

Ignacio Ellacuría: The Ideal of a Radical Christian Intellectual

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Abstract

The life and work of Ignacio Ellacuría, S.J. is of radical vision, and revolutionary change. His dynamic life and works accompanied El Salvador and the Universidad Centroamericana through perhaps the most tumultuous years of the country's history, yet there has been limited work done to examine his contributions. This paper shows how Ellacuría viewed the role of a Christian intellectual, and a Christian university within his philosophical and theological framework. I argue that Ignacio Ellacuría held, similarly to his soteriological views, that the intellectual must also be willing to sacrifice all for the sake of his/her work in a pattern of discipleship/martyrdom prefigured by his exemplars Christ and Socrates. It was this dedication to praxis and theory that western theology and philosophy had respectfully lost since their foundations which he sought to restore to a central role. In conclusion, the Christian intellectual and institution, according to Ellacuría, must use its voice and life in service of the people even to the point of martyrdom; he would argue, the implicit reason for Christian martyrdom and the crucifixion of Christ himself.

Keywords: Ellacuría, Liberation Theology, El Salvador, Catholicism, Central America, Philosophy, Martyrdom, Catholic Education, Jesuits, UCA.

In recent news, with a looming crisis spurred by the Ortega government, and death threats being posed against the UCA rector, Jesuits, and Bishop of Managua, Nicaragua, it is appropriate to ask what prompted such a response against the Church. What is it about the Catholic Church in Central America that has provoked repression from so many regimes in recent history? In particular, what is it about Catholic Education that provokes the ire of these regimes. Of course, this question requires manifold responses, but it is a necessary time to look back to the life and legacy of those who faced this same abuse to find answers. The life and work of Ignacio Ellacuría gives us insight not only into an example of government repression, but critical analysis of the place of the Church, and religious education in Latin American life and society.



Jon Sobrino relates that when Ignacio Ellacuría would teach his course on the *Historical Jesus of Nazareth*, he would become visibly moved with a tremor in his voice speaking of a man who was killed at the hands of the state for speaking the truth, Jesus of Nazareth; who because of his allegiance to the truth, to the poor and to their liberation was killed in a violent death– he would conclude “a great man.” It was that passion so evident in his teaching that shaped his radical pedagogy and his view of the role of the university. The assassination of Ignacio Ellacuría, his Jesuit companions, their housekeeper and her daughter draws painful parallels to the life and death of Jesus, however, for Ellacuría, there was a similar paragon who came to illumine the minds of those who never questioned, and was killed for his teachings as well. Just as Padre Ellacuría came to view the world and his work through the dual lens of philosophy and theology through the “philosophy of

historical reality” which shaped his Liberation Theology, his exemplars reflected these principles just as well. Ellacuría would channel these two as the accessible classical examples of what it meant to be an intellectual, and what the message of the university should be: Socrates and Christ. More than anyone else, in his view, these examples were grounded and invested personally in their communities, willing to break down the walls of division and political repression, and willing to risk breaking unjust laws to give their message to the people were his inspiration for his role in the society.

This paper will examine the thought of Ignacio Ellacuría, and how he was perceived and saw the role of the intellectual and university in El Salvador. I argue that his radical ideal for an intellectual is inextricable with his dual philosophy and theology of martyrdom best expressed through Socrates and Christ, and that the Christian intellectual must be willing, under extreme conditions, to sacrifice all. It was Ellacuría’s belief that this was the best way of being a teacher – particularly in his times. While there were difficult questions which he faced as to his loyalty to the Salvadoran people, regardless of his status as an outsider, he attempted with his life to prove that he had an organic interest in the people of El Salvador, not as an ivory tower academic, but as a committed *Socratic* dedicated to the liberation of the people he felt to be part of. To fully appreciate his view of the role of intellectuals – and, by extension, himself – one must examine his writings, particularly his soteriology, his philosophy, his work at the UCA, and of course his assassination in entirety.

