theological black liberation theologian James Cone (also in *C&C*); Catholic feminist and liberation theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether (also in *C&C*); novelist Alice Walker; anti-war and -nuclear activist and wife of activist priest Phillip Berrigan (brother of Daniel), Liz McAllister (head of the successor to the Pledge of Resistance); civil rights leader Roger Wilkins; columnist Mary McGrory; author Studs Terkel; poet-farmer and environmentalist Wendell Berry; Buddhist monk and peace activist Thich Nhat Hanh; and interviews with South African bishop Desmond Tutu and Chicano labor activist Cesar Chavez.

### **WTDS, Human Rights and Otherwise Unworthy Victims in El Salvador**

Moving from *The New York Times* to *Sojourners* may be a bit disorienting because of the contrast between *The Times*' "disinterested" reporting model (not always so, as we have seen) and the "sacramental" model of *Sojourners*. Some might say the latter makes for compelling confessional or diaristic writing but hardly qualifies as real journalism. Such contestation begs questions about the definition of the craft and whether it is mostly in the eye of the beholder.

First, in its narrowest sense, "sacramental" means related to a sacrament. Catholicism defines these as baptism, ordination, matrimony and extreme unction (for healing or death). In most Protestant churches, baptism and the eucharist are the only sacraments. However, a second definition of sacrament from the *New Webster's Dictionary* (1993) is: "any ceremony or act symbolizing a deep spiritual reality." It is also sometimes seen as an outward sign of an inward and spiritual grace. The second definition of "sacramental" is "a religious rite resembling a sacrament but not regarded as having been instituted by Christ." Calling much of *Sojourners*' writing sacramental, especially when featuring WTDS, means that when witness testifies to suffering that is sacrificial for the faith, it takes on a virtually sacred meaning. Because of the nature of the events witnessed, the way they are framed, especially when resonating with the passion of Christ and combined with a use of scripture and sacred symbols, this writing bears witness to the numinous. The deaths of the martyrs, meaning any religious folk killed in the repression, especially are a sacred trust.

In returning to our question about the fundamental characteristics of journalism, two major considerations apply. First, the keynote of journalism since the advent of

the printing press has been its diversity across time and space (Hallin & Giles, 2005; Schudson & Tift, 2005). Second, among attempts to define news, in “The Nature and Sources of News,” Entman (2005) says most scholars cite reporting on power, policy, ideology or the interests of groups and individuals enmeshed in the former. In that vein, he lists the following “news properties that might help in assessing the civic value and effects of media content”:

- focuses on the substantive goals and activities of those holding power in government or those outside government who influence government decisions;
- provides insight into the distribution of power, wealth, and status in society;
- illuminates impacts of public policies and proposed policies on the lives and opportunities of various groups of citizens—for example, those with lower incomes or limited education, those facing ethnic discrimination, or alternately, those enjoying wealth and ethnic privilege; and
- penetrates the hype and spin to reveal the true policy stands, key support groups and advisers, and demonstrated records...of candidates for office (p. 61).

In light of these criteria, the *Sojourners* copy chosen for this study certainly qualifies. It just takes on a different cast from mainstream writing because it speaks without hesitation to an audience with a shared worldview, or those it wants to introduce to this worldview.

In contrast, *The New York Times* tries to speak to people who have vastly different world views. To the extent that we are becoming a society in which it is increasingly difficult to report for a diverse audience, *The Times* should be given due respect and some critical leeway in this regard. (I address the multi-vocal quality of its coverage further in the conclusion.) It was not in a situation where it could assume its readers wanted to hear from only to those who shared their worldview.

*Sojourners*, on the other hand, practices “attachment” as opposed to “detachment” journalism. It is unembarrassed by emotion, sacred imagery and devotional rhetoric. The keynotes are letting those closest to the poor speak freely of what they have seen, what they believe and why one is persecuted for acting on one’s faith. Its writers then build on these schemas. In addition, as a concept being fleshed out, WTDS in print can benefit from an unfettered discussion about its characteristic types, models and genres. With that in mind, a number of these articles alter conventional genres of reporting, or combine them in new ways, and were chosen on that basis.

But before we look at the *Sojourners*’ writing in detail, we should examine the tabulations of reporting that reflects witness to distant suffering. Of 169 articles dealing with El Salvador or Nicaragua during the period in question, 46, or 27%, meet our heuristic criteria for WTDS in print. Thirty-five of 95 articles on El Salvador, or 37%, did so, and 11 of 74 on Nicaragua did, for 14.8%. Six covers were devoted to El Salvador and four to Nicaragua. In percentage terms, these are orders of magnitude greater than the data for *The Times*. More remarkably, in more than 2,500 *Times*’ articles examined, these numbers are greater in absolute terms as well.

The next two articles feature different kinds of native reporting. The writers or their families, friends or colleagues have suffered, some unto death, for standing with the poor. The main way they can make that suffering meaningful is to identify with the suffering of their archbishop and biblical characters and to recognize the often-partial signs of a resurrection, construed in spiritual terms but evidenced in a material commitment to the struggles of the downtrodden.

**Confessional as exposé: A seminarian chooses for the poor and pays the price.** The writing in this first article, published in December 1980, is relatively low-key compared to much of such writing in *Sojourners*. Regarding WTDS, the source mostly notes the atrocities at issue and offers a few salient details. Of equal relevance is how he processes the losses in spiritual terms, how he justifies a commitment to the poor in the face of great risk and celebrates a triumph of the spirit in the midst of assassination and massacre. At times, he points to this triumph as a promise of things unseen. This is the rhetoric of a community of resistance couched in terms of hope amid despair. It may seem extreme, even sentimental, to those steeped in traditional journalism. However, if we embrace a diversity of culture and expression, we have to acknowledge that this is advocacy writing, yes, but it also, as good journalism should, captures the human drama and social ethics of contested public policy and its contested witness. Certainly, it illuminates the “distribution of power, wealth, and status in society” and “impacts of public policies...on the lives...of those with lower incomes or limited education, those facing ethnic discrimination...”

This characteristic of journalism is especially relevant given that most of the deep class divisions in Latin America are rooted in ethnic prejudice. These issues have emerged out of a conspiracy of silence into sporadic protests that became a pan-Indian movement sweeping the region since the early 1990s. It is striking that, like the movement for African-American civil rights in this country, the culture of the oppressed has adopted the spiritual tradition of its oppressor and turned its meaning on its head. It has become critical in freedom and has begun to hold its oppressors accountable. Most of the priests and teachers of the liberation movement were of

European ancestry, or were from the continent and educated by European norms, as were their superiors, the conservatives in the hierarchy, so their solidarity with the poor did not always come easily and was seen by some as betrayal.

The article is reprinted nearly in its entirety to show the full dimensions of that struggle and the consequences of identifying with the poor. It comes from an issue that predates the inauguration of Ronald Reagan by a month, but it would have been read around that time and was too compelling an example of witness to pass up. It is also included to show: a) that the writers in all three publications were responding to a human-rights disaster, not mostly out of animosity for the Reagan administration; b) that the legacy of Bishop Romero was transformative enough it permeates the consciousness of this witness; and c) that the priests who faced the repression framed their suffering not in terms of cold-war imperatives but a “good news” (gospel) for the poor. It also contains an indictment of the church from within, not often made public in any forum, long before the sex-abuse scandals, that is, which makes it a unique form of exposé. Italics indicate WTDS or human-rights violations.

### **Christmas Has Begun in El Salvador: Carrying on the Work of the Martyrs**

*Nine priests, a bishop, and a deacon have been killed by the repression in El Salvador. Following are the words of a brother [a “brother” in the faith, probably of the same order] of one of the martyred priests, excerpted from a conversation with members of Sojourners staff. He is in exile studying for the priesthood and has requested that his name be withheld.—The Editors*

[December 1980; headline on cover]

The situation in my country is very grave. The bishops have expelled all the seminarians because of their participation in a May 1 demonstration in solidarity with the workers. Any priest who becomes involved in the social needs of the people, in the [basic] Christian communities is accused of being a subversive.

The story of the church in El Salvador has been one of bishops who were chosen because they were friends of the military and of the powerful families who dominate the country and want to guarantee that the church will support them. Bishop Oscar

Romero was chosen as archbishop of San Salvador because it was believed that he too would have that mentality. He was one of the first bishops who opposed the priests...trying to incarnate [the social changes of] Vatican II <sup>16</sup>; he was one of the ones most filled with fear. But his conversion to the people of the church made him change.

The conservative bishops feared that those of us in the diocese of San Salvador would pervert the other. And so they removed us from the area.

*One very close friend of mine was later assassinated by the military. He and I loved one another like brothers. I can give witness to his beautiful gospel and pastoral work among the people. But the authorities and the bishops did not trust him.*

In the country where he was studying, the church esteemed him very much and gave him all the vestments for his ordination. But he came back to El Salvador and gave the vestments to my sister and said, weeping, “Give these to your brother. *I will not be ordained here. I’m afraid of threats that have been made to me.*”

The next day he went about inviting people to a Eucharist that was going to be held in one of the villages. The people had begged him to do his first Mass in their village, and they were in the process of building a little chapel which they wanted to complete for it.

*A professional assassin came with about 50 men, among them members of the National Guard, and surrounded him. They made him lie down on the ground and shot him; then they chopped up his head with a machete. And the people had to gather it all up in bags. Now he is known as a martyr who gave witness to his gospel commitment to the very last minute....*

He has given me strength to continue. Even though I will not be able to share with him in this life, I feel that he is with me, accompanying me in my own priestly commitment.

There is a process...within the church....If you do not work with the people in the process moving forward, you are left behind. It won’t matter if you get out your documents and say, “I’m a bishop” or whatever else. If you don’t walk with the people, you are not recognized as the church.

There is no other Bishop Romero. Bishop Rivera y Damas, who is his replacement, is closest to Bishop Romero’s beliefs. He is doing what he can. But there is no one who could completely represent Bishop Romero’s presence. Still, as we learn how to become more incarnate among the people, how to respond to their needs, the process moves forward. We must move forward with hope that someday change will come. *But many will die.*

*I was already out of the country when Bishop Romero was killed. I wanted to go to his funeral, but it was not possible. People told me that because of the dangers I would probably be killed at the airport or made to disappear. I know that my people feel a tremendous loss and emptiness. He was a voice that called out in the desert; yet people heard him, and the poor were walking with him.*

Many priests saw in Bishop Romero a great leader, but they really hadn’t allowed themselves to think that he might be killed. They had to see Jesus Christ in Bishop Romero and realize that Jesus Christ would still be with them even if Bishop Romero

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<sup>16</sup> A 1962 conference in which the Catholic Church articulated a firm commitment to the poor.

were killed. It is very difficult. But he has given strength to more people who commit themselves to the struggle.

In my own brother, I saw a conversion process of his growing identification with the people. He went from wearing his habit and living with priests to removing his robes and living among the people to participate more. He was one of the first priests to do renovations within the Eucharist, giving life to the Mass, helping the people to participate more. He wanted the people to know that this Eucharist was their own. He began to do conscientization [consciousness-raising] among the catechists.

Each parish had to pay taxes...for the bishop's palace and to pay its priest's salary. My brother refused to collect those taxes. He taught classes in the high school to support himself. He began to work with Christian groups that the people might live their Christianity in community.

The bishop pulled him out of that parish and sent him to a small village in an area which is having heavy repression right now. And that's where he began again to work, the same way he had begun in the other parishes.

Every year the bishop takes trips to the parishes and confirms several thousand children, for each of whom he gets paid. The bishop was making a great deal of money at the expense of the people, and my brother said to him that he could no longer confirm tiny children, but only those of an age that they knew what confirmation was.

They took my brother's parish away...and they never gave him another. The bishop finally permitted him to go to the diocese of San Salvador; this was before Bishop Romero came in. The priest in the parish with whom he was supposed to collaborate used to do many Masses each day and charge a high price according to how much light, how much organ music, and how many candles were used. It was a commercialization of the sacraments and the Eucharist. My brother objected.

Finally, the priest told him that a replacement for him was coming within a week. I was living with my brother...at the time and we were told to leave, but we had no money to rent a house. *One day I arrived at the room and found that the wall of our house had been knocked down all over the beds and everything we had.*

My brother had great clarity about the meaning of the events that were happening around us. He had a special quality. He said that priests could not identify with one particular group of social action or political organization, but had to identify with all the people.

Bishop Romero called him and asked him to share with others his clarity, to share with other priests about how the church could be led through a process of identification with the people like ours. The day before my brother's assassination he was at a conference speaking on the topic that a blind person cannot lead other blind people: "If I do not understand my priestly mission, I cannot be a priest for my people. I will be a politician, or I'll be just any person, but not a true priest. And so as not to be blind, I need to have clarity about the gospel message. And I have to make that clarity present in the current circumstances."

He had many problems with the government, who accused him of being a communist, and with the bishops, who denounced and mocked him. There were clergy who accused him of profaning the Eucharist because he did not wear his vestments. But he never went away; he never ran from dialogue with his enemies.

*Bishop Romero told my brother to go on identifying with the people as he had. He felt very badly about my brother's death. I'll never forget the day of the assassination. I was about 30 kilometers from the scene when I was told about an hour afterward, that my brother had been killed. I quickly drove there in a car, listening to the diocesan radio.*

The first thing Bishop Romero did when I met him right after the killing was to give me huge hug and say, "I know you're afraid."

And I responded, "I am afraid."

He said, "But we have to be clear that the Christian in our time has to give a different kind of answer than in the past. Whereas before we responded with prayer, now we must respond with prayer and action. And we must run the risk of assassination."

Bishop Romero's concern was for me. He was trying give me courage and comfort, telling me to continue [in] the priesthood. "There is a spot for you. Please come and fill the place of your brother."

My brother drew close to all types of people—teachers, students, people from the slum areas, young people. He formed communities. His greatest concern was that, with all the problems of the Salvadoran church, we not forget about our personal sins.

Being conscious of personal sin and structural sin...was his work. Identifying himself with the poor...was his conversion. *He identified to his death.*

*Many people asked, "Why did they kill this man?" The only answer is that if you are persecuted, it is because you are doing something that is not liked by the powerful of the country. When you love the poor, you receive persecution.*

Now the word is: Be among the least and evangelize from there...and speak to the whole society out of that posture. Christ spoke from out of poverty to all. It was through his meeting with the poor that he reached out to everyone. He spoke to the young rich man, inviting him to become poor with the poor.

Christmas has begun in El Salvador. Christ has been giving himself to El Salvador through the priests, through Bishop Romero, through the lay people, the religious. This being born of Christ within their hearts, identifying with the poor, that is that Christmas—that birth that has brought us this Lent, this time of passion and suffering, this Holy Week we live. First there was the birth of this liberating Christ in the heart of the people. And then the preparation; and today a great suffering, another birth process. The resurrection will be its fruit.

Bishop Romero once said, "Something will come out, a model, which is not entirely perfect or complete, but it will be moving forward. And we as Christians, as the church, must be the salt, giving flavor and being deeply committed even if death surrounds us."

This Christmas, hopefully this Christmas, may be celebrated with fullness; perhaps with weeping, but with joy. May it be that our people are no longer massacred and may those of us who are outside be once again within—with our friends, with our families. We await resurrection, and we are seeing it even now. [end] (pp. 18-19)

Beyond the instances of WTDS, the two most crucial issues in the article are the indelible figure of Oscar Romero, a religious witness as national martyr, and the fact that the church has not been just a passive partner in the ways and means of oppression but an active participant. The transformation sought by liberation theology did not mean that the option for the poor began at the doors of the church. Instead, after 1,700 (post-Constantine) years of currying favor with the powerful, emancipation had to start within and spread from there (Gutierrez, 1973).

Many in the secular sphere advocated for liberation, of course, and some of them, fed up seeing their *compañeros* jailed, tortured and killed for it, gave up on nonviolence. The priests, nuns and catechists, while not choosing nonviolence in every case, were among the most important leaders for nonviolent change. The liberation clergy were not naïve about the dangers of a civil war rooted in class, yet the vast majority did not, and believed they could not, condone violence, even in self-defense. This article shows that advocating for the poor was not a sentimental decision. Those who did saw they had a choice to make, one that opted for nonviolence but also required action for the poor, even if they defied their own hierarchy, and that there would be a price to pay.

Given all that, this isn't an easy story to read, so it wasn't likely an easy one to tell. The internal contestation was probably as significant as the external. This level of corruption in the church, though hardly new, is hard to process and harder to accept. We have no statements to this effect, but the account raises the question whether church authorities ever collaborated with the military. Obviously, transferring a liberation priest to a region where the repression was heavy is hard to understand.

When he is transferred back to San Salvador, objects to the commercialization of the Mass and his room is ransacked, it is even more so. The journalistic point is we have an exposé as confessional, a novel form that might seem too odd to take seriously by hard-boiled types within the discipline were it not for its courage, authenticity and understated but damning critique of some of those acting in the name of God.

*Sojourners* was more at home exposing labor- or human-rights violations, environmental degradation, military buildups or war mongering. But it did at times expose church leaders who justified the oppression of the poor or war making or who squeezed money from those of limited means. It later devoted a cover story to exposing fundraising by the Christian right, Pat Robertson and PTL in particular, that gave private money to the *contras* after Congress banned federal funding (Kemper, 1985). But this is a different sort: witness as confessional and exposé.

Still, a few simple but profound truths remain. Inspired by his fellow seminarian and friend, a young seminarian makes a life-changing decision for the poor. The friend, having already made that decision, is brutally murdered by the national guard. The seminarian interprets the death in terms of the example set by the martyred Archbishop of San Salvador and connects both deaths to the reigning exemplar of his faith, Jesus, and his commitment deepens. The deaths of the martyrs resulting from popular advocacy are made meaningful spiritually and manageable psychologically by identifying with the latter-day saint Romero and the Savior himself.

But these deaths are not the sum of the story. Resurrection is, not an ethereal one, but, as befits this worldview, one that translates into more people committing to liberation. This is interpreted in terms of Christmas, not Easter, the birth of the Christ

child representing the birth of the nascent movement. Witness to distant suffering is redeemed from its numbing, compassion-fatigue effects. With the devotional and exhortational material interspersed, the article warns the faint of heart (“If you do not work with the people in the process moving forward, you are left behind.”), builds hope (“Christmas has begun in El Salvador. Christ has been giving himself to El Salvador through the priests, through Bishop Romero, through the lay people, the religious.”) and declares a new day (“We await resurrection, and we are seeing it even now.”), all biblical themes with deep cultural resonance for its audience.

This account generally defies Chouliaraki’s (2008) and Boltanski’s (1999) typologies, though part of it may conform to the emotive and denunciatory categories. Ashuri and Pinchevski (2008), however, would recognize this, among the most morally grotesque tales of dirty war, as a contested field like few others. We can also observe that the primary contestation process has already taken place, in-country and within the church. Once the witness is in exile and the mediators get the story down, there is quite likely little. Judging from the editorial introduction, the format seemed to be an interview in which *Sojourners’* staff asked an open-ended question or two, then edited the recording into a testimonial. The source, thereby, becomes both a religious and journalistic witness, a unity Peters (2001) could appreciate. Compared to *The Times*, trust between witness and mediators is transparent, based in the risks the witness has taken. It also engenders trust in any reader with basic biblical literacy not biased against liberation theology (because of its association with Marxism).

*Sojourners* excels at and often prefers in-depth interviews in which the source is allowed to speak from the heart. This is easier in a magazine, fits a homiletic and

confessional tradition and fosters a call-and-response style of repetition that allows religious meaning to build from more mundane starting points. In this format, the witness's credibility stems from his status as clergy, his liberation convictions and the price he has paid to tell his story. His allegiance to the poor, along with witnessing to the aftermath of Romero's and his friend's deaths, are esteemed credentials within the *Sojourners* community. However, they put him at sufficient odds with the dominant ideology at home that he had to flee for his life. This same habitus is not at odds with the non-traditional culture and inverted, "least of these" ideology of *Sojourners*, a spiritual awning blocking the heat of the dominant US and Salvadoran ideologies and the conservatism of most evangelicals. Historically, Catholics and evangelicals do not make common cause, so this is a tribute to the openness of this community, its commitment to ecumenism and unifying orthodoxy and orthopraxis. But back to simple truths: his witness means that his seminarian friend and the religious martyrs of El Salvador, priestly, catechetical and lay, become worthy. It does not bring them back, but it is a hermeneutical first principle that means they died for something.

**Embedded reporting as prophetic witness: A community of resistance flees genocide.** In the next article, the language becomes more urgent, more lyrical and more explicitly prophetic, including ample use of scripture to place the rhetoric in a sacred discursive space. It also takes native, point-of-view reporting to an extreme because of the reporter's embedded position with refugees under literal fire. While one could imagine the previous article running in *The New York Times* as an op-ed

piece, it is very difficult to imagine with this one. At the same time, its intellectual and emotional power is considerable. Its strength is its authenticity.

Its mix of genres is war reporting as confessional plea, prophetic critique and devotional doxology (praise of God), another novel form that creates a discursive nexus of prophetic indignation and sacred celebration, of mourning and grace. Throughout this study, prophets and their social criticism are construed in this-worldly, social-political terms. In keeping with the best of hermeneutics, prophetic vision means seeing deeply enough into the present one can extrapolate for the future. Biblical prophets, including Jesus, often proclaimed the downfall of the ruling elite and the coming of a new social order. But crystal-ball gazing was not their intent. Their purpose was to call the powerful to account and to stand with the downtrodden.

#### **A Baptism by Fire: Reflections from the Honduran Border**

*The following was written by a North American church person and friend of Sojourners who witnessed the crossing of Salvadoran refugees into Honduras in March.*<sup>17</sup>

[November 1981; headline on cover]

The waters of the Rio Lempa divide the dry hills of Lempira, Honduras, from Cabanas, El Salvador; water no wider than a stone's throw across to the other shore and just deep enough to reach over the head of a man or woman. On both sides of the river the hills rise sharply to a crest; cliffs and trees jut out into the water to offer protection from the sun....

*To the west flow the waters of the Rio Sumpul, where 10 months ago 600 refugees fleeing from the repression in Chalatenango, El Salvador, were massacred...by the Salvadoran Security Forces. Honduran troops turned back those refugees who managed to cross the river. Children were thrown up into the air as targets and shot. Some were bayoneted. Women carried babies and other children who died in their arms. Few survived. And those who did cannot forget. Esperanza told me this morning she dreamed again of Sumpul. A Salvadoran My Lai.*

Who would have believed it! Today, in the Rio Lempa, 4,000 refugees crossed over....In the darkness of the dawn hours they began to cross, cautiously. Now the hills are filled with men, women and children—above all, children. Cries fill the air. Men

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<sup>17</sup> Name withheld.

and women in the river pass children over...to the other side. *Everywhere shouts, mortar fire on both sides of the river. Then in the sky, a helicopter. Shots of machine-gun fire and several sweeps over the river. Unmistakable signs of a Salvadoran helicopter and the Security Forces.* Rush to safety behind the cliffs and trees, then back to the river. Hundreds crossing. Everywhere cries fill the air. A baptism by fire.

#### **40 days in the desert**

The Village of La Virtud in Honduras is situated a few short kilometers from the border of El Salvador. Ten years before, the people here suffered a border war with El Salvador. Now the generals of these two nations have signed a peace treaty. Toasts were celebrated last November by the Organization of American States (OAS). But the only peace one encounters here is the “peace” with which the armies of both countries collaborate in their war against the refugees.

Since September, more than 11,000 Salvadoran refugees have crossed over the river to the hills and *aldeas*, or hamlets, of the municipality of La Virtud. The town itself has more than doubled in size to 3,000. Now with the new arrivals, the number of Salvadoran refugees in the region approaches 15,000—nearly half the total number in Honduras.

Just to climb over the dusty rocks and pass through the hills evokes a biblical landscape: the dry dusty earth, ageless and monotonous rocks, trees jutting out of the stone to offer occasional shade, and the trickling water of a stream to give relief to our thirst. One thinks of Abraham: “Go, leave your family, to a land that I will show you.”

Here, the simplest tasks of the day require a journey through the rocks and hills—to gather food or water, to carry a child to the clinic, or to gather to celebrate the Word of God. This is the daily bread of refugees. Everywhere the impression is of a people on the march, in procession, just to survive, and with the hope to reach a promised land, to return to a land from exile. A people formed in the desert, in the wilderness, and on the march toward their liberation.

#### **March 17: A visit to the hills**

Today we set out for the hills. Everywhere—here as well as throughout the continent—people are preparing for the anniversary of the death of Bishop Oscar Romero....A whole people remember their 40 days in the wilderness as they relive the passion and death of their nation expressed in the life of their beloved *compañero* [comrade], looking toward a day of liberation.

It is the time of Lent—40 days which take on vivid proportions here, both in the transformation of the landscape with the approaching rains as well as in the transformation of an entire people.

Daily news comes from El Salvador with the arrival of new refugees. *Today for the third day, there are bombings in the distance. We can sight planes just on the other side of the mountains and hear the resounding explosions....* Reports of movements of Honduran troops toward the border fill the air. Just this morning a soldier informs us they have been in radio contact with the Salvadoran Security Forces on the other side. *Thousands of refugees are in flight from the bombings. People begin to speak of another [massacre such as] Rio Sumpul.*

It is a Lent lived out in the daily history of the people: in the ashes of the villages, in the blood shed by so many innocent, in the march toward resurrection.

Now, one week before the celebration of [March] 24<sup>th</sup>, the anniversary of Bishop Romero's death, we gather in the evening with the refugees...We listen to the homily of Bishop Romero given one year before.<sup>18</sup>

The voice is unmistakable:<sup>19</sup> "Poverty is the force of liberation. It is a denunciation, a spirit, a commitment." The people listen with conviction. "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of Heaven."<sup>20</sup> There is joy in the bishop's voice as he announces the great hope, the joy that the people share for knowing that this hope is theirs, that this word is addressed to each one, the great mass of poor which is El Salvador.

"Woe to you who are rich." Here his voice begins to break as the message takes on flesh. "You who join house to house, field to field, and sell the poor for the price of sandals."<sup>21</sup> To call injustice by its name: the oligarchy, the armed forces, the Christian Democrats who obscure the brutal repression, and—U.S. intervention.

There is no mistake. One is called by one's name. And the impression is profound. The rising prophetic voice of truth and authority bring to mind a Martin Luther King Jr. shortly before his own death: "I've been to the mountaintop...and seen the promised land."

*This poverty which is at the same time a commitment: "Make no mistake, brothers and sisters. Those who commit themselves to the poor must run the same risks. And in El Salvador today, we know what that means: to disappear, to be captured, to be tortured, and to appear as a cadaver."*

The applause [on the recording] is thundering. There is no mistake. This man speaks the truth, and [its] authenticity...is not only in the inevitable persecution, but in the love of his people, expressed now in the faces of those gathered around the lantern....

### **March 19: Return to the river**

Two days later we decide to return to the river to investigate, to look for survivors. To return, just to return. Something happened here which we still cannot believe. The return is more difficult. By now the Honduran soldiers have mobilized. We are checked every hundred yards along the way—negotiating, displaying passports, bags and possessions searched. We travel as a "commission," as journalists, and are able to pass. At the last checkpoint the soldiers inform us that they are prohibited to go any further, and we travel at our own risk.

We approach the river with great anticipation. What will we encounter? And who? The dead. The missing. Those who have managed to cross the river and who have saved themselves?

*Along the way we see unmistakable signs of the battle the day before: rocks piled up in circles like miniature caves behind which the people hid from the helicopter fire.*

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<sup>18</sup> On the day before his death.

<sup>19</sup> A famous recording broadcast on the radio, the main form of mass communication for the peasants.

<sup>20</sup> From the Beatitudes, Jesus' blessings on the traditionally marginalized.

<sup>21</sup> From the prophet Amos.

*Huge holes gape in the ground where the mortars fell. On Honduran territory? There is no mistake. I reach down and pick up the lead fragments of the mortar. This is the neutrality; this is the peace which falls from the lips of the generals and politicians.*

Suddenly someone shouts out ahead: “We’ve found somebody! He’s alive!” As we approach we find an old man: the gray in his hair and the features on his face show 80 or 90 years of age. He can hardly speak for fear and exhaustion. He lies still by the tree. Someone from his village recognizes him. “That’s Don Felipe!”

*A little further toward the river we encounter more refugees: three women and their children. What joy! A little further on we find a small child, four years old, lying still on the rocks. Her mother brings us closer and turns the child over. She cries out in pain. Half of her backside is torn away, infested with flies and dirt. Her mother informs us it was a helicopter which did it. “Animales,” [animals] the people say to refer to helicopters and planes.*

*At last we reach the river and climb down the steep cliffs to the water. “Here’s another! Dead!” There stretched out on the rocks is a woman, 60 years old. Her mouth is open and turned toward the sky: silence. Her hands, folded across her chest, are clutching a straw cross. Her clothes are soaked in blood. No one speaks. Only the water ebbs on the shore.*

*“Salvador!” Another man...cries to the other shore. “Salvador!” He is looking for his 10-year-old son who did not cross over. We have to restrain him to prevent him from crossing over. “Salvador!” he cries again. “Salvador!”*

The return home is somber...Over our shoulders we carry the old man and the little girl in hammocks. The soldiers stop and search us and let us pass. At one stop I call out for water for the little girl. No one responds. Then a soldier steps up and offers some water from his canteen. The girl drinks thirstily. The soldier, no more than 20, looks like so many of the peasants here. The woman next to me urges me to drink too. I am unable.

*Finally, we arrive at the camp. A makeshift clinic has been set up to attend to the refugees. Someone attends to the little girl. The old man rests in the shade. Next to me a mother feeds her child through a medicine dropper. On the cot another child receives nourishment intravenously. His belly is extended, his ribs pronounced. I reach out to touch his forehead. By morning both children are dead.*

### **March 20: A day in the camp**

[The writer here chronicles the stirrings of a new life in a new makeshift village as it gets started: women carry water, men wood. Some grind corn for tortillas. “Everyone who can walk works.”]

“We’re workers,” says one [refugee], his worn face and hands testifying to his words. “We want to plant a *milpa*—a cornfield.” The crowd of men who gathered all around agree. The creativity, the industry, the pride and joy of work is evident in the activity around us. “*Somos trabajadores*,” he says. “We’re workers.”

[He or she then describes the expressions of faith among the refugees, highlighting their characteristic greeting: “*Primero Dios!*”—Above all, God! They have reason to be

grateful, she says: 4,000, mostly women and children, made it into Honduras with very few deaths.]

One man explained it to me in terms of the flight from Egypt and the passage through the Red Sea. God divided the waters to allow us to pass through. There is no other explanation. *Four days they fled the bombings, day and night without food. By the time they reached the river, the Salvadoran Security Forces were only one kilometer behind.* The popular forces provided cover [the first mention of them] and time for the refugees to cross. And only the night before the Honduran troops had departed from the other side of the river. “God is all-powerful!” “An arm strong and mighty!”

*But the reality is still grim. Most of the refugees have been in flight since August of last year. Nearly nine months on the run, fleeing from the repression and the bombings, 500-pound bombs, incendiary bombs, napalm. “The soldiers burned our houses in June...They killed my niece, pregnant with her first child, and threw the fetus to the dogs...The soldiers have no compassion...These are the things of the devil...” Nine months in flight: men, pregnant women with babies in their arms, young children, and the old and the lame. Each night a different spot. Days without food or water. And always the fear. “How long have you been in flight?” I ask another. “Two years.” “Three years.” There is no end to this testimony of suffering, this Calvary, it seems.*

*[The writer then recounts that the Honduran army has already captured 15 people and killed seven. In addition, four bodies were found with their thumbs tied behind their backs, the sign of ORDEN, Salvadoran paramilitaries who have been seen cooperating with the Honduran forces by pointing out refugees thought to be rebels or sympathizers.]*

*[But] few are willing to speak out [about the killing]. Even the United Nations High Commissioner [for Refugees] congratulates the Honduran authorities on their cooperation with the refugees. And in the distance, one still hears the bombs.*

### **March 23: Songs of liberation**

[Here the author tells of the gatherings at night when, as an informal religious and community ritual, people begin to sing movement folk songs.]

“When the poor believe in the poor  
Then we can sing of freedom.  
When the poor believe in the poor  
Then we will build fraternity.”...

“You are the God of the poor  
A God human and simple  
A God who sweats in the street.”

[Again here, he or she invokes “the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God who blesses the poor in the Beatitudes, the God whose blood was mixed with that of Bishop Romero as he raised the chalice the moment he was shot.”]

### **March 23: Rebuilding houses to live in**

[Here he or she chronicles the excursion of a hundred men inland to find a place where they can found a more permanent camp, still in La Virtud but where it will be safer. There are signs of hope, a resilience the peasants claim as their own.]

I stop to rest beneath a tree. An old man, his face worn and tired...smiles through his toothless mouth: “When they mistreat and persecute you...” He stops to scratch his head, trying to remember a few words. Then he smiles. “Blessed are you when they mistreat you and persecute you...for you will be rewarded.”<sup>22</sup> I smile in return.

Today in the refugee camp the first child was born. Healthy and full of life, they say. Looking over the field and the work, there is a sign here of a new day. A day when the poor will inherit the earth, when those who join house to house and field to field, excluding the poor, will be banished from the earth.<sup>23</sup>

The people already have a new name for the colony...“La Victoria.” *This is the new heaven and new earth promised by the prophet Isaiah when no more children will die before their time of malnutrition or babies be ripped from their mother’s wombs with machetes.*

*It is a day which approaches, a day of judgment for those rich and powerful in San Salvador and Washington alike, who manufacture and send arms of war to massacre innocent peasants and children, a day of liberation for the masses of poor, the peasants and workers in El Salvador who will inherit the land of their ancestors, as God promised: “Woe to you rich; blessed are you poor.”<sup>21</sup>*

A new day dawns over El Salvador. [end] (pp. 20-23)

This is another piece of native, point-of-view writing, remarkable even for *Sojourners*. I chose it for its contrast with the traditional writing of *The Times*, but it differs even from the bulk of the writing in *Sojourners*. It transcends mainstream journalism by leaps and bounds, but it communicates emphatically, both in factual detail and near-mythic terms, the plight of peasants driven into Honduras by Salvadoran security forces, who chase them on foot and bomb and strafe them from the air. This is a religious journalist so embedded he or she identifies completely with

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<sup>22</sup> From the Beatitudes.

<sup>23</sup> The Beatitudes and Amos, as with Romero, who cited them together earlier.

the unworthy victims around him or her, made worthy by the writer's courage and commitment to being in harm's way, a habitus of unquestioned validity for *Sojourners*. A key observation is that this writing is so emotional and rife with advocacy that it would be of concern in an ordinary newsroom, even in the pages of a mainline Protestant journal. But it is not out of place in a publication that, for all its worldly politics, is still quite evangelical, and liberationist.

Here we have a diaristic account of the emergency evacuation of some 4,000 people, a few villages, to Honduras, a common situation that led to many tens of thousands living there, as long as a decade for some. The relevant characteristics of WTDS in print apply and do not need to be rehearsed here. We could almost describe it as a much briefer Anne Franks' diary (only four pages covering 10 days), albeit of Central America and running in terror, not hiding. But instead of the isolation and loneliness, we have a celebration of community. It has elements of both emotive and overwhelming news, mostly the former. It also calls to mind the denunciatory and aesthetic topics of Boltanski. However, these categories break down due to the precarious but undeniable sense of hope in the narrative. It is so steeped in biblical symbolism and the courage of common people that it seems a category of its own. Here witness to distant suffering is rendered as a compelling triumph of the collective spirit, a marvel of fortitude by a community of faith. The discursive framework here is prophetic ethic as political critique, combined with doxological celebration and sacred thanksgiving.

As in the previous article, the author invokes the modern martyrs of liberation Christianity: Romero, the anniversary of whose death, replete with radio broadcast,

takes place on the march, and Martin Luther King Jr. While embedded in a community narrowly escaping genocide, the reporter relays the gruesome facts and history of a human-rights crisis. These are seamlessly integrated with some of the most tragic, indignant and restorative parts of scripture. These supply the discursive bounds and exegetical reading of the event. As such, the biblical references deserve a little more discussion.

First, we need to appreciate that these are often-used passages for the theology of liberation. The first reference is to the Exodus legacy, the flight from Egypt that actually begins with Abraham leaving Ur and going to Israel, where he has nothing and knows no one. In the next paragraph, this reference continues with comparisons to a trek in the wilderness and the search for a promised land. Then the author quotes Romero citing the Beatitudes, from the gospel of Luke, in which Jesus explicitly blesses the poor and condemns the rich. In contrast, in Matthew, written later, about 80-100 CE, for Hellenized Jews living in a worldly Antioch, the language is etherealized as “poor in spirit” (Funk, Hoover & Jesus Seminar, 1993).

Next is Amos, the earliest voice on record in the Bible (Genesis and Exodus were written after the return from exile in Babylon, to sanctify the new society). He is often considered the Old Testament prophet whose poetic ire about social injustice is most brazenly critical of Israel’s aristocracy (May & Metzger, 1977). Others are another quotation from the Beatitudes rewarding those who are persecuted for their faith and the invocation of Isaiah and the apocalyptic remaking of reality, a new heaven and a new earth. This is biblical rhetoric for a new day and a new deal.

Criticism of social-political injustice and its key players fits well within this prophetic frame: the duplicity of the leaders of El Salvador and Honduras concluding a superficial peace; the complicity of the OAS in this pseudo-peace; the description of the security forces as animals and in league with the devil; and the litany of oppressors. First, the political:

To call injustice by its name: the oligarchy, the armed forces, the Christian Democrats who obscure the brutal repression, and—U.S. intervention.

Then, wed to the liturgical:

It is a day which approaches, a day of judgment for those rich and powerful in San Salvador and Washington alike, who manufacture and send arms of war to massacre innocent peasants and children, a day of liberation for the...poor, the peasants and workers in El Salvador who will inherit the land of their ancestors, as God promised: “Woe to you rich; blessed are you poor.”

Even the UN High Commissioner for Refugees comes in for criticism. This condemnatory rhetoric, maligning those who abuse their power, shows up at least seven times. It unites and defines the group as a resistance community. It would be extreme in another context but inter-cut with the language of sacrifice and loss, it fits with a witness of prophetic denunciation. Lastly, the sentence fragments, a misstep in most journalism, are not out of place. Their use creates a sense of agitation and urgency, as if the reporter had no time to write in complete sentences:

Everywhere shouts, mortar fire on both sides of the river. Then in the sky, a helicopter. Shots of machine-gun fire and several sweeps over the river. Unmistakable signs of a Salvadoran helicopter and the Security Forces. Rush to safety behind the cliffs and trees, then back to the river. Hundreds crossing. Everywhere cries fill the air. A baptism by fire.

As a postscript, we should note the use of media within media, the radio broadcast bringing the people the voice of their beloved martyr. The folk song, “The God of the Poor,” is another example. It shows up a few times in coverage of the Salvadoran resistance in the Christian-left journals. For “the poor to believe in the poor” requires “a God of the poor, a God who sweats in the street.” This is not a god the Catholic hierarchy would easily recognize. This is also the discourse of defiance, bringing conviction and cohesion to a community under the utmost stress. Anthropologically, such cultural processes occur under conditions of intense material, intellectual and spiritual deprivation, usually from a colonizing force. The deprived and persecuted often create their own gods, in essence, their own religion (Wallace, 1966). They also often generate a discourse of resistance with special means of communication.

In keeping with a critical consciousness, we should note that some of the writing begs certain questions. Does this represent a different standard borne of advocacy or just amateur reporting? We have only one mention of the guerillas. We ought to be told how they were involved in the evacuation. Did they escort the evacuees? Or did they only inform them of what was coming? Were these peasants living in rebel-held territory and therefore vulnerable to targeting by the security forces?

This information would supply much-needed context without compromising the heroism of the peasants. It would make the account more credible outside the progressive religious community. The return to the river is quite detailed regarding who and what was found there, but elliptical regarding what group, under what auspices, was allowed to return. We are told they travel as a “commission” of journalists and their papers and passports are examined. Is this an authentic

designation or a cover story? A way of protecting the author's identity? Are they all journalists? With what organizations? How many? How many were from El Salvador and how many from elsewhere? Did this status protect their lives?

These details would have added context and credibility. Another important issue of long-term political context would be what happens once the refugees get into Honduras. Even if allowed to enter, refugees often were deported to their home countries. Honduras was allied with the United States against communist aggression and did not trust the politics of the refugees, though it became more tolerant as the conflict wore on. And if allowed to stay, refugees often face prejudice or persecution where they relocate. We will confront this again in a *C&C* article.

Filling these holes would have helped the report better conform to traditional standards, broadening its credibility. Here, the journalist's habitus within this spiritual community does not translate unequivocally into credibility within the broader journalistic community or the national audience. It points to the bivalent, changeable nature of trust. Perhaps the reporter's embedded status and related stress produced a tunnel vision regarding these larger questions. The additional information would have helped the readers see the victims as more fully human.

This critique is not to suggest that this is other than a courageous, powerful form of WTDS, duplicated nowhere by *The Times*. As per Chouliaraki (2008) and emergency (emotive) news, it "makes the victim[s] personal and historical and places the suffering in a historical context [and]...does not relent on why such suffering exists...or what might be done."

Regarding the latter quandary, at the end of the article, *Sojourners* begins a feature of many such reports, one this study seeks to highlight. Here it features a calendar and study guide used to raise money and awareness. In other issues, it begins to list many resources for learning more about the situation and numerous organizations to which one can donate. In future issues, it also will begin to document programs or protests for which one can volunteer.

WTDS or human-rights abuses are in italics; action one can take appears at the end, including ordering a study guide. Also worth noting is that “martyrs” means more than religious workers. It includes nearly 1,000 lay people who have died for every bishop, priest, nun or catechist killed and another 1,000 tortured, imprisoned, disappeared or exiled.

**Year of the Martyrs** [boxed near the end of the article]

In February, 1981, 268 North American missionaries in Latin America sent a letter to North American bishops asking for a special “Year of the Martyrs” to be celebrated in solidarity with the people of Latin America. The letter states that, based on many years of service in Latin America, “we feel privileged to accompany a people whose faith, sacrifice, and dedication have evangelized us....*In the past decade nearly one hundred religious leaders (including Archbishop Romero) have died before their time. But that is just the tip of the iceberg: for each religious [worker] who has died, at least one thousand of the poor have met a similar fate, and for each death, another thousand have been tortured, detained, imprisoned, deported, gone into exile, or have simply disappeared....*The entire U.S. church...is called by these tragic signs of the times to fulfill the prophetic demands of our faith, specifically in both educating the American people to the suffering of their Latin American brothers and sisters, and in assuming a critical distance with regard to the U.S. Government’s policy priorities in the hemisphere.”

The Year of the Martyrs will begin on December 2, the first anniversary of the murders of the four North American church women, Dorothy Kazel, Ita Ford, Jean Donovan, and Maura Clarke. To commemorate this and other events, a 13-month datebook, *Calendar of the Martyrs*, is available from the Religious Task Force on El Salvador. The calendar, which lists feasts and fast days, includes brief biographies, points for reflection from church documents and Scripture, and a bibliography. Also being developed are “Year of the Martyrs” study packets, which will integrate official church

teachings on social justice, documents from the grassroots church, historical background, and study questions with suggestions for action.

A subscription to “Year of the Martyrs,” including a calendar, bimonthly update packets, and five copies of the current Religious Task Force newsletter, is \$20, including postage. Individual calendars sell for \$3.50 each. Orders of 10 or more are \$3 each. All material is available from the Religious Task Force on El Salvador, 1747 Connecticut Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20009: (202) 387-7652. (p. 23)

An alternative journal has a distinct advantage in this regard, and *C&C* and *Sojourners* both exploited this possibility, *Sojourners* dramatically. Out of 73 issues covering one country or both, *C&C* ran 37 notices, commentaries or coverage of protests, rallies, forums or other ways to help. These included “Civilian Deaths of the U.S. Contra War,” a booklet by Ed Griffin-Nolan, a WFP leader who later wrote a book on the movement (1991); “How to Do Sanctuary” and “Nuts and Bolts for Sanctuary Organizers,” booklets by the Chicago Religious Task Force on Central America; *Sanctuary: The New Underground Railroad*, a book by Renny Golden and Michael McConnell (1986), running with their *C&C* article on Sanctuary examined here; Medical Aid for El Salvador, a group sending medical supplies; and the Salvadoran Medical Relief Fund, an effort sponsored by Charles Clements, a Vietnam veteran and Quaker physician who became a doctor to the rebels after treating refugees in California. In keeping with this natural symbiosis of reporting and relief, the notice ran with an account of his experiences taken from a talk he gave at the Interchurch Center in New York (1983; Appendix C).

*Sojourners*, while having more pages to devote and running many more ads than *C&C*, had an even more remarkable record: 203 such notices, reports or commentaries out of 69 issues covering one country or both. These included (chronologically): a petition by evangelical leaders calling for an end to military aid

to El Salvador; the International Day of Prayer and Fasting for Salvador; the Year of the Martyrs calendar; many articles on Peace Pentecost, an annual spring event featuring nationwide demonstrations, rallies and public prayers for peace; an article on the meaning of Sanctuary in church history; a open letter by the Nicaraguan evangelical coalition CEPAD to Ronald Reagan calling for an end to aid to the *contras*, signed by 28 leading US evangelicals; information on the Interfaith Task Force on Central America; a feature on Witness with a history of human shields, a statement of purpose and information on how to join; the inaugural announcement of the Pledge of Resistance, including statement of purpose and signatures from religious leaders, evangelical and other; articles and notices on the Pledge of Resistance with addresses and phone numbers of US chapters; an article on civil disobedience near the refugee detention center at El Centro, California, including a focus on the Sanctuary Caravan, a traveling educational and protest effort; a film on life in the Nicaraguan war zone for screening to church, political or community groups; *Crucible of Hope*, *Sojourners'* study packet on El Salvador; *Outcast Among Allies: the International Cost of Reagan's War Against Nicaragua*, another such packet; *What We Have Seen and Heard in Nicaragua: Witness for Peace On-the-scenes Reports*, a booklet documenting *contra* abuses; *Not In Our Name*, a video on *contra* aid; articles on a WFP boat witnessing in the US-mined harbor of Corinto, Nicaragua, and on a WFP flotilla down Rio San Juan near Costa Rica; and a cover story on the first Sanctuary trial, with in-depth interviews with the indicted.

Along with these were notices or articles on spin-off projects and groups, in both journals but more so in *Sojourners*. These included Going Home, assisting the

repatriation of exiles from the front that interposed US citizens in a manner similar to WFP; Quest for Peace, which sent humanitarian aid to Nicaragua, particularly to the war zone; and Walk in Peace, which sent artificial limbs to land-mine victims.

Efforts of other organizations or groups noted or advertised in *Sojourners* included a record by Peter, Paul and Mary, "Salvador," a fund-raiser; the *Directory of Central American Organizations*, by the Central American Resource Center of Austin, Texas; *Access to Films on Central America*, a directory by the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador-Northwest; *Options for Peace in Central America: Background and Analysis, What Are We Afraid Of? Facts and Fears About the Communist Threat in Central America* and *Militarization: Central America and the U.S. Role*, a book and booklets, respectively, by the American Friends Service Committee (the Quakers); *El Salvador: A Spring Whose Waters Never Run Dry*, a book designed to raise money for the Oscar Romero Pastoral Center at Central American University in San Salvador; *Fulfilling the Promise*, a booklet on refugee assistance by Church World Service, a coalition of 35 denominations supplying aid for sustainable development, disaster relief and refugee care; *Torture in Salvador*, a report by the Human Rights Commission of El Salvador; *Forging Peace: The Challenge of Central America*, a report by Policy Alternatives for the Caribbean and Central America; *Preguntemos [We Would Ask]: A Resource Guide on Central America* by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America; as well as a number of notices about materials from the national Committee for Solidarity with the People of El Salvador and Salvadoran Humanitarian Aid, Research and Education. This list is not exhaustive but comprises the most significant notices on

the most important materials, players and events, many of which were run repeatedly. It is cataloged here because its significance lies in its quality and quantity and it is less likely a reader would grasp its full import if “buried” in an appendix.

**Witness to witnessing: Sanctuary as an underground railroad.** Another way the Central America peace movement and US churches in particular devised to address the central problem of WTDS, the redress of suffering, was to establish an “underground railroad,” a project to move refugees through and harbor them in the morally protected space of churches across the country. Legal protection was a different matter, but the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) was not eager to force a public-relations disaster by invading churches. Interestingly, as one of its prime movers, Jim Corbett, explains later, not every group supporting Sanctuary saw themselves as political. They were merely responding to a human need. The early stages of this movement are detailed in this next report, fairly self-evident discursively and rhetorically. It also conforms more closely to traditional norms of reporting, but not without a point of view of course. This mix of advocacy and fact-laden writing, more sophisticated than those above, shows another side of *Sojourners*.

### **Sanctuary: Churches Take Part in a New Underground Railroad**

By Renny Golden

[December 1982, headline on cover]

On July 24, 1982, Rev. David Chevrier risked [a] felony by declaring the Wellington Avenue Church in Chicago a sanctuary for a young Salvadoran refugee. The congregation was jubilant when the young student stepped into the knave of the church. A bandana and a straw hat covered his face, except for his eyes. As...congregational applause exploded and continued, his dark eyes filled with tears.

Juan is an “illegal alien,” wanted by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). But Chevrier and the congregation want him also—enough to risk a five-year prison term and/or a \$2,000 fine for harboring a fugitive. Juan greeted the crowd,

whispering to an interpreter, “Thank you, my friends, for this safe house. I am glad to be among you.”

Knowing the Wellington congregation had sent the INS a letter of intent to break the law by providing sanctuary, I asked Chevrier...what would happen if the INS came to arrest Juan.

“We will do all that is humanly possible to prevent them,” he replied. “Our resistance will be nonviolent.” Chevrier stared through a stained glass window in the now-quiet church and seemed to reconsider or think out loud: *“But it’s his life if they take him—deportation and likely death.* I know he’d be one of the thousands they’ve sent back, and that our interference is a small distraction. But we can’t let it happen. They’ll have to take him from our arms.

“This is only a beginning: they can’t arrest all of us. And if they do, there are 59 churches and synagogues supporting this sanctuary. Others will come, and others will harbor them.”

Upstairs...Juan spent his days with a 24-hour companion. I visited him there....

*It was during his student days at the University of San Salvador that Juan was picked up. One day after class, while he was waiting for a bus, a security policeman came up behind him, yanking his hair and throwing him to the ground. At first, because he wasn’t “political,” he was bewildered and hoped for mistaken identity when his papers were checked.*

*But the police didn’t ask for his papers. They threw him on a jeep floor, and a soldier pressed one boot against his head and another on his back. When he tried to move, one of them slammed a rifle butt against the side of his face.*

Next they blindfolded him, and he felt terror lock a muscle in his neck. He began to breathe deeper to loosen the cramp. Like a drowning person, his life spun before his eyes. But in El Salvador such desperate scrutinizing is focused. Had he been a subversive? But how? Of what was he accused? Juan was never to find out. No charges. No trial.

*He felt the thud of two more bodies jar the jeep floor. “They piled us up like potato sacks, only they respect the food a little more.” When the jeep started, he felt terrible sorrow for his mother, then stabbing anxiety when he remembered the pattern of arrest, followed by raid and murder of the arrestee’s family.*

*During Juan’s imprisonment, his father “disappeared.” Neighbors saw the security forces come to the house. Three months later his mother died of a heart attack. Juan never located any of his six brothers.*

*When Juan began telling about his first day of torture, I felt him distance slightly; his voice flattened. I was sad suddenly that all we offered was horrified silence—none of us knew, we could barely imagine. Though safe, he was still alone. He seemed to know it, so he smiled a lot to reassure us, except when he told of his parents’ deaths.*

*They began his torture in a place that was not a jail. He remembers hallways and torture rooms. He never saw other prisoners because he was always blindfolded when taken from his cell-room, but he heard the screams daily. For eight months he endured, when others went mad or committed suicide. Near the end he was delirious, and his hope was waning.*

*They pounded his hands with heavy metal rods, demanding responses to questions he couldn't answer. They asked him for names, names. When he wouldn't answer, they hit him in the chest over and over. He still has continual pain in his chest and occasional lack of sensation in his spine. They used electric shock, pulled out his fingernails, hung him by his wrists, burned him with acid, broke his arms.*

"But what were they after," I asked, "was it your student activities?"

"No, it wasn't that. It's true I was part of a student movement demanding curriculum change, an overhaul of the educational system, and student participation in university decisions. But their interest was in my truck-driving years before the university. I had a route that ran into Guatemala toward the Atlantic coast.

*"In both El Salvador and Guatemala I saw many cadavers lying in the roads. Back then, when they bothered to disguise things, they threw the bodies in the road so that high-speed trucks or cars would run over them, making their deaths appear to be accidents. But if you stopped you could see the bodies had been tortured. I think they thought I knew something from my travels."*

*Juan was unaware that a general amnesty had been granted prisoners when they blindfolded him and drove him to what was clearly a jail. The next day he was released in San Salvador. It was 1978.*

He dwelled on that day somewhat, how friends and relatives came to greet prisoners, but he waited unsuccessfully for one of his brothers to step through the crowd. Then he began a 10-block walk to a friend's house. He laboriously pulled his 96 pounds through the streets. The lonely walk took him six hours. "I was weak, looked awful. When I went to my friend's home, he did not recognize me."

*He stayed there three days before the National Guard came looking for him. He learned later that four out of the five prisoners released with him had been apprehended and their decapitated bodies thrown in the streets. When the guard came to his friend's front door, Juan leapt out a back window, scampered over a row of rooftops toward Rio Acelhuate, a city drainage river, where he dropped into the water and thus covered his retreat.*

Juan finished his story, telling of his escape to Honduras, then Mexico, and finally his connection with the underground railroad created by religious groups on both sides of the Mexican-American borders and extending now to Chicago. He made his way out slowly, carefully, because in Honduras and Guatemala, Salvadoran refugees are targets for military and right-wing death squads. In Mexico, Salvadorans are jailed or extorted. Mexican border guards demand payments from families carrying life savings in hidden pockets.

But for Central American refugees, the United States border is the "big round-up." The INS returns to El Salvador an average of 500 refugees a month. These refugees, 75 percent of whom are women and children, are met at the El Salvador International Airport by armed military....

According to the State Department, Salvadorans are not political refugees fleeing a genocidal war, though that war has cost the lives of 33,000 of their people in the last two years. Rather, they are considered economic refugees seeking better opportunities. The State Department has not considered the war in El Salvador severe enough to grant general political asylum.

In 1980 none of the almost 12,000 Salvadorans who applied was granted political refugee status. A total of 1,792 refugees were deported, either through “voluntary” or involuntary departure status, according to the Central America Refugee Center. Of 5,559 applications for political asylum in 1981, the INS has granted only two.

According to Peter Larabee, director of the INS detention facility in El Centro, Calif., Salvadoran refugees “are just peasants who are coming to the U.S. for a welfare card and a Cadillac.”

As a final question to Juan, almost as an afterthought, I asked him why he came here, prepared for possible arrest by the INS.

*“It is because of the children,” he says, the same innocence in his eyes. “They don’t just die from guns. They are hungry. I want them to grow up, not just to a strong adulthood. I want them to have an infancy. That’s part of why I’m here, to demonstrate that all of us must be willing...to stop this suffering.” He sighs. “It’s a call.”...*

[Golden explains that Juan was the first refugee to come through the new underground railroad—one that had since crossed the country north to south—an arrangement by a then-nascent movement that began in Tucson and had overwhelmed the good intentions of Rev. John Fife’s Southside Presbyterian Church, which had harbored and processed more than 1,600 refugees. His example, and that of the Wellington church, moved many churches to provide food, supplies and monitors. Many others chose to become sanctuaries or stops on the “railroad.”

She then reports on the introduction of a refugee family at Wellington, the Vargases. The father fell to his knees when the congregation welcomed him with applause, sobbing in thanks to God and the community for his family’s safety.]

Rev. Sid Mohn, who officiated at the Vargas family’s welcoming service, had his own interpretation of the congregation’s...[new] definition of...pastoral work: “When the church has to break the law in order to provide refuge for homeless people, the struggle for justice has reached a new stage. Now the pastoral has merged with the political, service is prophetic and love a subversive activity.” Such a conviction, according to Mohn, is no longer the theological expression of the church of Central America or the prerogative of liberation theologians but the discovery of the North American church through the...giving [of] sanctuary....

[After briefing the reader on Sanctuary’s history, which began with Rev. Fife and Corbett in Tucson, including Corbett’s plea before the National Council of Churches that the church do more than profess support, that it take in refugees, she turns to a press conference introducing the Vargas family and the resistance movement.]

*When the press asked Mr. Vargas if he felt his family was being used in order to draw attention to the plight of the refugees, he replied, “That is the wrong question; people should be asking, ‘Why are we fleeing?’ The answer to that would be because of the genocide in my country....This extermination of our people is being made possible with the aid that this government is sending to El Salvador.” [end] (pp. 24-26)*

*Renny Golden is a founding member of the Chicago Religious Task Force on Central America.*

[Boxed near the end of the article]

Information on providing sanctuary is available from Lee Holstein, Chicago Religious Task Force on Central America, 407 Dearborn #320, Chicago, IL 60605; phone: (312) 663-4398.

While more conventional than the previous two articles, the reporting is still part of the sacramental model. In light of the refugee's tales and the congregation's deepening commitment to resistance, this is especially true given the spiritual example set by and the symbolic significance of that resistance. Yet the writing does not differ sharply from what might appear in a mainstream magazine if done by an empathetic reporter. Its sacramental qualities are inductively driven by the extreme nature of the events themselves and the evocative interpretations of these events by the principal characters, "Juan," Mr. Vargas and the two ministers.

The WTDS material and its attributes have been well discussed by now. Just as significant is how *Sojourners'* proactive witness makes otherwise unworthy victims significant and assists the mitigation of suffering—documenting the first church outside Tucson to create a sanctuary for Salvadoran refugees. It holds up Wellington as a model, publicizes its risky witness and offers information on how to provide sanctuary. Other crucial selections are the excruciating details of Juan's torture and flight; the murder of his whole family; the defiant and prophetic action of the church; its increasing awareness of the biblical pattern it is living out; and the fearlessness with which Mr. Vargas tells the press why his family needs sanctuary.

## **WTDS, Human Rights and Otherwise Unworthy Victims in Nicaragua**

**Nonviolent resistance as witness: A ‘human shield of love’.** As noted, Witness for Peace put North American volunteers near the Honduran border to deter *contra* violence. These activists then became journalistic witnesses who generated their own reports on the suffering. As the first of two WFP articles indicates, they also began to investigate every report of *contra* human-rights abuses and substantiate them for governments, churches, NGOs and media. Besides feeding this information to religious and secular peace, justice or human-rights groups, they were encouraged to contact local media when they went home and were often interviewed or asked to write guest pieces and letters to the editor (Griffin-Nolan, 1991). These two articles chronicle this program, one focusing on a dialogical witness shared by Nicaraguans and Americans and one on the witness of the villagers of Jalapa, a town near the border the *contras* tried repeatedly to take and make the center of a “liberated” Nicaragua. The difference between reporting as coverage and reporting as witness here is the testimonial nature of the latter. *The Times* could convey these facts, and did, albeit infrequently, but the *Sojourners* articles have an emotional and intellectual power typical of WTDS. They motivate action and also offer ways to help—readers can become witnesses via WFP, educators, a form of witness, or contributors.

This first selection profiles an early reconnaissance trip for what was then called “Action for Peace in Nicaragua.” It focuses on Americans building the movement and Nicaraguans forgiving them for being from the country that is killing them.

## For Penance and Peace: North Americans Pray on the Nicaraguan-Honduras Border

By Richard Taylor

[September 1983]

Preparing to board a bus for the nine-hour trip to the Nicaraguan-Honduras border, I suddenly realized that I was traveling with a unique and special group. I reflected that each of these 150 people must have said to themselves at some point, *"I'm going into a war zone; I might not come back; I have to be ready to die."* But they came anyway. That seemed remarkable, especially for a group of mostly middle-class North Americans.

And what a diverse group we were: a high school student, a congressional staffer, several housewives, three Catholic priests and a large contingent of nuns, a number of Protestant pastors...teachers and college professors, journalists from the United States, Japan, and Europe, a carpenter, a lawyer, some missionaries, and a peace organizer. We represented 31 states and at least as many backgrounds. Our ages ranged from the teens to a dozen people in their 60s, 70s, and even 80s.

Frances Brand, a refined and cultured 82-year-old portrait painter from Charlottesville, Virginia, was among our number. "Brandy," as she likes to be called, is a proud member of the Daughters of the American Revolution, served as an army liaison officer during World War II, and is active in St. Paul's Episcopal Church....Why would she ford streams and choke on dust to share the mortal danger of Nicaraguans under attack by CIA-backed counterrevolutionaries?

"I love my country," she said, "and I can't bear it when it does stupid and selfish things."...

*Rather than working with the new government...the Reagan administration has cut off economic aid, applied severe economic sanctions, begun CIA funding of rebels on the Honduras-Nicaragua border and allowed Nicaraguan exiles to train military troops in Florida camps. CIA-supplied and -trained National Guardsmen operating from bases in Honduras are now striking across the border into Nicaragua, killing soldiers and civilians alike. Nicaraguans refer to them as contras, or counterrevolutionaries. It boggles the mind and saddens the heart to realize that the rebel forces we are supporting are the same forces which dominated Nicaragua so brutally for 43 years.*

In response to this U.S. policy, a group of 28 North Carolina religious leaders traveled to Nicaragua in April...Not only did they find it immensely beneficial to see . . . the reality of the...revolution, they also found that when they visited the border area, an expected *contra* attack didn't happen. "Apparently, by shortwave radio, it was announced that North Americans were in the area, and no attack came," reported team member Sister Marge Grabarek....

This gave the...group an idea. What if more North Americans could...see Nicaragua's reality and station themselves on the border? Mightn't they serve as [a]...*"human shield"* [to] reduce the violence and perhaps even stop the killing?...

[The author then explains that Sandinista junta leader Daniel Ortega and Interior Minister Tomas Borge expressed serious doubts about placing anyone else in harm's way, particularly U.S. citizens, but Nicaraguan supporters prevailed upon them.]

The “Carolina Interfaith Task Force on Central America” gained the cooperation of the...skeptical Nicaraguan government and the sponsorship of the [evangelical coalition] CEPAD....It then put out a call through religious, human rights and peace groups for people who would join “Action for Peace in Nicaragua.”<sup>24</sup> Even though responding meant paying one’s own way and potentially risking one’s life, the call produced many more applicants than could be accommodated.

The final group of 150 arrived in Nicaragua of July 3 and set off on a near-frenzied schedule of meetings with church leaders, government representatives, and other who both strongly support and vociferously oppose the Sandinista revolution. We visited housing projects, talked to Miskito Indian leaders, attended rousing church services, and visited Christian base communities and a center for juvenile delinquents—all in all, trying to find out as much as we could in five days.

Although I was uncomfortable with some of the political tendencies and policies of the Sandinista government, I came away deeply impressed by the achievements of the revolution, including the massive land reform, extension of medical care throughout the country, attempts to assure adequate nutrition for all, reduction of illiteracy from 58 percent to 12 percent, and respect for religion and freedom of worship. The death penalty has been abolished, human rights are respected, the terror and torture of the Somoza days has been eliminated, and the prison system has received commendations from Amnesty International, the Red Cross, and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

Considering that the Sandinista government is continually described as Marxist in our press, it was fascinating to meet so many Christians, both outside the government and in prominent government positions, who strongly support the revolution. Those in government say that they find it a Christian vocation to work for a government so committed to serving the poorest of the poor. And that 60 percent of the economy is in private hands and 80 percent of Nicaraguan land is privately owned rarely gets reported here in the United States. . . .

“Action for Peace in Nicaragua” was an experiment in nonviolent interposition at the frontier. A Nicaraguan bus driver asked me, “Are you going to the frontier town of Jalapa? I’ve been there. Boom! Boom! Mortars! 120mm weapons!”

*A nun who worked in the Jalapa area said the contras had kidnapped 337 Nicaraguans from January to June, 1983, sometimes torturing and killing them. During a military briefing, an army captain told us that journalists had been ambushed, wounded, and killed on the dusty, winding 70-kilometer road we would be traveling from Ocotol to Jalapa. In another border town near Jalapa, he said, a mortar round exploded in a school yard, killing one child and destroying another’s face. Several towns near Jalapa had been abandoned following contra attacks.*

The captain said that the army would do its best to see that no *contras* were in the area, but they couldn’t protect...all of the mountainous region on both sides of the 70-kilometer road. And it would not be wise to provide an armed escort, as that might be seen as provoking an attack....

In the middle of his welcoming speech [at Jalapa], the Sandinista political director said: “Some people don’t understand this revolution. I’ll ask the people. Are we

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<sup>24</sup> Later “Witness for Peace.”

Christians?” “Yes!” the crowd roared. “Are we revolutionaries?” “Yes!” was the even louder response.

During a “*Campesino* Mass” at a nearby church, the songs, Bible readings, and homilies stressed Christian [duties] to work for social justice, to care the poor, to build a better society for all. That night we slept on the floor of a school building and woke to the sounds of guitarists...singing “The God of the Poor.” ...

We gathered in the open air, Jalapa residents and North Americans, and opened [our] banners: “Your Freedom is Our Freedom,” “No to Violence, Yes to Peace,” “Alaskans Against U.S. Intervention,” “We Pray for You and For Peace and Justice.”...

*A weeping Nicaraguan mother told us that the contras had kidnapped her son, then decapitated him and cut him apart. “I could resign myself to his death,” she mourned, “but they even deprived me of the ability to bury his body.”*

We prayed together for the world’s martyrs, saying “*Presente!*” after each name, acknowledging the presence of the spirits of those who had died. A Nicaraguan woman prayed also for the *contras*. “They’re mistaken people,” she said, “but still God’s children.”

Later...a North American woman led us in a prayer of petition for pardon. “For our government’s support for the Somoza dictatorship,” she said. We responded, “Forgive us, and pray for us.” “For the killings and kidnappings funded by our government.” “Forgive us and pray for us.”

I don’t think that any of us expected what happened next. After about the third petition, we heard a murmured response from the lips of the poor *campesinos* gathered with us. At first, we couldn’t hear what they were saying. But their voices rose, and then we heard: “*Estan perdonados*—You are pardoned, you are pardoned.” Tears welled up in our eyes.

At the close of our service, under a bright, blue sky, we walked single-file, North Americans holding hands with Nicaraguans, out onto the corn field facing the frontier mountains, and stood for an hour of quiet prayer and reflection. A Nicaraguan mother told me that *contras* had fought throughout the surrounding mountains and that Jalapa people could almost always hear the sound of guns and mortars. But there were no attacks, or even the sound of fighting, that day....

Nicaraguans we talked to were universally in favor of the idea. The plan is to have groups of five to 20 North Americans (other countries might also become involved) come to Nicaragua to live for a while on the frontier, to share the life and danger of the people, to live in their homes and work...at tasks determined by the host community.

They will be available to go immediately to the scene of any acts of violence to witness for peace as they feel led and to collect information, take pictures, tape interviews with survivors and report their findings to the project office. The project office will communicate this information to as wide a sector of the U.S. public as possible, but especially to churches, religious groups, and peace, human rights and solidarity organizations.

For centuries, people have sought a “moral equivalent to war.” Might that equivalent be developing at the end of a dusty road in the mountains of Nicaragua? [end] (p. 13)

[Boxed near the end of the article]

The ongoing peace mission described in this article is coordinated by the Interfaith Task Force on Central America. For more information, write the task force at 475 Riverside Drive, Room 633, New York, NY 10115.

*Taylor works with Sojourners' peace ministry.*

Beyond the disturbing accounts of *contra* atrocities, the most emotional part of this article is the call-and-response ritual surrounding the roll call of the deceased and the villagers' forgiveness of the Americans for their government's support of the *contras*, giving a deeper, more moral meaning to their visit. In the roll call, the dead are symbolically resurrected, their latent stature and credibility made active. Forgiving the Americans represents a spiritual transcendence of the possible cultural barriers between the relatively affluent US witnesses, no matter how well intended, and Nicaraguan peasants who have been the victims of American support for *contra* violence. Here is another form of sacramental reporting, journalism conveying liturgical content and evoking the power of liturgy itself in places. The stature of the Americans, their discursive power to dissuade the *contras* from attacking, with their bodies in-country but with an "effective" speech when they return, is potentially compromised by their moral vulnerability to the residents of Jalapa. This represents a guilt by habitus if not by association (with American power). It is instead transformed into grace by the villagers, who forgive them for the knowledge-power they represent as Americans because of the way they have used it to protect Jalapa. This is driven by the preference for the poor—the inverted habitus of progressive Christianity.

The chain of WTDS concern is complete in this case. It encompasses the suffering prevented as the emotive reporting of the Christian left (along with other notices and

media) has moved Americans to put themselves between the *contras* and the villagers in a discursive resolve of nonviolent resistance. It brings together the primary witnesses, the secondary witnesses and the mediators to redress the plight of the villagers. More than performing a passive nonviolent resistance, on a proactive level, once set up in-country, the WFP volunteers, both as delegates of *Sojourners* and as witnesses themselves, would begin to investigate “acts of violence [and] collect information, take pictures, tape interviews with survivors and report their findings to the project office. The project office [would then] communicate this information to as wide a sector of the US public as possible.”<sup>25</sup> Witness for Peace, then, becomes a form of citizen journalism. Their initiative and courage engender the trust Ashuri and Pinchevski (2008) say translates into stature and credibility. These resources are crucial for witnessing to audiences beyond the already converted. The WFP volunteers take their risk-taking and turn it into a journalistic event consisting of liturgical content. This inverted ideology asserts that poor Central American villagers do not threaten the United States, do not deserve persecution with the weapons of war and that these unworthy victims are, in the words of liberation theology, “the privileged ones of God.”

**A cloud of witnesses, from the mouths of children and a divine foolishness:**  
**The risky road to Jalapa.** The next article concerns the WFP delegation, its risk-taking and uncertainty, in the first part, and women and children under siege in Jalapa in the second part. By a prominent *Sojourners* writer, Joyce Hollyday, it documents

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<sup>25</sup> Including the media.

the first short-term WFP team, but, as befits a concern for the Other, it places the ultimate focus on the Central American victims, not the North American delegates.

### **The Long Road to Jalapa**

By Joyce Hollyday<sup>26</sup>

[February 1984; headline on cover]

The sun pauses for a moment on the edge of the Honduran mountains that ring the tiny town. The market stands empty where earlier in the day onions were spread out over the ground and fresh rolls sold for pennies a bag. The bell in the church tower next to the community peace garden, which is dominated by a broad-leafed banana tree, gives forth a few rings, and the voices of children giving glory to Mary drift out of the church's windows. A rooster crows—they crow at all times of the day and night here—and a few dogs bark.

Someone once told me that Jalapa is “at the end of the world.” It was meant as a compliment to the dusty, little Nicaraguan town which exudes character and warmth to the peaceful stranger who comes to its isolated streets....

When the sun finally slips behind the mountains, stars pop out by the millions in Jalapa's sky. At night one can occasionally hear the call of a child, the clapping of a horse down a street, or, if you're in the right part of town, the seemingly misplaced North American rock music filtering out of Sandra's Place. *A report of gunfire now and then from the mountains reminds the town that all is not at peace in Jalapa.*

Jalapa may seem like the end of the world to a foreigner's eye, but it is the center of the world for the people of Jalapa and the surrounding valley, which is the agricultural hub for all of northern Nicaragua. *Ironically, by...its isolation, the town has become the focus of attention from unwelcome intruders and their primary supporter, the United States government....*

*Located just six kilometers from the border on a peninsula of land that juts into Honduras, Jalapa has been an ideal target for the contras in their effort to capture a town and set up an independent territory with a provisional government. One of their strategies has been to cut off Jalapa by taking over the only access road...to the rest of Nicaragua.*

*Contra activity began in Jalapa in March, 1982. The first evidence:...people found beheaded outside their homes. Since that time there have been four major attempts to take Jalapa, and bands of the marauders continue to roam the hills spreading terror, using state-of-the-art campaign equipment supplied by the CIA. For almost two years the contras have been unable to prevail militarily. Their most recent slogan: “We cannot win, but we can kill.”*

While the people of Jalapa have suffered terrible tragedy, crop production in this area has also suffered. The *contras* have focused on disrupting the harvest, and crops have sometimes been brought in under a rain of bullets. Because of the war, only 50 percent of

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<sup>26</sup> Hollyday is a frequent contributor to *Sojourners*. She is now married to Jim Wallis, the leader of the Sojourners intentional community. References to other editions of *Sojourners* are in the original.

the rice crop was planted last year, and losses between December, 1982, and July, 1983, amounted to more than \$100 million in land, homes, storage barns, and crops....

North American Christians who visited the northern Nicaraguan frontier in April and July of last year found that while they were there, the *contra* incursions ceased. Townspeople in Jalapa attributed the cessation to the presence of the North Americans. Soon the idea emerged that a continuous presence of North Americans might inhibit *contra* activity and offer some protection for the people....Turning a different kind of U.S. attention to Jalapa, the U.S. Christians began to organize Witness for Peace (see "Penance and Peace," Sojourners, September, 1983, and "Witness for Peace" and "A Shield of Love," Sojourners, November, 1983). By early October, 1983, plans were underway for a long-term team of four members to go to Jalapa to prepare to receive rotating short-term teams of 15 members who would go to Nicaragua every two weeks to pray and offer nonviolent resistance to U.S. policy against Nicaragua.

It is a long way to Jalapa, and...[as] the first short-term team to go, our journey began long before we arrived. In late November [1983] the team, representing a wide diversity of ages, occupations, church denominations and geographical areas, converged on Washington, D.C. We gathered for a few days to get to know one another and share our fears and expectations about [what] lay ahead of us. We worshiped together and participated in the role-plays [of] possible scenarios...the ambush of our bus on the road to Jalapa, the disappearance or death of one of our team members.

On the evening of Wednesday, November 30, before friends and family gathered at a Washington, D.C. church, members of the Witness for Peace steering and advisory committees, who had come from all over the country, placed white stoles over each of our shoulders at a commissioning service. The names of the long-term team members already in Nicaragua were read, and they too were "commissioned."

Songs and prayers were offered up, and Vincent Harding of Illiff Seminary in Denver placed the Witness for Peace [within the] history of nonviolent witness, speaking from the "cloud of witnesses" text in Hebrews 12. He sent us forward on our journey with the mandate, "Walk your talk."

On Thursday morning we held a press conference and prepared for our next day's departure....

[Once in Nicaragua] we pushed north toward Jalapa and got as far as Ocotal, a town 13 kilometers from the Honduran border and about 60 kilometers west of Jalapa. Upon arrival in Ocotal, we got word from local military officials that we could not go on to Jalapa: the *contras* had taken over a section of the road, and combat was taking place in an effort to reclaim it. This was the first time since June that the road had been closed.

We heard from the CEPAD representative...and the Maryknoll Sisters...that the *contras* were within 15 kilometers of Ocotal and that the town had been under alert the night before.

We held our first vigil that night in Ocotal. We began with a procession through three of Ocotal's barrios, and by the time we arrived at the town park, we had with us a crowd of 400 people.

In the park, we had an ecumenical service of song and prayer. David Gracie, an Episcopal chaplain at Temple University in Philadelphia...talked about his shame at what the U.S. government is doing against Nicaragua and explained that we were there to

remember and uphold the best of the American tradition, which claims a commitment to justice and freedom.

Scripture was read, and, as is common in Latin America, the congregation was invited to offer reflections on the readings. One woman, like many...we met in Nicaragua, apologized for her lack of education and then spoke eloquently about her faith. She is the mother of one of the martyrs in the revolutionary struggle to overthrow Somoza. She closed with gratitude for the current situation in her country: "Under Somoza we had no voice; but now we can speak."

We spent that night at the Baptist Church, which we shared with refugees who had fled their scattered mountain homes during attacks by the *contras*. Their presence [and] the trenches dug in front of homes in Ocotal, reminded us that we were in a war zone. We heard gunshots that night and slept close to our "crash packs," small bags packed with our most essential items—passports, flashlights, water purification tablets, and anti-malarial medication—that were easy to grab in case we needed to flee on sudden notice.

We felt very vulnerable that night, and I was conscious that we were making our way into this war zone armed with only gifts and prayers. I had...letters from the Sojourners community and my family, including a rainbow painted by my young nephews and labeled "for God's promise of safekeeping."

I felt assurance in knowing that people in many places were focused on us. The Community of Celebration in Woodland Park, Colorado, had given us a candle to light every night, knowing that an identical candle was burning for us at their community and that a similar one was the center of a continuous prayer vigil at Sojourners. A member of our...congregation at Sojourners gave me a beautiful necklace made of myrrh to carry until Jalapa as a reminder of her prayers and [then] give away....

We awoke early with Jalapa on our minds and washed our faces in a rain barrel...The refugee women already had firewood in their dome-shaped clay stove and were slapping out tortillas. They had fled with little more than the clothes on their backs, but they offered us coffee and tortillas, one of many examples we found in Nicaragua of profound graciousness and generosity in spite of meager resources.

By nine o'clock the road was open, and we were on the last leg of our journey to Jalapa. We had heard that vehicles on this road are often ambushed, and it was easy to see why. The road is narrow, rutted, and steep, and the first half of the journey was through dense underbrush.

We stopped at occasional military checkpoints to get news of the road ahead. We were told that a *contra* attack was expected on the road at noon. It was 10:30....About halfway to Jalapa the road opens out onto expansive fields of coffee, beans, and rice. Ambush is less likely on this part of the journey, but the Honduran mountains are visible and the road is within mortar range.

Women pounded laundry against rocks in the streams that flowed over the road and...made passage...difficult for our bus. Cows wandered over the road, and scattered on both sides of us were small houses with orange clay-tile roofs. We saw an occasional homemade cross...marking...where someone had been killed.

*A large cemetery marks the edge of Jalapa, row upon row of homemade crosses. A sign at the entrance to the town lists the names of Jalapa's martyrs, fallen in combat or by contra attack.* As our bus wound its way toward the center of town, the long-term

team came out to greet us. We prayed together in thanks for our safe arrival and expectation of the days ahead....

The day begins in Jalapa when the sun appears. A bright green parrot hanging upside down from a branch of a dead tree argued in Spanish with a radio for dominance of the dawn.

We began our first day in Jalapa by asking the proprietor [of a restaurant] where [to] go for shelter in case of an attack...She nodded toward boards covering a large hole in her porch floor. Three of her children were swinging over the boards in a hammock, laughing and playing with masks.

*Our first trip out [of] Jalapa was to La Estancia, a community a few kilometers away being created from displaced families...scattered through the mountains. More than 600 families have been made refugees in the Jalapa area by the raids of the contras. Some have had to resettle temporarily in old tobacco barns, while others are building permanent shelter in areas like La Estancia.*

While there, we met Martita, a 15-day-old baby, and her mother, who had fled on foot from their home in the mountains just days before delivering her beautiful daughter. Her husband was fighting with the militia and had not yet seen his baby.

*Another mother told how armed contras came to her home and took away her two sons and three sons-in-law. She heard gunshots and, when she went outside, found them all dead. "When my husband returned, we fled. But he is old, and there are no more males in our family. The contras have cut off our future."*

It has been said that to understand Nicaragua, you must talk to the mothers. Through their tears of grief we found the most profound understanding. Some of the mothers in Jalapa have established the Gallery of the Heroes and Martyrs, a house across from the church that displays pictures and stories of their slain sons. They understand the struggle and political situation as well as anyone. One mother asked us, "Why should the United States attack us now? Before we didn't even have schools; we had to live like animals. The first thing the new government gave us was not arms but hospitals and a chance to read." Another added, "The rich can still stay here, and the government is giving amnesty to those who fight against it—what other government would do this?" And still another: "We want peace; we don't want blood. But we must defend ourselves."

*But mostly they speak about their children: "It is incomparable suffering for a mother to lose her child; we feel the loss of a child in our own flesh."* The bond of mother and child was particularly poignant while we were in Jalapa, because we were there during the purisima, the celebration of Mary. This festival, accompanied with processions and singing, is as important in Nicaragua as Christmas. It is a celebration of Mary, a remembrance of her bearing of Jesus and her giving him up to death. It is a passion with which the mothers of Nicaragua readily identify.

*Perhaps the most agonizing of the stories we were told came from a mother who had lived in Teotecacinte...on the Honduran border about 15 kilometers northeast of Jalapa. The mother was preparing a meal when she was alerted of a contra attack. She sent her 13-year-old daughter to their underground shelter and was going to follow. But the girl remembered her puppy and ran off in search of it. When the mother got outside, her daughter was dead. She carried her body to the shelter, and it wasn't until*

*she got inside that she realized the contras had decapitated her daughter. This woman, like many of the others, broke into weeping as she finished her story.*

*The refugees, a reverent people who have a profound respect for life, spoke of the atrocities...as “ingrattitudes” [by] men who feel no relationship with their sisters and brothers. One woman said they “act like tigers” and described atrocities she had witnessed: tongues cut out, eyes removed, spikes through limbs, facial skin cut and rolled back over the heads of victims, and gang rape of women both young and old. Burying the remains of the dead is particularly important for these people who draw so much strength from the sacrifices of those who have given up their lives, but the contras often dismember bodies and scatter the pieces to prevent burial.*

It is difficult to write down such stories; it was even more difficult to listen to them. But this is the reality of Nicaragua, and it must be known that the Reagan administration, which denounces terrorism in so many places, is sponsoring such terrorism against the civilians of Nicaragua.

Half the population of Nicaragua is under 15 years of age, so this war is a war against children. It seemed that we met most of the children of Jalapa—the exuberant and the serious ones, the many who saw us as a curiosity and gathered around us with endless questions or tugged at our banner and begged to help carry it, the sad ones who have been made orphans by the war.

And there were the sophisticated ones, like 14-year-old Isaac who, upon hearing of the Witness for Peace, decided to help form a “peace corps” of Nicaraguan teenagers to go to the United States to pray for peace. He spoke to our team and extended an invitation to the children of the United States to come to visit Nicaragua: “So that we can express solidarity with one another, let us have an exchange of children for peace.” When we asked Isaac what he wants for his children when he has them, he replied, “I want my children not to be marginal.”...

The sun was just up, and the mist hung low on the simple crosses stuck in the thick grass. The mist brought to mind the image of the “cloud of witnesses,” and I felt quite literally surrounded by them in this quiet place. There was an enveloping stillness, and then a giggle. A young girl carrying a water jar appeared, and then another and another behind her.

They were sisters, they explained, with 11 children in their family. “I’ll go get the rest,” the oldest one said, and she skipped off. They came like a parade, each with a jar, the youngest, a 3-year-old, with a small tin can.

There’s a well in the center of the cemetery...the children begin every day carrying the water...for that day. A well of life in the center of so much death. And before me, the future of the community, who draw life from both the well and the...crosses, who understand the struggle....

As we pulled safely into Ocotal and whispered prayers of gratitude, the faces flashed again through my mind: Martita, Isaac, the orphans, the young ones with guns, the children in the cemetery. The ones who ask not to be marginal, who ask simply to have a future.

I remembered the pleas of one mother: “Please ask your government to stop. If they had any degree of mercy, they would stop this war. If they could hear the mothers, then maybe they would stop.”

Hear then the mothers—and the children, and the others. There is tenderness in this war zone, and laughter and love. And unless we do all that we can to stop the U.S. war against Nicaragua, the laughter will die. [end] (pp. 26-30)

As this is a magazine piece, one of the issue’s centerpiece articles, Hollyday can take some time setting it up, but her introduction is more than scene setting. She wants us to know that while Jalapa might seem like the end of the world to Americans, it is a place of beauty and an agricultural center. She wants to make sure we do not marginalize its inhabitants because of their remoteness. However, once situated in the Nicaraguan countryside, we find the article is, in fact, a form of war correspondence, and another unique sort. As readers, we are “embedded” with a group of nonviolent “guerillas” going to stop violent guerillas. Their main protection is their citizenship in the most dominant country in the hemisphere, similar to Roman citizens traveling in conquered parts of that empire. Again, shame expressed about the dominant culture’s actions—*contras* equipped by that culture’s government are murdering poor Nicaraguans—is part of a status-negating habitus and moral capital that Witness for Peace (and *Sojourners*) bring to this meeting. The visitors’ humility reverses more conventional issues of ideological contestation.

Following the confessional model central to this publication, Hollyday lets us in on her, and the group’s, sense of apprehension and absurdity regarding their place in the war zone. In contrast to the triumphalism of much of conservative Christianity, these are attitudes fundamental to discipleship for progressive Christians. Those who challenge the dominant culture armed only with their spiritual vision and commitment

to nonviolence often report this feeling of vulnerability and divine foolishness. But while these delegates want their spiritual intentions known, the most significant part of their presence in Nicaragua is that it is well marked in the United States, by like-minded Christians, by sister congregations, by congressional representatives, by NGOs, by alternative media and especially (to a lesser but notable extent) mainstream media. Without the press conferences and many contacts with local and national media, specialized and mainstream, the effort would risk irrelevance. In fact, Smith (1996) explains that 24% of Witness participants first learned of it through the media, 19% from religious publications. Figures for Sanctuary were 22%, 13% from religious publications. This was probably most dramatic when a boat of WFP volunteers going down the Rio San Juan between Nicaragua and Costa Rica, attempting to deter attacks by southern *contras*, was briefly held up and boarded by them. Coverage was ambivalent, but the public did take note (Griffin-Nolan, 1991).

The *contras* knew that their pay, supplies and equipment came from the United States and that the Reagan administration and its budget were closely watched by members of Congress, who are vulnerable to local and national media. In this situation, the Fourth Estate takes on an oddly asymmetrical role relative to the administration of the most powerful nation in the world. It can hold up an army backed by many tens of millions of US dollars. It does so in this case by emphasizing the “wayward-America” frame, not, as it might have, the “imperial-America” frame, which is too damning and confrontational for a national evangelical audience.

The story contains the historical, geographic and civic/domestic detail, and the specificity of atrocity, that we have established as defining characteristics of WTDS

in print. But instead of reviewing those features, demonstrated elsewhere, we can use it to examine the rhetoric of vulnerability and the discourse of resistance offered by two different communities of faith, Nicaraguan and American.

With the Americans, we experience both their sense of courage and foreboding, the fact that they are testing themselves against their spiritual standards: “conscious that we were making our way into this war zone armed with only gifts and prayers.” Religious ceremony attends their departure from the United States and arrival at stops in-country. Reporting it enhances the writer’s and the delegation’s credibility with the primary readership, mostly evangelical, by cementing the connection between piety and politics. But the most stunning, heart-rending parts of the narrative come from the reports of the mothers and the observations of the children in the second half of the article. This focus also resonates liturgically with the celebration of *purisima*, Mary’s conception of Jesus, that coincides with their visit.