Ignacio Ellacuría S.J. was born November 9, 1930 in Portugalete, in the Basque region of Spain. He entered the Society of Jesus in 1947 at the age of 17 and was sent to El Salvador in 1948. He lived and worked in El Salvador for most of the rest of his life, gaining

Salvadoran citizenship. From 1962-1965 Ellacuría worked on his doctorate studying under Xavier Zubiri, writing a lengthy dissertation on his concept of historical reality. In addition, he studied under the great Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner, completing all the coursework to attain a doctorate, but did not write a second thesis. These men were arguably the two most influential to his academic writings, but while he referenced their concepts and ideas, Ellacuría took inspiration from others as an intellectual and individual. This knowledge of the work of Zubiri and Rahner in addition to Hegel, Marx, and many important philosophers were critical to the development of his philosophy, and soteriology.

This renowned European past would be fortunate for him but raised suspicion of allegiance among his fellow Salvadorans. Theresa Whitefield would note: “Ellacuría would answer criticisms – and they were frequent – that he was a foreigner meddling in the internal affairs of El Salvador by reminding his critics that not only had he been the holder of Salvadoran nationality for many years, but that he had first arrived in the country as a boy of nineteen. By the late 1980s forty years of dedication to the people of El Salvador, twenty of them in the face of revolution and war, gave him, as it gave his generation of Jesuits, both the historical credibility and the moral authority necessary for their voices to be heard, if not always heard.”¹ He was often criticized for not doing enough at the grassroots level, and for neglecting to emulate other priests that dedicated time in the base communities and worked with people interpersonally. Many saw him as bourgeois, and his intense commanding personality often reinforced this belief. He also had an innate desire to debate, and to leave those debates a winner, often succeeding. This led to additional

¹ Teresa Whitfield, *Paying the Price: Ignacio Ellacuria and the Murdered Jesuits of El Salvador*. Temple Univ. Press, Philadelphia, 1995., 208.

criticisms of Padre Ellacuría as arrogant. However, even though Ellacuría was highly cerebral, and spent much less time with the peasants than some of his fellow Jesuits – one thing is certain: that he took great risks to ally himself and the university with the needs of the impoverished, and he did so fully. He said on several occasions that his calling was not among the people and that he did not have those gifts. Whitfield would go on to say: “Cerebral, cool, and critical, Ellacu’s guard rarely came down, but when it did it was to show the passion and commitment that lay beneath the rational constructions of his intellect and fueled his extraordinary capacity to keep on going to live in El Salvador creatively, constructively, and with Christian hope.”² His fellow Jesuits often questioned him as well for his confident intellect and academic career in Spain. When César Jerez teased him saying “be careful of Ellacuría he’ll get you in a whole lot of trouble, and when you get into a lot of trouble, he’ll up and off to Spain!” Ellacu responded with “Gordito the only thing I can say is that I am with you to the death.”³

Indeed, if we are to measure his dedication in the amount of academic output dealing with the poor, and his - and by extension the university’s - political affiliation with their interests, it is reasonable to say there was a completely personal stake in the needs of the Salvadoran people. It must be said that Ellacuría moved closer to this direction over time, and that the witness of the death of Monseñor Romero and the coincidental popular movements were one of the last great influences on Ellacuria and his thought.⁴ It was a testament of his compassion, a side which often went unseen, but which was remembered

² Ibid., 209

³ Ibid., 209.

⁴ Ibid., 209.

fondly. Jon Sobrino would write: “Perhaps the most important thing I learned from him as a human being, as a Christian, and a Jesuit, was how to look at the reality of the third world through God, and how to act on this reality with the mercy – justice in structural language – of the heart of God.”⁵ Despite not being directly involved with the people interpersonally, Ellacuría effectively placed a target on his own head. This was something he was bitterly aware of since the death of Romero when the government called for the death of all the Jesuit priests in the country. This awareness, indeed this “sacrifice” was central to his philosophy and theology as we see in the development of his soteriology. Even his largest critics were unable to criticize his willingness to fight until the end saying: “Your best argument now is your blood... Before some of us didn’t believe you much. We used to say that you spoke from within the UCA’s air conditioning. Now you’ve got your hands dirty, you’ve humbled yourself like your master and emptied your strengths and the remains of your pride in the earth that’s the same for all of us. Now your Father will hear your priestly prayer.”⁶

It is impossible to understand how Ignacio Ellacuría saw himself in the Salvadoran conflict, or society at large without understanding his most revelatory and challenging theology: his views on Christian soteriology. As Michael Lee notes, it is crucial to understand Ellacuría’s sense of Christian behavior, which he refers to as ‘discipleship,’ to understand Christianity’s fundamental message of salvation in Christ. As he writes: “For in soteriology, one deals both with Christ’s redemptive act and the believer’s reception of that

⁵ Ibid., 210.