Typical of its author, a Christian feminist who has written a good deal about a new evangelical view of women (Hollyday, 1986), it is focused on women: “It has been said that to understand Nicaragua, you must talk to the mothers.” This is a virtual constant in human-rights struggles throughout Latin America. Mothers, who in their grief find their political courage, create organizations and petition, protest and file suit against governments accused of abducting and killing their children. A famous example is the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, who challenged the murderous military government that ruled Argentina from 1977-83. Another of some renown is the Mothers’ Committee of El Salvador. Nicaragua also formed a mothers’ committee, as have other Latin American countries where dirty war has claimed the

lives of children. These tales of atrocities humanize the survivors, rather than distancing them via compassion fatigue. This is largely because they are placed in a human context—going on with their chores and trying to make the visitors feel comfortable. Yet they speak the uncensored truth about their losses and their horrific quality, finally breaking into tears we can believe only a stone would not shed.

Ultimately, Hollyday's concern is for the young. She bears witness: to the fact that the war is a war on children, who make up half the population; to the 14-year-old, Isaac, who wants to start a children's Peace Corps so US and Nicaraguan children can "express solidarity" and have an "exchange of peace," and who, most of all, does not want his children to grow up to be marginal; and to the horror of a mother finding a decapitated child and another with one in too many pieces to bury. Not included here, but farther down in the article is a meditation on a boy who, during a Mass held by the Witness group, held back when children were asked to approach the altar for a special homily for them. A young-looking 13, he shouldered a gun nearly as tall as he was and seemed confused about whether he was considered a child or an adult, something any in early adolescence might feel but without the weight of military service hanging over one's head. Asked about carrying a gun at his age, the boy said he was glad he could protect his family. She later finds out that members of the militia ranged from 11 to 80 years of age. Seeing his ambivalence about this simple distinction, she can only deliver this relatively restrained judgment on the US-backed disruption of normal life among a people with so little to cling to: what a burden it must be that robs parents of their children and children of their childhood. She is not just sentimental. She wants most of all to make these otherwise unknown victims

significant in the eyes of affluent North Americans with access to powerful decision makers in Congress.

Lastly, she leaves us with two very strong images, sacred symbols in effect: the cloud of witnesses from Hebrews, a reference from the apostle Paul to the example of all the saints but especially the martyrs; and the well in the cemetery, quite actual, that symbolizes life amid so much death, water being a fundamental biblical image. These two metaphors make the schemas (motifs) of sacred sacrifice and spiritual rebirth the central symbols of the article, among the most moving from *Sojourners*.

Hollyday's portrayal of Witness for Peace, then, relies on multiple biblical schemas to highlight its WTDS frame: a) the divine foolishness of the delegates; b) the soul-searing example of the sacrifices made by the peasants and their cloud of witnesses; c) the enduring fidelity of the mothers to their children; d) the hope and wisdom beyond their years of the peasant children; and e) the morality tale of a dream of solidarity among US and Nicaraguan children in the face of lethal terror. These evoke symbols straight out of the gospels. They remind us of Herod's inability to kill the Christ child while he slaughters the innocents and the Christological prophecy from Isaiah 11:6 that "a child shall lead them": "The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them." (International Standard Version).

## **Chapter 8**

### **Cultural Criticism as Prophetic Witness:**

#### **Incidence of Distant Suffering in**

#### **and a Textual Analysis of**

#### *Christianity and Crisis*

## ***Christianity and Crisis: Theology, History and Politics***

### **Definition of *Theological Liberal***

Being a theological liberal does not always mean one endorses a left-of-center political agenda, though it often does (Browning, 2009). It refers mostly to a critical perspective on thought and belief that has its roots in the Enlightenment. This view holds that ambiguities in scripture and spirituality require tolerance regarding doctrine and an emphasis on behavior (Glossary.com Encyclopedia, 2010). Regarding the Bible, it holds that rigorous study of the historical, cultural, political and economic context and the literary, formal and other textual variations of scripture should inform interpretation. This is fundamental to modern biblical hermeneutics and made possible by advances in biblical archeology and anthropology, current and ancient sociology, historical methods and literary and textual criticism (Hulsether, 1999; Wellman, 2008). Scholars have identified many strands of authorship and can connect them to various locales, cultures, social and political realities and theological periods and concerns in the ancient near East (Crossan, 1991). These should have a strong influence on interpretation, theological liberals believe.

Closely related is the hermeneutical principle that says that the modern mind is not like the ancient mind, so one must understand the ancient mentality, individual and cultural, in the midst of the various social-political and cultural cross-currents at work. Once this is done, one can determine what social, political and theological problems the writer (not always one per book) was trying to address. From there, one creates an epistemological bridge to the present. One looks for analogies to the situations and problems the scriptural message meant to address and determines a

contextual ethic from there. This means that the symbolic logic of most of scripture and attendant doctrine is both revealed and celebrated, instead of being unmasked and discredited. The hermeneutical first principle is that, while the gospel and other key parts of scripture first need to be demythologized, they can be reinvigorated—reintegrated—through consciousness (Bultmann, 1961). As poets know, the language of the human heart is the language of dramatic imagery and rich symbolism. For theological liberals, this approach to scripture yields ethical aims and credos of compassion, not primarily metaphysics. Those who need the supernatural thinking of traditional religion find this incomplete or insincere. Those who want an ethos of compassion, not an all-powerful father figure or ladder of doctrine and special knowledge to climb, find it fulfilling.

Liberal theologians, therefore, are not mainly interested in asserting metaphysical true-or-false propositions (Glossary.com Encyclopedia, 2010). Instead, they seek to create modes of thought and models of behavior that reflect the psychological, social, and political contexts in which the scriptural thinking emerged and look for messages of love, human dignity and social justice. These often include what German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1949) called “the cost of discipleship,” his critique of the “cheap grace” of evangelical and civil religion, and hold out Jesus as “the man for others” (Browning, 2009). Following his example often means paying a social or political price, as Bonhoeffer did when left safety and security teaching at Union Theological to return to Germany to be part of the resistance. He was later found out as part of a plot to kill Hitler and was executed for it.

### ***Christianity and Crisis' History and Theology***

*Christianity and Crisis* began as a largely neo-orthodox journal theologically and was a politically liberal part of the anti-communist mainstream from the 1940s to the mid-1960s (Hulsether, 1999). However, by the 1970s, it had become liberal theologically, liberal to radical politically and increasingly post-modern epistemologically. It had adapted to, kept up with and sometimes led the tumultuous social and cultural changes in the United States from about 1965 to about 1981. When the election of Ronald Reagan to the presidency signaled a conservative trend nationally, it refused to react to the tenor of the times and tack back to the right. This refusal may have been courageous, or it may have been the beginning of the end, or both. Or, as its last editor said, the lack of a sufficiently broad audience did not bring it to a halt in 1993, but, once Union Theological Seminary withdrew financial support in 1986, the lack of a viable business model did (Hulsether, 1999).

C&C's theological liberalism means it emphasized the ethical example of Jesus much more than his supernatural intervention as the savior of humankind. This perspective places an equal emphasis on love among individuals and justice among groups. Personal piety matters but is mostly individual and more low-key, as is evangelism (Wellman, 2008). *C&C* was founded by Reinhold Niebuhr, renowned social ethicist and Presbyterian professor at the interdenominational Union Theological Seminary in New York (Hulsether, 1999). Union is the theological counterpart to Columbia University and has been a center for Christian social action since the turn of the last century. But in 1941, with Niebuhr as editor, *C&C* began its publishing from a stance of Christian realism. This discursive move came as

Protestant socialists, particularly Niebuhr, their intellectual leader, became disillusioned with the social gospel of the 1910s-1930s. It had emphasized the steady progress of Christian civilization toward a more humane future. Given the horrors of Stalinism and the rise of the Nazis, Christian realism re-emphasized the transcendence of God, which passed judgment on all human institutions and was therefore suspicious of human efforts at change (Hulsether, 1999).

However, 30 years later, it was advocating a much more humanized worldview, one some would say had lost sight of the transcendence, or otherness, of God. Still others, emphasizing the immanence, or presence, of God, would say it bore witness to a revolutionary discovery about where the good news should always be proclaimed, one more relevant and decidedly this-worldly, heavily influenced by liberation theology. This view believes that God is at work wherever the socially, politically and economically disadvantaged achieve a greater stake in the status quo, and, of course, wherever groups or individuals express love and kindness. It published from that perspective for another 22 years, during which its audience was still a theological and political elite but one generally farther left (Hulsether, 1999).

Given its opinion-leader focus, it had about 20,000 select subscribers at its height in the mid-1960s. These included Dean Acheson, Truman's Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, Eisenhower's Secretary of State and his brother, Allen, the first director of the CIA, as well as Eisenhower himself. When it folded, circulation was about 13,000 (Hulsether, 1999). It ranged from 16, 8½-by-11-inch pages to 32-40 later on. *C&C* slowly added more graphics, moving from line art to photos, but was never more than two-color while publishing fortnightly for more than 50 years.

An indication of its stature is that it published these authors at various times: US statesman Adlai Stevenson; Swiss and German theological giants Karl Barth and Jurgen Moltmann, respectively; University of Chicago political scientist Hans Morgenthau; American Museum of Natural History anthropologist Margaret Mead; German-American theologian Paul Tillich; and South African novelist Alan Paton (Steinfels, 1993). It also has published renowned German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer; Niebuhr, the leading Protestant ethicist of his time; Union president and social ethicist John Bennett; civil rights and anti-war activist William Sloane Coffin, former chaplain at Yale and former senior minister at The Riverside Church, a historic liberal congregation near Union. Others who have written for it (and *Sojourners*, as noted and identified above) include Cornel West, Robert Coles, Thomas Merton, Lewis Mumford and William Stringfellow.

### **WTDS, Human Rights and Otherwise Unworthy Victims in El Salvador**

First, we should note that the second of these two sparsely staffed, underfunded religious publications was also able to cover rights abuse and witness to genocidal suffering more extensive and intensively than the nation's paper of record. Quantitatively, *Christianity and Crisis* met our heuristic criteria for WTDS in print in 19 of 72 articles on El Salvador (26%) and in 10 of 60 articles on Nicaragua (17%). Overall, its record was 29 of 132 articles (22%). Again, these figures exceed *The Times* by an order of magnitude in percentage terms and exceed or equal it in absolute terms. Ten covers were devoted to one country or the other.

Qualitatively, in relation to *Sojourners*, *C&C*'s writing is less confessional, less emotional and more humanistically, socially and ethically oriented. It is more interested in stories about the religious community that call Christians and others to account on social ethics than it is to unite the devotional and the political, or politicize evangelicals. Whereas *Sojourners*' writing can be termed sacramental and confessional, *C&C*'s could be called "socially and culturally critical." These are not airtight distinctions but points of emphasis. Both journals are prophetic, which is their main rhetorical posture and anti-hegemonic discursive stance. For *Sojourners*, personal piety is the font of social witness. For *C&C*, a commitment to change starts with what liberation theologians call a "pre-theological assumption": The world should not be the way it is. The response to this predicament is to act to change the face of suffering. There are inspirational parallels of prophetic resistance in the Bible and the Judeo-Christian tradition, but the community of faith must find its own way, relying on one another for reflection and correction and for emotional, political, even economic support. What the tradition makes clear, however, is that a cozy relationship with the majority culture is not a biblical pattern. For *C&C*, social ethics sit in the foreground, personal piety in the background. Existence precedes essence. Right action (orthopraxis) trumps right belief (orthodoxy).

Again, because witness to distant suffering in print has been well explained by now, I chose an even more diverse sample of this kind of writing. WTDS is not a hard and fast concept. The criteria stated earlier allowed us to examine the three publications for their frequency of WTDS, useful for this study. But as a focus on

witness in print is new, scholars should first find as many examples as they can to begin a fruitful discussion about what the concept most fundamentally consists of.

**Real drama and metaphoric dramaturgy: A sacrificial Salvadoran reality and a lethal U.S. fantasy.** Thomas Quigley opens our analysis of *C&C*'s writing on El Salvador with a foreboding meditation on the dark reality the poor and their champions in the church face. He sees that the church will not stop its advocacy and that, try as they might, the security forces and their champions in government cannot kill them all. As US progressives try to persuade politicians that the junta refuses to let change triumph over blood, Salvadoran church people will not go gently into this dark night of the nation's soul. Nor will Quigley. As a witness, he will not let the US religious or policy communities just ignore the carnage.

This is commentary on a par with Jesus' crisis in Gethsemane. As the main adviser to the Catholic bishops on Latin America, Quigley sees the Carter administration illusion that a centrist government exists and should be supported give way to the Reagan team's fantasy that more money for killing in the short run means a more peaceful region in the long run. Both believed, or cynically promoted, the junta's myth that the violence could be controlled and was not targeting the religious. Quigley is being diplomatic when he says that the US government needs a new metaphor for El Salvador. He emphatically rejects the fragile-democracy frame earlier than most, which also makes this piece significant, and implies that the reality barely conforms to a botched-diplomacy or wayward-America frame, that it is much closer to the imperial-America frame. As noted earlier, *The Times'* editorial

record generally was more critical of US policy than its reporting, and here, it too alludes to the imperial-America frame in the first sentence of this article.

### **Salvador: Metaphor vs. Truth**

By Thomas Quigley

[February 2, 1981]

In its Christmas Eve editorial, *The New York Times* suggested that “El Salvador is in danger of becoming a metaphor—one of those demonstration cases where superpowers aim to advertise their potency.”

El Salvador has been that flawed metaphor of US policy in Central America through all of 1980, replacing...the Cuban and Nicaraguan metaphors...With a fine sense of dramaturgy, the US constructed a scenario that positioned a...reformist center beset by snarling, mustachio-twirling oligarchs on the right and half-crazed, bomb-throwing ideologues on the left.

The problem is that it was all done with mirrors. The State Department’s imagined center is largely a product of stage directions, with few on-scene actors to play the roles. The real actors of the Salvadoran center are democrats like former junta members Enrique Ungo and Roman Myorga, [and] former Government leaders Hector Dada and Ruben Zamora. *Along with Enrique Alvarez Cordoba, the president of the Frente Democratico Revolucionario (FDR)* [the rebel’s political arm], *who was murdered later* [see next story below], *they had led the way out early in the year.* Exeunt [Exit] Left. In demographic terms (i.e., number of supporters) the true center in El Salvador, as in most of Latin America, is on the left.

In the fall of 1979, Salvador presented the US with two choices: Continue supporting the repressive Carlos Humberto Romero Government that, under that name or another, the US had backed for half a century; or, by withholding support, contribute to an already well-advanced process of change. Had Salvador been located in the Sargasso Sea, the Carter human rights policy would have clearly opted for the latter. But Nicaragua lay just across the Gulf of Fonseca; if the virus of Sandinism took hold in Salvador, it was feared it could spread north to Honduras, Guatemala, even Mexico.

By ousting [Carlos] Romero in an October coup, the young colonels eliminated one choice and briefly held out the hope of a new order. One didn’t have to wait until January, although much of the new civilian leadership did, to see that the fragile coalition would not hold.

With the beginning of 1980, we were back to two choices: Either press for true participation by the organized expressions of the popular will and for firm control over the military; or, if sufficiently traumatized by the specter of rising leftism in the region, just encourage those in power, the oligarchy, and the military, to stay in power. Who would have thought that a third option, the cherished chimera of the old hard-line Christian Democrats, would emerge as Washington’s choice?

*Tercerismo* in Latin America is something more precise than just a general third or middle way between communism and capitalism. It implies an elitist reformism, implacably hostile to both Marxist and non-Marxist mass-based movements and

supportive of the modernizing of industrial elites. It does not openly identify with the old, usually agrarian, oligarchy, nor with the more obviously brutish sectors of the military. It's the vaccine of progressivism designed to inoculate the body politic against the real thing.

### **Opting for the Junta**

The Carter Administration had not been notably friendly toward Christian Democratic parties in the hemisphere, leading some prominent demo-Christians to complain that, unlike their more favored rivals, the social democrats, they could not get a fair hearing in Washington. The corner was turned during the first quarter of the year [1980] as the US threw its full support behind the January junta consisting of three civilians, two colonels and the army....

With the US buttressing the same old repressive military but fronted now by a new set of [State Department] public information officers...the Government is a "revolutionary governing junta," its land and banking reforms are the most "far-reaching in the history of Latin America since the Mexican revolution," and the principal obstacle to its achieving the goals from the October 15 declaration [of a new government] comes from what US officials have called "kids with red bandanas" and the "Pol Pot left."

What was new in the equation and what has made Salvador another kind of vibrant metaphor for the whole Christian world was the unprecedented engagement of much of the church. The engagement took the form of accompanying and supporting the people in the struggle for dignity and justice, and, as a consequence, of suffering the most intense persecution experienced by the church anywhere at this time. It is this persecution, more than any other aspect, that has exposed the rhetoric of the junta and the State Department as fatuous, deceptive and cynical.

*Direct persecution of the church—shooting up convents, bombing the church radio station, killing catechists [lay leaders]—was one of the constants of 1980. Insofar as any change occurred during the last months, it was an increase in such behavior, culminating in December with the martyrdom of the four American missionaries. In the first 10 months of the year, the church recorded 180 acts of persecution, 132 of which were perpetrated by the armed forces. These included the assassination of no fewer than 28 church workers, among them a deacon killed just days before his priestly ordination, an Italian Franciscan who had been a local pastor for 27 years and, of course, Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero...*

Early in October, church offices circulated a document. "Under a government that calls itself democratic and bears the name Christian," the document began, "the country is experiencing a process of de-democratization and open persecution of the church." Among the incidents cited:

*—On September 18, army troops invaded the San Miguel Cathedral, killing five persons...and taking...nine prisoner before assassinating them. The same day the army invaded St. Lucy's Church in Zacatecoluca, killing 10 peasants and arresting 50, 26 of whom were discovered dead over the next three days.*

*—On September 19, the Cathedral and the Calvary Church of the capital were machine-gunned.*

—The next day, the church's radio station was...destroyed again by bombs.

—September 24. The convent at Guazapa was ransacked and burned by rightist paramilitary groups.

—September 29. The convent at San Antonio de los Ranchos was ransacked by the army...Julia and Dora Monge, were tortured and killed. Bibles and catechetical books were burned. Soldiers, stating they were acting on "superior orders," broke into the church, robbed the alms box and desecrated the eucharist.

### **Escalation of Terror**

September's two weeks lengthened into two more months of ever escalating terrorism...

—October 3. Maria Magdalena Henriquez, information specialist for the Salvadoran Human Rights Commission, was kidnapped and tortured to death.

—October 6. Father Manuel Antonio Reyes, who worked with the diocesan refugee centers, was taken by security forces to the police station for interrogation. His body turned up the next day with two bullet wounds.

—October 25. Ramon Valladeres Perez, administrator of the Human Rights Commission, was shot dead on the streets of San Salvador.

—October 24 and again October 27. The residence of the Jesuits was dynamited for the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> times in the year.

—November 8. Porforio Damas was assassinated in his home by the National Guard. He was the nephew of Bishop Arturo Rivera [y Damas, later Archbishop], Apostolic Administer of San Salvador.

—November 10. Manuel Tejada, administrator of the University Catholic Center, was kidnapped; his body, showing signs of torture, turned up three days later.

—November 19. Troops cordoned off the seminary which houses the archdiocesan offices and a refugee encampment, forced their way into the refuge and terrorized the people there, mostly women and children. Others entered the diocesan printing plant, stole equipment and money, ransacked files and threatened to kill those working there.

—November 21. The administration office of the Jesuit review Central American Studies was bombed.

—November 27. Thirty persons, including the leadership of the FDR [Revolutionary Democratic Front, the rebel political arm], meeting privately at the Jesuit high school, were taken by armed men in broad daylight in full view of uniformed police. The bodies of six FDR leaders turned up later that day and the next.<sup>27</sup>

—November 28. A powerful bomb exploded at the cathedral where the bodies [of the FDR leaders] were lying in state in Chalpipa. Father Marcial Serrano was kidnapped by National Guardsmen and killed.

—December 2. Ita [Ford], Maura [Clarke], Dorothy [Kazel], Jean [Donovan].<sup>28</sup>

On December 8, the governing junta met with the Rogers-Bowdler-Einaudi mission sent by the Carter Administration to assess the seriousness of the new situation. The

<sup>27</sup> Including top man Enrique Alvarez; see Ray Bonner's story next.

<sup>28</sup> The US nuns and lay worker killed coming home after visiting Nicaragua.

junta, more desperate than ever for international support, especially from the church in other countries, cynically assured the visitors that “no religious persecution exists, nor will exist under this government.”

The evidence is all to the contrary. There is no denying the terrorizing activities of the government’s own forces. Junta attempts to blame “run-away rightist elements” among the security forces...underscore its own impotence and further challenge its fading legitimacy....

Bishop Rivera described the reality:

The church is persecuted because it tells the truth...because it has made a preferential option for the poor who for centuries have been oppressed by unjust structures and continue today to be oppressed and suffer a virulent repression bordering on the unbelievable....

It is impossible to know whether such voices will be screened out by the filters that tend to protect the State Department and the White House from reality. *But on the third day of the new year, as Ronald Reagan prepared to assume office, gunmen entered a coffee shop in San Salvador and killed two Americans and a Salvadoran, all associated with land reform.* The junta itself acknowledged that the murderers were probably rightists...who have their most important allies in the Government. Washington needs a new metaphor to understand the political realities of El Salvador. [end]

(pp. 2, 13-14—numbers are by volume, so do not reflect position in individual editions)

*Thomas Quigley is adviser for Latin America in the office of International Justice and Peace, United States Catholic Conference [the US bishops]. He has specialized in Latin American affairs for more than a decade, has traveled frequently in the region and has visited El Salvador several times in the past year.*

One reason to focus on this column is that it represents the earliest complete list in the publications studied of murdered church and human-rights workers. Another is that, while this is clearly a opinion piece, technically a commentary, it deals with the contestation process by making sure the main part of the article honors the canons of disinterested journalism: a litany of 18 days of murder, torture and bombings of church workers in less than three months. The most affecting aspect of this piece is just a catalog of facts about violent abuse and extra-legal killings, with only the bare details about the circumstances.

In the place of a great deal of physical or social context, the article substitutes crucial religious and political context. Editing out one set of contextual variables places the other in stark relief. This catalog of crucifixion, in its cumulative effect, has a powerful, quasi-liturgical quality. It is as if—as with the villagers honoring *contra* victims—the reader should say, “*Presente!*” when each martyr’s name is read. In all, it becomes another form of WTDS in print, built on the credibility of the US Catholic bishops and the pounding effect of that summary. Print can summarize and focus attention in a way that video cannot, the images of which continue to distract—as video per se, not voiceover or text-block summaries. It can also provide emotional distance as needed, which here focuses our attention with its somber, bell-like toll. As with a memorial for the slain in any dangerous profession—police, fire, military—the writer’s intent was not liturgical per se but ceremonial: a solemn list of atrocities against those who only crime was to work for the poor. Its rhetorical power lies entirely within the catalog of facts.

Because it was published right after Reagan’s inauguration, we know Quigley’s attitude about the persecution is not primarily antagonism toward the new administration, though he looks with apprehension on its advent. It is about US cynicism and blindness. And while he makes a few castigating remarks about the State Department, mostly he compiles a petition consisting of victims whose annihilations cry out for justice. He is intent on showing that those who resemble the “Pol Pot left” were not the leftists but military officials and their assassins. This is comment as denunciation of the strongest sort, but in place of shrill rhetoric, we have an understated litany of murder. It is the understatement and just the right

amount of context that builds the trust readers need. The junta's denial that "no religious persecution exists, nor will exist under this government" burns up in its smoldering, unflinching gaze.

**Requiem for an aristocrat: An oligarch declares for the poor.**

"When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die."

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer

This next article represents another unique genre, or combination of them.

Reprinted from *The Times*, it is an obituary as political critique and prophetic witness. It also reflects a novel use of a standard media technique that has been criticized of late: personalization. This refers to the tendency of media to focus on individual actors, often highly placed, such as politicians, executives and celebrities and human-interest angles rather than systemic factors, when reporting on social-political issues (Rucinski, 1992). In this story, WTDS, obituary as eulogy and personalization call attention to, rather than deflect it from, structural issues.

**[In Salvador, the] Unmaking of an Oligarch**<sup>29</sup>

By Raymond Bonner

[February 2, 1981]

Volumes will certainly be written by Latin American scholars and charges will be traded by politicians—if this country goes Communist—about "who lost El Salvador." But the life, work and death of Enrique Alvarez Cordova may more incisively illuminate the undercurrents of the near civil war in this Central American republic.

*The majority of El Salvador's 4.5 million people have long staggered under a rigid class structure and distorted income distribution. Before some reforms this year, the top 5 percent of the population received 38 percent of the income; less than 2 percent owned more than half the valuable agricultural land.*<sup>30</sup>

Enrique Alvarez was part of the 5 percent and 2 percent. After Hackley Preparatory School in Tarrytown, N.Y., and Rutgers University, where he studied economics, he used

<sup>29</sup> Longer headline in *New York Times*, shorter for reprint in *Christianity and Crisis*.

<sup>30</sup> Issues of social, economic and cultural human rights, so put in italics.

his family's wealth—primarily from coffee—to make more. His...ranches are worth more than \$2 million.

Quique...as he was called by friends and colleagues, was an "all-Salvador boy." A scrapbook photo shows him in the two-handed set shot position, a standout on the national basketball team. He was a ranked tennis player and one of the best polo players in the country's history.

Friends and relatives told of his having dated a Miss Universe finalist, of being a "dazzling dancer." "He was charismatic, like your John Kennedy," said one. But they also recalled that while he was not political in the sense of belonging to any party, he was concerned and moved by the plight of the poor.

*"The more he worked, the more poverty he saw, and he had such a big heart, he couldn't stand seeing a child with a distended belly," a close friend said. "He felt, if I am rich, I should spare part of my money. If I'm a professional, I should give part of my talent."*

In 1968 Mr. Alvarez agreed to become a deputy agriculture minister in hopes of reforming the system. He stayed only a few months "because he thought the ministry was moving too slowly," remembered a colleague, who like others who agreed to talk, asked to be unidentified.

Thinking that as top man he could make real changes, he returned as Agriculture Minister in 1969. He began by proposing to limit the size of farms in government irrigation districts. Less than 2 percent of the land was affected, but he was attacked for betraying his millionaire friends, who saw the proposal as the first step toward agrarian reform. It was.

The minister's team drafted a plan limiting...holdings to...about 500 acres. But politics frustrated his efforts. An outgoing President didn't want to alienate the wealthy with whom he would soon be relaxing, and an incoming one wanted to remain in power. Defeated, Mr. Alvarez resigned in 1973, but not to become an absentee landlord. Back at El Jobo, his 145-hectare spread 42 miles west of the capital, he made the property both socially advanced and profitable, ranking second or third in the world in terms of milk production per unit of grazing land.

A man who worked for Mr. Alvarez remembers his dedication to reform. "I've been thinking about this for a long time," he quoted Mr. Alvarez as telling the workers. "I'm not married. But you are my family, my responsibility. I want to build a new type of organization in El Salvador and I want you to be part of it." El Jobo became a cooperative, owned by the 73 permanent workers. Mr. Alvarez helped them buy their interests with loans.

When in October 1979 a group of young, seemingly progressive army officers deposed Gen. Carlos Humberto Romero, ending almost 50 years of military rule in El Salvador, Mr. Alvarez returned as Agriculture Minister. His first task, however, was to strengthen civilian control over the military, and in that he failed. Unable to remove Col. Jose Guillermo Garcia as Minister of Defense, he, the rest of the Cabinet and two civilian junta members resigned.

"He was a Christian, not a Marxist," said a priest who knew Mr. Alvarez for almost 20 years. Unlike Education Minister Salvador Samayoa, who announced his resignation at a press conference and then picked up an AK-47 machine gun and walked out to join

the guerrillas early last year, Mr. Alvarez joined the left quietly. His closest friends say they learned about his conversion only when his picture appeared in the newspapers as the leader of the Democratic Revolutionary Front, a coalition formed...of moderate to far left church, labor, student, peasant and guerrilla groups.

Some of the reforms Mr. Alvarez wanted had already been enacted. In March, the largest estates became peasant cooperatives and the Government announced—though has not yet implemented—a plan to give about 150,000 peasant families title to the small plots they work as tenant farmers or sharecroppers. The Government also took control of the banks. Robert E. White, the United States Ambassador, asserted last week that these reforms have given Salvadorans "a basis on which to reject the Marxist-Leninist program." But Mr. Alvarez joined the front anyway. "Many of us have tried to win the structural changes that our country so badly needs by working with past governments," he said in June. "It did not work. We came to the conclusion that a change at the very center of power was necessary." He stressed that he wanted "a mixed economy" with a "pluralistic government."

During the summer and early fall, Mr. Alvarez led a goodwill mission abroad and secured commitments from some European and Latin American governments to sever relations with the junta....He returned to El Salvador in October, reportedly leaning toward negotiations with the junta. *He was killed last month along with five other leftists kidnapped from a meeting in a church-run school in San Salvador.*

*"He was the first wealthy man to die for the poor of this country," said Msgr. Ricardo Urioste, the General Vicar of San Salvador, of Mr. Alvarez. The assassination "sealed the insurrection," a Latin American diplomat predicted. "More of the middle-class will become radicalized."* [end] (p. 2, *Week in Review* section)

*Bonner is a correspondent in El Salvador and Nicaragua for The New York Times. This article first appeared in The Times on December 14, 1980. Copyright © by The New York Times Co. Reprinted in C&C with permission.*

One way to deal with the contestation over Bonner's witness was to give him an opinion piece, which *The Times* did once (Bonner, 1984b), or a *Week in Review* article, which it did here. They tend to be more interpretive than daily reporting. This article deserves examination, first, because it is about the murder of the leader of the political arm of the rebel coalition. Second, it appears near the very end of the Carter administration and shows that the Reagan team did not create the explosive situation in El Salvador—it merely threw liquid oxygen on the fire. Regardless of its public support for the fragile-democracy frame, acting out of the civil religion mode of

traditional American values, the Carter administration mostly believed in the viral-communism frame. It also shows that Bonner reported the Carter team's misreading of the situation just as critically and incisively he did with Reagan's. If he had biases regarding US political parties, they did not affect his writing.

In addition, the article appeared in both *The Times* and *C&C*, which allows *C&C* to "slipstream" on *The Times*' credibility while its most aggressive reporter in El Salvador could still bear witness to the civil war. We might also notice that it has only three sentences about one (very important) killing and a few more about human rights generally. So while it seems to barely meet our stated criteria for WTDS in print, it assumes the moral force of the others above. Why? Because it foregrounds the issues of distribution of wealth, especially land-reform, that lay behind the revolt and the killings, and, most important, because in this article the violence against the poor has been sublimated into Enrique Alvarez's life and death. His substantial credibility, his symbolic capital, stands in for the millions of anonymous poor and is pitted against that of the oligarchy. That the agents of the oligarchy killed him in the end makes his death a blood sacrifice, and the unworthy victims he represents, significant thereby.

Bonner may have known that this classic case of tension between Alvarez's transformed and reoriented habitus and the dominant ideology would make for an archetypical morality tale. But he really only needed to know that Alvarez devoted his life to enacting, and met his death championing, land-ownership reforms that could no longer be ignored. His death ensured that, we are told. Along with Father Rutilio Grande, Archbishop Romero, the US religious workers and the Jesuit professors at Central American University, he became one of the main icons of injustice unmasked.

Bonner also captures the split personality of the civilian-military junta through Alvarez's conscientious objection to its duplicitous and lethal character (with his resignation). In the best traditions of personalization in journalism, one life, and its death, bear witness to the intransigence of the oligarchy, but more so, to the likelihood that its killing machine has become morally dysfunctional. We are told that killing Alvarez ensures the moral imperative of the insurgency and moves the middle class farther to the left.

As in "Witnessing as a Field" (Ashuri & Pinchevski, 2008), here one group gains credibility while another loses it. Bonner negotiates this social construction of trust through Alvarez's disputed legacy, the contested reputation of the FDR, the debates in *The Times* newsroom and the equally disputed status of the junta. An aristocrat reinventing his life in service to the poor, Alvarez's symbolic capital and inverted habitus supply the credibility with which to challenge the traditional cultures of the United States and El Salvador. Bonner marks this usurpation of the cultural capital of the junta as a defining moment for the insurgency. In reprinting the article, *C&C* uses Bonner's personalization of Alvarez, his still-vital legacy, a botched-diplomacy frame and the stature of *The Times* to tell the truth about the junta.

**Voices of the living, voices of the dead: Taking up arms in a deeply dysfunctional society.** *C&C*'s increasing use of professional writers in place of theologians, scholars and church leaders is evident in this article. This did not necessarily move it closer to the center. It took place as the journal was moving, slowly but inexorably, farther left. Here we have a piece by Anne Nelson, a journalist

who had written for *The New York Times*, *Harper's*, *Maclean's*, *The Nation* and *Rolling Stone*, among others. In it, she practices a mix of interpretive and depth reporting, a more disinterested, social-facts-based reporting and commentary. An especially compelling feature is the use of boxes within the body copy (now at the end) to highlight those who have joined or support the rebels. Her writing might seem like a bastardization to some, or a painfully honest attempt to deliver a greater truth than mainstream reporting to others. But more accurately, more technically, it is a form of new journalism that *C&C* adopts for the purposes of social witness. She uses this form to explain an intractable situation, one that will not yield to the craving Americans, and their new president, have for good guys and bad.

### **El Salvador Revisited**

By Anne Nelson

[June 20, 1981, cover story]

SAN SALVADOR—*A couple of weeks ago Deane Hinton, the new US Ambassador to El Salvador, announced that he felt the human rights situation was "improving." Two days later...pieces of four different bodies were found chopped up and scattered along a four-mile stretch of highway with a sign that said: "This is what happens to subversives." It keeps on happening.*

Junta member and land reform head José Antonio Morales Ehrlich—himself under almost daily attack by businessmen and the military—declared that the opposition front, the [FDR], cannot participate in next year's elections because it is a guerilla group, not a legal party. Legally registered parties, such as the Nationalist Democratic Union (UDN) can participate, even though they belong to the FDR. Nevertheless, the killing of the UDN's secretary general, Manuel Franco, along with other FDR leaders on Thanksgiving Day last year, was justified in Ehrlich's view because "he had gone over the guerillas." ...

The military's favored party, the ironically named Party of National Conciliation (PCN), is taking out full-page ads to attack Phase III of the land reform program, otherwise known as "land to the tiller" [as was a similar program in Vietnam]. Phase I limps on short of cash and credit, while Phase II, which was to affect the country's richest coffee and cotton land, has been postponed indefinitely (or, officially, "five to ten years"). But the coffee and cotton growers are throwing...tantrums anyway; the latter have...refused to plant, thus lashing out at the junta's Christian Democrats by depriving the country of foreign income and contributing to its imminent economic collapse. On the world market the price of coffee has fallen below production cost.

*The capital is wracked by searches and seizures. There is an 11 P.M. curfew; more than 800 people have died for violating it. President Duarte tells a joke about an elderly peasant hobbling past a pair of National Guardsmen at 10 minutes before 11. One of the Guardsmen shoots him dead, explaining, "He wouldn't have made it anyway."* In El Salvador's 11<sup>th</sup> hour, many are saying the same about Duarte....

El Salvador is, more than ever, a land of contradictions. We North Americans have several serious limitations when we address a situation like [this], or elsewhere in Latin America for that matter. The first is that our own political system has trained us inexorably toward a bifocal vision. There are two, and only two, sides to everything. We want our angels, and our devils, neatly in place. Secondly, we always want to know, "what we should do about it." Solutions must be our solutions....

### **Fabric of the Frente**

The FDR is one of the most interesting and complex political entities in Salvadoran history. It is, and has always presented itself as, a coalition....It contains some Marxists. There is also no doubt that many of its members, on every level, emphatically including the guerrillas, are devout Christians and that the "grassroots church" has been as important an organizing force for the *Frente* as any political group.

Another large sector that has drifted into the *Frente*'s camp...has been the politically disenchanting, traditional politicians who worked "within the system" throughout their careers, took heart in the October 1979 coup only to become gradually convinced that there was simply no possibility for significant, peaceful change under the existing regime. The divergence of political opinion within the *Frente* has sometimes caused it grave discomfort, but this pluralism has been tolerated precisely because the opposition is united by one perception: that the current regime has no capacity for far-reaching change...

How representative is [the rebel coalition] the *Frente*? El Salvador is not a place where one takes opinion polls. Nobody knows the membership of any Salvadoran political body—even the junta's Christian Democrats refuse to talk numbers these days. A very reasonable guess is that the mass organizations of the *Frente* include at least 200,000 people. One possible gauge is the march that took place in January of 1980 which, according to reliable witnesses, brought at least 100,000 to the streets of the capital. The US Embassy, including the new Ambassador, has delighted in claiming that popular support for the *Frente* fell off so sharply by the march on May Day that they could only rally a thousand people. This was not so. *Because of the deaths in January, when troops opened fire on the marchers, there was a great dispute among the organizations about whether to hold a May Day march at all.* The groups decided and announced—in late April—that for security reasons they would send [about 1,000] the minimum representation to the march....

In 1972 and 1977 PCN candidates Generals Molina and Romero deprived the Christian Democratic...party of victory through electoral fraud. Next year's race would be different in one...respect. The Christian Democrats' allies who enabled the coalition to win...namely, the UDN, the Social Democrats and the wing of the Christian Democrats now known as the Social Christians...have all gone over to the FDR.

The elections become part of a vicious circular argument. The Christian Democrats would have to win in order to have any hope of implementing the [land and banking] reforms they have tried to initiate. Yet the very suggestion of those reforms erodes their support from the business sector and the military. The PCN, on the other hand, has already said in this month's paid advertisements that it would not only block future reforms, it would also set about reversing both the spirit and the letter of those reforms already on paper...

Either way, El Salvador's social cauldron will not cease to boil. The victors in any election will [face] utter bankruptcy. An estimated \$4 billion...has already left the country over the past three years. Unemployment stands at over 50 percent. A new government will inherit the most corrupt bureaucracy in the country's history; businessmen report that the average payoff for a government contract has now reached 30 percent. The economic crisis is now being [felt by] the middle classes, as it has long [been] known in the bellies of farmers and workers. Economically, socially and politically, the country is bound to burst wide open so long as those in power do not recognize that the guerillas are the symptoms, not the disease....

### **No Exit?**

I have painted a bleak picture without offering a solution. In the past year and a half that I have been writing about El Salvador, I have found solutions less and less easy to come by, and I found myself more and more grateful that as a journalist it isn't my job to create them. Living up close, the massiveness, the drama and the sheer pain of this thing take your breath away. It is a society inexorably collapsing in on itself. One asks: How could anybody have staved off the French Revolution?

The United States Government, above all, cannot "solve" anything here. Since it has, for the moment, chosen to speak the language of war, it can at best raise the number of casualties one side inflicts on the other and on the scores of defenseless civilians in between—who, make no bones about it, numerically suffer more casualties at the hands of the Government forces than at those of the guerillas. This is perfectly understood everywhere from the sorriest slum of *Mejicanos* to the deepest bowels of the State Department.

US policy has not explored peace; it has shunted aside all talk of...negotiation with bravado and bluster. It is reaping increasingly negative international responses...from old allies in Europe and new clients in the Third World, who see their own good-faith offers blunted by the US stance and who express horror at the consequences and scorn at the hypocrisy of its policies. I wouldn't presume to try to persuade the Reagan Administration to change sides, but to reconsider its means. I don't know what will "work." At this point, however, for the US to court peace, to use the nooks and crannies of the diplomatic process to press for a negotiated, truly political solution instead of against it, to try to export our own ideals of every person's right to life and liberty—instead of sheer firepower—would be a long step in the right direction. [end]

### **Voices of El Salvador: III** [boxed inside the article]

*He was a 35-year-old man, now fighting with the guerillas in Chalatenango. "I used to be a member of [the paramilitaries] Orden," he said. "One day they sent us to*

*beat up some schoolteachers who were going on strike in Santa Teclas—not kill them, just beat them up and scare them. I went to the school with the others and we started dragging them out, but I just didn't have the stomach for it. Some of them were women, they were crying, and besides, there was nothing wrong with them going on strike, they were making terrible money.*

*“So I went home and didn't want anything to do with Orden...But then they got suspicious and came to my house looking for me. They told my wife they were going to kill me. Because they thought I had gone over to the other side, but I hadn't, I just wanted to quit Orden. Then they came back after I went into hiding and told my wife that if she didn't find me they'd kill her. That's when we went up to the mountains and I joined the [rebel] organization.”*

**Voices: IV** [boxed inside the article]

*“I will confess to you,” said the Jesuit, “that in 1961, during the Bay of Pigs invasion, I was so anti-Communist that I prayed the invasion would triumph. In the Dominican Republic [1964] I was cheering for the Marines. But now I look at this situation and I think that anything, including the most extremist, repressive, Stalinist regime imaginable, would be better than what we are living now, would be better than the reign of death that the United States is promoting in this country.*

*“I ask myself: Under a Communist regime, what would we have to lose? You can make a little chart. Freedom of the press? There is no freedom of the press now. There has never been freedom of the press in this country. The Government has always controlled newspapers, broadcasting. Free assembly? It is now considered subversive to hold a political meeting of three persons or more. Freedom of religion? The guerillas haven't killed any priests or nuns here; it's been the Government, the security forces, that killed the priests, the nuns, the altar boys, the catechists. I ask you, what do we have to lose?”*

**Voices: VI** [boxed inside the article]

*“I was working with a Christian community for a number of years. There was no single factor that made me opt for the armed struggle, but many.” The speaker was a guerrilla commander fighting in Usulután...*

*“One of the most important was the election in 1972, when we saw there was no chance to make democratic machinery work, that the dictatorship wouldn't allow it. Then there was the fall of [duly elected Chilean President and Socialist Salvador] Allende.<sup>31</sup> Then the land reform failed in 1976 and there was another electoral fraud in 1977. That was also the year the dictatorship killed Father Rutilio Grande and the repression against everyone around us increased steadily after that.*

*“They forced us to take up arms. When I made my decision, it was at a moment in the 70's when it was not a personal question, but a social question, one the whole country was asking each other. What other hope was there for change?” (pp. 199-203)*

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<sup>31</sup> Overthrown in 1976 by dictator Augusto Pinochet in a bloody coup engineered by the CIA

*Nelson has reported on the Caribbean basin for the past three years [1978-81]; since April 1980 she has spent eight months in Central America, primarily in El Salvador. Her articles...have appeared in The New York Times, Harper's, Maclean's magazine (Canada), The Nation, Latin American Weekly Report (London) and Rolling Stone, and her photos in Newsweek, The Washington Post and other publications.*

This piece was chosen mostly to spotlight the boxes headed "Voices." Each explains why the source has supported or joined the guerillas. They differ in style and content from *The Times'* more official voices. They also differ from the more emotional writing of *Sojourners*. It also features Nelson's devastating X-ray of the Salvadoran elections. She turns the tables on the "balanced" election coverage of *The Times* and its White House frames, the same that Herman and Chomsky skewer. But instead of hammering away with numbers and legal norms, she juxtaposes the agonizing but so-human decisions leading to revolt with a political and electoral analysis that sees into the social caldron at depth. These dilemmas make mainstream reporting seem less like rhetorical code and more like a fogged-up window.

The conundrum the elections represent, and the party posturing leading up to them, offers another novel form of WTDS in print. Without stretching a point too far, I want to show how the concept might, and should, apply to social and psychological suffering as well. They are the political manifestations of the deep social divisions already described that pit the irresistible force of social change against the immovable object of the oligarchy. Nelson's analysis gives the lie to any notion that a frame of fragile-democracy is adequate to this quagmire, or that the elections stand any chance of being free, fair or even welcome. Since the two stolen elections and the assassination of many tens of reformist and rebel leaders, a time-honored practice in dirty war, there is no center to support. As with the land reform it depends on, it is a

spongy, termite-ridden platform that can barely hold the few centrists that are left.

This view of electoral dysfunction, kept in place by widespread terror, resembles the aesthetic topic of Boltanski (1999): Nelson looks it in the face, and we are transfixed by the horror. The rampant physical suffering is sublimated into the psychological cruelty of an electoral farce that can only prolong the society's agony. This is a new expression of WTDS, as much as it might give us headaches to look on it. Nelson is ultimately too mournful to denounce, too Salvador-weary to jerk tears. She can only show "what is relevant about the unfortunate in his misery."

Even as it depicts an ethical morass, the article still illuminates, and its most revealing aspects are the parts where the rebels speak. Nelson asks how representative the *Frente* is and estimates this with the best quantitative data she has: public demonstrations of support, increasingly hidden due to the repression. She also relies on the qualitative data in the *Voices* boxes. These portray normal people who have faced the cruelty of the status quo and found it impervious to nonviolent redress. They have each reached a crisis point. In individual horror and dismay, but in dialog with others, what they have witnessed becomes a new habitus. They pool their individual moral capital to create a social capital capable of supporting a resistance.

Likely joining up for a paycheck, most of which he would send home, a peasant trained to kill by ORDEN sees he must abuse those of his own class. (Teachers were so poorly paid, they might as well have been peasants, as well as being held in high esteem by those who needed their services to rise socially). He then marshals his conscience to leave. When he does, as with most mafia, ORDEN must kill him, then his wife. He has witnessed the depravity of the security forces; he can no longer say

he does not know. A Jesuit once an anti-communist looks without flinching at the gross abuse of civil and political rights, especially religious workers gunned down at an alarming rate. He supports the leftists, because the violence of the status quo is much worse. As the political process is unmasked as more and more corrupt, a guerilla commander goes from working with a basic Christian community to leading insurgents. He explains that he was responding to a long-term moral dilemma, a deepening and widening social quandary, not a personal one.

These are voices both Christian and revolutionary, and the terms of their discussion are somewhere between anathema and hard for Americans to comprehend, particularly American Christians. Nelson uses their honesty, pain and heroic witness to show how each voice creates a new habitus that runs counter to the ideology of mainstream American Christianity and the mainstream media, as well as the Reagan administration and its evangelical backers.

While *C&C* is more cerebral than *Sojourners*, it doesn't gloss over the agony of distant suffering. Instead, it frames these events more in social than individual terms, more in ethical than confessional terms, more willing to embrace cognitive dissonance than resolve it. In this article, even the evocations of suffering are boxed off and set against a longer, more analytical narrative about the resistance. The agonizing of the guerilla commander calls to mind German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1971/2010) debating, Camus-like, whether as a Christian he could participate in a plot to kill Hitler. He decided that, *No, he couldn't*, and, *Yes, he had to* (the plot was found out; he was captured and killed near the end of the war). In contrast to most of what we see in *Sojourners*, Nelson portrays decisions similar in

dramatic tension to what we see in that publication but less sentimentally. The *Voices* may seem to be sentimental or even aesthetic topics, but in fact, they are all denunciations. They are an apologetics for the rebellion as (low-key) denunciation, another novel genre, or mix of them. *Apologetics* is a term borrowed from the apologetics for the faith, meaning explanation, not apology, an attempt to make the extra-rational comprehensible.

**By the rivers of Babylon: ‘A note of incomparable dolor’.** In the two articles below, we are put in the middle of a moral and political dilemma surrounding Central American refugees. The WTDS passages are self-evident, shocking and haunting. As before, they need little further explication. Worthy of comment here is another facet of the relationship between North American church people and the refugees.

#### **No Peace for Salvadoran Refugees**

By James Gittings

[December 28, 1981]

*The men were not dead, or at least not yet. They were lurching forward along the bed of a rocky stream, their thumbs lashed together behind their backs, the snouts of M16's in the hands of their captors prodding them whenever they lagged. But from the sounds being made by the watching women and children, one would have thought the men were already dead. "Papa! Mi Papa!" screamed the children. And from the women, quiet but swelling in those interminable mini-seconds, came a low, kicked-in-the-belly whimpering, a note of incomparable despair and dolor that will torment me until I die.*

*Five of us—Bob Brauer of Congressman's Ron Dellum's office, Professor James Stephens, Jr. of the Washington-based Quixote Foundation, Bianca Jagger, the actress [and Nicaraguan human-rights activist],<sup>32</sup> Rusty Davenport of [the anti-hunger NGO] Oxfam America and I—had blundered in the early afternoon of November 16 onto a joint "cleansing" operation by the Salvadoran Army and an ORDEN death squad<sup>33</sup> at a refugee camp near the Honduran town of La Virtud, three kilometers from the El Salvador frontier. Before the afternoon was over, Rusty Davenport at immense peril to himself had led the rest of us in bullying the Salvadorans—by use of our cameras,*

<sup>32</sup> Formerly married to Rolling Stones frontman Mick Jagger.

<sup>33</sup> Note they are working together.

*invocations of the power of “the prensa internacional”<sup>34</sup> and threats that “the whole world will know”—into releasing their prisoners. It was a tense, dangerous time and I, for one, don’t wish to be present on the next occasion such action is necessary.*

The sound the women made on the bridge at La Virtud as they watched their sons and husbands being led away to slaughter is...heard today all the way from El Centro, Calif., to the borders of Nicaragua, wherever and whenever Guatemalan or Salvadoran refugees are thrust back into the hands of their tormentors by those to whom they have turned for refuge, or...whenever these tormentors are permitted to cross borders in search of their victims....

*At La Virtud 3,000 refugees endure this sitting-duck existence; at Guarita and Calamancagua another 6,000. Outside these camps, on the edges of remote Honduran upland villages, an additional 10-20,000 Salvadorans huddle...Regularly...the young men of refugee families are seized and slain, the young women violated [raped] (“We will make them into cooks,” one soldier told a mother as he led her daughters away), the old people beaten.*

*A campaign against the refugees and relief workers is clearly under way. [It] extends from Honduras’ northern border with Guatemala, where Guatemalan troops enter to “screen” refugees, along the whole length of the El Salvador frontier where Salvadoran troops do the “screening,” to the border with Nicaragua, where armed Somocista troops based on Honduran territory provoke incidents of another and more internationally dangerous kind. The El Salvador conflict already has become regional and international.*

### **Moving the Refugees**

[Gittings then explains that the Honduran government and the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees are starting to move refugees off the border, a contradiction of U.N. policy not to move refugees against their will. He says he “firmly opposes” such a move because:

- a) The border supplies an “escape value” for those fleeing the violence in Guatemala and El Salvador. Moving them would make it much harder for other refugees to flee the bombing (done with U.S. aircraft and munitions) and death squad predation. The presence of international observers and relief workers should deter most military violence; and
- b) The refugees have secured lives for themselves—creating dwellings, clearing fields for crops and setting up schools and clinics—and will face more trauma if moved, something they expressly oppose; it will also expose Hondurans who have helped them to harm;

Because the plan is proceeding regardless of their opposition, he believes it is for reasons more military than humanitarian, to create a “free-fire” zone, a move that would create more refugees by adding Honduran peasants to the list.]

The office of the Human Rights Coordinator at the National Council of Churches is searching for Spanish-speaking volunteers to go for ten-day periods to camps like La

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<sup>34</sup> Or “*la prensa internacional*,” the international press.

Virtud as an “international presence.” Given the temper of the Salvadorans, the work will be dangerous—but I urge Christians to take the risk.

Meanwhile, my thoughts turn often those American military “advisors” seen so often recently...in the Honduran border zones. In a recent letter from Dean E. Fischer, a spokesperson for Alexander Haig, the work of such advisors was said to involve training of Salvadorans in “communications, logistics and other skills.”

Well, the intruders at La Virtud had a brand new radio, the use of an American-made helicopter, M16 weapons, and something called an “electric belt” for interrogations. And, oh yes, they had “other skills” too. [end] (pp. 354, 365-366)

*James Gittings is editor-at-large of A.D. [the Presbyterian denominational] magazine. He reports here on his third and most recent trip to Central America.*

In this story, Gittings engages in a form of new journalism that looks closely at the life-and-death plight of Salvadoran refugees, even after they reach a camp in Honduras, La Virtud, a place we have already visited in *Sojourners*. By accident, and ominous journalistic coincidence, he and four notable others, including celebrity-activist Bianca Jagger, stumble onto an incipient massacre by the army and ORDEN, a collaboration that belies any fantasy that the military had nothing to do with death squads. With nothing more than some cameras and notebooks, thinking quickly, the group tries to intimidate a virtual platoon into giving up their prisoners based on the problems international publicity would cause for them, their superiors and the junta: the much-mythologized “power of the press.”

Using nothing more than their nerve and journalistic habitus, they save their lives and those of a unspecified number of refugees. The event makes riveting reading, but Gittings is ethically mature enough to redirect our attention quickly to the real victims: the women watching sons and husbands being led away to certain death. As he does, he confronts a traditional literary challenge: writing about sound, in this case, a singular sound the women make, one of “incomparable despair and dolor,”

something between a moan and whimper. Gittings says he will remember it all his life. As readers, we are left with a memory nearly as indelible.

These events become welded in human-rights lore, an object lesson with dolorous soundtrack: the blunder of well-meaning gringo opinion leaders, “fact finding” on safari in the human-rights jungle, who somehow tap-dance their way out of their own massacre by making much of their journalistic stature, and peasant women appealing instinctively to the cosmos to spare them one more horrific trauma, the death of their men, emotionally irreplaceable but also economically crucial in a peasant economy.

Still, it is most likely that the shock of outside observers in such a remote location jolted the armed actors out of their predatory habits (and orders, let us not forget) and into releasing their captives. This is the effect of what conflict-resolution specialist William Ury (2000) calls “the third side,” the innocent by-standing stakeholders with a vested interest in resolving a given conflict. (Ury is the co-author of the well-known negotiation handbook, *Getting to Yes* [Fisher & Ury, 1991].) This shift in tone and moral perspective can move antagonists, armed or not, into a realizing that a conflict resolved is less costly for all concerned than one pressed to the limit. It is a role the press can often play and yet is not much recognized in scholarship.

The article also shows the difference in the writing in the two Christian journals. In contrast to what might have appeared in *Sojourners*, we have no spontaneous thanks to God, no quotations of scripture and no identification with biblical themes. This does not make it more or less “spiritual,” not for its audience. Instead, its focus is on the social, the political and the economic, on the ethical issues Christians and progressives should address, and about which they should call the nation to account.

The event leads to a different kind of object lesson, a more cognitive one, as Gittings continues to focus his witness on the real victims, explaining the precarious existence of refugees in a Honduran camp. These camps are never entirely safe as refugees become sitting ducks for any predatory force with the will and amoral tendency to abuse them. They have few belongings worth taking so the most that the desperate and deranged can do is abduct them, shoot them for sport or rape the women. Once he grabs our attention with his “do-gooders-in-the-lion’s-den” beginning, Gittings proceeds to educate regarding the predicament refugees face and includes an appeal to anyone who wants to help, one similar to Witness for Peace. As the UN seems to be fumbling the ball, volunteers would put themselves between refugees and oppressors under a program of the National Council of Churches. This is part civil disobedience, part third side and part direct action as effective speech. We see the risks he has taken to bring us such a report and so have fewer qualms about his asking readers to take an equivalent risk. It allows us to place more confidence in his account, as well as in the risks and the rewards of such volunteering. So, in the end, his anecdote of “fact finders in danger” is not glib or aggrandizing but part of building a trust that brings us face to face with the truly vulnerable.

**The road of life, the road of death: Sanctuary and the press.** Here, Renny Golden and co-author revisit Sanctuary for *C&C*, highlight its relationship to the press and also use evocative voices in typographic and existential boxes.

## Sanctuary: Choosing Sides

By Renny Golden and Michael McConnell

[February 21, 1983]

. . . For Milwaukee's Archbishop Rembert Weakland, the first Catholic bishop to endorse the offering of public sanctuary, it was not a typical service. Before him, in a continuous circle, stood Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugees, wearing bandanas to cover all but their eyes before the [media's] exposing eye. Weakland couldn't finish a sentence without applause. *"I had to weigh this act, civil disobedience," said Weakland, "with the very real threat to these people's lives if they return to their homeland."*...

Part of the difficulty of the decision to provide sanctuary lies in the...concrete commitment it implies for the congregation and its members. Sanctuary requires more than an envelope in the collection plate or a signature on a petition. Physically, the space of sanctuary involves the church itself; refugees have been provided living spaces ranging from the rectories to church attics. Then there is the food and clothing (for northern winters) to be provided.

But perhaps the most intense personal commitment is...that aspect of sanctuary referred to as "monitoring." At least until...the intentions of the INS in a particular sanctuary case become clear, it is necessary for a monitor from the congregation to be in the company of the refugees 24 hours a day, to accompany them through any possible arrest (and to be arrested oneself, of course) and to sound the alarm for legal, medical or other assistance as needed.

Broader forms of church involvement in sanctuary have also been developing. In the Chicago area, some 80 churches have signed statements supporting sanctuary and organized a "secondary sanctuary" program—a pool of food, clothing and volunteers from various congregations to be available as needed to those churches providing immediate sanctuary to refugees....

### Choosing Sides

It is 2,500 miles from Milwaukee to San Salvador and Guatemala...the distance a plane would fly if the Sanchez family or Miguel were deported. It is over 5,000 miles to Milwaukee when one has to escape under the cover of darkness, past national guard patrols, through a chain of Mexican officials looking for bribes, and then through the barbed wire fence and random road blocks of the US Border Patrol.

The distance is even greater from the San Salvador Cathedral of [the late] Archbishop Romero to [St. John's] cathedral in Milwaukee...much farther, perhaps light years. *The San Salvador Cathedral still bears bloodstains on its floor from past martyrs.* Romero refused to finish renovation of the cathedral because the lives and struggle of the poor claimed all fiscal resources. And so back of the high altar is warped plywood. The windows are corrugated plastic instead of stained glass and there is no light to illuminate the crucifix. It is a sharp contrast to that of the Milwaukee Cathedral where, on December 2, Msgr. Romero's portrait shone beneath a gold canopy supported by gothic marble columns.

...Archbishop Weakland had also chosen sides. From the beginning Weakland had supported the sanctuary project...as an act of civil disobedience historically necessitated

by the immorality of INS deportation practices. *Archbishop Weakland, like Romero, took a stand against his government to save lives because, he said, "if they are sent back, their chances of survival are almost zero."*...

### **A Father and His Daughters**

Ramon and Mercedes Sanchez are one of the...families living with Miguel in the makeshift living quarters at Cristo Rey church. Ramon and Mercedes were not political in El Salvador, but one of their high school daughters belonged to a student organization, and this involvement was enough to draw the military to their home that night. *It was 1 a.m. on February 5, 1981 when soldiers burst into the sleeping house, shouting "Everyone on the floor!" The family of eight was herded into the main room, [then] the soldiers raped the 13-, 16- and 18-year-old daughters while forcing the parents and [other] children to watch. In return raids on the home the soldiers first took the 16-year-old daughter and days later the 18-year-old.*

*After the second daughter disappeared, never to be found alive, Ramon broke. "I went crazy," he says, simply. "For seven days and nights I searched for my children's bodies in cemeteries and fields." He saw the dead, the old and the young, the mutilated bodies of his people. Traveling without food or sleep, the grieving father finally met an old woman in Santa Ana who recognized his girl's description as that of the one in the cemetery "without an arm." Ramon dragged his whole life and his last traces of innocence to that small cemetery plot. There amidst the debris of death was the body of his child, mutilated and swollen, her severed hand being chewed by a starving dog. Later he learned the other daughter's body had been burned.*

A Salvadoran newspaper published photos of the dead daughters' bodies, providing Ramon's family with proof of their persecution and a possible way out of El Salvador through connections with the Mexican Embassy. After being smuggled into Mexico City, they were left on their own. An engineer offered them work at a ranch near Jalisco. They were misled and literally abandoned without food, funds or clothing. Though 45 minutes from a town, the family was isolated for four months and close to starvation when the pittance they received for work from the engineer, combined with money friends sent, allowed them to make their way to Tijuana where a "coyote" (a border-crossing guide, similar to "juice loan" sharks in our culture) took them across on "credit" for a cost of \$1,500.

Ramon still carries the photos of his daughter....He shows the pictures, unwilling to set you free...The ritual is a hint of the trauma he carries...Ramon's oldest son Jesus says nothing; his depression is severe. Cristo Rey's community moves gently toward Jesus, hoping to call the young man back to the light....

*The Sanchez family came to Cristo Rey after the first refugees arrived in Milwaukee and so they missed meeting Abel, the ex-national guardsman traveling to a Minneapolis church sanctuary. Perhaps the encounter could heal: To meet a soldier who could not obey the order to kill women and children. Abel refused his commanding officer's order to shoot people left in a village his unit had taken. When the officer repeated the command, Abel slowly pulled the rifle he pointed at the ground upward. In the moment that the barrel pointed at the officer, he'd finally faced the moral choice*

*that history offers every Salvadoran, daily as bread. Choose the people or choose their killers. Abel told the officer he would shoot him first if forced to kill villagers.*

Abel finished the story after the cathedral service, and the press room fell to dead silence. He stared at the floor over the bandana disguise wet with tears. “I was in the army for six years. I am embarrassed that I played a part in the oppression of my people, a people dying like dogs with as little impact as the death of a dog.”

One of the [main aims] of the “Sanctuary Project” had just begun: the opportunity for refugees themselves, the voiceless ones, to [testify to] the war’s effects. Saturation of political analysis does not deeply educate the North American base church about the effects of State Department policy in Central America.

### **The National Campaign**

The December 2...declaration initiated a Midwest praxis invitation to the North American religious community to join a...campaign for sanctuary sponsorship. The Chicago Religious Task Force on Central America...coordinating the national project and...the first Midwest city to offer sanctuary at Wellington Avenue United Church of Christ last summer, is targeting March 24, the anniversary of Archbishop Romero’s assassination, as a date for sanctuary declarations across the country....

The unfolding of a national sanctuary campaign was the conception of Rev. John Fife of the Southside Presbyterian Church in Tucson, Arizona, and Jim Corbett—the Quaker “coyote.” Fife and Corbett became “coyotes” for people, not profit. They began the underground railroad northward because their church sanctuary project was so successful that the deluge of refugees was swamping the community’s capacity to provide social services, housing and “cover.”...

Urgency for the lives of refugees led Jim Corbett to entreat the religious community to move beyond advocacy to direct action. In a plea before the National Council of Churches, he said:

The refugees are right here at our door pleading for help to avoid capture. Actively asserting the right to aid fugitives from terror means doing it...not just preaching at a government that’s capturing and deporting them, not just urging legislation that might help future refugees. With people in our midst being hunted down and shipped back, denouncing terror while ignoring the victims simply teaches the public how to live with atrocity. [end]

### **A Ticket Home** [boxed inside the article]

*When Salvadoran refugee Santana Chirino Amaya received a traffic ticket in California, he feared, rightly, that INS officials would return him to his war-torn country. One month after he was deported (for the second time) by INS, his decapitated body was found at a crossroads known as the “Road of Death.” Amaya was 24 years old. He is one of the few Salvadoran deportees whose murder has been documented. According to Peter Schey, director of the National Center for Immigration Rights, deported people “simply disappear” in El Salvador. Refugees deported by INS are loaded on planes and flown to Ilopango airport in San Salvador, where they are met by Salvadoran military. INS provides Salvadoran authorities with passenger lists and date of arrival.—RG/MMcC*

**Proof Positive** [boxed inside the article]

*Tightened federal immigration policies require refugees to show written certified proof in order to qualify for asylum. Ricardo Ernades, a Salvadoran trade unionist, claimed he had grounds for seeking political asylum. The California immigration judge reviewing the case demanded concrete proof substantiating Ernades' claim. In his petition, Ernades states he had been shot at three times because he was active in the union in his factory. He said further that assassins shot and killed a cousin they mistook for Ernades. The killers left a note on the cousin's chest stating they had been seeking Ernades. Finally, Ernades identified the men who shot at him before his escape as National Guardsmen dressed as civilians.*

In spite of these experiences, Ernades was refused political refugee status because he'd failed to provide concrete written proof. He told a *Los Angeles Times* reporter that there would be only one way to produce proof. "He can see the concrete proof by my death when I go home."—RG/MMcC

Author's note: "How to Do Sanctuary" and "Nuts and Bolts for Sanctuary Organizers" are two booklets which can be obtained from the Chicago Religious Task Force on Central America, 407 Dearborn, #320, Chicago, Illinois 60605. (pp. 31-36)

*Renny Golden is co-author, with Sheila Collins, of Struggle Is a Name for Hope (West End Press, 1982; reviewed in C&C, Nov. 29, 1982). Michael McConnell is a member of the Wellington Avenue United Church of Christ in Chicago. Both are members of the Chicago Religious Task Force on Central America.*

Renny Golden of the Chicago Religious Task Force on Central America has already reported on Sanctuary for *Sojourners* (explored above); here she writes a remarkable summary of the movement for C&C. At this time, only those committed to the movement and a few others really knew the ordeal the refugees faced. Readers of *Sojourners* and a few progressive magazines like *The Nation*, *The Progressive* and *Mother Jones* would have known the genocidal facts, but only a few in mainstream churches knew and fewer in the mainstream of society did.

The Sanctuary movement resolved to change that by becoming the most publicized anti-war movement since the Vietnam-war moratorium. Here we have Sanctuary as one of Boltanski's (1999) benefactors, but also one committed to denunciation. Sanctuary had a symbolic resonance at its heart, gut-wrenching stories

and a receptive progressive-Christian constituency that had learned how to organize during the Vietnam era but had not hit burnout or compassion fatigue. The mainstream media was crucial to telling this tale of suffering and resistance, so they are invited to both Sanctuary services in this study, a very unusual event in worship.

The most striking feature here, of course, are the tales of torment in El Salvador and the travail of escaping over 5,000 miles of harsh, foreign lands to the United States, only to be told that, as the director of one INS detention facility said, it was all for a welfare card. The director of the El Paso detention center, Dan McDonald, said, “They are looking for jobs, and the only reason they fear going back is because jobs are hard to find down there. Sure there’s violence and they want to escape it, but that doesn’t mean they are political.” These comments come from another box in this article called “On the Dotted Line.”

Witness to distant suffering in this case means, first, just preserving the lives of these primary witnesses, saving them from a death sentence using a series of what were all temporary moves, no matter how deep the symbolism of sanctuary. To make the public aware that federal policy on Central American refugees contradicted both US law and UN conventions, Sanctuary made these refugees available to the media as much as possible without revealing their identities. The Sanctuary churches would even declare their intentions to the INS and make that act as public as possible. Pending an honest interpretation of the law, the main way to stave off deportation was to publicize the national and international rights that refugees were entitled to and to trumpet the gross violations of the INS. All media were useful and fair game, religious and secular, local and national, print and broadcast.

In her two articles in this study, Golden was trying to reach both evangelicals and theological liberals. With the publicity attending Sanctuary and its trials, the movement was trying to reach the whole country, to find more benefactors. We trust the testimony because of the risks the refugees, churches and alternative and mainstream media took in revealing, while concealing, the main actors in this civil disobedience. It becomes a form of confidential sourcing, a high-wire act of “struggles with relative values” in which the refugees are both intrinsically worthy and political capital, victims without identities crying out, in danger of being silenced at any time. This dedicated negotiation of the acutely disputed fields of immigration, journalistic witness and the logistics of sanctuary provide a compelling endorsement of the refugees’ and the movement’s credibility. Supporting these refugees was no small feat for the church people, who held the refugees’ entire trust in their hands; it was an unsung heroism of ethics, courage and logistics. It involved not just travel but food, clothing and housing, even menial jobs without green cards. This was way too much trouble to go to merely to con the country into getting on welfare. To paraphrase Jim Corbett from an interview during his trial: To believe in the movement, all you had to do was meet a refugee (see Appendix D, “Conspiracy of Compassion: Four Indicted Leaders Discuss the Sanctuary Movement”):

The personal contact makes the difference....That’s how it was all along. We didn’t ever organize by running around and asking, “Will you become an active member of this secret organization?” When someone is in need, a lot of people respond.

This was as true for Golden as for Corbett. And her witness was not just writing for *Sojourners* and *C&C* but urging others to help via the Chicago Religious Task Force she helped to found.

### **WTDS, Human Rights and Otherwise Unworthy Victims in Nicaragua**

**On the road in Nicaragua: Travelogue as benchmark of terror.** In the next article, Andrew Reding reports on a trip that began in Mexico and wound through Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica. His observations on the press and elections in Nicaragua are first-hand and especially helpful in debunking Reagan administration myths about them, myths Herman and Chomsky (1988) believe *The Times* swallowed whole.

#### **Central America—Some of the Truth: A Journey in Search of Context**

By Andrew Reding

[November 12, 1984; cover story]

...My next destination was Nicaragua. Knowing that the contras, with Honduran complicity and U.S. help, operate out of the border areas of Honduras to wage war on...Nicaragua, I thought it advisable to [go] to the U.S. Embassy in Tegucigalpa, to find out how I could enter Nicaragua in reasonable safety. They gave me a two-page travel advisory that contained a paragraph each on El Salvador and Guatemala, and a page and a half on Nicaragua. I noted that the FMLN [rebel] forces in El Salvador were referred to as “terrorists” and that the designation “(Military Control)” was uniquely set beside the heading for Nicaragua....

*A hundred yards down the highway from the Honduran border posts stood the shell of...Nicaraguan customs. Beside it were the bombed-out ruins of duty-free shops....The Hondurans allow the contras to bombard the Nicaraguans from the sanctuary of Honduran soil. To avoid...any pretext for invasion, the Nicaraguans have pulled back their effective border, to positions they can better defend without risking incursions into Honduran territory.*

The result is a sort of no-man’s-land, across which few care to venture...[Later] I boarded a minibus for the ride to Somoto, the town closest to the border. As we left, a young soldier with a red-and-black FSLN [Sandinista] bandana around his neck jumped on, riding shotgun to protect the passengers against terrorist attack by the contras....

Somoto was a revelation. It was as poor as most of Central America. Yet for the first time in my travels I saw the streets being paved; I saw quality medical attention being

dispensed for free; and I didn't encounter any beggars. There was no trace of prosperity anywhere, but neither was there any sign of social tension. The population was well-armed, but the arms were all slung over shoulders or set aside; there was no national police force patrolling the streets. All this in the midst of a war zone. Strange to say, I felt more free here than I had since leaving Mexico. I was never stopped for identification. I was permitted to photograph freely. In fact, I was everywhere treated with courtesy...In the morning, when I went to board the bus for Esteli, I saw *La Prensa*, a newspaper that is in open sympathy with the aims of the contras, freely offered for sale in the midst of a war zone. There was no harassment of the few who purchased it....

However nondescript...Esteli is renowned in spirit. Throughout Nicaragua it is known as "Esteli Heroica" for its fierce resistance to Anastasio Somoza's repression. Three times in less than a year—in October 1978, April 1979 and again in June-July 1979—its people rose in insurrection. Bearing handguns and hunting rifles, and building barricades out of paving blocks, the city's teenagers challenged the machine guns and armor of the Guardia Nacional....

*Five years later, Esteli still bears the scars of its ordeal. The city is pockmarked with empty lots and solitary walls...where homes were flattened by the bombardment. Just about every remaining structure is riddled with deep holes from machine gun bullets....Not even the cathedral was spared, the Guardia [using] its strategic position to turn it into a fortress....*

The family I lived with for the next month, the Zeledons, are as representative as any in their experience apart from their exceptionally good fortune: Though they lost all their belongings, they suffered no deaths, in spite of being as involved as anyone. The *muchachos*—Edgard and William (aged 14 and 13 at the time)—fought the *Guardia* in the streets while their mothers and sisters prepared and brought them food.

*The story they tell is one of almost unremitting terror. The soldiers broke through the front doors of each house on their street, searching for the males over 12 years old. Though they managed to escape out back, the Guardia stole everything they had...leaving the house bare. Then there was the relentless bombardment. Somoza's planes—four of them—made bombing passes from sunrise to sunset. Whenever the bombers would strike their barrio, the family would gather out back, huddled against the brick wall of a lean-to shed with little more than their prayers for protection. Three houses down [the street], on the corner, the solitary front wall of a gutted house stands as mute reminder of how near the bombs fell.*

*Many friends and neighbors weren't so lucky. On one night in June, the Guardia broke into the house of the Laguna family nearby, murdering two family members. The same night they knocked on the door of the Mantilla Ocampo family. When Señor Mantillo answered, he was killed on the spot, and the guardsmen then entered and slew his wife, not even sparing their daughter in the crib. Most unfortunate, though, were those who were taken to a hacienda outside town, where the Guardia tortured and killed their victims, gouging out eyes and cutting out tongues and placing them on display.*

*The victory more than five years ago should have ended all this, but it hasn't. The Zeledons...told me that many of these psychopaths, reincarnated as "freedom fighters," have returned to prowl the...country side. So the tales of horror persist. A middle-aged*

*couple who lived on the next block were recently seized, tortured and killed by the contras while out harvesting coffee north of the city. Campesinos speak of the calling cards left by the contras in the wake of their attacks on the agricultural cooperatives: grotesque mutilation of the dead, and the dumping of corpses down wells so as to render them unusable...*

At the heart of the food distribution system that has [turned] begging into an anachronism stand the very organizations—the *Comites de Defensa Sandinista* (CDS)—that are often accused (as in the *New Republic*, Oct. 8) of being the prime agents of “totalitarian” control. They are small neighborhood organizations, originally born of the needs of the [Sandinista] insurrection that are today the grassroots of the Revolution, administering its programs at the local level...

[Regarding the influence of Soviet politics] some influential Sandinistas go further, engaging in outright worship of the Soviet system. This was the single most troubling phenomenon I encountered in Nicaragua, all the more troubling because these persons dominate the official FSLN communications media. [The Sandinista paper] *Barricada*, SSTV, and FSLN-run radio stations put out a regular stream of features lauding the achievements of socialism in the Soviet bloc, including such Shangri-las as East Germany, Bulgaria, and North Korea. They refuse to acknowledge any parallels between their predicament and that of the Poles or Afghans, reserving exclusive use of the term *imperialismo* for the United States....

Yet Nicaragua is significantly different from any of the Soviet bloc nations. Apart from the major contribution of Christian thought and practice to...the Revolution, the current electoral campaign is virtually without precedent in existing Marxist polities. Although the Reagan administration has already pronounced the elections meaningless, and it is viewed with extreme skepticism in the U.S. media, it is a far cry from Soviet-style elections...[that] approve a single pre-selected slate. Nicaraguan citizens will have seven complete slates to choose among. Although three of the parties opposing the FSLN are fringe communist groups, the other three probably deserve a more serious hearing than the U.S. press and television appear ready to give them. The country’s two main pre-Revolutionary parties are represented in the Conservative Democrats and Independent Liberals, the latter being the breakaway anti-Somoza wing of the old Liberal Party; the Popular Social Christians seek to represent the moderate Christian sentiment.

(Editor’s note [in original]: As this issue went to press, the withdrawal of the Independent Liberals, led by Virgilio Godoy, reduced the number of slates to six and outdated parts of this report. The reasons for the withdrawal and its effects will be covered in a later article.)

As I moved from Esteli to Managua in mid-July, I was astonished at the high visibility of the opposition’s campaign. With the exception of the two most extreme communist groups, I found each of the parties well represented in giant billboards lining the major thoroughfares...

A series of supplements in two of the three daily newspapers ( [the conservative paper] *La Prensa* has sided with the...three parties...boycotting the election) described the details of the electoral process in easy-to-understand cartoons, listed neighborhood registration addresses and explained how to register, and set forth the binding code of ethics. The code mandates respect for...for opposition political parties, prohibiting slander

and vilification of opponents; it forbids the distribution of gifts and intoxicating substances... Weapons, propaganda, and drunkenness are banned from the polling places... as are efforts to register or vote twice. Intimidating people to vote or refrain from voting by the use of violence or threats bring 6 to 12 months in jail... Supervision of the electoral law is [done by] an independent agency—the Supreme Electoral Council, described as “the fourth branch of government”—the majority of whose members are drawn from the opposition political parties.

To date the most serious infraction of the electoral law has been that of Arturo Cruz and his coalition of abstentionist parties, who while refusing to register for the election have insisted on campaigning anyway—to discredit the election. Cruz has been widely portrayed in the U.S. [media] as having been arbitrarily excluded from the election by the Sandinistas, and has been shown hounded by violent FSLN mobs whenever he tries to address a public rally. What has not been explained is that Cruz made a number of special demands, most notably that the government enter into negotiations with the contras as a precondition for his participation. It is as if Walter Mondale were to require that Ronald Reagan negotiate arms control with the Soviet Union as a precondition in the November election in the U.S. The Electoral Council suggested that Cruz could make negotiation with the contras a plank in his platform, thereby allowing the Nicaraguan people to decide the issue in democratic fashion. Cruz refused. But, as a high official of Cruz’ coalition told *The Washington Post* in late July, the coalition had never seriously intended to participate in the election....

It is also worth noting (but little reported in the U.S.) that it was not the FSLN but the moderate parties that petitioned the Supreme Electoral Council to end the legal existence of Cruz’ party, and it was their voices within the Council that carried the motion. . . .

I was intrigued by the ways in which the press responded to [various election] developments. Most striking were *La Prensa*’s attacks on the moderate parties contesting the election. Instead of reporting on the content of PLI candidate Godoy’s campaign speeches... it... featured a front-page article claiming that Nicaraguan workers had known Godoy as a tyrant who never looked after their interests. Early this year *The New York Times* described Godoy as “generally respected” by all parties for his stewardship of the Ministry of Labor. *La Prensa* has since maintained a steady stream of vituperation aimed at the PLI, the PPSC, and the Democratic Conservatives, denouncing them as fellow-travelers of the FSLN and denying them both objective coverage and advertising space.

(Editor’s note [in original]:) Godoy and the PLI received favorable coverage in *La Prensa* after they withdrew from the election campaign. . . .

*Barricada*, as the official newspaper of the FSLN, has likewise contributed little to the cause of pluralism. [Only] *El Nuevo Diario*<sup>35</sup> [has given the] opposition parties a press platform... to make their appeals. It has done so in two ways: by front-page coverage of the campaigns, and by printing full-page campaign advertisements setting forth party platforms. It has, in addition, printed lists of candidates.

Nothing resembling this electoral process has ever occurred in the Soviet bloc. Though there are some disturbing signs of alignment with that bloc, the wonder is that

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<sup>35</sup> “The New Day”; *The Times* regularly called it a “pro-government” paper but it was in fact center-left.

Nicaragua is [also] taking major steps that are distinguishing it in important ways from both the Soviet Union and Cuba... (pp. 412-429)

*Andrew Reding...is founder and former president of Isles, Inc., a not-for-profit group established in 1980 to promote socially and ecologically responsible development...Now a foreign affairs analyst and writer, Reding has contributed articles to C&C, The Christian Century, World Policy Journal, Anima and International Interactions.*

This political travelogue meets our stated criteria for WTDS in two paragraphs on Esteli, one on the border zone and one on Somoza's National Guard, but it is most relevant for its take on civil-political rights. It is no small matter to re-emphasize that state terror rarely occurs in countries with freedom of speech and fair elections. So these issues are crucial to any holistic discussion of human rights and dirty war.

First, we should note that our trust is engendered by the risks he takes as a lone traveler across a much-contested actual, not conceptual, territory. Second, this too is a relatively novel or underused form: travel writing as political critique and human-rights assessment. We should also note that Reding is quite evenhanded about Soviet-style influence in Nicaragua. He says it exists, would be troubling if it grew but that in most fundamental ways the system does not resemble a Soviet-bloc nation. With only isolated exceptions, it observes freedom of speech, media, association and political organization and free and fair elections. This assessment stands in dramatic contrast to the frames used by the Reagan administration and *The Times*. He has seen good evidence of respect for civil liberties and in the arena of social and economic rights, an economic safety net, if not prosperity, within a economy that is 60% private—widely noted, though not by Reding. He also debunks the evils of the

neighborhood defense committees as covered by *New Republic*, also negatively by *The Times* and other mainstream media.

But the most useful part of the article is that he provides a detailed, nuanced analysis of the dynamics and manipulations of the 1984 election process, the first elections since the revolution. Reding believes that the Reagan administration grossly misrepresented these elections. It was not a one-party sham. In rhetoric less strident than that of Herman and Chomsky (1988), he supports their view that *The Times* bought the Reagan-team's frames and distorted the fairness of the elections. He also is at pains to explain the cynical strategy of the "abstentionist" parties, the coalition led by Virgilio Godoy, made much of but largely misread by U.S. media.

On the other hand, he is quite critical of state-run media: the newspaper *Barricada* and Sandinista radio and television. He says that the worst emulation of a Soviet-style political system comes from state media, not the election process or censorship (temporary and designed to punish *La Prensa* when it published lies that could have caused economic or political panic). Overall, he notes free speech is widely observed: a key example is that the opposition newspaper can be bought even where those the paper champions, the *contras*, are indiscriminately killing civilians and shelling cities. Many governments would have at least prevented it from sale in the war zone, he says, if not shut it down. Reding revisited Nicaragua in 1986 and to report on the results of the constitutional assembly (building a new government) for *C&C*. He still found much political pluralism but also noted that the social goals of the revolution were being undone by the economic blockade and the *contra* war.

**Remembrance as witness: From the annals of the martyrs.** These last two excerpts return *C&C* to one of its time-honored stables of talent, liberal professors of theology, in this case, with connections to *C&C*'s birthplace, Union Theological Seminary in New York. From the early 1970s into the 2000s, Robert McAfee Brown and Dorothee Soelle were important Euro-American interpreters of liberation theology for European and North American audiences. Both taught at Union, looked fondly on the social-political experiment in Nicaragua, visited at various times and mourned its sabotage by the United States. An aside in his article indicates that Brown was likely a participant in Witness for Peace. Both deal with human-rights abuses and witness to suffering, nearby and distant, and both bring recognition to otherwise unknown, and in media terms, "unworthy" victims: three martyrs.

#### **A Difference in Nicaragua**

By Robert McAfee Brown <sup>36</sup>

[February 1, 1988]

I spent most of the 19-hour trip from Managua back to San Francisco searching for an answer to the question I knew I would be asked repeatedly: "What are the differences between Nicaragua today and the Nicaragua you visited two years ago?" I formulated some general answers—worse poverty, more killings, deeper comradeship—but they lacked specificity.

*The specificity was waiting for me in Palo Alto. The letter I opened out of the accumulated mail contained the news that Carmen Mendieta had been murdered by the contras on Wednesday, December 2, at 11 a.m. on the road between Paiwas and Rio Blanco. That was a degree of specificity I had not wanted. And with heart-rending simplicity I could formulate the difference between...then and...now: Two years ago, Carmen Mendieta was alive; today she is dead.*

Carmen Mendieta was the mother of seven children, aged two to fifteen, living in Paiwas, the little town where the road going east ends and the jungle trail begins. Carmen was head of a local chapter of AMNLAE, the national Nicaraguan women's organization,

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<sup>36</sup> Robert McAfee Brown was a professor emeritus of theology and ethics at the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, California, when died in 2001. He taught at Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota, Union Theological in New York City, his alma mater, Stanford University in Stanford, California, again at Union and then at Pacific until his retirement. He wrote 29 books and was one of the main Protestant interpreters of liberation theology in North America.

and was in charge of the sewing cooperative. Along with her husband, who teaches carpentry in the local school, she was also a Delegate of the Word in the local parish of Cristo Rey—a Catholic layperson who had been trained to work with children, help parents understand the meaning of baptism, and instruct engaged couples in the meaning of marriage.

A friend and I lived in Carmen's home for the better part of a week in January 1986. Her husband helped us sling hammocks across their living room to keep us away from the lizards that claimed squatters' rights to the dirt floor. Carmen (as we later realized) got up earlier than usual each morning to prepare a more substantial breakfast for the two gringos than her own children would later receive. We played with their seven children despite language difficulties (balloons are almost as good as a dictionary), and through an interpreter talked with Carmen and Damos about their life...and their work with the church. I have on my desk a photograph of myself in a Witness for Peace T-shirt getting help from Jamalita, the 13-year-old daughter who wants to be a doctor, in reading a story in Spanish to the other children.

*On the morning of December 2, 1987, Carmen climbed into the back of the flatbed truck to go to Rio Blanco, 15 miles away, to purchase electrical wire for the child-care center under construction in Paiwas. Eight members of the local militia were along to guard the truck, a standard procedure. Along the way a woman and a young girl hitchhiking from another town were picked up, another standard procedure. And then came the unstandard procedure. A Claymore mine in the road was activated, and the contras sent a grenade through the windshield of the immobilized vehicle with enough force to kill Carmen and the other two women sitting in the back of the truck.*

I made that same trip from Paiwas to Rio Blanco in that same truck three times in the few days we were there. I can imagine the place where the slaughter may have occurred. I can imagine Carmen sharing her excitement about the child-care center with the woman and girl from the next village. I can imagine her saying that Jamalita was going to work in the center with her. What I cannot imagine is why Ronald Reagan is so threatened by the Nicaraguan government that he hires mercenaries to kill Carmen Mendieta and people like her.

When I returned from Paiwas two years ago, I wrote an article about her husband's hands. At 4 a.m. one Sunday morning I had seen those hands holding a rifle as he crept out of the house in response to a signal the contras were close to the town. At 11 a.m. that same Sunday morning I had seen those same hands make the sign of the cross on the foreheads of children at mass, and then, as a Delegate of the Word, administer the rite of Christian baptism to them. Hands able to inflict death had, within a matter of hours, been transformed into hands that could bestow new life. A sign of hope, I concluded.

But I concluded too soon. For after December 2, 1987, at 11 a.m., there were new tasks for the hands of Carmen Mendieta's husband. I imagine those hands in the woodshop of the village school, measuring boards, sawing them, planing them, nailing them together to fashion a coffin for the misshapen flesh that earlier that same day had been his wife. I see those same hands shoveling out the shallow pit for his wife's grave, and covering the coffin with earth when Fr. Jaime has completed the service of burial. And I see those same hands holding his seven children close to him at the graveside as a light goes out in their lives forever. If that is a sign of hope, it is...too high a price.

The angry side of me cries out for vengeance against supporters of a senseless war that leads to senseless death—and yet knows that vengeance is no way to honor Carmen Mendieta. The preacher side of me searches for words of consolation and strength for Carmen's family and fails to find them. The human side of me realizes that only stopping the war will stop the killing—and realizes that the obsessed man in the White House will never agree.

So in an almost despairing act of faith, I have to believe that Carmen Mendieta's death can still be transformed by the rest of us, into a power that is ultimately greater than the power of Ronald Reagan and George Shultz and Elliott Abrams; and that what we learn from her death and the deaths of thousands like her, can enable us to take from the killers their power to inflict death on all other Carmen Mendieta's at whom grenades have not yet been thrown. (pp. 5-6)

Brown's elegy is more discrete, and perhaps discreet, than the eulogy of discipleship below by Soelle. He does not go into great detail regarding the violence, instead writes an elegy as object lesson, not so much in the name of liberation as decency and humanity. His is a prayer for deliverance from wanton violence and a soft-spoken petition for mercy as geopolitical critique. It is not, as some might have done, a jeremiad, but it is denunciatory nonetheless. It demonstrates low-key literary qualities as he searches for, if not a moral, at least an edifying summary. Realizing that he will be asked to explain the difference in Nicaragua since a visit two years earlier, he focuses on the difference one Carmen Mendieta made, a constructive communitarian difference, not the destructive difference of war. He notes how her husband split the difference between war and peace, between life and death. With artistic poignancy, he notes her husband made the sign of the cross on his children's forehead, a sign of hope, he concluded in his earlier visit, and worked in the school's woodshop with the same hands that had to handle a rifle to defend them against *contra* attacks. But he concluded too soon, he realizes. Those hands will now build a

coffin. They remind us of William Faulkner's (1967) carpenter in *As I Lay Dying*, Cash Bundren, making his mother's coffin with meticulous care.