⁶ Ibid, 214.

gracious offer—a reception that involves faith and action.”⁷ That is to say, in part, that the disciple of Jesus may have to be willing to lay down his life – “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”⁸ But, this sacrifice is not arbitrary or in vain, but fundamentally connected to the teachings, and what Ellacuría calls “historical reality” of the life of Jesus of Nazareth. Lee finally notes that “For clearly, Ellacuría’s thought and life demonstrate that the transformation called by discipleship may require the ultimate testimony, a martyr’s death.”⁹ Indeed, the interconnected inextricable nature of the teachings and discipleship of a Christian, and the passion and death of Christ were the most fundamental part of understanding Ellacuría’s idea of his role, and the role of every Christian in his situation, and it must be understood to understand his behavior in Salvadoran society.

The soteriology of Ignacio Ellacuría’s liberation theology is rather complicated, due in part to a process of disabusing elements of Christian thought since the time of Constantine, which established a radical shift in Christian theology toward a theology of the ruling elite. So, to understand the landscape of Ellacuría’s theology there is an important philosophical element that must be discussed: his Zubirian understanding of “historical reality.” For Zubiri and Ellacuría, a central problem in Western philosophy was that it created a division between sense and the intellect which they found to be disastrous for two reasons. Firstly, in their way of thinking, they said that intellect can only arrive at concepts as it is divorced

⁷Michael Lee, “Transforming Realities: Christian Discipleship in the Soteriology of Ignacio Ellacuria.” University of Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame, 2005, 22. curate.nd.edu/downloads/rj430289f7z.

⁸ John 15:13

⁹Michael Lee, “Transforming Realities: Christian Discipleship in the Soteriology of Ignacio Ellacuria.” University of Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame, 2005, 29. curate.nd.edu/downloads/rj430289f7z.

from reality, and secondly, reality itself becomes reduced to something without dynamism.¹⁰ Ellacuría acknowledges that “meaning,” “being,” and “existence” all emerge from reality, while maintaining that this reality also has a materiality. He states that concepts are historically conditioned, and “cannot, in fact do not, remain in the abstract realm of ideas.”¹¹ His philosophy, *open materialism*, was one that views reality as “dynamic open ended and transcendental”.¹² And so, since reality under his definition was something that encompassed more than what other scholars may view as the strictly empirical or materialist understanding of the state of being, Ellacuría’s philosophy of historical reality allowed for philosophical and spiritual components of individuals and societies to be incorporated into the situation at hand. In theology then, as Lee notes, “his most important step was overcoming the dualisms that reduced faith, God, Grace, and salvation to private concepts divorced from history and removed from the challenge of the Gospel.”¹³

For Ellacuría, once the dualistic nature of neo-scholastic Catholicism had been overcome, this historicism could be applied to the life of Jesus and the nature of his death. Kevin Burke S.J. illustrates this problem in his book, *The Ground Beneath the Cross*.

“From Ellacuría’s perspective, the key dangers arise when the cross is separated from the crucified in such a way that it appears as an abstract, idealized or de-historicized symbol for negativity in general. More pointedly, serious problems emerge when the cross is separated from the act of crucifixion and the fact that specific persons did the crucifying. These dangers are real, not merely speculative. They can be encountered in history today, where innocent victims suffer ten thousand versions of “crucifixion” at the hands of historically real and guilty crucifiers. If theology wants to encounter the cross of Jesus, it

¹⁰Michael Edward Lee, Ignacio Ellacuría, *Ignacio Ellacuría Essays on History, Liberation, and Salvation*. Orbis Books, 2013, 5.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹² *Ibid.*, 6. [Italics, mine].

¹³ *Ibid.*, 6.

must encounter the historical reality – the ground – beneath the cross. If theology wants to discover the Crucified Christ, it must uncover the crucified people.”¹⁴

The problem of the cross, or martyrdom more generally, for Ellacuría, must be fundamentally historicized to understand the reality of *why* Jesus was killed. Indeed, often in standard Christian theology the death of Jesus is couched in a prophetic and metaphysical necessity. Whether it is an historical fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah, the “New Adam,” or a fulfillment of Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice Isaac, or the mere necessity for a perfect sacrifice – all inherently disconnected from the mission and teaching of Jesus and his allegiance to the marginalized and impoverished. Indeed, a favorite phrase of Ellacuría’s was “Let us not ask why Jesus died, but why he was killed”.¹⁵ For Ellacuría’s soteriology and concept of discipleship, it was important to examine the society in comparisons with the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth.