Brown had made the same trip, had ridden in the same truck, in which Mendieta was killed. We sense the unspoken feeling that there but for grace of not so much God, but US citizenship, go I. Mendieta had helped with the building of a child-care center, and Brown asks why President Reagan feels he has to hire mercenaries to kill those who build child-care centers. The question is less rhetorical than honest dismay—it is his denunciation. Finally, he has to look for the lesson in the event, if not the meaning. His message is simple: vengeance is no way to honor Carmen Mendieta, although he wants it for a moment. The other message is also simple: the difference between Nicaragua then and now is there are more innocent dead. The only way to stop that is to stop the *contra* war, his appeal for redress to anyone who will listen. This is in keeping with *C&C*'s humanized, this-worldly emphasis. It is also typical of Bob Brown, a man with a huge heart whose considerable intellect was often subtle and soft-spoken. The master schemas here are decency, peace and justice, and observance of human rights, not divine transcendence.

### **The Barredas: A Christmas Legend from Nicaragua—People Who Belong to God**

By Dorothee Soelle

[December 23, 1985]

We look for people, common, unknown people who belong to God, for saints in the sense that the Bible uses the word. We search for stories of encouragement which can teach us that the power of sin, which still imprisons us, is not eternal and not inescapable.<sup>37</sup> The first Christians called each other saints.<sup>38</sup>...They were not morally or ethically superior. They simply were people no longer controlled by sin<sup>39</sup>...

<sup>37</sup> Sin is defined in the modern/post-modern era, even by most evangelicals, as a broken relationship with God, self and others, not congenital evil.

<sup>38</sup> Meaning "believers" not paragons of virtue.

<sup>39</sup> She means no longer driven, or managed, by sin, by brokenness, as opposed to being above it.

According to tradition, stories of saints are called legends. A legend is a story to be read again and again and to be remembered. Legend also has the meaning of miracle. But believing in miracle does not mean passively gazing at the miracle maker in admiration. It means emulating the work. Jesus trusted his friends to heal the sick, to drive out demons, to feed the hungry, and to do all the things he did. The legends of the saints are of the same order. We listen to learn how to live our lives.

Listen then to the legend of Felipe and Maria Eugenia Barreda, a couple from Esteli, in the north of Nicaragua. These common people, Christians and Sandinistas, belonged to God, even unto death. Their story is a story of Nicaragua.

In Nicaragua, coffee is a key source of income, and people are mobilized...to work in the annual harvests. In December 1982, a group of citizens from Esteli volunteered for the work. Alicia, a health worker, tells what happened:

*In the night of December 24 some of the people in charge told us to get ready to move forward because we were needed. Doña Maria and Don Felipe got up immediately and said they were available to go where they were needed. They were moved to the Honduran border. A few days later their group was raided by a band of contras. The two Barredas were kidnapped, taken to Honduras, tortured and killed. "When they went to pick coffee, they grew over themselves<sup>40</sup> into death," their coworkers later said.*

Who were the Barredas? Felipe, born in 1931 to a very poor family, started as a jeweler and later worked as a watchmaker. He often repaired the watches of [the] poor...without pay; his son reports [up to half the bills] remained unpaid.

Maria, born in 1933, came from a family that was slightly better off. She worked in a beauty salon. Then, Felipe won a lottery, and they were able to live a more comfortable life. Maria quit her job at the salon. But the Barredas never became rich. They put their money into traveling and the education of their children, whom they sent abroad. They were deeply devout, traditional Catholic Christians. Their marriage was depicted by those who knew them as loving and caring. Their house was open to everyone. A son reports, "I cannot recall a single day when we ate our meal alone. There were always people around who did not belong to the family."

During the insurrection against the dictatorship of Somoza, the Barredas gave refuge to Sandinista soldiers and worked more and more with the Sandinista movement. This continued after the triumph of the revolution in 1979. Felipe said that a jeweler's trade was...for the rich; he decided to do watch repairing. Maria became a member of a neighborhood defense committee (CDS) and worked as its political secretary. Felipe did not aim at a public political career; he committed himself to the church. His wife, though, was so occupied with the reconstruction of Esteli, which had suffered more destruction than any other Nicaraguan city, that he jokingly said: "We won the revolution but I lost my wife."

To Maria, working with the poor became [very] important. A weak, undernourished child...hurt her deeply. She started to support women in a poor barrio, mostly single

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<sup>40</sup> Beyond their physical existence.

mothers. Maria won their trust and became...a counselor, healer, and teacher. “We could trust the Barredas like a priest,” people said.

Felipe started working for the Christian *cursillo*, adult education for lay people who then became catechizers. These courses were often taken by...conservative people who wanted an individual, spiritual experience unrelated to the social realities facing the country. They tried to keep their religion free from the reality of injustice and human suffering. In contrast, the Barredas...recognized...that Christians might withdraw from the process of social responsibility and not get involved. They also saw the revolution had to move beyond the overthrow of the dictator to establish a new and more just distribution of wealth. They believed that it was precisely the task of the church to train people for the necessary stages of [this social] learning....

Were Maria and Felipe Marxists? One coworker who lived like a son in their house replied: “No, they were Christians, not Marxists. But they understood the meaning of Marxism as it is applied in Nicaragua—creatively, not dogmatically. They respected the culture of the...people....They did not see a contradiction. Above all, they knew how to love and keep friendship with those who did not share their political ideas....

### **I am a revolutionary**

Maria Eugenia Barreda’s courage and conviction is evident in a confession she wrote a few months before her death:

Ever since I said yes to the Lord...I have believed I was following his steps in the Gospel, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, loosing the fetters of oppression and looking for a more just society. Why am I a revolutionary? Because I believe that these are the aims I always searched for and that the option for the poor is related to the well-being of the majority....This revolution of ours is not the ideal society, but it is...a rung on the ladder toward making society more perfect. And if I don’t participate...how then can I be useful to the poor? How can it help the poor to stand comfortably by with crossed arms and negate our Christian commitment to preach the Gospel?

Why did these beloved and respected people have to die? A daughter explains: “My mother knew that she wasn’t going in order to achieve something in the coffee harvest. She had never been a coffee worker. They went with the sense they should be an example. They never were people of words but of deeds, and it was natural of them to offer an example.”

*When the Barredas, along with several other members of their coffee-picking brigade, were taken prisoner by contras, their daughter knew they were going to die, “given the character of my mother.” The contra who tortured, and finally shot, them carries the nickname El Muerto (Death). He was later captured and imprisoned in Managua. From...a few of the Barredas’ companions, who were taken to Honduras with them but [escaped], we know what happened in the first days of January 1983 in the U.S. military camp, Pine Tree One, where the Barredas were held.*

*Before arriving at the camp, Maria Barreda was gang-raped. She arrived naked, suffering severe vaginal bleeding. Felipe Barreda had been wounded by the contras*

*and had lost much blood. Since he could not walk, the contras bound him with a rope to a horse and pulled him to Pine Tree One. The Barredas were beaten, kicked and smashed with the handle of a pistol.*

*El Muerto had hastily called in Honduran television and wanted to make the Barredas renounce the revolution for the campaneros. He asked Don Felipe what his commitment to the revolution was. Don Felipe replied that he was a Christian and involved with his people, which obligated him to take part in the coffee harvest. He had not gone for pay, he felt free, he regretted nothing, nothing whatsoever. His response so provoked El Muerto that he kicked and beat Felipe again. When he realized that the torture was ineffective, he left the prisoners all night in [the] rain under an open sky.*

### **I am a Christian**

When the Sandinistas questioned El Muerto after his torture, he said he killed the Barredas because it was impossible to break their morale: “We could not make them adaptable. When we suggested they save their lives by working in our struggle, they responded, “We have been Christians and Sandinistas for many years. We will never stop being what we are.”

El Muerto was also asked if it was true the Barredas, Sandinistas and practicing Catholics, wanted to pray at the end. “Everyone has his own beliefs. Everyone does what his faith tells him; it is up to one’s conscience.” El Muerto said, “I am a Christian. I am a Catholic.” Is the catechism one thing and your job another, he was asked. “That’s correct. When I receive an order, such as we just talked about, then I can’t refuse. I would have been arrested and handcuffed.”...

[The Barredas’] relatives and people [they fed, counseled and taught] have not taken [their] sacrifice...as a tragedy or fate. Their death, as violent and gruesome as it was, is a sign of their exemplary life.

It is a privilege to die as they did, said one son. “Through their example I know that I cannot be a perfect revolutionary if I am not a Christian and that I am not an authentic Christian if I am not a revolutionary.”... (pp. 513-516)

*Dorothee Soelle,<sup>41</sup> a theological writer based in Hamburg, West Germany, teaches often at Union Theological Seminary in New York and has contributed frequently to C&C. She heard the story of the Barredas during a visit to their home, Esteli, Nicaragua, in 1984. This “meditation” grew from what she heard then and from two books, one in German, the other in Spanish. Quotations are from Dieter Eich and Carlos Rincon, La Contra: The War Against Nicaragua (Hamburg, 1984), and Teofilo Cabesero, Death Will Not Separate Them (Madrid, 1985).*

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<sup>41</sup> Soelle died in 2003. Perhaps best known for *Suffering* (1975), she debunks the notion that God is all-powerful and a cause of suffering. Instead, God suffers with human beings. When humans are powerless, God is powerless alongside them, but works with them as they struggle together to overcome oppression, sexism, ethnic prejudice or persecution and other forms of authoritarianism.

This is homage to an extraordinarily giving couple. Not coincidentally, this Maria and Felipe Barreda are the aunt and uncle of Digna Barreda, whose ordeal with the *contras* is told in the Reed Brody report, part of *The Times* material examined earlier. The legacy of the Barredas extolled here places their horrible death in dramatic relief against their remarkable life and allows us to see why Soelle calls them “legends.” We should note that legends are an important way theological liberals interpret scripture: a legend, of the sort surrounding the prophets and the Christ of faith—rather than the Jesus of history, a crucial epistemological difference—is history transformed for a moral meaning. (German biblical scholar Herman Gunkel called the stories of the Exodus and the prophets “sagas.”) Soelle also emphasizes that these two were Christians first, and then revolutionaries, not vice versa.

In this tradition, the Barredas almost resemble the martyrs one reads about from early Christianity, praising God while facing the lions. And yet Soelle makes them accessible in way Chouliaraki would recognize by recounting normal events in their lives before and after the revolution, events framed by a unstinting desire to give back to the community, to help others materially and spiritually. Felipe gives up being a jeweler, largely to the rich, to repair watches, many for free. Even extraordinary serendipity in their lives makes them seem “normal”: Felipe wins the lottery but chooses not to live as an aristocrat, instead uses the money for travel and the best education they can find for their children. In a role reversal, after the revolution, Maria does political work while Felipe works for the church. Here we have God talk and confessional similar to *Sojourners*, except that, after an introduction providing

spiritual context, the devotional statements come from the Barredas and those who witnessed their lives and death.

Soelle (1974) was one of Europe's leading Christian-Marxists and did not hesitate to emphasize either the Christian or Marxist side of that equation. But in keeping with an ethic that does not privilege global northerners over southerners, she lets Maria Barreda witness to her own faith, a faith in both God and revolution, and her friends to her suffering. And it is a consummate suffering, not in a crazy, arrogant or doctrinaire way, but in a way that makes her, in Chouliaraki's (2008) terms, a "thoroughly humanized and historical being," one who "feels, reflects and acts on her suffering," a suffering that carries the power of a martyred saint, a believer, Soelle means. Her life becomes a Christological imprint.

Relative to *Sojourners*, and in keeping with *C&C*'s more humanized theology, Soelle does not say God's ways are not ours, does not invoke God's will regarding atrocities that claim the lives of the morally gifted, does not seek consolation in a heavenly reward for the Barredas. Instead she lets the story itself, the Barredas' words and actions, frame a message of sacrifice and renewal—and "miracle." The miracle is that there are people like the Barredas. The Reagans and Schultzes of the world say this is the kind of giving to others they most admire, but instead they destroy it, Soelle would say. So this a profoundly political act, a story that makes the Reagan team's fantasies about *contras* being morally equivalent to the US founding fathers a deception as dark as the rape, torture and murder of Maria Barreda.

In fact, even with the gruesome accounts of torture and murder, the most shocking revelation may well be the Nazi-like comments by El Muerto ("just following

orders”), along with his views on freedom of conscience. This quote alone is an exposé of US policy as damning as any revelations of drugs for guns or arms for hostages. Yet it is nowhere near the final word. It merely belongs to the banality of evil. As with the liberal interpretation of the “legend” of Jesus of Nazareth, in which his legacy is his life, not his death, so it is with the Barredas. As with the instruction to love one’s enemies, for the Barredas all relationships were cosmopolitan.

Our trust in this account is built through the conventional journalistic practice of multiple sourcing, including two books, and the risks taken by those testifying to the Barredas’ legacy as they negotiate the field of witnessing under the threat of terror. Soelle knows well by this time how “the personal is the political” and uses it in ways North American feminists may never have dreamed of. She understands how witness to suffering, near or distant, when recounted with fidelity to facts *and* values, is how unknown victims—Herman and Chomsky’s meaning of “unworthy”—become worthy. And known. And how they become an inspiration.

## **Chapter 9**

### **The Nature of Witness, its Ethical Dilemmas and the Impact of the Third Side:**

**Summary and Conclusions—  
with Notes on Theoretical Issues**

### **Witness: History, Semantics and the Veracity Gap**

Witness to distant suffering is something the media have confronted, practiced and agonized over for quite some time. It long predates visual media and has been a recurring part of print media at the very least since the Civil War, when the invention of the telegraph allowed for near-real-time war reporting. But in most other ways, it probably could be dated from the writings of Josephus or Thucydides. Only with the advent of film and photography has it been possible to simulate an eyewitness experience. Prior to that, and for a long time afterward, reporters were the trusted emissaries, the surrogate eyes and ears, of the audience. There is no compelling reason theoretically or practically to restrict it to visual media. As long as we are not fixated on an overly literal, foreshortened notion of witness, one that insists the audience have visual contact, it is just as much a part of print. This is most possible if narrative detail—physical, social, political, economic—empathic, pictorial writing and editorial integrity are sufficient to the task. At its best, it is a high form of the art and craft.

It does not consist of technology but risk-taking reporters and trusted organizations. In terms articulated by Herman and Chomsky (1988), it can make previously “unworthy,” meaning unknown, victims “worthy,” meaning their suffering is known in depth, in detail. We all fear suffering alone and dying in anonymity. If the victims have died, this does not, of course, bring them back, but it makes their lives more meaningful. At its best, it can make the relatively powerful reflect, for a moment at least, on the often-avoidable suffering of the much less so. While it is impossible to focus on all the world’s victims, as Boltanski (1999) laments, a detailed

reflection is often the least the media owe to those who have suffered and died, particularly those seen as the Other: dissidents in authoritarian client states, the relatively innocent in and around movements for social justice and those subject to state or insurgent terror.

All witness is contested; all is built on trust. Trust is not a given; it is socially constructed. There are many layers and levels of witness and many layers and levels of trust. Peters (2001) breaks these down into witnessing agent, text and audience. Ashuri and Pinchenski (2008) talk about “zones of contention” in which there is always a struggle for agency, voice and audience. Terminology is less important than process. We could call them “nodes of resistance and conductance,” as I did to emphasize the “alternating current” of trust. We could discuss the hermeneutics of faith and suspicion. But whatever we call them, they are just the limitations of finitude. They exist wherever there is a transmission of consciousness: in the event of suffering or the victims, in the reporter or the organization, in the text or the audience. All are bounded by social, political and economic interests that may have nothing to do with the agent’s, victim’s or audience’s interests, and may distort the witnessing.

Boltanski (1999) and Chouliaraki (2008) develop typologies that place kinds of WTDS on a spectrum of events and responses. These are useful but not exhaustive and should not be seen as static, reified concepts. However, both provide insight into the psychology of WTDS. More important than their typologies, perhaps, both seek to connect a “chain of concern” back to the victims, even as they point to manifold obstacles interfering with the public’s attempt to address such suffering. To deal effectively with WTDS means we have to come to grips with both narratives of

“conductance” and “resistance”—with the search for a persecutor, a benefactor and the nameless horror itself, on one hand, and with the many ways humans can miss, shade, distort or deny the truth, on the other, a gap as it were.

Witnessing has a long history with many meanings that Peters (2001) explores as well as anyone. But he does so with an epistemological bias for presence, or its simulation through visual media, even though the very tradition he explores makes it clear that for most of human history, we had no such technology and relied on testimony and trust. Even with visual media, we confront the manifold intricacies of trust and must judge any report holistically. Peters breaks down WTDS in terms of distance from the event, giving the most authority to presence in time and space, and the least to recorded witness. However, such a view founders on a lack of moral imagination. It suffers from what philosopher Alfred North Whitehead (1919/1927) called the fallacy of misplaced concreteness, the notion that one can locate truth.

If one trusts the mediators, has found them reliable in the past, and if many thousands or millions of others have, then WTDS is more a moral than a technological act. It depends on believing a witness, an organization and your own eyes, ears and, most importantly, cerebrum, that is, your own habitus and schemas, the micro-scale to macro-scale knowledge base that involves critical faculties, powers of abstraction and experience with suffering, near and far. Peters (2001) says that witnessing has “two faces,” a passive seeing and an active saying. Between these two lies the gap: “Testimony is another's discourse whose universe of reference diverges from one's own. Like somebody else's pain, it always has a twilight status between certainty and doubt” (p. 710).

To deal with this distance, tests have evolved: signature, witnesses to one's own witness, such as a notary or corroborating testimony, or swearing on one's ancestors, on the Bible or by God. Peters (2001) notes the first and last, then explains that we have also resorted to testing the body: polygraphs, torture, even death. In ancient Greece, a slave was thought to tell the truth only under torture, but a citizen would speak it readily because he was free. Still, this has more to do with the anthropological Other, with the psychology of I-Thou over I-It, than breeding or education. But it does bring us back to Boltanski's communitarian relationships over cosmopolitan. Peters also cites French philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1981), who notes that when a witness is willing to die for his or her beliefs, the witness becomes a martyr. But the root of "martyr" means *witness*, so, ironically: "The martyr's death proves nothing for certain, but demonstrates the limit-case of persuasion, the vanishing point at which proof stops and credence begins" (Peters, 2001):

The whole apparatus of trying to assure truthfulness, from torture to martyrdom to courtroom procedure, only testifies to the strange lack at its core. Witnessing is necessary, but not sufficient: if there are no witnesses, there is no trial, but witnesses do not secure a conviction or acquittal. A witness is never conclusive... despite the most militant attempts of martyrs or torturers to make it so. (p. 713)

He calls this "the veracity gap," a problem not just intellectual but moral. Ultimately, he means to say, we must believe someone. What martyrdom does reveal, though, is that the witness believed, no small thing. While the history of the meaning of witnessing is fascinating, we are left with an epistemological surd, an irreducible whole: belief based on greater or lesser quantities and qualities of evidence, and especially, the legacy of the reporter and organization. For those of us interested in

pragmatic or even approximate ethics, the issue has to be confronted but can become a dead end: How many victims can cry out on the tip of a pen? Or a microphone?

Fortunately, journalists are schooled in who is credible and how to substantiate claims—mostly by multiple sourcing and extensive reading and digging. Often these work in the long run, but can fail in the face of deadlines and commercial pressures. Resistance to conventional and authoritarian wisdom is limited by finite organizational capital and political pressures, within or without the organization. The reading public uses its habitus to ascertain, often immediately, always quickly, whether to believe a report. It has no time for lie detectors or the methods of the court and can be fooled by power and prestige alone. It also might be that Americans are insular enough in their relative affluence that they can afford to be ignorant of life in other countries. Many have little or no experience living abroad. So to many, stories like those told in *C&C* and *Sojourners* are hard to believe and harder to relate to (Smith, 1996; John Bender, personal communication, July 2010).

We return to Boltanski's quandary in which WTDS boils down to vested interests and relationships of force. His question, however, is not whether there are valid victims (he knows there are), but whether the audience can be morally and practically engaged to help, and which can be expected to help which, the list is so endless. However, Peters' deliberations do bring us to into the presence of martyrs.

### **Somewhere Between a New Heaven and a New Earth: What Is To Be Done?**

As much as we might want to, we can't really say that witness to distant suffering, as featured here or elsewhere, is an homage to the martyrs. Nor is this study itself.

But we can say we wish to mark their passing by illuminating a kind of reporting that believes they died honorably, and that their deaths shed light in a darkness. They are the real story in this study and defy easy analysis or summary. For one thing, there were somewhere near 120,000 of them, military and civilian, most of them civilians and unworthy (in the terms of Herman & Chomsky, 1988), very few known to North Americans before, after or at the time of their deaths. If the dead from the Sandinista revolution are included, which the United States assisted by supporting the Somoza family, it becomes nearly 150,000 in both countries, the vast majority of them civilians killed by forces we funded, armed and trained, or by paramilitaries directed by a government we supported.

In the final analysis, the more reductive approaches of Ellis and Peters lead to interesting places theoretically but to practical cul-de-sacs. In the end, we have only multi-variable analyses and holistic decision-making and the knowledge that most attempts to redress mass suffering will likely be little enough, fairly late and all-too partial. Ultimately, as Michael Schudson and Tony Dokoupil (2007) say, journalism can't do everything. In "What Journalism Can't Do," a research report in *CJR*, they extrapolate from a study by a psychologist at the University of Oregon, Paul Slovic, who seems to show that psychic numbing increases with numbers of victims. Slovic asked paid participants in a mock study if they would donate earnings from the study to a child chosen from Save the Children, or two. He gave them photos and information on the organization. People were more likely to give to one child than two. The authors (2007) say:

That's not exactly news. People ranging from Mother Jones ("If I look at the mass, I will never act. If I look at the one, I will.") to, reportedly, Stalin ("A single death is a tragedy; a million deaths is a statistic.") have long recognized that people confronted by large-scale human suffering are often overwhelmed. But it is a new and unsettling twist that compassion begins to fail with the mere addition of a second person. (p. 62)

They (2007) cite Slovic's interpretation:

It seems our brains have evolved to be very good at responding to immediate threats—the predator in the bush, the friend caught in the flood—but fail to act when large, far-off groups are in danger. We have what amounts to old parochial brains in a new globalized world....

Ultimately...Slovic contends that journalism's ability to overcome mankind's inherent "psychological deficiencies" is limited. Instead, he counsels, we must "design legal and institutional mechanisms that will enforce proper response to genocide and other crimes against humanity." (p, 62)

We should take care about making sweeping generalizations from one instance of experimental psychology, as they do, but there are at least two well-considered responses to this study. First, it may point to a rehabilitation of personalization in reporting, as with Bonner's profile of Alvarez. The individual profile can make horrific events comprehensible by making them real (Chouliaraki, 2008).

Biographical detail and historical context can humanize a victim and make a massive tragedy more psychologically manageable. These are the same narrative techniques that Herman and Chomsky (1988) say make an unworthy victim more meaningful.

The second response takes off in a different direction. In fact, we know that people do respond to masses in need. This is most evident in responses to natural disasters, the most recent being the Haitian earthquake of January 2010. In events in which victims seem especially random and their suffering undeserved, a general

outpouring is possible, and while individual stories are told, the public is clearly responding *en masse* to a mass of victims.

Moreover, in these cases, mainstream media have no reservations about running notices for a wealth of organizations, religious and secular, giving aid to the victims and soliciting donations or volunteers. In early February 2010, in a section devoted to Haitian earthquake relief, the Web site of the *Omaha World-Herald*, Omaha.com, carried 46 such notices. The problem is that one disaster soon eclipses another, but that is beyond the scope of this study. We have another, equally thorny problem to confront. Natural disasters allow the mainstream media to promote NGOs that can help, but human-made disasters, disasters of political economy, are not included. For the most part, only alternative media do this. However, if the perpetrator is the dehumanized Other, as with Nazis, communists or jihadists, mainstream media more freely promote assistance to victims, usually in articles or commentary, sometimes in notices, ads or public service announcements. Here we have the perversion of the communitarian difference: dissenting victims in oppressive nations that are our enemies are like us and valorized—the enemy of my enemy is my friend, a communitarian relationship masquerading as cosmopolitan. Yet those in oppressive nations we support can be abused and silenced, and then, even more ironically, are driven into the arms of our enemies.

Peters' (2001) elegant discourse on semantics, and it is, does not much help us here, nor his gradations of vicarious witness (lesser accountability with temporal and physical distance), except as a statement of what is, not what ought to be.

Unfortunately, neither does Ellis (1999) and his implicated witness (full

responsibility). The first is too communitarian, too parochial, the second too cosmopolitan, too universal. And any golden mean reduces genocide to a perverse-seeming, if inevitable, cost-benefit analysis of the collective psyche, not to mention the national coffers or personal bank book.

In the existential heart of darkness into which a popular US president with an avuncular personality led a nation into two proxy wars, and thereby doomed thousands of the already doomed poor to torture and death, we read in the Christian-left journals of people of faith whose risk-taking, we are tempted to think, might be driven by delusion or desperation, rather than passion for a new deal for the poor. Of the dead we might wonder: What did they really expect? A new heaven and a new earth? Once we have restrained or suspended our disbelief, once we place a judicious faith in the mediators, their risk-taking cements our trust. Next in our awe and dismay are the journalists. They behave like cowboys and cowgirls of mercy. However, perhaps they could set aside their treasured independence briefly for some systematic geopolitical kindness. (Random acts of kindness are laudable, as are senseless acts of beauty, but far better are systematic acts of kindness and meaningful acts of beauty.)

Journalists could help in a few crucial ways—if editors and CEOs would let them. First, when they put themselves on the ground in a hot spot, they could work with human-rights workers to document abuses or warning signs. They could even build articles around indicators already created by the United Nations and others that point to a likelihood of abuse. These become part of an early warning system, part of Slovic's "legal and institutional mechanisms that will enforce proper response to genocide and other crimes against humanity." Without compromising impartiality,

they could make sure the UN's "special rapporteurs" (reporters) on various human rights get copies of articles, even the notes, that ensue. These are agents of the United Nations assigned to countries or specific issues such as food, housing, sanitation, freedom of expression or torture and killing. They become part of what the United Nations terms "special procedures" that warn of human-rights concerns. These are most often "letters of allegation" and "urgent appeals." They generally request a country visit so a rapporteur can investigate (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2009). The same journalists could then follow up, visit and publicize the reports of these investigations. As Boltanski (1999) says, the publicity alone may restrain leaders from further abusing their own people.

An epistemological corollary, mentioned earlier, is that defining WTDS in terms of human rights creates an operational definition of this form of witness, and the authority of the United Nations (similar to Amnesty in the sharia-verdict story) could be used to encourage people to donate. This rights-based approach to WTDS would also include social, economic and cultural rights, so it could be used for development or defense—even peacekeeping forces are often hampered by a limited budget. Cutting through endless contestations of political economy or social ethics, the UN's Declaration of Human Rights (2010; Appendix A) supplies a secular hermeneutic, and its special procedures a way to assess the gravity of the situation.

### **With New Eyes: The Mass Media and the Role of the Third Side**

One last aspect of any holistic approach to the media's role in addressing mass suffering involves "the third side." Paradoxically and more uplifting than most of

what we have just covered, reporting on abject violence can lead to conflict resolution. The third side consists of all the others, local, national or international, affected by the conflict. As the antagonists' interests are not the only ones at stake, a petition from the third side that they settle their differences peacefully changes the frame of the dispute. When other stakeholders are brought into it, their presence allows the antagonists to see themselves outside the binary straits of the conflict. This is what Rivera y Damas did when he invited all but the rebels and military to the National Debate for Peace. Through the eyes of the third side, suddenly aware of the ecology of relationships around them, they begin to see that the surrounding community, as innocent bystanders, bears most of the costs the belligerents cause. They have as much to lose and need to be heard.

Unlike the ultimate arbiter [such as] a king or authoritarian state, the third side is not a transcendent individual or institution who dominates all, but rather the *emergent will of the community*. It is an impulse that arises from the vital relationships linking each member and every other member of the community. (Ury, 2000, p. 14) [italics added]

When social conflict threatens the community, in bearing witness to any "slaughter of the innocents," the media's job is to call out this "emergent will," to tell others, some near, some far, about the crucial relationships that tie each member of the community to every other member. When the third side is engaged, the conflict broadens from good-bad dichotomies to multi-lateral interests. So Ury (2000) believes, and he has built this body of theory out of his own practice and that of others in conflict resolution.

For the Central America peace movement, the third side was a coalition of media and social movements, North and South, who saw that the costs of supporting

authoritarian regimes and undermining progressive governments had been hidden and that, once revealed, were too high morally and economically. As the Christian-left publications showed in graphic and sometimes agonizing detail, alternative media, as a kind of social fulcrum, were able to move the discursive options not just to the left (only slightly), but toward the center, toward reason. They used their increasing leverage with the mainstream media and the culture at large to get the former to rework its frames and the latter to revise its discursive range and values, at least in part. When the mainstream media abdicated their watchdog role, the alternative press, and attendant social movements, stood in for them and advocated for the third side. Doing so, they became the social conscience of the nation regarding this region. Media support and the mobilization of Witness for Peace, Sanctuary and the Pledge of Resistance also represented third-side roles and became a critical mass of resistance. As with Vietnam, it took a decade to stop the carnage, but they slowed it in the meantime. Of course, the alternative media needed the social movements as newsmakers. And these movements, more so, needed the media, alternative and mainstream, to carry their witness to the public.

### **Theoretical Models and Issues**

#### **What Kind of Concept Is This?**

Lastly, while witness to distant suffering is mostly a matter of practical urgency that should focus on stopping social implosions as soon as possible, we should probably address a theoretical quandary. Is there a conceptual category for WTDS

and does it need one? Is it a frame? Is it a “master frame” or “master narrative”? Is it a paradigm? A model?

I would not say it is a frame per se, which is more specific, but it can be applied to one. It needs to be integrated into a frame, which requires a concrete narrative with particular actors. But if it is more general, is it a paradigm? Thesaurus.com (2010) defines “paradigm” as “example.” Its synonyms are “archetype, beau ideal, chart, criterion, ensample, exemplar, ideal, mirror, model, original, pattern, prototype, sample, standard.” Does calling it a paradigm imply a worldview and value system and, if so, can WTDS be used with a variety of worldviews, or only some, such as those on the left? (A counter-example is that, largely because of the many Christians in southern Sudan and Darfur, the political right became very concerned about the genocide there and mobilized the Bush administration to pressure the Sudanese government.) On the other hand, is it a news category, like crime, sports or business? Do we have a category for “disaster news” and should it be put there? The point is that robust scholarly debate about this issue should begin. I want to call it a paradigm and define it as an important model of disaster reporting, one independent of technology but dependent on detailed coverage of natural or human-rights disasters that must be rendered as holistically as possible by the rigorous reporting, popular concern and moral vision of the journalist and organization.

### **Applying a Hermeneutics of Faith or Suspicion**

In revisiting the interpretive model we outlined in the beginning—the tension between a hermeneutics of “faith,” or restoration, as Josselson (2004) calls it, and one

of “suspicion,” or demystification—we should remember that she characterizes them as a dialectic. She says they are points of emphasis, implying that each contains parts of the other, and they do. But in light of our quantitative and textual analysis, we also have to acknowledge a significant distance between the two reporting models. By far the more difficult to evaluate, the one about which we have to be the most “suspicious,” is *The Times*. In contrast to what Herman and Chomsky maintain, we have seen that it did not ignore the human rights issues at stake. But neither did it respond in appropriate depth to the crisis at hand. There were both more acceptable and less acceptable reasons for this.

The latter reasons involved its need to be many more things to many more people. The demystification approach understands that all texts and all messages are multi-vocal and that all lives, groups or movements are multi-determined. Scholars, therefore, must look beyond the given for what is hidden, elliptical or deflected. Most meanings leave traces even if they are beyond the central narrative Josselson (2004). This model is often applied to discourse about race, gender or class that appears to be value-neutral, texts in which these variables don’t seem to exist or are not at issue. In them, the latent must be decoded. Josselson (2004) says this about relations of power:

Another place to look is in the hidden structural grammars of language which reflect social structure as it is encoded in everyday discourse. This is the discourse analysis approach which may analyze texts for markers of social class, authority relations, power dynamics, gendered experience or other bits of social life that may not be consciously recognized by the teller because they are so much a part of the taken-for-granted fabric of life... (p. 15)

This has been the interpretive method *The Times* required, an emphasis on decoding. Josselson also cites Jacques Derrida (1988) and his definitive post-modern

analysis of texts in which all meanings are not only relative, but fundamentally and permanently indeterminate. These are points well taken in most communications, but with the dire conditions that attended these civil wars, such diffidence seems an intellectual luxury and a moral dodge. Finding out and telling the truth were logistically, physically and psychologically difficult, as with all war reporting. But the meaning of the events was not. The issue was surviving the challenge it presented to the political and journalistic status quo. Here again we meet up with Boltanski's uncertainties about vested interests and Ashuri and Pinchevski's insistence on the primacy of struggle and contestation in all discussions of narrative credibility, especially regarding mass suffering.

The main lesson here is that *The Times* presented narratives that required a critical unmasking, a deconstruction of its mostly majority-culture frames. It did so both honestly and dishonestly, intentionally and unintentionally. In its defense, it was speaking to the nation and the world. It was managing voices as diverse as those from a former B-movie actor turned neoconservative figurehead to congressional liberals fighting rear-guard actions to social movements using tactics of dissent presumed dead, thought to be aberrations of a different, more divisive time. It also had to try to do justice to the voices of decision makers in Central America, as well as those of its dissidents, revolutionaries and liberation church people, the latter mostly an oddity of the first order to the majority culture here.

It had to be multi-vocal and could not avoid being multi-determined, and by highly pluralistic values. This led to certain chronic levels of contradiction or obfuscation in its messages. This is sometimes true within stories as with the

Salvadoran articles, and is especially true when comparing its reporting to its op-ed record. Another distinction is that the demystification model looks backward at personal and group history—the “archeology” of the narrative—and the restoration model looks forward, toward aims and goals—the story’s “teleology” (Josselson, 2004). This means *The Times* had a preconditioned set of assumptions about the dysfunctional nature of Latin American societies, about communist influence, about the relative benevolence of our actions there. It was a captive of the anti-communist past and failed to let its own standards of disinterested, objective coverage inform a newer view of national liberation movements and guide its actions.

*The Times* had to be read with a certain amount of critical thinking and moral detective work mostly because of these issues: a) traditional canons of news value that emphasize highly placed sources, domestic sources over foreign sources and highly placed sources in other nations if international sourcing is used; b) the rudiments of human nature dictating “communitarian” values over “cosmopolitan”; c) a need to please the powerful, at least in part, in order to ensure continued access to news-laden information only they can provide; and d) a presidential administration with fewer reservations about manipulating media than any in US history (see the history of government secrecy and the public diplomacy program in Appendix B).

By contrast, the Christian-left journals had more specialized audiences and fewer voices producing more univocal narratives—especially after *C&C*’s turn to the left in the late 1960s; and *Sojourners* was created out of that same social crucible. They also had access to dissenters in Central America that apparently *The Times* did not, an “in” with leftist groups: contacts, credibility, habitus. Like most guerilla movements, these

smaller, leaner journals less encumbered by the past and the need to preserve their status, could act and react more nimbly, could rely on support and access provided by dissenters in Central America and could tap the passion of those who were reporting out of moral dedication and idealism more than money or status. Not that *The Times* paid its stringers, who did much of the Central American reporting, all that well, but they surely made more than those writing for the religious publications.

Their specialized audience and more self-contained message did not need as much decoding. In their passion and prophetic denunciation, these publications could screen out the broader social-political context. Critically speaking, they probably could have benefited from some selective restoration, from standard journalistic rigor, but they did not have to face the internal or external contestation that *The Times* did. Their broader restoration hermeneutics meant that meanings, if they had been lost, such as a social gospel fallen out of favor, could be reclaimed with a new edge, as in the application of critical theory to spirituality, creating a theology of liberation. So, in Josselson's (2004) terms, they could look forward, could look genocide in the eye without flinching due to political pressure and still announce a new day, a new deal for the otherwise damned, the protesting poor. They could envision a restoration, proclaim it and point to its piecemeal evidence, as with health care in rebel strongholds in El Salvador (see Appendix C, "Death and Life on the Volcano: With the Guerillas in Guazapa") or the Sandinista literacy campaign, even if they could not bear full witness to its completion.

**The multiple facets of witnessing to suffering.** Finally, without succumbing to ivory-tower abstractions that belittle victims, we should begin to typify and catalog the many aspects of witnessing. Understanding it from many angles helps us see how to do a better job as scholars and journalists, how to better connect with audiences and how to better do justice to those who suffer. Moreover, these generally depend on a hermeneutics of restoration or one of demystification, or some combination.

First, witnessing has one aspect that is primarily moral and political. This dimension is closely related to Boltanski's denunciation, to the indignation of the pamphleteer and investigative journalist. It is unabashed in its search for a persecutor, but also for the facts, not blindly lashing out. Its "empirical credibility" is its power.

It uses a hermeneutics of demystification to accuse a persecutor, or many. In this study, we see this face of witnessing in the investigative work of Ray Bonner and Robert Parry. Parry, whose work has not been as well explored here as Bonner's, actually cracked the Iran-*contra* and drugs-for-guns stories but met with such resistance at the AP that the *Miami Herald* beat him and partner Brian Barger to publication. In the face of active and passive resistance from editors at AP and later, at *Newsweek*, both responding to Reagan administration pressure, instead of being cowed by this attempt to intimidate him, he more doggedly pursued the Reagan team's public diplomacy program, chronicled in an article (Parry & Kornbluh, 1988) and a book (Parry, 1992). This initiative was designed to pressure media, to distort, disown and invent the truth, so as to demonize the Sandinistas and lionize the *contras*.

We can note, as with good journalism generally, this is not the special province of professionals. Others who fit this model include attorney Reed Brody, who did

ground-breaking work documenting *contra* atrocities before Witness for Peace really geared up. Other examples are Witness for Peace speaking truth to power about *contra* human-rights violations and Sanctuary telling the real story of the Salvadoran death squads. Another is former Jesuit and *contra*, Edgar Chamorro, part of the family of leaders and publishers that produced *La Prensa* publisher<sup>42</sup> and anti-Somoza leader Pedro, killed fighting Somoza, and his wife Violeta, president after Ortega. Edgar was the *contras*' publicist in the United States until he grew disgusted with their lies and human-rights abuses, went public with his role and divulged a slew of ugly tales to the World Court. Parry (1992) says,

Chamorro's first moment of crisis came with the *contras*' kidnapping of an elderly couple. He had pleaded with the *contras* to spare the lives of Felipe and María Barreda...captured while picking coffee. Chamorro had known the family during pre-revolutionary days in Estelí. Despite [his] personal intervention, [they were] executed after "confessing" to serving with Sandinista security [CDS—neighborhood defense committees]. Chamorro was a...somewhat pliable man, but he had a core of integrity [haunted by] hard moral choices...After nearly three years as a *contra* director, he split with the CIA over the so-called murder manual, which...some in the U.S. government blamed [him] for leaking a year later. In 1985, Chamorro poured out his CIA experiences in a sworn affidavit to the World Court. He described in detail the CIA's role in uniting the movement, paying for Argentine [special forces] trainers, creating a special unit for demolitions, and funneling money into the hands of CIA-favored leaders. (p. 227)

This is the world of whistle-blowers, genocide survivors and muckrakers. Seymour Hersh's exposé of the slaughter of civilians at My Lai during the Vietnam War fits this category. But this dimension has both a "harder" and "softer" side. Joyce Hollyday, with her tales of women and children at Jalapa, reveals its more mournful expression. Anne Nelson's "Voices" series reveals this same aspect, no less soul-searing but less overtly outraged, a sadder, more reflective voice.

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<sup>42</sup> As noted earlier, this was the pre-revolutionary *La Prensa*, not the conservative shill for the *contras*.

Second, we should note the social and psychological face of witnessing. This does not refer to therapy after the fact, though that might be a result. It refers to a hermeneutics of chaos, of emergency management, the mentality of the first responder when witnessing means encountering naked tragedy, when it tries to put the first face on raw, formless suffering. This is akin to Boltanski's aesthetic category and Chouliaraki's ecstatic (overwhelming) news. This is witness as plea and lament. It leads to a search for not so much a benefactor as an intervener, but both—the Allies at Auschwitz, NATO in the Balkans, or in this study, Witness for Peace.

We are familiar with this aspect in relation to natural disasters, or perhaps random, urban terrorism, but its most compelling form, certainly the one with the most meaning for human-rights coverage or intervention has to do with genocide in action. Rwanda and Kosovo are both characteristic recent examples, but lesser known and equally devastating have been Sierra Leone, Liberia, the Congo and southern Sudan and Darfur. The Holocaust and the Armenian genocide also belong to this realm. While enough of the world knew what was happening to mobilize against most of these, no one with sufficient courage and authority acted until it was very late. This is why there are UN peacekeeping forces, but it also points to why their record is so mixed—because the intervention is often too little, too late.

Regardless of Boltanski's typologies, we have to acknowledge that there is no "useful" or "productive" suffering, no suffering that eventually serves some redemptive purpose, without an intervention-oriented benefactor, whether that is a government, an NGO or a para-statal organization such as NATO or the UN—in a human-rights context, that is. In a natural disaster, the most relevant would be

organizations such as the Red Cross, Doctors Without Borders, FEMA (when fully functioning) or Oxfam. To the extent that journalists can make some sense of the chaos early on, put a human face on the suffering and begin to direct those with questions to the right authorities and those wanting to help to the right organizations, they have done some of their best work.

Third, there is a literary and formal aspect to WTDS writing. Studying this facet can benefit victims because it can help a mediator (journalist) connect with an audience. It requires a genre analysis and makes use of a hermeneutics of restoration. This aspect of witnessing involves the search for “what is most relevant about the [victim] in his [or her] misery” (Boltanski, 1999). By that we mean it involves a search for a form of writing that is appropriate to the audience and the specific dimensions of that suffering. There is no “meaningful” tragedy unless the reporting can make it palatable. There is no psychologically manageable mass suffering without some formal container that allows the reader or spectator to assimilate it without becoming paralyzed emotionally. We have noted various formal qualities, and more should be done to examine what genres arise out of what situations.

We can fairly confidently say that the principal types, the prototypes, are embedded, first-person narrative, so-called "native" reporting, and being a by-standing eyewitness to mass suffering or interviewing eyewitnesses soon after the fact with corroborating testimony or evidence. But all new disciplines or subjects begin with a search for vocabulary and need to develop an approach to taxonomy or typology. Some of the variants we have examined are: exposé as confessional, from the seminarian, the first *Sojourners* article (“Christmas Has Begun in El Salvador”);

the writer is also an eyewitness as victim in exile, as are all refugees, which makes it a useful variant to explore. The Rio Lempa evacuation (“Baptism by Fire,” *Sojourners*) was another example of a unique combination of traditional genres: a) embedded war reporting; b) exposé, of the Salvadoran and Honduran governments and their paramilitaries, the Salvadoran air force, the OAS, United Nations and United States; and c) a confessional journal recording a people fleeing persecution and death, a virtual Anne Frank’s diary with crucial characteristics reversed: running to safety, not hiding, celebrating community, not mourning one’s isolation, and, for a time, a sense of grace, rather than foreboding.

We also noted the use of personalization in the portraits of the martyrs: a) WTDS as obituary—technically a notice, but generally a biography that sums up a life and life’s work, Bonner’s article on the FDR leader Alvarez; b) WTDS as elegy—a lyrical work written in a mournful mood lamenting a death, Brown’s literary musings on Carmen Mendieta; and c) WTDS as eulogy—praise for the dead—Soelle on the Barredas (definitions from *New Webster’s Dictionary and Thesaurus*, 1993). We also looked at Quigley’s litany of the dead as an example of political and organization detail, and import, working in place of physical or personal detail. He also substitutes a kind of “stop-action” format with only isolated physical details, a virtual “black-and-white photography” as memorial, in place of the action-oriented narrative we said usually provides the pictorial prose that creates video-like verisimilitude.

Another creative use of form was Nelson’s article with the agonizing personal decisions for revolution profiled in the “Voices” boxes. Psychological suffering, in this case, as it bears witness to physical suffering, creates a moment of psychic

distance. When juxtaposed to her analysis of the fraudulent election process, this allows for a more critical reflection. The Sanctuary refugees were another case of eyewitnesses off-site and in exile. Their recollections provided snapshots of a cultural pogrom and US complicity with it.

Highlighting these articles, I also offer the proposition that print more than visual media can create a powerful moral tale, one with the critical psychological and cultural resources, and social-political context, that readers need to withstand being overwhelmed by the news. More than visual media, print supplies a "buffer zone" needed to marshal a resolve borne of psychic stability. This can create a commitment based on a more controlled and contextual understanding of the conditions behind the suffering. This commitment needs to be made psychologically "within" and yet outside of the trauma, so that the situation of suffering can be deconstructed, then reconstructed for appropriate action.

In keeping with this emphasis on the need for psychological perspective, I should take this opportunity to comment on the basic differences between the two religious journals. Taking my cue from Josselson (2004), at the end of Chapter 10, I add brief reflections on potential biases at work in my interpretations of the publications examined. Those should be read as conditioning the comments I have made and am about to make regarding these publications.

I positioned *C&C* last among the three journals to hold it up as a kind of golden mean. The relative failings of *The Times* have been well discussed by now, and they were significant but most were sins of omission, not commission. While the religious journals did not neglect policy deliberations, *The Times* did by far the best job of

covering that part of the process, and it deserves credit accordingly. However, that was not the focus of the study. Witness to distant suffering and worthy victims were.

Of the religious publications, I believe that *C&C* offers the best combination of empathy and analysis. It was an advocacy journal, obviously, but it was scrupulously honest yet not overly emotional. It allowed for an identification with the victims—they are construed as real, historical beings, as Chouliaraki says—but also offered a psychic space for reflection and grounding. Little uncritical or prescientific mysticism is needed to complete the “circuit of compassion” discussed earlier for those who have the ethical interests and instincts to want to help the situation.

Examples of its critical balance we can note are: a) Quigley’s list of violent deaths of church and human-rights workers; b) Bonner’s use of biographical facts to build a case for reform in the profile of Alvarez; c) Nelson’s incisive look at the Salvadoran elections juxtaposed to her more passionate “Voices”; d) Gittings’ use of the danger to his own life, and that of his colleagues, to call attention to the real plight of refugees; e) Reding’s travel writing as a means of looking closely and honestly at signs of terror and Nicaragua’s elections and civil liberties; and Brown’s lyrical but understated mourning of Carmen Mendieta’s death.

Without criticizing *Sojourners* within the limits of its intended audience, we can observe that it was generally the religious journal with the more sentimental or spiritually “romantic” writing and that it published from a largely medieval epistemology, one that would appeal to the already converted but would speak with less authority to those who do not share its worldview. Its human-rights coverage should be lauded, of course. But such concerns might be in danger of being

marginalized by those who would discount it because of what they believe to be a sentimental or magical worldview. While it does take an unvarnished look at the depths of these human tragedies, it never quite gives up the romantic triumphalism that is characteristic—some would proudly say emblematic—of evangelical faith.

For those not necessarily Christian but with some sympathy for its ethics, *C&C*'s more balanced writing should have a broader and more rationalistic appeal. This is a result of its general worldview, its approach to knowledge and compassion, head and heart. As the product of theological liberals, *C&C* was spreading a humanized gospel, a religious vision deconstructed through historical-critical methods too involved to belabor here but that use the best of social science and the humanities (archeology, anthropology, sociology, historical and textual criticism) to make the traditionally extra-rational available to common sense. The symbolic vision of scripture and tradition is reconstructed through consciousness to deliver an ethic. This perspective positioned *C&C* to communicate with an audience as broad as the unchurched with basic ethical literacy and the religiously oriented who needed an integrated gospel, those unwilling to use critical methods to deconstruct social or political conditions but dismiss them regarding biblical matters.

Regarding the epistemological problems *C&C* tackled and tried to resolve, Hulsether (1988) explains what modern theology began to face as the lessons of the Enlightenment began to catch up with it:

In general, many believed that rational and scientific thinking made “dogmatic” and “magical” ideas inappropriate for a modern age.

Liberal Protestants responded to these challenges by steering a middle course between fundamentalists [or evangelicals] who...denied the challenges of science and historical criticism on one hand, and secularists who...abandoned

religious...commitment, on another. Making the home of Christianity within modern thought, they began to rethink Christianity within that horizon. (p. 9)

They did this by embracing the best of scientific and critical methods.

*They presupposed the historical methods and scientific assumptions of the day, then reconceptualized theology in terms consistent with them. For example, rather than questioning historical evidence in the name of the Bible, they tried to learn as much as they could using historical [and text-critical] methods. They drew a contrast between the deeper abiding truths of Christianity and the external forms which had sought to express these truths at different times. Commonly, this entailed discounting orthodox teaching and rituals...and presenting them as external forms that masked and distorted deeper truths.<sup>43</sup> Liberals granted that some prescientific language, such as Bible stories about miracles, may have expressed truths in ways appropriate for prescientific eras. However, [they] reasoned that modern Christians must express the deeper truths of faith in a modern way, somewhat like a world traveler might translate the same story into different languages in different places. (p. 9) [italics added]*

Alongside this demythologizing of the good news is the dilemma facing liberal Protestants in general and *C&C*'s former readership in particular: the decline in membership in liberal Protestant churches and the demise of their most outspoken journal. About this, Hulsether, author of a definitive history of *C&C* (1999), says:

The central issue [in finding a U.S. audience for radical theologies] is how Protestant social thought relates to hegemonic power structures and various counter-hegemonic movements, no matter what paradigm they use for theology and social analysis. *All kinds of people can learn from...this issue, but it holds special interest for those who would like to see Protestants collaborating less with elite power structures and making larger contributions to movements for social justice.* This is a crucial question, not only for religious people who need broader secular allies but also for secular activists and cultural workers who need religious allies. Bridges need to be built from both sides. Despite its limitations, *C&C* was among the better bridges we had. If it is not replaced, I believe that this represents a significant loss for the left at large. (p. 269) [italics added]

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<sup>43</sup> See the discussion of Bultmann's demythologized gospel on p. 216.

Speaking to the balance it generally tried to strike between emotion and reflection, or at least the dialectic it embodied, he adds that throughout its history, *Christianity and Crisis* raised issues that could not be relegated to the well-mannered prose of academic journals and white papers. Instead, it wrote about “issues of deep suffering and passion, utopian hope, [and various] understandings of God.” Yet it attempted to do so and still reach a broader audience than *Sojourners*. It “maintained a bridge between its ideal vision and the pragmatic possibilities attainable in a world that it understood as tragic” (p. 270). Its reporting and commentary were tempered by human tragedy but forged in a hope that saw social justice realistically, as a limit concept, a horizon of consciousness we can steer by but may never quite reach.

Another contrast with *Sojourners* is that *C&C* did give voice to opposing points of view, often in the form of rebuttals, though many fewer in the point-counterpoint style it used frequently during the 1940s-60s period. And it did offer occasional but usually mild critiques of the Sandinistas and some of the Salvadoran rebellion. However, in general, it did not feel much obligation to give voice to conservative or moderates points of view. It also did offer reporting on the policy deliberations but nothing like the extensive coverage of *The Times*. Another potential criticism might be that it was fixated on Central America and particularly the revolution in Nicaragua. One letter to the editor said, "I'm tired of hearing about Nicaragua." But the editors said they were committed to covering the social experiment thoroughly as long as it survived and as long as the United States continued to try to destabilize it.

Lastly, in the literature on religion and media, scholars have investigated the ways in which religion and media have similar or interlocking roles, seeking to move beyond

merely how one uses the other and make them a seamless whole (Silk, 1995; Hoover & Venturelli, 1996; Stout, 2002; Stout & Buddenbaum, 2002). These studies have mostly focused on how media supply liturgy, ritual or cultural identity in an increasingly secular world. Some of this builds on McLuhan (1964), who said that media use is our new religion, our new set of rituals, that reading or viewing the news, especially on television, perhaps as a family, is a kind of liturgy. They have emphasized that religion in post-modernity is a hyper-mediated experience—the best (or worst) of evangelical sanctuaries often feature big-screen TVs and state-of-the-art sound systems, not to mention the world of televangelism (McLuhan, 1964; White, 2007). These discussions are worth pursuing but seem incomplete. In the main, most have focused on the visual, cognitive and affective qualities religion and media share and secondarily on behavior.

I would like to reframe the discussion and focus instead on social issues, one of the main purposes of religion, but one easily neglected in a fragmented, individualistic society. My thesis is that the most important marriage of religion and media is through ethical aims in general, and witness to distant suffering in particular, not ritual or performance, that being a witness to suffering and seeking to redress it can constitute a significant unity of religion and media in our time.

This is especially true in religious media, of course, but within the liberal theological paradigm, it is also valid wherever people work cooperatively for peace and social justice (and as their efforts are chronicled in the media, often in specialized media such as the ones we have examined). That ethos says that the divine is manifest wherever such values are extolled and embodied, regardless of religious or secular affiliations. My proposition is that through witness to distant suffering, religion and media join hands in an ethic that

champions the rights of the most vulnerable citizens of the global village by highlighting their plight in an inverse proportion to their social and political status. It is at least another approach to creating a more unified paradigm, one that should be the subject of more research.

**Chapter 10**

**Time and Again:**

**Epilogue: An Update—**

**With Notes on Personal Perspectives on Interpretation**

**Personal Views, the U.S. Social Movements  
and the Central American Governments—Then and Now**

**Issues in Interpretation: Self-Reflection as Update**

In keeping with the post-modern epistemology used in most of this thesis, and as an update on my own experiences with the issues discussed and the publications examined, I take a lesson from Josselson (2004) regarding personal issues in interpretation. In her dialectic, her last point is about personal biases that might affect interpretation. Given a post-modern skepticism of all master narratives, she says the scholar should examine his or her beliefs and explain how they may have influenced the interpretation in question. This is called “reflexivity,” for transparent self-reflection. In the hermeneutics of restoration, “Issues of over-identification with participants under study may become problematic and researchers then have to be scrupulous that the meanings they ‘discover’...are indeed ‘faithful’ to the meanings of their participants and that they haven’t simply substituted their own” (Josselson, 2004, p. 11).

Regarding the “restoration” model, the main concern would be an overconfidence about interpretation. A kind of Christian “leftist” in my youth (mostly a pragmatic progressive in my early 20s and, briefly, a democratic socialist in seminary), I have been well disposed toward the Christian-left journals. But since the early 1980s, my life took a different turn entirely, and I had not revisited that world for decades. I think this allowed me some critical distance. I am not and have not been a Christian for 30 years, nor a leftist for about 25, but I consider myself a sympathizer in each case. I think I can function as an ambassador between those worlds and the

mainstream. Also, for independent background, I read an excellent history of *C&C* (Hulsether, 1999) and another on the Sojourners community (Hollyday, 1989). And I read a wide variety of articles from back issues of each to get re-grounded in the interpretive environment.

In addition, I criticized one lengthy excerpt from *Sojourners* (“A Baptism by Fire”) from the standpoint of traditional journalism, chosen because it was farthest from the mainstream. In the interests of space, I did not do more, but I could have. I also offered an additional general critique of *Sojourners* (relative to *C&C*, above) and a similar one of *C&C*. In general, both Christian-left publications suffered somewhat from unquestioned assumptions about the virtue of the leftists in both countries and from occasional leading rhetoric that glosses over certain inconsistencies, the Sandinista human-rights record, for instance, or the same with the Salvadoran rebels.

In the demystification model, the researcher should steer clear of intuitive notions of what “just feels right” (Josselson, 2004). In this hermeneutic, the scholar has more authority over the interpretation than the narrator, but for this reason, the methodology must be sound and the documentation thorough. With *The Times*, I used two quantitative assessments, one sweeping (mine), the other more narrow (Herman and Chomsky’s), combining it with extensive textual analysis. I also did detailed background research on social-political factors, players and institutions affecting its coverage. (Again, conditioning *The Times*’ coverage of Central America during this period, the ambitious effort by the Reagan inner circle to intimidate mainstream media and manipulate its coverage is well documented in Appendix B.)

In addition, Josselson (2004) says that one should reflect on any personal history that affects one's view of the material. My perspective on the Christian-left publications is colored by a few formative experiences. This begins with the two years my family spent in Colombia while my father was an agricultural adviser to its government, from mid-1967 to mid-1969. These were during my eighth- and ninth-grade years, an impressionable age, though I had not heard of liberation theology and was indifferent to religion at the time. We traveled widely there, and an exposure to severe poverty in rural and urban settings sensitized me to disparities between rich and poor in a way I had never been before.

My first contact with liberation theology came during the early 1970s, in my late teens shortly after returning to the United States during a period of national soul-searching and cultural upheaval. After an evangelical conversion, within six to eight months or so, I became much more liberal theologically, and, for a time, virtually radical politically (a Saul Alinsky-like, issue-oriented "radicalism" with a reformist view of the system). This view waxed and waned through the 1970s but experienced a renaissance during 1979-81 while I worked on a master's in theology at Union Theological in New York. During my first semester at Union I took Liberation Theology for North Americans, team-taught by Bob Brown and Dorothee Soelle.

I read *Christianity and Crisis* avidly and *Sojourners* occasionally during most of the 1970s but have not since leaving Union—until beginning research for this thesis. By my graduation in February 1981, I was becoming an agnostic, the politics of the nation were changing dramatically and my career was shifting to journalism. Out of professional ethics and in keeping with the times and my own maturation, my politics

moved closer to the center. They became mainstream liberal and remain so. Another key event was editing a quarterly newsletter put out by the Human Rights Office of the National Council of Churches during my last two semesters at Union. That experience kindled a long-term interest in human rights and catalyzed a commitment to journalism, as did reading *The New York Times* regularly.

Regarding any predispositions toward *The Times*, while an undergraduate at Princeton University (an hour south of New York) and a graduate student at Union, I read *The Times* nearly every day for six years. I came to depend on it, and, when I abandoned a career in ministry, it too inspired me to enter journalism. In addition, for more than 25 years as a journalist, the vast majority of it doing high-integrity public relations in natural resources for the University of Nebraska–Lincoln (objective writing on objective research), I have held the model of disinterested, balanced reporting in high esteem and *The Times*, as a paragon of that tradition, also in very high regard. As with most journalists, I probably have held for it the highest respect I would hold for any daily paper; *The Washington Post* and *Los Angeles Times* are probably second and third, respectively.

I grew out of the habit of reading *The Times* regularly after my first year back in the heartland, gravitating to local papers. Upon recommitting to a master's in journalism, I have become more interested in the best of journalism broadly and have reaffirmed frequent reading of *The Times*, mostly on the Internet. Regarding my predispositions toward it, I probably had too high an estimation of it and expected behavior that only a paper free of commercial funding could deliver. That likely affected my disappointment with some of its coverage. Still, my research and moral

code tell me during this period it lost its way ethically in covering crucial issues in both countries—particularly regarding depth and detail of reporting on otherwise unworthy victims and the legitimacy of the Salvadoran and Nicaraguan elections.

### **The Social Movements Today**

Remarkably, and more positive than much of the content of this study, the Pledge of Resistance, Witness for Peace and Sanctuary all still exist in some form or another. All continue with similar objectives but have broadened their application or approach. The Pledge was reborn in September of 2002 as the Iraq Pledge of Resistance. A network of organizations, it was committed to ending the Iraq war through nonviolent resistance. It became the National Campaign for Nonviolent Resistance (2010) and continues to organize, educate and protest against the Iraq and Afghanistan campaigns and for peaceful solutions to geopolitical problems. It has altered its focus from breaking unjust laws to spotlighting the illegal and unjust practices of elected and appointed decision makers.

Growing directly out of the anti-*contra* project, Witness for Peace (2008) today is “a politically independent, nationwide grassroots organization of people committed to nonviolence and led by faith and conscience.” Its mission is “to support peace, justice and sustainable economies in the Americas by changing US policies and corporate practices which contribute to poverty and oppression in Latin America and the Caribbean.” It sponsors missions to Colombia, Cuba, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua and Venezuela.

The New Sanctuary Movement (2010) also traces its genesis to the original. It formally reconvened in 2007 as a faith-based organization to “to accompany and protect immigrant families who are facing the violation of their human rights in the form of hatred, workplace discrimination and unjust deportation.” Its goals are to stop deportation of immigrant families, alter public discussion about immigration, broaden the nation’s moral imagination and help others see that immigrants and their families are “the children of God.” It is especially opposed to an immigrant policy driven by raids and deportations, which split up families but do not stop illegal immigration.

### **Leftist Governments in Power in Both Countries**

**El Salvador.** In 1989, Alfredo Cristiani of the Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) was elected president. Cristiani had previously been associated with ORDEN founder Robert D' Abuisson and death-squad activity. State terror and death squads did not end with his election. In fact, after a pre-election decrease, they escalated and continued until 1992, when the peace deal was signed (US State Department, 2010a).

In November 2008, the San Francisco Center for Justice and Accountability and the Association for Human Rights in Spain filed suit with Spain’s High Court against Cristiani and 14 former Salvadoran military men for the 1989 killings of six Jesuits and two women who worked for them. As with a highly publicized human-rights case against former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet, the plaintiffs based it on a Spanish principle that such crimes may be prosecuted anywhere at any time (Burnett, 2008). In January 2009, the Court opened its investigation of Cristiani but closed it that day

because the judge ruled there was insufficient evidence to tie him directly to the murders, only to their “concealment,” which universal jurisdiction did not cover.

The ARENA party dominated the National Assembly until 2000, when the FMLN (Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front) won the largest number of seats but not enough to control it. It continued to make gains in the assembly but lost presidential elections through the 1990s and 2000s. It finally won in 2009, when it ran a journalist, Mauricio Funes, instead of a former guerrilla leader. In the 2009 municipal and legislative elections, it won most of the mayoralties in the country and a plurality, 35 of 84, of the seats in the assembly. An important initiative of the Funes’ government has been fighting corruption left by the ARENA regimes (US State Department, 2010a).

Since the peace accord, terrorism by the left and right has been curtailed, even under the ARENA governments. Economic reforms since the early 1990s have improved social conditions and broadened Salvadoran exports. Trade has been liberalized, and foreign investment has helped the economy, but crime by gangs and syndicates remains a major problem and hinders investment (World Bank, 2010a). Two major gangs have chapters in the United States and are considered among the most ruthless in this country. Land reform has been halting, but much land was transferred to former combatants. Progress implementing reforms and rebuilding the economy has been slow and was further hindered by a major hurricane in 1998 (US State Department, 2010a).

**Nicaragua.** After Violeta Chamorro became president in 1990, the Sandinistas still controlled most of the military, unions and judiciary, forcing her UNO (National Unification) party to work closely with them while she was in office. Her administration stabilized the economy and many democratic institutions, privatized some state-owned enterprises and curbed rights violations. In response to both Somoza's and the Sandinista's abuses, a new military code in 1994 and a new police law in 1996 professionalized the army and police and put them under civilian control (US State Department, 2010b).

Running against Daniel Ortega, Mayor of Managua Arnoldo Alemán, of the center-right Liberal Alliance, won a 1996 presidential election certified free and fair by international observers. His party later became part of the Constitutional Liberal Party (PLC). Alemán continued to liberalize the economy and improved public infrastructure by building highways, bridges and wells (US State Department, 2010b). Corruption that led to his resignation and that of other officials in his administration tainted his legacy, and for it he received 20 years in prison.

In 2000, the FSLN (Sandinista National Liberation Front) won mayors' races in many departmental capitals, including Managua. In November 2001, in presidential and legislative elections, also assessed as free and fair, Enrique Bolaños of the PLC was elected president over Ortega. In November 2006, Ortega regained the presidency. Since 1990, the country's economy has been partly rebuilt but was badly hurt by major hurricanes in 1998 and 2007 (US State Department, 2010b). The years of war and the US economic embargo, along with the natural disasters, have left the country the second-poorest in Latin America, after Haiti (World Bank, 2010b).

To aid his political prospects, Ortega moved closer to the center while out of office, giving up Marxism for democratic socialism and becoming a more public Catholic. He also helped enact a much-debated agreement between the FSLN and the PLC. It revised the minimum vote needed for a presidential victory from 45% to 35%, a key to his 2006 win.

Ortega remains a controversial figure. He was accused of rigging the 2008 municipal elections and of having too close a relationship with Alemán, the disgraced former president. A group of observers not approved by the government, Ethics and Transparency, said with 30,000 monitors in place, it found discrepancies in about 30 municipalities, about one-third of the polling places (CNN, 2008). Soon after, a group of intellectuals and activists condemned his administration for barring two opposition parties from participating in these elections. A letter of protest denounced what they said were authoritarian policies. The government said the two parties had missed a filing deadline. One of these was a Sandinista breakaway movement led by a former guerilla with a popular following, Dora María Téllez. Noam Chomsky, the British novelist Salman Rushdie, Bianca Jagger and others, including writer Ariel Dorfman and social activist Tom Hayden, signed the letter (Carroll, 2008).

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## Appendix A

### **The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights** (United Nations, 2009)

Proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly, December 10, 1948:

#### **Preamble**

Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,

Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people,

Whereas it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law,

Whereas it is essential to promote the development of friendly relations between nations,

Whereas the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,

Whereas Member States have pledged themselves to achieve, in co-operation with the United Nations, the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms,

Whereas a common understanding of these rights and freedoms is of the greatest importance for the full realization of this pledge,

Now, Therefore THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY proclaims THIS UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the peoples of Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction.

Article 1. All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

Article 2. Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

Article 3. Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

Article 4. No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.

Article 5. No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Article 6. Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law.

Article 7. All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.

Article 8. Everyone has the right to an effective remedy by the competent national tribunals for acts violating the fundamental rights granted him by the constitution or by law.

Article 9. No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.

Article 10. Everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, in the determination of his rights and obligations and of any criminal charge against him.

Article 11. (1) Everyone charged with a penal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law in a public trial at which he has had all the guarantees necessary for his defence [defense]. (2) No one shall be held guilty of any penal offence on account of any act or omission which did not constitute a penal offence, under national or international law, at the time when it was committed. Nor shall a heavier penalty be imposed than the one that was applicable at the time the penal offence was committed.

Article 12. No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour [honor] and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.

Article 13. (1) Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state. (2) Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.

Article 14. (1) Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution. (2) This right may not be invoked in the case of prosecutions genuinely arising from non-political crimes or from acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

Article 15. (1) Everyone has the right to a nationality. (2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality.

Article 16. (1) Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution. (2) Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses. (3) The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.

Article 17. (1) Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others. (2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.

Article 18. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

Article 19. Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Article 20. (1) Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association. (2) No one may be compelled to belong to an association.

Article 21. (1) Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives. (2) Everyone has the right of equal access to public

service in his country. (3) The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.

Article 22. Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality.

Article 23. (1) Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable [favorable] conditions of work and to protection against unemployment. (2) Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work. (3) Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable [favorable] remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection. (4) Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.

Article 24. Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay.

Article 25. (1) Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control. (2) Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.

Article 26. (1) Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit. (2) Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace. (3) Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

Article 27. (1) Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits. (2) Everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author.

Article 28. Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized.

Article 29. (1) Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible. (2) In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society. (3) These rights and freedoms may in no case be exercised contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

Article 30. Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any State, group or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms set forth herein.

## Appendix B

### Iran-*contra*: Official Secrecy, Rogue Governments and the Media

#### The Birth of the National Security State

In his analysis of federal classification policies, *Secrecy*, Patrick Moynihan (1998), formerly vice-chair of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, says a usurpation of power by the executive branch (over the congressional) and an exponential growth of clandestine activity by the federal government began with the Cold War. In *Bomb Power*, historian and political columnist Garry Wills (2010) traces the legacy of the imperial presidency, government secrecy and shadow governments to the development of the atomic bomb. Both are right.

The War Department developed the atomic bomb as a ultra-secret project under Franklin Roosevelt and told Harry Truman, the new president, about it only after he took office. Run by General Leslie Groves, who had “dozens of sites, hundreds of thousands of workers and billions of dollars” under his command (Wills, 2010, p. 32), the project became the first major shadow government. Its development and the subsequent nuclear arms race with the Soviet Union changed the nature of national security. And the press was expected to cheer the home team.

The main property of secret weapons systems and wars is that they are not that easy to hide. They cost a great deal of money, and they produce great deal of heat, light and noise, some of it physical, much of it intellectual and ethical. So publicity issues come quickly to the fore. Groves soon went to the *New York Times* and asked that its noted science writer, Bill Laurence, be put on payroll to prepare the public for the coming of the bomb. Groves also edited his copy liberally. During this period, Laurence also was paid by the *Times*. Beverly Kever (2008) notes:

The final version of those...[news releases] that had largely been approved by censors was published in *The Times* as a 10-part series from 26 September to 9 October 1945. *The Times* lent its pre-eminent reputation by passing off as news articles Laurence’s government-paid [releases] to the nation’s newspapers at no cost, thus bolstering credence to the War Department’s policies....For that series from behind the ‘Atomic Curtain’ and his eyewitness exclusive on the A-bombing of Nagasaki, in 1946 Laurence was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for journalistic excellence. (p. 187)

These developments followed: a) an obsessive fear of the expansionist tendencies of the Soviet Union created two superpowers capable of nuclear war and put the country on a permanent war footing as never before, with an attendant obsession about secrecy; b) the need for bases for planes carrying nuclear weapons meant that the whole planet was contested territory and that governments that were authoritarian but friendly were courted, funded and propped up in the face of popular resistance so these bases could be maintained; and c) the combined effects of Soviet control of Eastern Europe, its development of the atomic bomb by 1949—aided by spies but which scientists believed would have happened within a year anyway—and the surprise invasion of South Korea by the North created a permanent Red scare (Wills, 2010; Moynihan, 1998).

Out of this came another, far-reaching change: The role of the president as the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, duties assigned him by the Constitution only during wars declared by Congress, became permanent. And because the whole nation was ostensibly vulnerable all the time, on alert all the time, he was seen as the commander of all of the people all the time, not just

of the military during wartime. His finger on the nuclear trigger and his traveling with “the football,” the portable command technology for launch, also meant that consultation with Congress was increasingly a dead letter.

These two authors build a convincing argument: The national security state and its military-industrial-intelligence complex developed in concert and have become a mushroom cloud all their own since World War II. In the process, these events changed the nature and size of the federal government. The presidency has increasingly appropriated powers once reserved for Congress and the courts, and its impact on foreign and domestic politics, the national and global economy and our military and foreign affairs has often been more damaging to our security than the dangers it has tried to prevent (Moynihan, 1998; Wills, 2010).

The political tenor for most of our history was that a nation as large and rich in moral and natural resources as the United States, increasing its power annually and bounded by an ocean on two sides, had little to fear and less to hide. A second world war changed that. During the war, we became a much less free society, but it was mostly voluntary and assumed to be temporary. After the war, as the threat of world domination by fascism bled into the same by communism, the nation never fully converted to a peacetime economy, or mentality. During this permanent war footing, actually involving sporadic proxy wars between the superpowers at various times and places, such as East Asia or Central America, hundreds of billions and trillions of dollars and countless person-hours were devoted to: a) the hatching of various schemes for getting the better of the enemy while evading the public; b) the implementation and mitigation of their side effects; and c) the destruction, cover-up or classification of records documenting such behavior. All came at considerable expense—the nation’s tax dollars at work—a cost mostly unexplored by scholars or journalists.

The Office of Strategic Services (OSS), which managed intelligence in World War II, was reborn as the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in 1948. The National Security Agency (NSA) was created in 1952 to decipher Soviet communications. Since then, a host of other intelligence agencies have joined the fray: the Defense Intelligence Agency; Department of Homeland Security; Federal Bureau of Investigation; National Geospatial Intelligence Agency; National Reconnaissance Office; National Security Agency; Office of Naval Intelligence; and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (National Security Agency [NSA], 2010). Along with these above-board agencies, since WW II, the nation has seen a parade of small, mostly short-term parallel governments. These have been largely ad hoc and often bungled.

Moynihan died in 2003 but left a legacy of independent thinking on a host of social and foreign policy issues. One was that the Soviet Union was less an expansionist state and more a realist state focused on self-preservation. He focuses the next part of his argument on the declassification of a little-known set of documents called the “Venona decrypts” (1988). These are the communications intercepted from the Soviet Union during the Cold War that could be decoded. They generally revealed that there were communist agents in the United States, but only about 200. A small number had important positions, but they existed in nothing like the numbers or placement that zealots such as Senator Joe McCarthy or many in military or intelligence circles believed. During this period, the most important aspect of Soviet life was ignored, by the government, the media and the public: that the whole society was gradually running out of money, consumer goods and hope and was not going to last long as that kind of social system.

Unfortunately, the NSA did not think it could reveal these communications until after the Cold War, when it was prompted to do so by the formation of the Congressional Committee on

Protecting and Reducing Government Secrecy (on which Moynihan served), which issued a 1997 report recommending massive declassification. Only when the Cold War was over were the public and most government officials given access to information crucial to effectively targeting our anti-espionage, anti-subversion efforts during that 45-year conflict. This means that billions and billions of dollars and countless hours of person-power were wasted in colossal and paranoid attempts to fight communism here and abroad, as opposed to using the dividend in money and human resources to target peacetime issues such as schooling, nutrition, environmental quality, health care or social welfare and security. A classic case of such a worldview is the Reagan team's view of communist aggression in Central America in the 1980s.

As a case study in secrecy and disinformation used for many reasons in many ways, most of them gone off the tracks, it leads in so many directions that it is hard to follow them all. It had maladroit intrigue, buffoonery before the klieg lights of Congress, support for genocidal armies and romantic reasons for finding new ways to skirt the law that were still largely ineffective. The conspirators did succeed, however, in helping a rebel army kill tens of thousands of innocent and very poor Nicaraguans in a not-so-secret, "secret war." It also intimidated the media effectively enough that many stories about administration illegal activities would take many years to come to light. Moynihan (1988) considers it a high-water mark in the use of secrecy to mock the founding fathers and shred the Constitution:

I...told [Theodore] Draper <sup>1</sup> I didn't believe the American republic had ever seen so massive a hemorrhaging of trust and integrity. The very processes of government were put in harm's way by a conspiracy of faithless or witless men—sometimes both. (p. 212)

He also told Draper:

The behavior of the CIA and...its director in the Nicaraguan mining episode was nothing less than the outset of a challenge to American constitutional government, the "first acts of deception that gradually mutated into a policy of deceit." (p. 212)

Moynihan (1988) also believed: "Had it not been possible for those involved with Iran-Contra to act under a vast umbrella of secrecy, they would have been told to stop" (p. 212). Implied in this statement is the faith that a proactive declassification and minimal secrecy policy might have prevented the Iran-*contra* affair. Answers will vary, of course, but the very important point is what an interesting question it becomes.

### **Iran-*contra* as the Fantasy World of a Small Rogue Government**

Part of what drives the chief of the executive branch to make any number of attempts to evade the will of the legislative is the very secure nature of the system of checks and balances the Constitution's framers believed so essential to reasonable men (and women) governing reasonably. Unfortunately, much of governance cannot afford that much deliberation anymore. One might make a case that it is a system designed for another, slower era. Presidents are faced with a seemingly endless list of fast-breaking social, political, economic and ecological problems and serve a citizenry that never tires of petitioning for their redress. The sum total of the

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<sup>1</sup> Interviewing Moynihan for his history of Iran-*contra*, *A Very Thin Line*.

complexity of any given issue, and their sum, means that, to sort through this conceptual miasma, presidents are tempted to develop their views in isolation, within a fantasy of sovereignty.

This development, sometimes called *the imperial presidency*, has been pushed along by the increasing number and complexity of the issues, by the need humans have to personalize the cosmos and their problems in it—including creating a grand benefactor like a god, an emperor or a president—and by the increasing polarization of the public and its representatives, sometimes called the “culture wars.” It is probably also a function of an American tendency toward personality politics and more mythic storylines than the party-driven, parliamentary system of northern Europe that emphasizes issues. This cultural collision has led not to traditional modes of compromise but to the newly famous feature of politics, gridlock. Presidents and their advisers hate gridlock and can be driven to overcome it extra-legally.

Chief executives are nothing if not strong egos. They want to do something about the problems they target, and they want to be judged by results, ends, not means. In fact, they have to produce them fairly soon to justify any given program and, by extension, their existence in office. So they are sorely tempted to assume that, because they preside over a virtual political-economic empire, they are a little less than an emperor and should be able to will not just a nation, but sometimes any nation, to do X, Y or Z. When this doesn't work, when they are confronted with the actual limited power of the chief executive, when their will is thwarted, like adolescents, they go rogue. They become cowboys.

Looking at these centrifugal and centripetal forces, Moynihan (1998, citing Koh, 1990) makes a crucial observation: *The federal government has not come up with a stable way to make decisions about national security.* The tug of war between Reagan's team of zealots and a Congress more skeptical about funding for Nicaraguan rebels demonstrates this instability as well as any single issue. The Reagan administration's line-in-the-sand commitment to containment or reversal of socialist governments in Latin America provided just the provocation needed to start their own war with their own rules. It also subscribed to an internal ethos that had no patience with bureaucratic restraint on freedom of action. This meant that the principals did not always distinguish between heroic adventures and extra-legal misadventures.

Living in a world of black-and-white values, this administration, as we have seen in the body of this study, believed that Nicaragua was another Cuba and was aiding El Salvador's revolt. Soon after taking office, in concert with the CIA, the administration began working to overthrow the Sandinistas without telling Congress of its intent. In fact, while Nicaragua surely sent arms to Salvadoran rebels early on, while they had declared a “final offensive” just before Reagan's inauguration, the offensive and the arms flow, largely due to US pressure, had stalled out. The administration could send Congress requests for military aid to El Salvador openly—albeit much contested—but it was in a quandary regarding Nicaragua. It faced federal restrictions on destabilizing other governments without the consent of key committees in Congress. These it ignored.

Avoiding a Congress likely to tell it not to destabilize Nicaragua, the Reagan administration found ways to redirect funding that had already been appropriated, called “re-programming.” Using loopholes, it began to bankroll a small, thus-far ineffective rebel movement aimed at restoring the status quo in Nicaragua. It supported the *contras* reflexively, some would say blindly. It justified its support by publicly saying the *contras* were trying to interdict arms coming from El Salvador. It also decided they did not have to win this war to meet US objectives. If it

could not stop the supply of arms to El Salvador, it could harass the Sandinistas into dysfunction and overthrow or electoral rejection.

### **The Mainstream Media Find the Trail**

Moynihan states his thesis plainly when he says early on that “secrecy is for losers” (1998, p. 1). He means that poor decision makers will want to hide their decisions. Wars are hard secrets to keep, however, and in 1982, *Newsweek* ran a cover story on the not-so-secret war (Draper, 1991; Smith, 1996). Congress banned any assistance to the *contras* in fiscal year 1983 and limited it the next to \$24 million. In 1984, the *Wall Street Journal* revealed that the CIA had mined harbors in Nicaragua, an act for which the *contras* took credit until reporters sniffed it out, which caused Congress again to cut *contra* aid. At this point, the Boland Amendment prohibiting this aid, previous legislation outlawing the destabilization of foreign governments without congressional advise and consent and international law prohibiting the overthrow of foreign governments all said that continuing to raise money and give it to the *contras* was illegal.

The Reagan administration, undeterred, sought private money and third-country contributions, a great deal from strange bedfellows Israel and Saudi Arabia, to keep the *contras* together “in body and soul,” as Reagan put it. It did this through the National Security Council (NSC) and its small staff, mostly directed by National Security Adviser Robert McFarlane and his deputy, Admiral John Poindexter. Their operation was called “The Enterprise” and their operative was a marine lieutenant colonel, Oliver North. Under North’s direction, this secret shadow government commanded airplanes, pilots, airfields, gun and drug runners, ships, secure communications channels and Swiss bank accounts. Along the line, an innovation in fund-raising involved selling arms to Iran—according to official policy, our no. 1 enemy and a terrorist nation, with which we ostensibly did not make deals—and using the money to fund the *contras*. In fact, arms sales to Iran had been going on steadily from the early days of the administration and may have been negotiated in return for releasing the US hostages in Iran for Reagan’s inauguration. Arms sales to Iran allegedly were to be used for leverage the Iranians would apply to Hezbollah in Beirut for the release of five American hostages, one of whom was the CIA station chief.

In the fall of 1986, *Al-Shiraa*, a Lebanese weekly, revealed that the United States had sold spare parts and ammunition to Iran for help gaining release of these hostages. Soon, the president was on television explaining that his NSC staff had tried to open a dialog with Iranian moderates through sales of anti-tank missiles, but in no way traded arms for hostages. (And if the moderates represented a parallel government in Iran, how good a policy was this? How was this to go undetected in Iran and not be used to embarrass us in the Arab and world press, as it was?)

A little later, the attorney general held a press conference to explain that there had been such sales and the money had gone to the *contras*. The media became much more aggressive in reporting the story, a special prosecutor was appointed and congressional investigations began, all by the end of 1986.

However, even as the media, particularly the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, ran an increasing number of stories that painted a picture of lawbreaking and extensive cover-up, in the end, the congressional leadership of both parties vowed to protect Reagan from impeachment. Vice President Bush, who some said had managed much of Latin American affairs for the White House, refused to give up his diaries and maintained he was not part of the decision making. Once a federal probe had ended, North and Poindexter had been convicted, but their convictions were overturned on appeal. Bush pardoned the rest during his last days as president in 1992.

### Selected Issues Related to the Media

The lessons from the Iran-*contra* scandal related to the mass media are many and various, too extensive to examine very many here. But the following present some key questions.

**Drugs for guns?** Not only were the cowboys in the West Wing trading arms for hostages, they were also turning a blind eye to widespread drug smuggling by the *contras*, or were helping them, to create another source of revenue. As with the brazen contradictions regarding Iran, at the height of a crack epidemic in major cities, as the First Lady was pushing a “Just Say No” anti-drug campaign, and following published accusations that the Sandinistas were dealing drugs that did not stick, the NSC was implicated in drug running. This made a minor media splash in October of 1986, when Eugene Hasenfus jumped out of a plane that was shot down over Nicaragua that showed signs of both drug and gun running.

The news about drugs wasn’t even new information. On December 20, 1985, Robert Parry and Brian Barger of the Associated Press broke a story that said *contra* groups were moving cocaine to fund their war against Nicaragua (Parry & Kornbluh, 1988). But Reagan administration officials pressured news outlets to embargo the story and did as much as they could to discredit the two reporters, as well as cast doubt on all reporting on the *contras* and drugs (Kornbluh, 1997). Parry said his editor told him the New York office didn’t want any more *contra*-drug stories. After this, Parry would slug (tag) these stories “deepsix1,” “deepsix2,” etc. (Parry, 1992). In 1986, the *San Francisco Examiner* ran a page-one story on a Bay Area dealer connected to the *contras*, but no one else picked up on the connection.

In April 1986, Democrats John Kerry and Christopher Dodd chaired a special Senate Subcommittee on Terrorism, Narcotics and International Operations, and the committee released *Drugs, Law Enforcement and Foreign Policy*, a complete examination of US dealings with all the countries in Latin America central to the drug trade. But when the report came out in April 1989, major media sent stories on it to the back pages, and it was barely noticed by the major networks. In the *Columbia Journalism Review* (*CJR*), Peter Kornbluh said:

*The Washington Post* ran a short article on page A20 that focused as much on the infighting within the committee as on its findings; *The New York Times* ran a short piece on A8; *The Los Angeles Times* ran a 589-word story on A11....ABC's *Nightline* chose not to cover the release of the report. Consequently, the Kerry Committee report was relegated to oblivion; and opportunities were lost to pursue leads, address the obstruction from the CIA and the Justice Department that Senate investigators say they encountered, and both inform the public and lay the issue to rest. The story, concedes Doyle McManus, the Washington bureau chief of *The Los Angeles Times*, “did not get the coverage that it deserved.” (1997, p. 34)

The report said, “There was substantial evidence of drug smuggling...on the part of individual Contras, Contra suppliers, Contra pilots, mercenaries who worked with the Contras, and Contra supporters throughout the region.” (LeoGrande, 1997, p. 14) [italics added]. It was unequivocal:

The Contra drug links included...payments to drug traffickers by the U.S. State Department of funds authorized by the Congress for humanitarian assistance to the Contras, in some cases after the traffickers had been indicted by federal law enforcement agencies on drug charges, in others while traffickers were under active investigation by these same agencies. (Pink

Noise Studios, [citing the Senate Subcommittee *Report on Drugs, Law Enforcement and Foreign Policy*, 1989], 2010)

The report said that the State Department paid more than \$800,000 to drug traffickers to carry humanitarian assistance to the *contras* (Cockburn & St. Clair, 1999). US officials didn't address the issue because they didn't want it to interfere with *contra* efforts to overthrow the Sandinistas, the report added (LeoGrande, 1997). Not incidentally, the Government Printing Office stopped printing the report after one week and never reprinted it (DemocraticUnderground.com, 2010). And again, the story died.

Then in August of 1997, Gary Webb of the *San Jose Mercury News* wrote a three-part series called "Dark Alliance" that implicated the CIA in dumping cocaine onto the streets of Los Angeles and into the hands of east LA gangs, and a minor firestorm ensued. Again, initially ignored by most major media, the story made it to black talk radio and wouldn't go away. Congresswoman Maxine Waters was a guest on such a show when she announced the congressional Black Caucus would look into the allegations. The head of the CIA went to Los Angeles to speak to an angry black community.

The *Mercury News* series "touched a raw nerve in the way our stories hadn't," observes Robert Parry. One reason is that Parry and Barger's stories had focused on the more antiseptic smuggling side of drug trafficking in far-off Central America. Webb's tale brought the story home, focusing on what he identified as the distribution network and its target, the inner cities of California. Particularly among African-American communities, devastated by the scourge of crack and desperate for information and answers, Webb's reporting found ready constituencies. (Kornbluh, 1997, p. 34)

Soon, the *New York Times*, *Washington Post* and *Los Angeles Times* all published investigations into the "Dark Alliance" allegations. All three called into serious question Webb's methods and the overreach of key conclusions. Webb's story had appeal because it had a conspiracy behind it, but the three major papers found that while the CIA and NSC may have turned a blind eye to drug running, it could not be definitively connected to selling drugs to a major dealer in Los Angeles, as Webb had said.