The primary importance of the death of Christ, for Ellacuría, was who he had been preaching against, and who he – according to believers – came to redeem. Much of his preaching and actions were focused against the Roman Empire who it was expected the messiah would redeem the Jews from – much like the Exodus from Pharaoh in Egypt. So, while the Church has historically fixated on the still important oppositions Jesus maintained with the Jewish elite and his breaking down of barriers between ethnically and ritually unclean persons such as Samaritan women, and lepers, they rarely focus on the liberation from Roman occupation, which would have been the obvious factor for Judeans

¹⁴ Kevin F. Burke S.J., *The Ground Beneath the Cross: The Theology of Ignacio Ellacuría*, Georgetown University Press, Washington DC, 2000, 175.

¹⁵ Michael Lee, *Ignacio Ellacuría*, 8.

of Jesus' time. As Burke notes, "He was killed by a conspiracy of religious and political elites, powerful people who were threatened by his preaching and prophetic actions."¹⁶ But, the political element of the death of Christ has been historically underdeveloped in Christian theology – in part due to antisemitism, and the affinity of Western authors for preserving Roman traditions, laws, and culture. However, Ellacuría focuses on this Roman Imperial oppression as a key element of the passion and culmination of the teaching of Christ. As Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise" to the thief on the cross,¹⁷ Ellacuría considers the importance of the symbol of the cross – the symbol of Roman persecution - as the symbol of liberation from Roman oppression as was its original subversive intent for Christians.

The crucified people are the final and most critical element of Ellacuría's soteriology and the linking force among his concepts of discipleship, martyrdom, and oppression. Indeed, the relationship of Jesus with the people who surrounded him, the people he spoke to, and claimed to represent, was, according to Ellacuría, one in which they became unified in the death on the cross. His last words to the man on the cross, the freeing of Barabbas, and the entire historical reality of the cross as a symbol of the brutality and oppression of Roman imperialism connected Jesus with the most marginalized sectors of his society – those with whom he was already associated. How the crucifixion prefigures the concept of Christian martyrdom, this relationship with the *crucified people*, the lowest stratum of Roman imperial society, was the key factor in the conspiracy and murder of

¹⁶ Kevin Burke, *The Ground Beneath the Cross*, 179.

¹⁷ Luke 23:43

Christ at the hands of Pilate. Jon Sobrino, his friend and fellow Jesuit intellectual would summarize it well:

“Looking back, thinking about Ellacuría the theoretician, the Rahnerian the Zubirian, one who knew and appreciated some of the contributions of Marxism, tireless seeker of rationality, I believe that his only really unchangeable historical truth during the many years of searching, his sole existential ‘dogma,’ so to speak was the reality of the crucified people and the requirement to take them down from the cross.”¹⁸

This was, it would seem his most important mission, and how he saw himself, and, indeed, the Christian in the society – even in the volatile society of El Salvador at the time. He was uniting himself – as he saw was his Christian duty and an essential part of discipleship, to the cause of the marginalized and the suffering. He found this proclamation of the “reign of God” as he often referred to the public ministry of Jesus, to be the most essential part of his life and mission. As a fellow Jesuit recalls, “When he was asked to rest, Ellacuría responded that the people did not get rest from the war, nor from poverty.”¹⁹ It is well to remember the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, and Medellín that the Church has an obligation towards the “preferential option for the poor,” Ellacuría takes this a step further, making union with the poor, and sacrifice to the point of death part of the innate nature of Christian discipleship.

While all of this relates directly to theology, I believe that Ellacuría understood his concept of “disciples” (Latin: *discipuli*) even beyond the range of theology or of Christianity. While, as a priest, Christianity informed his worldview and the nature of much of his

¹⁸ Robert Lassalle-Klein, Jon Sobrino, Aquino, et al., *Love That Produces Hope: The Thought of Ignacio Ellacuría*, Liturgical Press, 2006., 18.