Still, the main contention was correct, and the major media spent many pages discrediting Webb instead of following up on the story. According to *CJR*:

Indeed, all three papers ignored evidence from declassified National Security Council e-mail messages, and *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* ignored evidence, from Oliver North's notebooks, which lent support to the underlying premise of the *Mercury News* series—that *U.S. officials would both condone and protect drug traffickers if doing so advanced the contra cause*. The...*New York Times* piece didn't even mention the Kerry Committee report. (Kornbluh, 1997, p. 38)

Geneva Overholser, then *Post* ombudsperson, looked into the *Post's* handling of the story and said that the larger issues Parry and Barger and Webb uncovered were valid and yet ignored. Kornbluh (1997) explains:

“A principal responsibility of the press is to protect the people from government excesses,” Overholser pointed out. “*The Post* (and others) showed more energy for protecting the CIA from someone else's journalistic excesses.” The mainstream press shirked its larger duty; thus it bears the larger burden [of responsibility for ignoring the story]. (p. 39)

**‘Truth Is Falsehood’: The NSC and public diplomacy.** The revelations above are staggering enough but not the whole story. Unreported and largely untouched by the Senate-House committee investigations was the domestic side of Iran-*contra*, a sweeping campaign of disinformation and intimidation coming from the White House. The congressional report was to include this material but was ultimately cut out. Dick Cheney, then a Republican Representative from Wyoming on this committee, steered it away from the domestic issues (Parry & Kornbluh, 1988). (Another disturbing set of questions emerges from the long list of George W. Bush appointees with ties to key Iran-*contra* events.)

To perform these disinformation and intimidation duties, the administration borrowed CIA covert operatives and reassigned them to the NRC so neither the press nor Congress could ask hard questions. Researching this program, Robert Parry and Peter Kornbluh (1988) reviewed the volumes of documents produced by the investigative committee and interviewed dozens of participants and investigators for an article for *Foreign Policy*, the prestigious scholarly journal published by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Their study showed:

The administration was indeed running...domestic political operations *comparable to what the CIA conducts against hostile forces abroad. Only this time they were turned against the three key institutions of American democracy: Congress, the press, and an informed electorate.* The similarities to a CIA covert operation were no coincidence. Iran-*contra* documents show that its chief architects were the late CIA director William Casey and a veteran of the CIA's clandestine overseas media operations, Walter Raymond, Jr., who...was detailed to the National Security Council (NSC) staff in 1982 to set up a “public diplomacy” program. (1988, p. 4) [italics added]

The administration created the country's first peacetime propaganda ministry. Going well beyond trying to spin public debate, it involved a "political action" campaign:

The public diplomacy office pressured journalists and news executives into compliance. *The White House deployed secretly funded private-sector surrogates to attack anti-*contra* lawmakers through television and newspaper advertisements and to promote the *contra* cause through organizations with hidden funding ties to the administration.* The FBI mounted intrusive and intimidating investigations of groups opposed to Reagan's Central America policies. The congressional Iran-*contra* report cites seven cases in which North and other administration officials sought to manipulate criminal probes to protect their operations from exposure. (Parry & Kornbluh, 1988, p. 5) [italics added]

In its public relations, it didn't just feed material to shows such as “The McLaughlin Group” and “This Week with David Brinkley,” its staff bragged about chasing *New York Times* reporter Ray Bonner out of San Salvador. Bonner had also reported from Nicaragua but came to their

attention in this case because he had written about government massacres of peasants in El Salvador just as Congress was to reauthorize funding for that rights-abusing government. Within the year, he was transferred to the business desk in New York. The *Times* did this by having Ambassador Deane Hinton meet personally with and pressure A.M. Rosenthal, the *Times*' executive editor and an anti-communist from his days covering Poland after World War II (Parry, 2010).

When CIA Director Casey, a former OSS agent, sent CIA operatives to attack the coast of Nicaragua and mine a harbor, damaging ships and shipping, the public diplomacy team went into full propaganda mode saying the *contras* did it. They peppered the media with these stories as evidence that the *contras*, who were seen as ineffective, were in fact an able fighting force and so were worthy of more US support. Subsequent reporting uncovered that the CIA performed the operations, but the earlier story placed doubt in the public mind, assisted the election and deceived and distracted Congress.

The public diplomacy team was a first in that they combined sophisticated polling and targeting of audiences with, for example, use of military attacks for domestic-propaganda purposes. Raymond said they tried to create a "new art form " in foreign policy. They thought they were incorporating the lessons of Vietnam—that the United States had lost the war (through discouragement and withdrawal) because the North Vietnamese and the Soviets had convinced most Americans through disinformation that the United States was in fact losing. The program was very concerned with “the need to counter *the Soviet-orchestrated effort to influence the United States' Congress, the national media and the general public,*’ which led to Western defeats in Vietnam and other ‘wars of national liberation’” (Parry & Kornbluh, 1988, p. 8) [italics added]. Among its creative approaches to co-opting the media and public mind was to stage a drug-smuggling sting, a flight carrying government cocaine to Nicaragua, replete with a photograph that convicted cocaine smuggler and pilot, Barry Seal, took of a Nicaraguan official unloading drugs.

Early on, the *contras* were said to be worth supporting because they were interdicting weapons moving from Nicaragua to leftist rebels in El Salvador. As Congress was debating \$100 million in aid to the *contras*, Oliver North and colleagues worked with Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega to set up a staged interdiction of alleged Eastern-bloc weapons headed for El Salvador. Before the media could be notified, however, Noriega became angry that the US press was writing about his drug connections and seized the ship containing the weapons. In addition, to throw the press off the trail of *contra* human-rights violations, North and Raymond had a Father Tom Dowling testify to Congress about Sandinista human-rights abuses. It later was revealed that Dowling had been working for North and was not ordained within the Roman Catholic Church. He was a member of a sect called The Old Catholic Church.

Public diplomacy officials took a “very aggressive posture vis-a-vis a sometimes hostile press” and “generally did not give the critics of the policy any quarter in the debate,” [head of the public diplomacy office Otto] Reich reported to Raymond in March 1986. *Indeed, Reich's staff literally policed the airwaves, monitoring major news outlets for offending items and taking action against the journalists who deviated from the Reagan line.* The [diplomacy office's] report cards boast of having “killed” purportedly “erroneous news stories.” (Parry & Kornbluh, 1988) [italics added]

The study also showed in some cases how the “diplomacy” program pressured journalists:

When stories aired that did not conform with the administration's point of view, Reich often met personally with editors and reporters to press for more sympathetic coverage....After National Public Radio (NPR) aired a poignant report on a *contra* attack that the [office] felt was particularly objectionable, Reich informed NPR editors that he had “a special consultant service listening to all NPR programs” on Central America and that he considered NPR’s reporting to be biased against U.S. policy. (Parry & Kornbluh, 1988) [italics added]

This is a more malignant form of public-information cancer than Nixon’s dirty-tricks operatives. It represented the use of domestic surveillance, disinformation (lies) and extortion-like threats against anyone from producers of stories featuring witnesses of human rights abuses to other journalists and analysts to former mercenaries who once worked with the *contras* such as Jack Terrell. Terrell grew disgusted with the *contras*’ human-rights atrocities and returned to the United States to expose them. After he began speaking out, the diplomacy office began a campaign to intimidate and discredit him. North worked with the FBI to create a “counter-intelligence, counter-terrorism” plan for Terrell, who soon withdrew from the public eye (Parry & Kornbluh, 1988).

Broader attempts at character assassination involved “leaks” that the Sandinistas entertained visiting journalists by providing male or female prostitutes. Other creative lying included leaking just before the 1984 US elections that the Soviet Union had sold MIG fighters to Nicaragua. Not long afterward, more leaks tempered the inflamed public mind with the suggestion that Soviet airplanes *might* be sent. *They never came*. Parry and Kornbluh (1988) say:

An executive branch...*battling phantom Soviet agents for control of U.S. public opinion is simply rationalizing the abuse of its awesome powers*. By intimidating innocent citizens who are exercising their constitutional right of dissent, this abuse deforms the public debate and guarantees misguided, and ultimately disastrous, decisions, as exemplified by the Iran-*contra* affair. (p. 30) [italics added]

Where were the major media as these manipulations were going on? It is not unreasonable to think that perhaps they had been cowed by the actions of the public diplomacy office into not reporting on the public diplomacy office. Or were they so jaded about presidents manipulating coverage that they never noticed how badly these efforts had jumped the tracks?

### **‘Battling Phantom Soviet Agents for Control’**

Moynihan believes that revelations of the Venona encryptions, as a case in point, and better intelligence generally on the Soviet Union and its satellites could have prevented the Iran-*contra* scandal—he doesn’t mention it by name, but his argument is that widespread knowledge of the real Soviet Union would have tempered exaggerated fears of the communist threat. One wonders. It is a very good question, yet so hypothetical that answers are elusive. Still, we are left with some outstanding heuristics.

Iran-*contra* was based on an inflated, almost paranoid assessment of the Soviet threat, rooted in the elaborate fantasy world of the Reagan administration. And Ronald Reagan himself, who had lived his life according to a cinematic fantasy of “rugged individualism,” anecdotal common

sense, “traditional values” and frontier vigilantism, would have had to believe in a much-diminished threat from the communist world. That idea would have had to have broken into his elaborately crafted notion of his own right-headedness, his own righteousness. And that is hard to envision given the hermetically sealed world he and his zealots lived in. Ultimately, in this case, the true believers made the military and intelligence professionals into amoral hacks—secret agents who could not operate in secret, who sought to mold public opinion and shape the minds of men and women even as they broke more and more laws. This caused a different vision of the administration to break into the consciousness of many more Americans than before Iran-*contra*, as Reagan’s popularity fell below 50 percent for the first time.

“The Cold War has bequeathed to us a vast secrecy system that shows no sign of receding. It has become our characteristic mode of governance in the executive branch” (1999, p. 214), Moynihan says. He notes that the CIA has moved increasingly from intelligence, where other players have been moving, into covert operations, which has not always been a strong suit. These include Iran in the 1950s, Vietnam in the 1960s, Lebanon and Central America in the 1980s, and Iraq and Afghanistan in the 2000s, to name a few. Then, legislation in the 1970s that required coordination with Congress of covert operations increasingly drove most of these operations outside the CIA—into the NSC and the inner circle of the executive.

And if the covert activities of the NSC were flushed out and it were required to be open with Congress, would not the same underground operations just find another office, another hiding place? Is the migration of covert operations out of their homes in intelligence agencies into yet another organizational cave a telling example of how secrecy, like water, finds its own level? Or would the macro-scale intelligence-gathering on the Soviet Union that Moynihan points to—assuming its widespread dissemination by the mass media—have prevented this sort of “unstable mode of decision-making in foreign policy”? (Moynihan, 1998, p. 213, citing Koh, 1990)

If so, it would only happen because the American people would not have tolerated Iran-*contra* in light of tell-tale evidence of a diminished communist threat, and that would require an extensive mass-media effort. Still, as a society, we are so used to secrecy by governments that we really do not know how to evaluate such a scenario. A government seeking to declassify documents and prevent secrecy is such an anomaly that we can scarcely imagine it.

But if, hypothetically, life under Soviet rule could have been discussed in demythologized terms, it is hard to believe that a Ronald Reagan could so easily arise. It’s even harder to believe that a public so informed would let him, his advisers and his operatives off the hook for their fantasies of heroism regarding the undoing of communism. Another argument stemming from anthropology and sociobiology says that humans need enemies to define them and will always create them, that aggression within the group is more easily controlled if it is foisted outward, in-group vs. out-group, spy vs. spy. Even so, it is the job of the media to puncture such fantasies and to hold out for a common humanity, consisting of what is flawed but real.

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## Appendix C

### Key Excerpts from *Christianity and Crisis* Not Included in the Text

Descriptions of WTDS or human-rights violations are in italics; additional information or action one can take is listed at the bottom of certain stories.

#### *El Salvador*

#### **Death and Life on the Volcano: With the Guerillas in Guazapa**

By Charles Clements

[June 13, 1983]

For the past year I have lived and worked in an area of El Salvador controlled by antigovernment forces, in a place called Guazapa, the Guazapa Front. It's an area only 35 miles north of San Salvador, so that from the slopes of the Guazapa volcano I can look out and see the city easily. The Front is 15 miles by 15 miles, so it's roughly 250 square miles. Within that Front live 10,000 civilians, 40 percent of them under the age of 12.

I think what is happening within Guazapa reflects the kind of society that the opposition forces hope to build someday. Even under the very difficult stresses of the revolution something very positive is happening. The stresses exists, of course, because the Guazapa region is a prime target for government attacks. I can't remember a day since July 1982 that the areas hasn't been bombed by A-37's, or rocketed by Cessna Skymasters, or strafed by Huey helicopters—all American-supplied.

Despite these stresses, some 30 elementary schools [operate] within the Front—even though schools are prime targets because any place there is a collection of people is an immediate attraction for aircraft.

There are also 15 health clinics in Guazapa, one in each of the 15 villages, and two hospitals, one that serves the civilian population and one that serves the military population. Health care is free. It has developed under very primitive conditions, with an emphasis on preventive medicine and patient education. This year we successfully developed a public health program; it has helped build latrines for 90 percent of the houses; introduced curricula in the schools that stress the importance of hygiene—why flies carry disease and need to be controlled—in general helping children understand how diseases are contracted and prevented. It's included working with the cooks in all the community kitchens to get them to use more fresh foods that *campesinos* don't ordinarily eat. They're introducing such things as the leaves of the yucca, papaya, radishes, cactus, foods that are not ordinarily consumed in view of the meager diet.

The program includes techniques for making natural medicines, because any medicine that enters the Front has to be smuggle in at great risk—people have been killed for carrying medicine in. So we try to make natural medicines....

*The health care and the education are just two elements of the society that is emerging there. There's less malnutrition in this zone, I believe, than exists outside the zone, because the only true malnutrition I see is among the children of refugees who come into the zone. It's significant that despite the daily bombings, rocketings, strafings, and the threat of invasions, the populations of Guazapa has grown by about 1,000 people this year. I think it speaks to the sense of order that exists in Guazapa. There's not the terrorism that exists elsewhere in El Salvador. There are not the raids by death squads, hauling people from their homes in the middle of the night, and there are certainly no bodies that turn up headless, as is the practice in most areas outside Guazapa. So people come there, choosing to face the known dangers of the army attacks rather than the unknown dangers of the government's terrorist activities.*

But there are other reasons I don't see malnutrition in the zone, because food is distributed, not totally equitably, but in accordance with needs. The children that are most malnourished receive their quotas of milk from the dairy collective. (The cows have to be milked very low in the zone, where there are trees, because the helicopters will shoot them whenever they can.)

That milk is run around the zone to the children who need it most. The 150 pounds of fish that the fish collective catch daily (the Front borders on a large lake) are distributed so that pregnant women and wounded patients, who have greater protein needs, receive fish when it is available. In general, if you're hungry, you can be pretty sure everyone else is hungry. It's an area certainly characterized by *undernutrition* all the time. But there is not much of the malnutrition that exists in other parts of El Salvador where the government is in control....

I never tire of talking to the *campesinos*. My Spanish...[is] still pretty terrible....Yet I've come to know the history of the zone, not by talking to historians, but more by listening to patient histories, from which a clear picture has emerged of the zone.

One border of the Guazapa Front is only about two or three miles from Aguilaries, which I can see easily but which lies outside the Front. That's where Father Rutilio Grande, before he was killed, did much of his work founding the base Christian communities. There were other priests, such as Jose Alas, and others who have been killed or who left to develop base Christian communities or other...groups. The base Christian communities still function to a large degree.

The *campesinos* tell me about this with great fondness, and I always enjoy hearing it, because they will describe the reflection group, and how everyone was asked what they thought of the scriptural passage...and how it compared to reality, and what can I do about it? Invariably, the person telling me this story would laugh, and say, "That was the first time anyone asked me what I thought."

*The Salvadoran campesino is used to being looked down upon, used to serving: even before the physical violence of the soldiers and the death squads, the campesino was used to experiencing a violence to the spirit that sometimes we overlook...for example, watching one out of four of their children die before the age of five, mostly because of slow starvation. Seventy percent of the people in El Salvador, according to the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization, go to bed with less than the minimum caloric intake every day. In one of the first of these discussions, one of the campesinos told me about how difficult it was for him to feed the dogs at the hacienda where he worked....He had to feed them milk every day, and he could never afford milk for his own children. When the dogs were sick he had to take them to the veterinarian in Suchitoto. But when his children were sick and died, he couldn't afford to take them to the doctor, and the landlord just gave him sympathy. They never had a doctor in the village before my visits.*

*I became interested in El Salvador because of what I learned about what was happening there....In Salinas, Calif., I was meeting refugees who bore the physical and psychological marks of torture and brutality; they painted a very different picture from the one our government and the government of El Salvador tried to draw for us.*

I consider myself a Quaker, and some years ago I had made a commitment to nonviolence....I examined very carefully what my commitment meant in the context of the revolution....the medical act is a neutral act by all definitions of the Geneva Convention...I began to think it was important to have a witness there [with the rebels]—that it is part of the Quaker tradition and other Christian faiths—a witness to see what was happening, to tell Americans what was happening from a perspective they might understand....

### **Joining up**

I ask practically everyone that I walk with, from one area to another, or spend any time with, how they came to "incorporate." That's their word for joining this process. A friend of mine named Magdelano, the oldest combatant in El Salvador, told his story...

Magdelano had gone to a meeting of the Federation of Christian Campesinos, one of the many organizations that sprang out of the situation and out of the hopes of the base Christian communities. . his first. Afterwards he was picked up by the security police and was questioned as to who the other 40 people in the meeting were. Magdelano still says, with a twinkle, that he wasn't sure what the

Federation of Christian *Campesinos* was really about at that time, but he knew that if the police wanted to know about everyone there, the federation was probably up to some good. *And that gave him the courage to withstand three days of intensive torture; he never told the names of the other people. When he was released from prison, Magdelano had to be medically castrated, because they had hung heavier and heavier weights from his testicles, until they were literally ripped away. . . .*

Despite the torture, Magdelano was still hesitant to join the revolutionary movement. He moved his family to the “control zone” in Guazapa and he went to San Salvador to ask for an audience with the archbishop...When the archbishop was asked if Christians could resort to violence, to defend themselves, he answered very reluctantly, “If there were no other alternatives.” *And, of course, [he] was to die by an assassin’s bullet not too long after that.*

I was first taken into the control zone across enemy lines—a very dangerous job—by a very young man: 12 years old. I asked him why he incorporated. *He told me that he and his brothers and sisters watched while six soldiers raped his mother and then blew her brains out in front of them.* That young man is not bitter, but he is determined. It is this spirit, which I have found in the whole population of Guazapa, that allows them to face the tremendous stresses with hopes for the future. . . .

*In October I was in a small village that was cut off when the army’s Ramon Belloso Battalion invaded...the Front. They...cut off the corner of the Front that the village was in, to keep reinforcements from arriving. The village sent out its militia, its defense force of 40 young people, whose job it was to hold off Belloso until nightfall. Evacuations can’t happen during the daytime because the spotter plane sees the civilian lines retreating and either fires its own white phosphorus rockets<sup>2</sup> or calls in the A-37 bombers....*

Everyone very efficiently and very calmly went about their business that day, packing up their seed stocks and whatever food they wanted to have until the next harvest, and burying that, and then hiding the livestock as well. The women were busy preparing tortillas, because that would be the only thing to sustain us in the hills. The teacher in the school was packing up the pencils and the notebooks—one each per student—and the three textbooks which comprised what they had for their three grades. The health care workers were preparing bandages and packing up the clinics so that they could be evacuated. One of my tasks that day was to make tranquilizing cocktails for the children because they have to be drugged during the evacuations....

At 6:30 [p.m.]...they began to evacuate, with great discipline, without the use of lights. The men carried water, and maybe a machete or whatever tools or possessions they wanted to preserve. Women carried tortillas and other food; older children carried smaller children, who by that time all had valium cocktails to keep them from crying, because they evacuated right underneath the hill where the government forces were mortaring.

Later that night I withdrew with the defense force as they covered the retreat of the civilians. For two-and-a-half days we hid in the hills, watching the smoke from the village during the gunfire. For me, it was a particularly strange time. Someone had loaned me a radio that we used to keep track of where the troops were because it’s announced from San Salvador many times. That Saturday night, I tuned in a Notre Dame football game with 60,000 cheering fans. I imagine they were eating hot dogs and drinking beer, which I certainly wouldn’t have turned down at the time, but it was just such a contradiction of the world that we live in. I was in a group of 50 civilians, hoping that the soldiers were not going to come after them and slaughter them, as is the practice when they find them.

We returned to the village...to find [it] mostly destroyed. The only thing unusual was that all the houses weren’t burned. The houses are adobe and the roof beams are wood, so that they have to take some time to set them on fire. Apparently, they were too busy looting....But they had located most of

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<sup>2</sup> “White phosphorus results in painful chemical burns...[It] penetrates the skin rapidly once the particles become embedded in the skin....It usually creates multiple, deep burns of various sizes that continue to burn unless deprived of oxygen.” [Human Rights Watch and other groups have condemned its use against civilians, most recently by Israel in Gaza (in 2009).] (GlobalSecurity.org; <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/systems/munitions/wp.htm>, retrieved 7/12/10)

the buried possessions very, very well. I don't know whether they used dogs, or just knew how to search for things.

The villagers are [used] this; there have been 12 major invasions of Guazapa in the past two-and-a-half years. *What was remarkable about the Belloso troops...was the minuteness of their destructive capacity. Every fork had its tines broken, every spoon was broken, every cup and saucer had a bullet-hole in the center of it, every piece of furniture smashed, every family picture destroyed. I didn't really hear any sobs, there was just a kind of silent acceptance, until one family found all the pictures of their saints desecrated—they usually have pictures of the Sacred Heart or Blessed Virgin or other religious figures on the wall of the simple adobe houses. The livestock was lying all around dead....*

*When I take prenatal histories, the stories of massacres just abound. I'll ask a woman of 40 how many pregnancies she's had, and she might say, ten. And I'll say, how many living children, and she might say, four. To learn if there had been prenatal problems, I'll ask: What happened to the others? The answer invariably that they were slaughtered in this massacre or that, or they were in a house that the soldiers surrounded and burned, or they tell me any of the massacres that have occurred in and around Guazapa.*

I have some very interesting responsibilities. They have made me a liaison to the International Red Cross, to arrange the release of prisoners of war. So I have come to know the prisoners of war, the young men, sometimes only 14, who are fighting with the army because they were drafted. They will admit to killing women and children because they're taught that women are factories for producing more guerrillas and children are the seeds of guerrillas that have to be eliminated. They say they're afraid to desert because it's well known that the families of deserters are sometimes killed. But many young men do stay in Guazapa. One of the first I got to know was an "Evangelista," a Protestant. He wanted to write to his congregation, rather than his family, and the Geneva Convention is very specific that prisoners are only allowed to write to their families. But we negotiated with the Red Cross so that he could write his family via the congregation. He asked that his letter be read at the service by his minister, because he knew his family might be killed because of his actions, and he wanted the congregation to protect them. So he explained that he was not a communist but a Christian, and had seen more Christianity practiced in Guazapa than he had ever experienced on the outside; for that reason he felt compelled to stay and help build the society. He wanted the congregation to look after his family and to understand why he was not returning to the regular army.

The prisoners that do return tell about what they've seen. Prisoners of war are guarded in homes and come to know families. They see worship services, schools, clinics—things that don't exist on the outside. It has a profound effect. It has been largely responsible for the terrible decline in morale that has occurred in the regular army in the past nine months. *Before June or July of 1982 I never saw more than one or two or three prisoners. They were taught to fight to the death, because the army had told them they would be tortured by the guerrillas. Prisoners of war that were released before did not return alive. The government said the guerillas killed them; other prisoners of war say that the government killed them because they feared that they would be returning as collaborators or they were cowards for having surrendered.* But when released prisoners were turned over to the Red Cross for their own protection, and they started returning to their units, telling the truth about what they saw, others started surrendering in larger numbers....I was amused to see a picture in *Time* magazine, showing a guerrilla with a bullhorn, with the caption, "Guerilla haranguing the population." Well, yes; they explain that the soldiers should surrender or they will lose their lives needlessly, to defend the oligarchy. They say that their lives will be respected, that they're victims of a system and that they'll be turned over to the International Red Cross if they surrender. In the fall they started to surrender in groups of 30 or 40; in December a whole company of 105 with all their officers surrendered; in January and February the guerillas captured as many prisoners as they had in the entire six months before. And that momentum is continuing. I don't think any amount of U.S. military aid or trainers can give them the capacity to win a military victory. They can only make it much bloodier.

**Ways to Help** [boxed at the end of the article]

Contributions for the support of Dr. Charles Clements and other medical workers in guerrilla-controlled areas of El Salvador may be made to the Salvadoran Medical Relief Fund, P.O. Box 1194, Salinas, CA 93902. Gifts to the fund are tax-deductible. Also active in providing medical supplies and equipment is Medical Aid for El Salvador, Box 3282, Los Angeles, CA.

*Clements is an American physician who entered El Salvador in March 1982 to treat civilian patients and teach preventive medicine in a guerrilla-controlled area of El Salvador. He is a former Air Force pilot who served in the Vietnam War but became disillusioned and refused to fly additional missions. After completing medical training, he practiced in California, where experience in treating refugees from Central America led him to question official accounts of the situation in the region. Currently, he is in the U.S. to describe his experience to members of Congress, journalists and the public and to help raise funds for medical supplies. This article is an edited version of a talk he gave at The Interchurch Center [national offices of the mainline Protestant denominations] in New York City.*

**Refugee Women and Children: Salvadoran Atrocities**

By Elizabeth Hanly

[December 10, 1984]

The women met in an airless room with thick canvas walls and a sheet-metal roof. Dire floors, wooden benches. The slimmest of cots. Rows of such rooms, thousands of them, each housing a family, share a plateau ringed with barbed wire. On the other side of that ring, Honduran soldiers, many of them still children, play in the trees, guns cocked. Some sleep in the boughs. To arrive here I passed through four or five checkpoints. Soldiers swarmed everywhere around them. Just beyond that last barricade, a dozen little girls watched me approach and shyly reached for my hands. They took me around those rows of rooms and other small boxlike buildings—clinics and classrooms mostly—until we found the women with whom I sit now. We're crowded here. Any one of us could easily touch the other.

The women are Salvadoran, from rural hamlets. The place is Mesa Grande, a refugee camp in Honduras about 40 miles from the Salvadoran border. Ten thousand have come here to live, about half that number under the age of seven. Women's meetings like the one I was attending occur regularly. A score of small support groups have sprung up in the camps.

"It helps to talk," said Rosa. Short enough and plump enough to seem endlessly round, she gave a breast to her child. "We women have never before turned to each other like this," added red-haired Luisa, her hands shoved in apron pockets, then tucked under her arms, hard against her breasts. *Luisa's three children are dead, but not just that. Two years ago when the Salvadoran National Guard came to her village in United States-supplied helicopters, they chopped up all the children into bits and threw them to the village pigs. "The soldiers laughed all the while," Luisa told me. "What were they trying to kill?" she asked, crying, her hands now in the lap of that flowered apron.*

*We went around the circle. Each woman told her story. The same story. Each had had nothing. They had worked, generations of them, all day, every day on someone else's land. Their children were parasite-ridden or starving. Visits to the landowners, the patrons, eventually had brought the Guard. "We asked for food. They gave us bullets." Mariella, her wrinkles like rivers, spoke for the group.*

*And so it began. Some of them sided with the guerillas, the muchachos, they call them. Some tried to remain neutral. The Guard honored no such distinctions as they returned again and again to a village....All of the women still had tears to cry as they told of brothers, husbands gathered into a circle and set on fire after their legs had been broken. They told of trees heavy with women hanging by the wrists, a sister or godmother among them, all with breasts cut off and facial skin peeled back, all slowly bleeding to death. A frenzy went with each telling, as though the women had*

*yet to find a place inside themselves to contain it. Now, to my right, one of the women was rocking another. Everyone was trembling.*

Later, Rosa, her baby on her hip, walked with me over to a dusty open field, the camp's playground. A hundred homemade kites crackled in the wind above the sunset: lots of giggling when the kites entangled. "We have found a voice," Rosa told me. "Together we write poems and songs about our poor Salvador. But our men feel they must suffer in silence. It breaks them," she added softly. "If we can do little for our men, at least we can work to help our children."...

*The author is a freelance writer at work on a book on the mothers of the disappeared in Argentina and El Salvador.*

### **Some Notes on the Search for Sanctuary: Holes in the Fence**

By James A. Gittings

[January 13, 1986]

At the Sanctuary trial the voices drone on and on toward Christmas. Matters disputed before Judge Earl Carroll by fourteen defense attorneys and two government prosecutors related to admissibility of this testimony, the credibility of [this or] that witness, the involvement in the trial's origins of this government agency or that political personality. Eleven defendants are almost lost behind the cloud of verbiage, and so is the reality of the search for Sanctuary. I go looking through my notes—in search of that reality....

HERMOSILLO, SONORA, MEXICO: In a cheap hotel of this provincial city almost 170 miles south of the U.S. border, two odd partnerships confronting each other in the trial of the United States vs. Sanctuary suddenly slide into focus. Oddly, even weirdly, the partnerships are law plus crime against faith plus suffering, with neither pair altogether clean of deceit or bereft of good intention.

I am awake at 4:30 a.m. because it has been necessary to keep the lights burning in my room lest roaches and bedbugs devour me. Therefore I hear the passage of the coyote (the people-smuggler) through the corridor as he summons the hotel's other guests to the lobby. . . .

The early risers are Salvadorans. They have come up the central and western highways of Mexico to this city, the penultimate stop on a 1900-mile journey from their war-torn homeland to the United States....

The coyotes who, after an hour, load the Salvadorans on a truck and drive them away, are criminals. They sometimes engage in smuggling of substances as well as people...But if criminal, they are not always vicious. Most do the best they can for the refugees; some are even kindly....

To a group of these men, early in 1984, came James Rayburn, INS chief investigator in the Arizona district. Rayburn was seeking incriminating data on persons engaged in the Sanctuary Movement. It was data that the coyotes, tradesmen aggrieved because others were doing for free what they do for pay, were happy to supply. And so, in the Sanctuary pretrial investigatory phase, work began with the accumulation of foundational links for the chain of evidence supplied by professional lawbreakers. With a partnership, that is, of law plus crime. . . .

TUCSON, ARIZONA: The context of this trial is almost surreal. Arizona is military-industrial country, full of military and air bases, factories turning out missiles, and conservative think-tanks and scholars. Tucson and Scottsdale are favorite residence areas for mercenary soldiers during the killing off-season....

*The attorneys talk to us in a room that is otherwise filled with U.S. Air Force flight crews, some in jungle fatigues, who are having breakfast. It is well known to the international press, if not to everyone here, that high-resolution aerial photography of rebel areas in both Guatemala and El Salvador is done by U.S. crews flying out of Panama. It is also known that some of these planes keep flying northward after their missions to bases in Arizona and Texas...The attorneys talk about*

*problems arising from attempts to save people here whose lives and families have already been threatened down there in Central America in operations made possible by the work of the men who sit across from us at our morning meal....*

*The other day Judge Carroll summoned up in a sentence a basic issue underlying the Sanctuary trial. His Honor's remark came after defense attorney James Brosnahan called for dismissal of the Sanctuary indictments on ground of unequal and selective application of law. Brosnahan grounded his motion on the fact that the United States Government recently laid aside INS procedures to make it possible for relatives of Salvadoran President Napoleon Duarte to enter America to escape dangers of kidnapping. Brosnahan pointed out that the government had done this at the same time that it moved to trial in Tucson to convict eleven defendants for having provided the same service to less eminent Salvadorans fleeing from near-identical dangers.*

Carroll's reply was nothing if not candid. "There are powers reserved to the executive, that is, to the political (judge's emphasis) branch" not to be exercised by other Americans. Judge Carroll made plain that these "powers reserved...to the political branch" include the right to take extraordinary steps on behalf of people who must run for their lives.

Attorney Brosnahan, representing Maria De Socorro Aguilar, retorted in words no less succinct: "I really don't think the American people much care for a rule of law that turns upon status...or for the notion that the exercise of compassion is a privilege reserved to the executive branch." . . .

The press covering this trial are decent people. They don't want to know enough about Sanctuary to get refugees seized or to make the government's effort to crush the movement easier. Nevertheless, they keep asking those who have been around through long pretrial days whether we believe Sanctuary is still serving refugees, by which they mean to ask whether a religious alternative to the coyotes still exists.

I don't intend to write anything here about where or how the Sanctuary movement people move their clients. But I tell the press that Sanctuary continues to assist refugees....

In Phoenix a new center is about to open, a gift of the United Methodists, in which refugees may live during their adjustment period. Also in Phoenix a Lutheran church houses several families. Meanwhile, the visiting journalists eat lunch daily at a Tucson restaurant. Among the waiters is a young man who was arrested a few weeks ago and sent back to his homeland. With movement help, he is back on the job.

Oh yes, Sanctuary goes on.

TUCSON, ARIZONA: We are all watching Judge Carroll's development. When I first listened to his comments—back in July—he had not met the defendants. From his remarks on that midsummer occasion, it was clear the judge thought he would be faced in court by some sort of countercultural gang. New Lefties perhaps. Instead this man of late middle years confronts Sister Darlene Nicgorski, a missionary nun sworn to lifelong obedience and assigned to the Sanctuary movement by superiors of her order. What's more, these same superiors come down to Tucson to tell the press that Darlene, if a "conspirator," has "fifteen hundred coconspirators," her fellow nuns....

TUCSON, ARIZONA: Prosecutor Reno blunders during his opening speech, imputing motive (the mercenary kind) to the defendants. His mistake upsets the judge's applecart, since he cannot very well bar the defense from talking about intent if the prosecution does. Carroll is visibly irritated with the prosecutor, and tells him so.

[Gittings explains Carroll had barred any discussion of motives or higher obligations, restricting the trial merely to whether the defendants assisted undocumented aliens in entering and staying in this country. Among the arguments he sought to bar were any appeals to the U.S. Refugee Act of 1980 or the UN Protocol Accords of 1967, both of which state that anyone with a grave fear of persecution if returned to their country of origin is a political refugee and may not be deported. The Reagan administration maintained the Salvadoran exiles were here for purely economic reasons.]

Next morning...before the jury enters [Carroll] open[s] the door to the defense attorneys: They may respond, clarify, explicate the prosecution's remarks. It is like lifting a floodgate—

Attorney Bob Hirsh, opening for defendant [Rev. John] Fife, gets on the record the whole religious package—duties of a pastor, higher law, supranatural obedience—that appeared to be barred by pretrial rulings.

James Brosnahan, representing Maria De Socorro Aguilar, the widow of Sonora, puts on the record the realities of noblesse oblige, community service, piety, that mark middle-class Mexican women, as well as her faithfulness in visiting prisons, aiding the sick, and feeding the hungry.

*Michael Altman, the...law professor from Arizona State University, crafted his introduction of the defense for Sister Darlene Nicgorski to include her Guatemalan experience at the hands of police and the murder of her pastor by security forces in that country. All of which, Altman led the jury to understand, made not only possible but necessary the nun's decision to aid refugees barred from the U.S.-Mexico border. So much, when Altman was done, for the judge's pretrial order barring testimony on international conditions behind Sanctuary as a movement. . . .*

William Risner, attorney for Nogales, Mexico priest Ramon Quinones, gets on record before the jury that his client is an exalted figure in the affairs of his diocese, the founder of many social service projects in his city and parish, and the author of transborder programs of cooperation between the Mexican city and its Arizona namesake.

Stephen Cooper, speaking in openers for defendant Jim Corbett, make sure the jurors understand Quaker beliefs, the imperatives that operate upon a professor of philosophy<sup>3</sup> and the role that his client has played in keeping the Sanctuary movement from becoming an organization, much less a conspiracy....

I think of the Sanctuary people. Of the elaborate transportation arrangements. Of the place to sleep, the food, the companionship. I think of the legal counsel made available, the help in finding employment, the language lessons. I think of the love in [Sanctuary worker] Sister Rosa's face, and in the welcome a Germantown, Pa., family of my acquaintance gave their refugees once they had completed the long underground journey north and east from Tucson. I am glad, I am proud, that Sanctuary exists. And I don't give a damn whether or not it is legal.

*Gittings is a freelance writer on religious affairs, best known as editor of Seventh Angel and, earlier, as an editor of A.D. [the Presbyterian denominational magazine]. He has twice previously reported on the Sanctuary trial in Tucson for C&C.*

### **El Salvador—'To Create Some Life': The Peasant Initiative for Repopulation**

By Renny Golden

[October 12, 1987]

*Marta, who is a grandmother, holds her adopted daughter still while...baptismal water falls on her head. The priest speaks the sacramental words but Ricardo, a laico (lay leader) invokes the blessing of Salvadoran saints and martyrs. He begins with Msgr. Oscar Romero, recalls Ita Ford, Maura Clarke, Dorothy Kazel, and Jean Donovan, as well as Marta's parish priest, Octavio Ortiz, killed in 1979. The litany includes the child's mother and father, members of Marta's base Christian community, who were killed...Marta says the child is the future, the seed of those who loved the life of all above their own....*

*The current phase of the war in El Salvador, often described as one of low-intensity conflict, succeeded the Government's 1980-1983 military goal of depopulation through genocide. That phase was summarized by the Salvadoran army as "draining the sea to catch the fish." The metaphor is precise, if horrifying: The "sea" is the people, the "fish" the guerrillas.*

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<sup>3</sup> A former vocation of Corbett's.

For the past two years the half-drained “sea” has been coming back into...the countryside...reconstituting a life. Committees of refugees representing sectors of the 800,000 displaced—living in and around San Salvador in refugee camps, along railroad tracks, on garbage dumps, near ravines running with sewage—have decided to return to the bombarded lands they fled. Repopulation is the initiative of *campesinos* fed up with years of refugee existence [and] war.

*“This isn’t a life, it’s waiting for death,” says Pedro, our 16-year-old guide in 22 de Abril, a land takeover where peasants set up champas (plastic and corrugated tin lean-tos) in 1982 and where 20,000 people scrounge for enough tortillas to quell their children’s cries.* Pedro is a responsible [leader] in a youth group in 22 de Abril. He is lean and sad, but still a pup, still full of dreams. “We may as well risk returning to seed our land and harvest, to create some life.” Then, more somber, he adds, “To try at least.” He is a member of a base Christian community, but he half whispers this because of the many *orejas* (ears/spies) in the settlement.

An old woman peeks from her shack, smiling toothlessly. To Pedro’s question, “How are you?” she shrugs, repeating the common answer, “*Luchando por la vida*” (struggling for life). Inside her hut a 3-year-old and a 6-year-old play on the dirt floor; their baby sister sways above in a hammock. There is room for one mat, one chair, boxes, and a wooden table. Six of them live there. *Abuelita* (little grandmother [literally, but colloquially “dear grandmother”]) and the 6-year-old clear the garbage dump areas damaged by the recent earthquake.

There are 800,000 refugees like this; the number is expected to reach a million within the next two years, according to an official of the San Salvador Catholic archdiocese. It is why the archdiocese...supports repopulation....The social infrastructure for supporting hundreds of thousands of people has been stretched to snapping. The people must take their lives back, grow and harvest, even in the bombarded patrol zones, or die—at least spiritually.

One of the last remaining archdiocesan refugee camps, Calle Real [the Real Way], is directed by North American nuns. Sister Margarita Kling from New Jersey sees Calle Real as a sanctuary for victims of low-intensity war—a place of refuge for people driven out of the countryside by the military bombing offensives. “Ideally, we want the people to move out in six months—to get them back into the countryside.” *Margarita is a nurse who’s heard the stories behind so many wounds and scars she’s attended that she tries to forget. But she remembers the night the cattle trucks arrived in February 1986. One hundred refugees bombed out of the Guazapa volcano during the military offensive code-named Operation Phoenix,<sup>4</sup> stood crowded like pigs or cows on the trucks, children with parasites, half-starved, numb with exhaustion, pregnant women who’d been held by the military for 12 days and barely fed. “They were so sick. I’ll never forget it as long as I live.” But there were more to follow. Five hundred were brought in during the next six weeks.*

### **Flight, work, faith**

It was during Operation Phoenix in 1986, when 35,000 pounds of bombs were dropped on the volcano, that the residents of El Barrillo came into *Calle Real*. They’d been 20 days in caves hiding from search-and-destroy patrols. None of them had eaten in three weeks, including the children. It took months for them to heal, to knit up the unraveled weave of *comunidad* [community], the broken limbs, the broken hearts. Then the El Barrio community, chastened by low-intensity warfare’s explosive lessons, made a decision: They would return to their land. Even, as one poetic *campesino* explained: “If the blasts and smoking earth block out the sun, we will work our land.”

And work the land they did. Under the protective accompaniment of a North American religious delegation, they were able to enter their village unmolested and begin the physical and spiritual process of reconstruction. In seven months, 100 families have harvested their first crops, built a school, a clinic, shelter for each family, dug a 12 x 18-foot water reservoir connected to individual pumps, and constructed a chicken coop for 200 baby chicks. Every week, or as often as the military will allow his battered car past check points, Padre Daniel drives from his sprawling slum parish in San Salvador to celebrate a eucharist with the base Christian community of El Barrillo. Every week

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<sup>4</sup> The same name as a nearly identical “pacification,” in fact a “cleansing” operation, in Vietnam.

Padre Daniel learns from unschooled peasants the meaning of commitment to a community, to one's people.

It is a meaning that transcends any liberation theology text, a meaning that can only be experienced. It is a meaning the klutzy North Americans who accompanied the El Barrillo delegation can't quite put into words....What is difficult to put into words is the experience of encouraging the faith of...a people who face enemies each day with strategic cunning, humility and a willingness to die rather than betray each other. Its is an encounter that offers tangible proof, in ways the institutional church never has, that love is stronger than death....

*In spite of constant patrols, arrests, beatings and bombardment by C-37s, a scorched-earth policy reduced most of their land to stubble; in spite of the growing hunger of their children because [local commander Colonel] Caceres' soldiers stalled or refused shipments from church agencies, the people of San Jose won't leave their land....*

*Successful repopulations depend upon a depth of community that can withstand terror and outsmart the psychological intimidation of counterinsurgency control strategies and civil patrols.*

But the psychological victory was the people's, not a grand victory, but it's what repopulation is about. That and the ability of peasants to reconstruct [a life] from burned-out foothills, or whittled from the desolate woody floor of a mountain valley in the middle of nowhere. A place, for instance, like Panchimilama.

Twice *campesinos* from the Lutheran refugee camp "Faith and Hope" petitioned San Salvador's Catholic Archbishop Arturo Rivera y Damas for official church accompaniment to a repopulation at Panchimilama. When no response was forthcoming they turned to Lutheran Bishop Medardo Gomez for protected accompaniment back into the countryside. Bishop Gomez, whose name was on an unofficial death list in 1986, agreed....He is not lean or fithe looks like—a bishop. But he doesn't act like one, unless it's one like Oscar Romero.

Medardo was in the lead of a singing procession of 70 families packed into 12 buses and 13 trucks bound for a disembarkment point above the Panchimilama valley. When they arrived, Medardo Gomez hiked the 45-minute walk straight down the mountainside, panting in the withering heat, playing Don Quixote's part, but looking more like the stubby Sancho Panza. Behind him a parade of children and small beasts squealed, the mothers balancing pots and baskets on their heads, the men bent with loads of wood and tools. A parade of the dispossessed headed for a wilderness.

Not everyone who begins the pioneer work can continue. Within a few weeks three families returned to Bishop Gomez and complained, "We can't do it, it means starting from scratch."...

It has been several months since the Panchimilama repopulation and already the refugee Directiva (leadership collective) has initiated plans for a health clinic, school and chapel. The harvest is expected in fall. But in June soldiers entered the camp, terrifying children and harassing adults. Lutheran church offices were broken into and files taken.

*Attacks on the repopulations do not deter national repopulation organizers. They expected them, knowing the counterstrategic impact of a human initiative desperately intended to force a quasi ceasefire—to say with the seeds in hand, "You cannot explode the land we are sowing." "They" could, of course, and have for seven years, but the U.S. repopulation witnesses, and diocesan endorsement, have provided a thin protection.*

Faced with the impact of a long and protracted war, and a military plan to drive one-third of the nation into controlled areas, the base Christian communities formed into CRIPDES (Christian Committee for the Displaced) and CNR (National Coordinating Committee for Repopulation).

...During our visit to Panchimilama, [Luisa, the director of CNR] spent some time meeting with health providers while we spoke with a group of mothers....[A]n older woman had begun to speak...in a timid but intimate manner...

*They killed my husband, then my sister and only brother. I don't like to remember because it's so painful. It feels like a hole inside that can never be filled.*

*When you suffer, you become strong. But coming together with others is the only way to overcome suffering. I seek community. I always wanted to live in a community with guitars.*

*Even though I am an old woman, I still need to sing. I'm not willing to let sadness consume me. I won't become crazy to my children. I'll sing.*

*Luisa watched us as we listened, measuring the impact. "That's why we insist that delegations visit these repopulation sites, so they can see and hear the suffering, because there are no words to explain what the poor suffer—it must in some way be experienced." ...*

Currently Luisa is collaborating in the most dangerous project of the repopulation movement. Over 5,000 refugees from the Mesa Grande camp in Honduras will repopulate their home villages in Cabanas, Chalatenango, and Cuscatlan. The first repatriation of 1,000 refugees will repopulate five areas of El Salvador...with the accompaniment of North American religious workers and the endorsement of all mainline Protestant groups and Archbishop Rivera y Damas....

*The Salvadoran military has anticipated the move with a warning. On September 1, the 20 families of Santa Marta who'd repopulated earlier in the year were bombarded from the air. One man was killed and six injured....Military presence in...San Jose las Flores increases almost weekly as the military prepares for the exodus of refugees into areas supposedly...depopulated and "sanitized." That "sea" of humanity that waited seven years in an alien land, harassed by Honduran soldiers, refugees who'd survived the Rio Sumpul and Rio Lempa massacres, is flooding back over the land. The soldiers and the refugees have forgotten nothing. Assuming the refugees make it to their homes, the need for international presence win the coming months will be paramount.*

Luisa is confident they can make it because of the refugees' faith that the repopulations will hold as long they trust in "God, each other, and you."<sup>5</sup> [end]

#### **Going home** [boxed near the end of the article]

People who wish to take part in the Mesa Grande repopulation project, which will continue into 1988, should contact the "Going Home" project. Those willing to sponsor a family, who will need a food supply until their first harvest, as well as seed and building materials, should mail checks to "Going Home." The organizers project a need of \$1,000 per family.

Going Home  
P. O. Box 24  
Cardinal Station  
Washington DC 20064

### ***Nicaragua***

#### **Growth Pains in Nicaragua: Notes on an Unfinished Revolution**

By Anne Nelson

[August 17, 1981]

...

#### **A shocking victory**

No one—including Washington—was more shocked by the Sandinista victory than the more doctrinaire groups of Central American revolutionaries. In Guatemala and El Salvador they had been struggling for decades...to refine...integrating all of the groups who would profit by the overthrow of the existing regimes. The peasants were the historically oppressed; the workers in the city were a growing economic force but an untapped political one; the university students were a traditional source of new ideas and challenge to authority; the Catholic Church was reconsidering its own position in society and a large part of it was siding with the poor....

In El Salvador and Guatemala the problem of forging unity among these sectors serves to buy time for the existing regimes, perhaps even more than the military aid they get from the US. How did

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<sup>5</sup> The North American delegation of witnesses.

Nicaragua manage so quickly? It didn't. The open secret in Nicaragua is that neither the Sandinistas, nor the mass tactics of a popular uprising, and certainly not the masterminds of Havana, defeated Somoza. Somoza defeated Somoza. He had presumed he was invincible, and he was sloppy. It was a mistake the Salvadoran and Guatemalan regimes would not repeat.

But the problem for the Sandinistas was that after the defeat of Somoza, the country's political organizations had yet to be created. In a very real sense, they were not just teaching people to read<sup>6</sup> they were effectively meting out democracy. Precisely "how much democracy" is good for people, of course, is a question that has been hotly argued by every nation in Western culture that has ever attempted to employ the concept, including our own.

Nicaragua is a scarred country in many senses, and one of them is the economic. It was inevitable that for the first year after the defeat of Somoza, Nicaraguan society would be more or less content to celebrate his absence. It was also inevitable that by the second year the people would expect more, in some cases, miracles. The average Nicaraguan spends a lot of time complaining about the economy and blaming it on the Government. Part of this seems to be a newfound joy in finding that now one is allowed to openly blame the Government; another part is disappointment that the Government hasn't been able to work an economic miracle. Nicaragua has never produced much by way of manufactured goods, and much of the little existing industrial infrastructure—factories, machinery, roads, telephone lines—was damaged or destroyed by the [1972, two-hour] earthquake<sup>7</sup> and the civil war. Nicaragua exports cotton and beef, but it must import basic grains to feed its people. Sugar, one of its most controversial commodities today, is exported to gain precious foreign exchange, creating hugely unpopular shortages at home.

Leaving aside for the moment all of the storm and fury that is attendant to Central American topics these days, the scenes that follow are not a complex policy analysis, nor an examination of what developments in Nicaragua mean to us. Instead, they are observations and reflections on a new government and its people reacting to each other, struggling to invent a political economy from the bottom up. Today's Nicaragua is at once a rampant internationalized conflict, and a coinciding wonderland of opportunity for planting new political systems in a virgin field. Finally, these remarks are, like the best and the worst of foreign news coverage, the subjective notes of an outsider passing through.

### **The teachers taught**

April 1980: It was the sort of house, not uncommon in rural Nicaragua, where no one bothered to shoo the chickens off the bed. Children and pigs padded across the dirt floors with more or less the same frequency. The only way to get to the place was over a steep, pitted dirt road—by jeep if you were a landlord or a foreigner, on foot if you were anyone else.

The girls trudged up the hill—up to the house where the chickens and children lived—looking like anything but proper young ladies from León. They wore dusty blue jeans and heavy field boots with a kind of shy swagger one doesn't often find in upper- or middle-class Latin American women. Although none was over 15, all had volunteered to join the literacy campaign to help teach the country people to read. They worked in groups of eight. They lived with the families they were teaching, receiving a miniscule subsidy from the Government so as not to strain the family rice-and-bean budget.

Many things impressed me during our conversation that hot afternoon. One was the girls' conviction that they had learned more from the *campesinos* in human values than they could possibly have taught in terms of mere literacy. One was their derision of their parents' purported belief that the *campesinos* were "inferior"—derision that came with that wonderful know-it-all attitude of 14-year-olds when they first experience the sensation of being overwhelmingly, provably, triumphantly right.

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<sup>6</sup> In a massive literacy campaign in a country with up to 60 percent illiteracy, a \$20 million project by the new government of a bankrupt country considered crucial.

<sup>7</sup> The earthquake devastated Managua; at least 10,000 died. Somoza pocketed the relief funds and sold the donations of food and supplies, which catalyzed the revolution.

Another revelation was the *campesinos* outright reverence for their teachers: One gawky 18-year-old told me earnestly that he thought they were “beautiful saints come to help us.” The final surprise was what the girls said they wanted to be when they grew up—“civil engineer,” “dentist,” “architect”—and their utter unawareness of North American-style feminism. It was going to be an interesting revolution, and it had only begun....

January 1981: The marketplace named after Israel Lewites is on the outskirts of Managua, but then Managua is a city where everything looks like outskirts. The market was chosen for the weekly Sandinista innovation called “Cara al Pueblo”—literally, “Face the Nation.” But here the politicians didn’t have the provocative distancing of the TV screen, and the questions came not from well-groomed, pre-briefed, play-by-the-rules moderators, but from average guys [and gals] with their own real grievances.

The market was jammed; people occupied all the folding chairs, and more stood on the fringes. Vendors hawked ice cones and sodas to the crowd. Sergio Ramirez, a civilian on the junta, was up on the platform, as were about eight other Government representatives, most of them having to do with economic matters.

And they were squirming. “Why haven’t you brought down the price of eggs?” one woman demanded. She really wanted to know; one can fantasize about how Reagan would try to finesse the question. Another fellow monopolized the microphone for nearly 15 minutes with his outrage at standing in line for sugar rations. The sugar shortage was temporary, they told him—“It’s been going on for a year!” he retorted sharply—and we all understand, they said soothingly, how we have to export our sugar crop for the moment to get foreign credits for machinery. But the man was not satisfied; he had to be forced to surrender the mike.

Its inheritor had a heartfelt but economically confused complaint about the evils of the black market, where Nicaraguan cordobas were being eagerly proffered at only half their official rate for dollars. The foreigners get us coming and going, he said. The response from the platform was a promise to crack down on the black market, but everyone knew that any such measures would be weakened by the country’s desperate need for dollars, whatever the price.

### **Arming the Revolution**

Only a few days earlier Ramirez and his colleagues had been able to participate in a different mode of wooing the masses. In Central America mass demonstrations often take the place of both social events and Gallup polls—at least, at those times that allow either large gatherings or any other expressions of public opinion to take place. Nicaragua’s favorite...gathering...was the send-off for the literacy campaign the previous years. No one, especially at that moment, could be opposed to literacy; the plaza was filled with more than 250,000 people.

*But 1981 began on a different note. Seven young soldiers had been killed in a border clash with exiled National Guardsmen working out of Honduras. Their coffins and their families were given places of honor on the podium, and the population of Nicaragua was being summoned to the citizens’ militia in their name.*

The number of participants in the rally, it was said, had fallen off over the past year. This time there had been no more than 200,000. No one had been “forced” to go, but there was certainly a factor of peer pressure within the various Sandinista civil organizations. In the past year the phrase “defense of the revolution” had taken on many shades of meaning, both for the struggling members of the Sandinista Government and for the people of the country. In the first year it carried with it a joyous proclamation of social reforms. In the second year the prepared slogans for economic reconstruction were quietly being scrapped for more conventional notions of defense: arms, militia, bullets, tanks. We’ve been forced into this, the Sandinistas tried to explain: Reagan, the Somocistas in Honduras, the situation in El Salvador, the counter-revolutionaries at home, the CIA—all have obliged us.

*Anne Nelson spent a working vacation in Nicaragua while reporting on El Salvador for the New York Times, C&C and other publications (see “El Salvador Revisited,” [C&C] issue of June 20).*

## Some Land to Work, Some Peace to Share: From the Nicaraguan War Zone

By Daniel T. Spencer

[May 13, 1985]

Tucked in a steep ravine in the rugged mountainous region between Honduras and Nicaragua, Murra is the last outpost at the end of a long winding dirt road that leads east from Ocotal, the departmental capital of Neuva Segovia. Between Murra and the Honduran border, perhaps 15 miles to the northwest, lie a handful of small communities accessible only by foot or on horseback, with names like El Dorado, Espinoza, and La Esperanza.

It is from these small hamlets that the people clustered in tents around the Murra school buildings had come, roughly 150 families totaling over 1,000 people, the vast majority of them children. Many had been walking for three days along mountain paths steeped in mud, carrying what little they could from the tiny plots of farmland and one-room houses they had been forced to evacuate because of the escalating war in the area, pitting the U.S.-backed counterrevolutionaries, or *contras*, based in southern Honduras against the Nicaraguan army. The faces of these mountain people reflected both their exhaustion from the journey and their sadness at leaving their homes for an uncertain future. Like any *norteamericano*, I had seen many conflicting reports of why and how the Sandinistas conducted these evacuations. Now I was to see one example of the program in action. . . .

In one large, open-air classroom local FSLN [Sandinista Front] representative Alcides Torres, Hernan Castillo, head of the local farmers and cattle growers union, UNAG, and Cesar, a young doctor just beginning his two-year rural service, gathered together most of the men and many of the women into a group numbering around 200, to explain to them why they were being evacuated and what the government planned to do with them in their designated resettlement area in Jalapa. . . .

The comments and questions seemed to group around two primary concerns: leaving their lands and homes for an uncertain future, and fear that they might be further caught up in the war:

“All my life I have worked the land. I have eight children and now not even a *pedacito* [a little piece] of land. How will we continue?”

“The government’s reasons for moving us sound logical to me. But tell me one thing. Will we be forced to carry rifles like you do? We don’t want to join either the *contras* or the *compas* [*compañeros*—the Sandinistas]. We just want to work and raise our children.”

“I am glad that our children will now have schools and health care. But will we all have to live collectively? We do not know how to do that.”...

Once they began, they were not at all hesitant to bring up their questions and worries, peppering the government leaders one after another. One by one Alcides and Hernan tried to address their concerns. It was because of the war that they were being moved, Alcides explained, not because the government wanted to move them. If not, why would the government have built these schools and health centers here, which will now be abandoned? Because of the *contras*, the benefits of the Revolution could not reach the people in their old homes. The fighting there was going to intensify soon and the government could not protect the *campesinos* if they remained in their homes, so the whole region was going to be emptied of people....

The new land would be far more fertile than the small plots of steep mountainside they had known previously, and by living together, the benefits of the Revolution would be available to all. They would not be forced to carry arms—the Revolution was so that all would have a free choice—but they could talk to the other *campesinos* on neighboring *asentamientos* [settlements] who...carried out their own vigilance and protection....

### A taste of the pudding

It was clear that many people remained worried and unconvinced. “Don’t take only our word for it.” Alcides told them. “We will take some of you over to Jalapa today to see the new lands you will have. Choose some people to represent you, the people you most trust. We will take them over there, and when they come back this afternoon, they can tell what they have seen.”...Eventually, six young-

to-middle aged men and one elderly woman were chosen. We climbed into the back of a pickup truck (the woman rode up front) and headed north to Jalapa....

*[Spencer then reflects on the abortive land-reform effort in El Salvador from 1980 to 1982, during which land was given to campesinos to work cooperatively. They were told by government security forces to elect their leaders. When they did, the armed forces returned to massacre those leaders as a lesson to any of the poor seeking a better deal.]*

But similarities to the Sandinistas current efforts to evacuate campesinos from the border region with Honduras are only at the surface. In El Salvador, the U.S.-backed government faces a popular insurgency with widespread internal support, one that many observers agree could topple the Duarte government and army were it not for massive military and economic aid provided by the United States at a rate of over a \$1 million a day and the fear that a leftist victory would trigger direct U.S. military intervention.

*And there's the question of methods. The Salvadoran army has tried to dislodge the civilian population from guerilla-controlled zones by subjecting them to repeated bombings and groundsweps by army troops. Many refugees and displaced people have told of entire villages being massacred, fields burned, and homes destroyed as elite U.S.-trained army battalions have swept through, looking for "subversives." In contrast, internal support for the *contras* in Nicaragua is so small that even General Paul Gorman, former head of the U.S. Southern Command in Panama and one of the architects of U.S. military strategy in Central America, has told President Reagan that no amount of aid to the *contras* will lead to the overthrow of the Sandinista government....*

Night fell, and I did not return with the *campesinos* to Murra, but stayed in Jicaro where I talked with Aurora, a 26-year-old member of the zonal office of the FSLN I had met the day before. Dressed in the olive green pants of the militia, a white embroidered blouse, and with neatly kept hair, her lively, animated character seemed especially poignant to me in light of what I had told her about the night before [the decision by the *campesinos* to relocate]. After the triumph of the Revolution in 1979, Aurora had received a scholarship to study in Managua. *Three years later in 1982 she received word that her entire family—both parents and five brothers and sisters—had been brutally murdered and dismembered by the counterrevolutionaries on their farm near Jiraco. Their crime? They had participated in government programs to set up farm cooperatives in the area.*

I asked Aurora how she could even talk to North Americans after what she had experienced. She paused, and then said quietly, "It's hard, but this is what it means to be a true revolutionary. It means being the most humble, it means serving the people. If we don't live out our values, who will follow us?" I asked her if she had a message to people in the United States. Another pause, and then, "I would ask you to let us live and develop the Revolution in peace. If your government is not going to help us, at least don't try to destroy us." [end]

*Daniel T. Spencer regularly leads travel seminars to El Salvador, Honduras, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Mexico in his capacity as program associate with the Center for Global Service and Education, Augsburg College, Minneapolis. In the most recent of five visits to Nicaragua he spent a week traveling through the northern region bordering on Honduras to study the effects of the war. This article is excerpted from a more detailed account of his experience to be published by the Center newsletter: requests for copies should be directed to the Center at 731 21<sup>st</sup> Avenue South, Minneapolis, MN 55454.*

## Appendix D

### Key Excerpts from *Sojourners* Not Included in the Text

Descriptions of WTDS or human-rights violations in italics; additional information or action one can take to help is listed at the end of certain stories.

#### *El Salvador*

From a regular feature for guest writers called *Soundings*.

#### **A Broken Candle in the Night: The Death of a Salvadoran Church Worker**

By Terry Troia

[March 1985]

In seeking the pastor of a poor Catholic parish located somewhere on the outskirts of San Salvador. It had been a laborious search. Nobody in El Salvador, not even the most faithful of churchgoers, will tell you the name of their pastor. Not that they don't know. It is just that handing over a name to a stranger is treason in El Salvador.

But I did [find] the right pastor after a week of asking. And after he pulled his pick-up truck into the rectory, which was really a garage, we had some time to talk. We would never know last names. That was an unspoken rule. We agreed to a Tuesday...meeting to discuss the work of the church in El Salvador. He promised to have church workers with him. I promised not to ask their names.

*We had set our Tuesday appointment for 8 a.m., but when I arrived at the rectory, the assistant pastor was there alone, reading the book of Isaiah and chain-smoking non-filtered cigarettes. His first words were an offer of breakfast. His eyes were weary and his face was drawn. "Something terrible happened here last night," he began. "They killed one of our people—a catechist of the children. The cadaver is in the street. Father's gone to find someone to take the body away."*

He didn't know where the body was. "I'm new here (in El Salvador)," he continued. "It isn't a good idea for me to go to the cadaver. I have got to say Mass for the Mothers of the Disappeared at 10 a.m. And now this..." His voice trailed off. He ran his fingers down his face. Then he lit another cigarette.

There was no need for him to explain further. The Committee of the Mothers of the Disappeared—a group started by Archbishop Oscar Romero—was considered subversive by the Salvadoran military. I knew that first hand. The week before I had been picked up by the National Police for carrying subversive material—documents of the Mothers' Committee—in my purse.

I decided to search out the body myself. At the first street corner, I met a young boy selling newspapers. I asked him where the body was. He ignored me. I asked again, this time adding that I was a friend of the pastor. Without looking at me, he finally whispered. "Straight ahead."

I followed a dirt road. Houses lined one side, an empty lot with garbage on the other side. In the middle of the street, people were gathered around a station wagon.

*She was there in the midst of them, lying in the back of the car. Her face was calm and relaxed. Her features were like those of the indigenous people, with soft, mocha-colored skin and thick black hair pulled back, much like my own hair. She had bled from a bullet wound above the right eye, and the blood had trickled down the side of her face. Her cotton pants had been torn from the knee down. Whether she had been macheted or machine-gunned in the knee was difficult to tell; I couldn't find the knee in the midst of this sea of blood. The crowd backed away quietly as, between my own heart beats, I took pictures of the body. Then the station wagon drove her away.*

Who was this young woman of 15 years? Was she a David who tried to slay Goliath and was met with machine-gun fire? Was she Judith trying to enter the enemy camp under cover of darkness, caught in her act? Yet this was not the ground of the enemy. The street was her barrio.

*Back at the rectory, with the testimony of unnamed witnesses and church workers, a story begins to unfold. She taught communion class to the parish children. Last night, the lights went out at 6 p.m. in this barrio. A squad of 12 members of the Civil Defense, a division of the Armed Forces, was patrolling the streets. At 7:30 p.m., a barrage of gunfire was heard. A witness recounted that then the squad of soldiers turned the corner from the street where her body lay. There the body remained, unclaimed for 13 hours. No one touches the body of someone slain in El Salvador.*

*And her name. No one would say her name. But in the rectory hung a memorial of those church workers slain by the military. Some of the names are familiar to us—Oscar Romero, Ita Ford, Maura Clark, Dorothy Kazel, Jean Donovan. But many names are unfamiliar. And somehow I felt that this unspoken name had already taken its place among them.*

*That afternoon only one paper reported the death: "Idalia — [last name withheld] appeared dead of bullets that were fired last night at 7:30 p.m. in Barrio — [name withheld], where there were no lights. The death of the youth, it is said, was reported to the parochial church, anonymously."*

Idalia never had a funeral. She was buried in secret, far away from family and church. This is the fate of those murdered by the military: marked in death, as she was in life.

Neither President Reagan, nor the Congress who voted to continue this madness, will ever meet her. But I met Idalia in the back of a station wagon. And I know the truth that her death tells. A broken candle in the night, she was. And what in God's name are we? [end]

*Terry Troia is a doctoral student at Union Theological Seminary. She spent six months in 1984 traveling throughout Central America and has spoken at universities and churches in the United States since her return.*

### **Conspiracy of Compassion: Four Indicted Leaders Discuss the Sanctuary Movement**

*On January 23, while the Inter-American Symposium on Sanctuary was taking place in the same city, John Fife, Jim Corbett and Phil Willis-Conger were arraigned in Tucson, Arizona. They and 13 other sanctuary workers had been charged with 71 counts, including conspiracy and harboring and transporting "illegal aliens." Evidence against them included tapes surreptitiously recorded by informants planted by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). Their trial date is set for April 7.*

*Stacy Lynn Merkt was convicted of transporting refugees in May 1984 and given two years' probation. She went to trial again in February on similar charges.*

*John Fife is pastor of Southside United Presbyterian Church in Tucson. Jim Corbett is a retired rancher [and former philosophy professor]. Phil Willis-Conger is project director for the Tucson Ecumenical Council Task Force for Central America. And Stacy Lynn Merkt works at Casa Romero, a hospitality house for Central American refugees in San Benito, Texas.*

*As participants in the sanctuary symposium, Jim Wallis and Joyce Hollyday had the privilege of meeting and conducting the following interview with the four indicted church workers the day after the arraignment in Tucson.—The Editors*

[March 1985]

**Sojourners:** *Could you talk about how your faith relates to the work you're doing, and particularly to your determination to continue doing the work in light of the threats you have received from the government?*

**Stacy Lynn Merkt:** I think that I would start by saying that my faith is my work, and my work is my faith. I believe in the sanctity of life, and that has carried me through the last 10 years or so.

It started out when I lived at Koinonia (in Americus, Georgia).<sup>8</sup> That's when I learned about living in community and about the social issues that we need to look at as Christians and as responsible persons...More than that, I learned about the nitty-gritty of seeing Jesus reflected in the face of my brother and sister. That is the essence of what faith is to me.

For me to start responding to the cry of the people in Central America meant that I had to start living and working [with] and touching these people. When I went to work at Casa Romero, these people became more than names and numbers and faces and events. They become María, and José, and I put living flesh onto statistics.

I just seek to be a person who lives what I believe and who lives what God has asked me to live. It's clear to me that God asks me to love. The greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind, and to love your neighbor as yourself. And my neighbor is a world community...That means I...offer food to the person who's hungry, clothes to [one] who has no clothes; I...welcome the stranger in my midst, and I have to work for the day when those needs...those deprivations, those injustices won't be. It's an outpouring of myself more than anything else. I believe that I am to love and in so doing, here I am. . . .

**Phil Willis-Conger:** I grew up in a church that was real concerned about the social gospel and talked about social justice. My parents had been missionaries in Latin America. In growing up I gained some consciousness about some of the major social justice issues, such as racism and U.S. imperialism.

I have a definite sense of what's right and wrong, and I believe that comes out of the very core of me, which is God-centered. If there are people out there suffering, I can't ignore them. My upbringing won't allow me to just close my eyes to that.

I'm inspired by the words of the people around me and the faith I see in the refugees, the hope that comes out of the incredible suffering and incredible hardship that these refugees are experiencing. They are Christ crucified, and yet the hope is still alive and still there. That keeps me going; this is an important part of my faith.

***Sojourners:** Jim, could you tell us how the sanctuary movement got started and how you got involved with it?*

**Jim Corbett:** How it got started? You'll have to consult [the Old Testament book of] Exodus on that. It's very important to realize that the sanctuary movement is not something that someone, somewhere, suddenly invented. It has been around better than 3,000 years.

[We] never...anticipated what sanctuary would become when it was declared. It has been a process of discovery that doesn't seem to be over yet.

On May 4, 1981, a friend...was returning from Sonora [Mexico]. He had borrowed a van from me, and he picked up a hitchhiker in Nogales, Arizona, who was a Salvadoran, a refugee. At the roadblock just a little north of Nogales, this refugee was taken from him by the border patrol.

He returned the van that evening. Another friend was there, and we discussed what might happen to the Salvadoran refugee. I think the other friend may have been the one who had read an account of a planeload of Salvadoran refugees—deported from the United States—having been shot down right at the airport outside of San Salvador on arrival in December of 1980.

I'd been working prior to that with some semi-nomadic goat ranchers. *I wasn't a Central American activist—I probably at that time could not have given the name of the bishop who had been murdered in El Salvador—but I had seen enough news that I knew that things were pretty bad, people were getting murdered.* And that's where we left it that night.

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<sup>8</sup> The Christian peace and justice community probably best-known for helping found Habitat for Humanity.

But I woke up the next morning convinced that I really ought to find out where this guy was, what could be done...I was naïve enough that the first thing I did was call the border patrol, and then the INS, and said, “You picked up a Salvadoran yesterday at a roadblock, and I want to find out whether there’s anything I can do to help him.” They said, “No, there’s not, and you cannot even see him unless you have his name and are an authorized legal representative.”...

[Corbett then explains a complicated legal chase through the INS bureaucracy and evasions of accountability—stonewalling on the numbers, identities and locations of refugees—including giving him a stint in jail for refusing to give up a tape recording a refugee had made documenting INS denial of the refugee’s legal rights.]

By early June my wife and I had set up an apartment in our house where refugees could stay while they were doing...their asylum applications....

[He explains he eventually became a liaison to refugees being held in the Nogales-Sonora Penitentiary, distributing literature about immigrants’ rights and legal services. He also became a “coyote,” a smuggler of human beings across the border. While most do it for money, virtually extorting hefty sums, Corbett did it for free.]

**Willis-Conger:** The difference perhaps between some of our actions and those of other Americans is maybe only that we’ve been more persistent about it. It’s all about responding to your neighbor, Christ in each one of us.

**Corbett:** The personal contact makes the difference. The first week after I learned about the refugee problem, I learned that there was a Salvadoran woman with a bullet in her who was hiding out and who needed a doctor but was afraid to get help. She’d been shot in El Salvador just a couple of weeks before and the bullet was still in her. I just started calling doctors to see who was willing to risk license, prison, and so forth in order to let us know what to do about this woman.

That’s how it was all along. We didn’t ever organize by running around and asking, “Will you become an active member of this secret organization?” When someone is in need, a lot of people respond.

**John Fife:** I think that what Jim has suggested has been common to all our experience. Our encounter with refugees has been the point at which we had to make some decision about whether we would turn our back on this overwhelming need or whether we were going to meet that need. As soon as you begin with one refugee, you begin to hear about others. As we started off, we didn’t realize we were standing on the edge of a whirlpool that just drew us in as we began to see the life-and-death plight of the people of El Salvador and Guatemala....

[Fife recounts becoming educated about the political and military situation in El Salvador and the persecution of the church there. He and his congregation, after some deliberation, began to work with other churches to bail out refugees and find places for them to stay. Churches in Tucson raised about \$750,000 for bond and legal fees. Then the commitment deepened.]

*Then Corbett started talking to me about theology and ethics. He said, “If you’re really serious and you really think God is calling you to serve the needs of refugees, then you’re working at their needs on the wrong end. After they’re captured and in detention centers, the process of deportation is inevitable. All you can do is buy time.” And he was right.*

*“If you really think that God is calling you to serve the needs of the refugees,” he said, “then you must meet their most critical and apparent need, which is to avoid capture and inevitable deportation and death.” He was already doing it, helping people cross the border safely, bringing them to his home. When I first went to Corbett’s house, he had 21 people living in one room.*

At any rate, Corbett says to me, “We’ve filled up our house. I’ve got other Quakers’ houses filled up in town. Can I bring people to your church? You’re already keeping Salvadorans that you’ve bonded out of detention centers in your church.” And I said, “Yeah, but that’s legal.” And he said, “Yeah, I know; can I bring Salvadorans who are undocumented to your church?” I said, Gee, Jim, I don’t make the decision around here, the elders of my church do. You’ll have to asked them.”

And we did. The elders and I sat down and spent about four hours discussing that question. I was real clear with them, “If the government catches us doing this, it’s five years in prison for every refugee we bring in this church.” They voted to do it. . . .

The congregation would take people home after church for dinner, call me up later that afternoon and say, “People can’t live in a church; that’s not a decent place for this family to live. They’re going to stay with us for a while.”

[The church did this for a while. Then the INS began to crack down.]

[Then] we got a very clear and direct message from the INS and the border patrol, delivered from an INS attorney to one of the paralegals who was working with us. It said, “Look, we know what Corbett and Fife are up to. You tell them to stop it, or we’ll have to arrest them.” We sat around my living room saying, “What do we do now?” I said, “I can see the headlines in the paper now—“Presbyterian minister indicted for smuggling illegal aliens.””

We couldn’t stop. We’d already made the decision when we got involved in that whole effort that the life-and-death needs of the refugees overrode any other set of risks that we might encounter here in the United States. The conclusion we came to is the only other option we have is to give public witness to what we’re doing, what the plight of the refugees is, and the faith basis for our actions. . . .

Out of that discussion emerged the idea that what we’re really doing is the ancient historic tradition of sanctuary in the church. We decided to publicly declare the church a sanctuary and publicly receive a refugee family into the sanctuary of the church. The only thing we could do was tell our story so that at least when they arrested us, they’d have to play on our turf. They would have to deal with the reasons why we did it. And the community and the church would have to deal with that too.

Then I left to make coffee, so they all decided that Southside Presbyterian Church ought to be the one to try it. But then we took about two months—December 1981 and January 1982—and we did Bible study, prayer, discussion, and agonizing over that two-month period. At a four-hour congregational meeting, we took a vote by secret ballot so nobody felt intimidated by anybody else. They voted to declare sanctuary. I think there were 59 affirmative votes, with two negative votes and four abstentions.

Somebody at the congregational meeting said, “Why don’t we ask other churches to do it, too?” And I said, “That’s a good idea! Great idea!” We wrote a bunch of letters to churches across the country and said, “We’re going to publicly receive a family into the sanctuary of the church at worship, and we’ve decided to do that on March 24, 1982. It’s the anniversary of (Archbishop Oscar Romero’s assassination, and the attention of the church is going to be at least partially focused on Romero and Central America.

Four other congregations wrote back and said, “Yes, we’ll do it on the same day.” They were First Unitarian Church in Los Angeles; University Lutheran Chapel in San Francisco; Luther Place Memorial Church in Washington, D.C.; and an independent Bible Church in Long Island, New York....

In 1982, I went to Central America for the first time and got converted. That’s the only way I can describe it. I discovered a new way of reading Scripture, of seeing the community of faith under enormous pressure and persecution respond with courage and hope.

The refugees began to tell us about the *comunidades de base* [base Christian communities], about their experience in the church in El Salvador and Guatemala and the new spiritual vitality and strength that was being given to the people in Central America through their faith. My first sermon to

the congregation when I came back was, “This may come as a shock to you, but I have been converted to the Christian faith since I last was with you.” . . .

[Boxed near the end of the article]

Legal costs are high, and funds are needed for the defense of the indicted sanctuary workers. Please send contributions to:

National Sanctuary Defense Fund  
American Friends Service Committee  
1501 Cherry St.  
Philadelphia, PA 19102

Attention: Angela Berryman

### *Nicaragua*

From a special issue on the Nicaraguan revolution, “*Nicaragua: A Fragile Future.*” In it, Joyce Hollyday and Jim Wallis, spiritual and intellectual leaders of *Sojourners*, made an “eyewitness report,” they called it, of a tour of Nicaragua in early 1983—

#### **Nicaragua: A Fragile Experiment**

By Joyce Hollyday and Jim Wallis

[March 1983]

. . . In the late 1920s and early ‘30s, a small man emerged with great prominence in Nicaragua. His name was Augusto Cesar Sandino. Sandino was a beloved leader committed to improving the plight of the poor particularly through literacy training. He was a nationalist who loved the people of his country and was determined to free them from U.S. imperialism, fighting the Marines until Franklin D. Roosevelt finally withdrew them.

*Before the Marines departed, however, the U.S. established a National Guard...and...hand-picked Anastasio Somoza Garcia to head it. On February 21, 1934, Sandino was invited to dinner with Somoza. After the meal...Sandino was murdered...on his way out, an action that had been cleared with the U.S. ambassador.*

When Somoza was assassinated 22 years later, his eldest son, Luis, took over Nicaragua. After Luis’ death in 1967, his brother Anastasio Somoza Debayle inherited the dynasty....

Somoza created a country of extreme poverty while amassing a personal fortune worth half a billion dollars. His holdings included half of the arable land of Nicaragua and 40 percent of its industry. He made the way clear for U.S. companies to appropriate Nicaragua’s land and exploit its labor.

Witnesses remember that more than 600 planes landed in Managua following the [devastating 1972] earthquake with relief aid, food, clothing, and medical supplies. None of the aid ever got into the hands of the Nicaraguan people: Somoza pocketed the money and sold the supplies.

Although thousands of Nicaraguans were left homeless by the earthquake, the city of Managua was never rebuilt....Downtown Managua [was] a monument to Somoza’s corruption and neglect. . . .

*As we traveled through the Nicaraguan countryside, we were shown points of Somozan history: “There is the hill where Somoza took the people to massacre them. Over by the lake a mass grave of 200 bodies was uncovered. Up there on the hill is the former Boy Scouts headquarters, which Somoza took over to use as a fortress from which to bomb and nearly destroy the city of Masaya.”...*

Sandino’s spirit had re-emerged to bring Somoza’s downfall...Carlos Fonseca, a Nicaraguan intellectual...brought together many groups—labor, students, women, peasants—and formed them into a common front named in honor of Sandino: the Sandinista Front for National Liberation (FSLN)...

A strong nonviolent component accompanied the armed struggle. Along with numerous marches and general strikes, a widespread tactic involved tearing up the “Somoza bricks” from the cities’ paved roads. Somoza owned the factory that made the bricks and sold them to the people at exorbitant prices. During the insurrection, the people piled them up as barriers to the advance of Somoza’s National Guard.

Almost four years later, the U.S. government still has not recovered from the shock or adjusted to the idea that a smaller nation has broken free from its power and control. . . .

In early February the U.S. coordinated joint maneuvers with Honduran troops in the border area aimed at sending a message to Managua. The Washington Post reported that the maneuver also had the intent of “preparing Honduras for the possibility of war with Nicaragua.”...

We talked with church people, evangelical pastors, [liberation-oriented] Maryknoll and [more conventional] Baptist missionaries, Catholic priests, a Moravian Miskito pastor and a representative from the archbishop’s office. We spoke with a member of the editorial board of La Prensa, the opposition newspaper.

Even the U.S. ambassador admits [the Sandinistas] have done “some remarkable things” to improve life in Nicaragua....One of their first major efforts...was a literacy campaign, called...their “second victory.” A hundred thousand young students from [the] cities went into the countryside, where they lived with *campesino* families, teaching them to read. The benefits went both ways, as one teenager shared with us that the experience opened his eyes and educated him in the hardships of Nicaragua’s poor. In the six months following the Sandinista victory, illiteracy plummeted from 58 percent to 12 percent.

Health care has improved considerably. Infant mortality has declined sharply, and polio has been eradicated...

The inheritance of a bankrupt economy and a \$1.5 billion national debt was one of the Sandinistas’ major challenges. Following the triumph, much of [the] middle- and upper-class...business sector, believing that Nicaragua would no longer have a profitable business climate, withdrew their investments. Many fled the country; large numbers went to Miami....

[A] second issue<sup>9</sup> that has filled the pages of U.S. reports...is...“religious persecution.” We carried our question to a wide range of people...From evangelical pastors to Maryknoll missionaries to the U.S. ambassador, the response was that no such persecution exists.

Most of the church-state tension is between the Sandinistas and the Catholic hierarchy, in particular with [archconservative] Archbishop Miguel Obando y Bravo.<sup>10</sup> The archbishop has clearly opposed the Sandinistas. As we talked with Catholics throughout the country, it became apparent that the voice of the archbishop is not the only voice of the Catholic Church...Other Catholic bishops are sympathetic to or supportive of the revolution. A clear difference of opinion exists between the hierarchy and the grassroots popular church....

Some of the most conservative [often evangelical] churches were hostile to the revolution and did not want their people to be involved in its programs. Some even called the severe floods of May of last year punishment from God for the revolution. The pastors encouraged their people to refuse health vaccinations and scheduled prayer meetings on the same evenings as literacy training. The most resistant were the Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormons and Seventh-Day Adventists.

In retaliation for this anti-revolutionary posture, 30 of these church buildings were taken over in the late summer of 1982 by Sandinista youth, who attempted to turn them into early childhood centers, libraries and health centers. Hoping that the problems would settle out, the Sandinista leadership did not interfere, and this was seen by the conservative churches as tacit approval of the takeover and a

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<sup>9</sup> Besides the somewhat overblown mistreatment of the Miskito Indians, whose movement out of a war zone the Sandinistas have called a mistake.

<sup>10</sup> Obando y Bravo was chosen by Rome to counter the regime as the Vatican saw priests and bishops getting too close to a Marxist-leaning government.

sign of religious repression....The government realized that it had made a mistake and reopened the churches. During this incident, CEPAD played a helpful, mediating role.<sup>11</sup>

In recent years a conversion has taken place in the evangelical churches, and CEPAD has been a central part of it....

The evangelicals began to understand the potential of Christians working together. Biblical reflection began to take on a new light. The story of John and Peter with the lame man (Acts 3:1-11) became a key one; the apostles had not given the man money, but they gave him dignity. Working with the poor...for dignity and justice became the basis of CEPAD housing, medical and agricultural projects that sprang up all over the country. These projects can now be found in 400 communities. Parajon...shared with us that CEPAD has worked with the new government on several projects, including a housing project on government land that we visited. Ignacio Hernandez, director of the Nicaraguan Bible Society, points out...that conditions...have never been so good for spreading the word.

Our hosts from CEPAD shared that they and all Nicaraguans have a great deal of access to the Sandinista leaders....We explained that we do not have such a relationship with Ronald Reagan....

Critics in the U.S. often attack Nicaragua for not holding elections. Parajon stated that this criticism shows a lack of understanding of the Nicaraguan situation. The popular support of the revolution was so widespread that the Sandinistas would have been guaranteed a victory following the triumph. No other party in Nicaragua has more than a few hundred members, though all are free to organize. Elections are expensive to carry out, and more pressing needs demanded the country's scarce resources, such as literacy and agriculture. The Sandinistas wanted first to educate the people so that they could be better prepared to make choices about their political future. Elections have been promised in 1985 [in fact taking place in 1984]. And, as Parajon points out, it was nine years after the American revolution that the first election took place....

The Sandinista government has also been strongly criticized for its press censorship, particularly of the opposition newspaper, *La Prensa*. Roberto Cardenal of the paper's editorial board shared with us the history of *La Prensa*, which was also an opposition paper during Somoza's regime. He reminded us that the paper had helped in the overthrow of Somoza, and claimed that it supported the revolution until it began a movement in a "totalitarian direction." What he failed to mention...was that about two and a half years ago business interests on the board became concerned about the pro-revolutionary stance of *La Prensa* and fired its director. Three-quarters of the editors and editorial staff resigned and started another paper, *El Nuevo Diario* [The New Daily], which should be considered the more rightful descendant of the anti-Somoza *La Prensa*.

Many people spoke of distortions in *La Prensa's* reporting. A shooting in the town of Masaya in which Sandinistas were killed was reported as an attack by Sandinistas. *La Prensa* has reported false food shortages, which frightened people into panic buying so that the report became true. Like [Archbishop's representative Father Bismarck] Carballo Cardenal<sup>12</sup> did not know if it was true that the CIA was operating on the border.

Several people, both Nicaraguans and Americans in Nicaragua, who do not agree with the press censorship [temporary shutdowns] said that it is to the Sandinistas' credit that they have not shut the paper down completely. That they might be tempted to do so is understandable given the history of conservative papers in Latin America, such as *El Mercurio* in Chile and still others that were used as propaganda tools by the CIA in campaigns to overthrow legitimate governments....

We believe that something unprecedented in Central America is happening in Nicaragua. What Nicaragua most needs is a chance—to solve its won problems, to make its own mistakes, to live

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<sup>11</sup> CEPAD is the Evangelical Committee for Aid and Development, an association of evangelical churches concerned with social justice and development. It was set up by Dr. Gustavo Parajon—a medical doctor with deep religious convictions—for earthquake relief to make up for the lack of any such effort from the Somoza regime and continued, broadening its work into other social projects.

<sup>12</sup> Who, when asked why the Catholic hierarchy didn't condemn the CIA's support of the contras, said there was no proof of it.

without an enemy on its border—and for the first time in a very long time to determine its own future.  
[end]

### **Nicaragua—Hearts and Bellies: A Discussion of Salvation**

*The following [excerpts are] part of a dialogue that took place in Managua between the North American delegation and a group of indigenous evangelical pastors from the Nicaraguan countryside. The conversation focused on the impact of the revolution on evangelical faith in Nicaragua.—The Editors*

[March 1983]

**Alvino Melendez** (Baptist Church): We have been challenged by the revolution to go deeper in our concept of salvation. From a theological standpoint, there is no salvation of the soul, but of the person. We don't speak now only of the spirit.

**Rodolfo Fonseca** (Church of God): Before the revolution, our preaching was directed more toward the spiritual. That is still the principal aspect, but we weren't preaching an integral gospel, according to Scripture. Luke 4:16 teaches us that salvation is not only spiritual but liberates the person from the many things that society makes him captive to.

**Gustavo Parajon** (CEPAD): In the perspective of Ephesians, chapter four, Paul speaks of the growth of the Christian. After we initiate our travel with the Lord, our journey, we are perfected...to the fullness of the stature of Jesus Christ. Sometimes as evangelicals all we preach is the new birth, and then we leave dwarfs; there is no growth, building up of the body of Christ. And then these dwarf Christians cannot do the ministry that Ephesians four teaches....

**Thelma Pereira** (Waves of Light radio):...Since the triumph of the revolution, the churches have grown. The word has been preached more. This doesn't mean that Christ has changed; he is the same yesterday, today, and forever. But we evangelicals in Nicaragua are now concerned for humanity. As Christians we must be concerned about progress not only in salvation of the soul but also in the integral advance of the human community. . . .

**Antonio Videa** (Assemblies of God)...This revolution as soon as it triumphed, began a program of literacy. It covered all the mountains of Nicaragua, and all of the departments, creating work, preparing people to further their lives and earn a living. I think this is evangelical. So we evangelicals have to learn to live as new humanity in Christ. The revolution challenges us to do that....

**Nicanor Mareina** [affiliation not identified]: You ask how the revolution has helped us? We could say, lots. Materially, it's provided work. On the other hand, it has challenged us to do the Lord's work in an integral form for the total person. You as North Americans, I believe, can consider the culture and economic development that we have here in relationship to your own. I was educated under North Americans who prohibited us from participating in the politics of our own country. I accepted that, I was formed in that mold....