¹⁹ Michael Lee, *Transforming Realities*, 21.

writings, he was not a man to neglect the reality of the world, nor of pluralism, nor agnosticism or atheism. Indeed, the same method of teaching and discipleship was to be found in another great secular philosophic hero of his – Socrates himself. It seems fitting with the twofold theological and philosophical nature of the writings of Ellacuría, that he would have two foundational witnesses (Greek: μάρτυς, mártys), martyrs of the quest for “truth” to set as examples of the role of the intellectual in society. As Ellacuría would have considered his teacher and collaborator Zubiri: “The obligation of his life, the sweet and costly obligation, was to pour himself out investigating the truth of those things that appear to be the fundamentals of human life. Like Socrates whom he so admired, Zubiri wanted to convert philosophy itself into an authentic way of life to make of theory a true mode of existence.”²⁰ It is evident how well the life of Socrates and the life of Christ can seem to mirror one another, both deeply attached to the people of their community, committed to their notions of truth, posing inconvenient opinions and gathering a following, and then conspired against by the powers of their communities, charged with blasphemy and “corrupting the youth” and sentenced to death. Indeed, as Zubiri and Ellacuría saw it, the role of the intellectual was to be willing to sacrifice all as Socrates, the father of philosophy had, and to move the ivory tower to which academia has been relegated to the needs of the people. And so, allegiance to the disenfranchised and most marginalized is following the tradition of Socrates. Jon Sobrino again recalls:

“Doing theology for the purpose described above is, first of all, an expression of the Socratic dimension of the intellectual task, that is, facing up to reality in order to transform it and its dominions in order to combat them. As in the case of Socrates, Ellacuría’s martyrdom

²⁰ Kevin Burke, *The Ground Beneath the Cross*, 31.

shows there is a way of using intelligence for the purpose of directly influencing reality, really transforming persons and structures.”²¹

It was this dedication to influencing the society around him, his ability to make people think about the human condition, and the condition of their lives and their poverty, and to take action that was so like Socrates. While the criticism would still stand that he was not involved in the everyday lives of the poor and those engaged in war, Ellacuría sought to create a space where the exchange of ideas would take place freely, and he sought himself to be an intermediary and a moral voice. Jon Sobrino said that Ellacuría demanded objectivity from the intellectual so that they could clearly see the national reality.²² Ellacuría and his fellow Jesuits were willing take a great risk so that there would be a place of objectivity while still holding on to the preferential option for the poor and an allegiance with those who were fighting oppression. This place was their own Universidad Centroamericana (UCA), and the reforms that took place there took great risk and worked to make clear the issues of the time and engaging in a Socratic dialectic with all members of the society.

The UCA under the rectorship of Ignacio Ellacuría witnessed a profound change and became one of the leading voices of reason in El Salvador since the death of Monseñor Romero. There had, since the UCA's founding been two main types of education in San Salvador, there was the very large public university which was often considered - and in many ways was - a bastion of Marxist thinking, producing many of the thinkers who would comprise various segments of the Salvadoran left. Then, on the other side, was the Jesuit UCA which served to educate the Salvadoran elite's children in a classic private Jesuit

²¹ Robert Lassalle-Klein, *Love that Produces Hope*, 21.

²² *Ibid.*, 6.

school setting. This all changed in the first two years of the 1970s when Fr. Ellacuría deigned to transform the UCA into a “different kind of university.” He said that the university “had a very clear idea of what it has to do... more than mold students, more than carry out research – although we do those two things – what the university has to do is set about solving the unacceptable problem of injustice in the countries throughout Central America.”²³ This would pose a radical shift from a university which was largely financed by and served the Salvadoran political, economic, and military elite. Indeed, after the decision to alter the ethos of the university, most of the Salvadoran elite pulled their funding and children from the university. In turn, a large number of faculty, unable to cope with the cut in pay or disillusioned with change in the country left and took positions elsewhere. Despite the staggering odds and the almost immediate death threats that the Jesuits received, they maintained this mission, and nonetheless established the most prestigious scholarly journal in Central America with a bare bones faculty and very little funding, but with the wholehearted commitment of the Jesuits and faculty.

The UCA set out to transform the reality that it saw to be so unjust, and to engage in dialogue with the popular majorities and the upper echelons of Salvadoran society. At the very beginning Ellacuría sought to reform the physical structure of the university which he saw to be “proper to a bourgeois mentality at the service of bourgeois mentalities”²⁴ But, where Ellacuría desires the UCA to go, to a necessary place of social criticism, is reflective of his Socratic methodology. He required the university to be reflective of “historical reality,” but it still maintained a place of privilege, which gave it leverage. Sobrino writes:

²³ Theresa Whitefield, *Paying the Price*, 2.

²⁴ Whitefield, *Paying the Price*, 233.

“It is unrealistic to think that a university could be physically in the world of the poor but it is necessary that it sees the world from the perspective of the poor, and that this world enters into its mind and its heart.”²⁵ Ellacuría would refer to this blending of the classical university with the needs of the popular majorities as the “university mystique.” The Salvadoran elite, who felt betrayed by the conversion of the UCA, would now monitor everything they did closely and target the Jesuits as one of the main targets throughout the civil war. The Jesuits were perhaps not as monolithic as the military would have believed, but their relationship with the popular majorities was enough to gain their opposition. Just as Socrates, the university often had things to say which, according to Ruben Zamora were “things that nobody else would say and precious few wanted to hear.”²⁶ It was not only the right-wing military junta, but also the FMLN and other leftist organizations could not always distinguish the position of Ellacuría and the university. They would often call into question leaders of the military, but they would also question the activities and abuses of the Left. Perhaps the most famous instance of this is when Ellacuría secured the release of President Duarte’s daughter from FMLN hands (indeed aware of the repressive right-wing backlash her death would bring). Just as Socrates was the inconvenient voice of reason, so too did Ellacuría see himself.

Ellacuría saw that there needed to be critical space between the intellectual and the institution and the matters of politics and society. When multiple requests came forward requesting the UCA be the official head of the Christian Democratic Party, before the election of Duarte, the rector insisted that that would not work. Ellacuría was also

²⁵ Ibid., 247.

²⁶ Ibid, 241.

concerned about the lack of boundaries between the Church/CEBs and organizations like FECCAS.²⁷ While some saw no problem having the peasant worker organizations headquartered in the university, Ellacuría was emphatically against it. Even when groups would schedule meetings at the UCA, Ellacuría would insist that most of the conversation be religious in nature, and while politics could come up, it could not be central to the discussion. He became unpopular again when he declared what was evident to many by the middle of the 1980s – that the war was unwinnable and would only lead to attrition. He used his weight as a public intellectual to speak to members of the US government, political leaders in El Salvador, leaders of the FMLN, and even Roberto D'Aubuisson – the general who gave the order killing Óscar Romero. In all his dealings personally and as the representative of the university, he always fulfilled the role of the organic public intellectual and with a central quest to find his idea of truth in the reality of an increasingly volatile El Salvador.



“He was a philosopher because he was a citizen, that is because he was political, because he was profoundly interested in the problems of his city, his state” His life and death set an example that all those who followed him in seeing a need for philosophy could only hope to emulate: “To want to know, to want to possess true knowledge about man and his city, about, in short, himself; to understand this knowledge as critical and operative; to do so with a desire for service, with detachment and liberty; or dedicate his life to this to the ultimate consequences... these are some of the characteristics of this man who was the critical conscience of his day.”²⁸



²⁷ Jeffrey L. Gould, “Ignacio Ellacuria and the Salvadorean Revolution.” *Journal of Latin American Studies*, vol. 47, no. 02, May 2015, pp. 290. doi:10.1017/s0022216x15000036.

²⁸ Whitefield, *Paying the Price*, 204.

These words Ellacuría spoke of Socrates seem eerily interchangeable between the life and *witness* of Socrates and of Ellacuría both – we could even suggest Jesus. It seems that for Ellacuría, philosophy could never be separated from its lived reality. As liberation theologians saw it – the ideas could not be separated from praxis. Ellacuría would even say that the danger of ideology is that it is removed from the reality of the people. As his two great models had – Ellacuría lived and died for the people he sought to represent. As Romero and the many other Latin American martyrs in the latter half of the twentieth century, he and his fellow Jesuits were gunned down at their residence at the UCA on November 16, 1989 on the order to “Kill Fr. Ellacuría and leave no witnesses.” Just as Socrates had been charged with corrupting the youth of Athens, so the Jesuits became targets for their position to speak out against the violence and repression taking place in the country. As, Ellacu had said many times in class, he had become the “inconvenient philosopher who paid with his life for the absolute necessity to philosophize,” and united himself fully with his crucified people.

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