Spring 1992

Notes on El Salvador

NOTES ON EL SALVADOR

The photograph on the preceding page shows the cross presented to the SHU delegation by the carpinteria at Dolores Medina, El Salvador.

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The plan for a Sacred Heart University delegation to El Salvador was initiated by the Ethnic Studies Center in December of 1990 with several objectives. First, the delegation was to be a faculty development activity designed to provide the participants with international experience and opportunities to pursue new or existing research interests. Second, the delegation was to be an opportunity for faculty and staff to learn first-hand about issues related to El Salvador and Latin America and to communicate what they had learned to the rest of the Sacred Heart community through their teaching and other activities. A third objective was to lay the groundwork for an institutional relationship between Sacred Heart University and an appropriate academic partner in El Salvador. It was hoped that such a relationship would eventually include faculty and student exchanges between the partners. A fourth objective was for the university to play a constructive role in fostering a North-South dialogue that would contribute to the peace process in El Salvador. Related to this was a final objective, which was to place Sacred Heart University in community with the poor and oppressed in that country.

With these objectives in mind, during the fall semester of 1991 a group of Sacred Heart University faculty and administrators was selected to participate as members of the delegation to El Salvador. Throughout that semester and through the spring semester of 1992 the members of the group met regularly to define individual and group goals, to plan the delegation's agenda, and to orient themselves to the history and current situation in El Salvador. In these tasks and in arranging the meetings, interviews, community visits, and other activities of the delegation while in El Salvador, the group was assisted by Minor Sinclair, co-director of the Ecumenical Program on Central America and the Caribbean (EPICA).

The SHU delegation visited El Salvador from June 12-22. The activities of the delegation included visits to repopulated and repatriated peasant communities in the Salvadoran countryside; tours of health clinics and health promotion programs in rural and urban

areas; participation in workshops and seminars with faculty counterparts at the University of El Salvador; and meetings with Archbishop Arturo Rivera y Damas and his representatives, the leader of a women's rights organization, the Salvadoran army chief-of-staff, officials at the U.S. Embassy, and faculty and administrators at the University of El Salvador and the University of Central America.

The notes that follow, written by members of the SHU delegation, including Minor Sinclair, represent initial attempts to share their experiences of El Salvador.

Gerald F. Reid

Beyond Death and Destruction – Faith and Hope

by Eilene Bertsch

It has been six weeks since our return from El Salvador. Despite several attempts to describe our journey, in anything but its most superficial aspects I have been strangely inarticulate. An unusual longing for silence has overtaken me. Tears come easily. *The New York Times* is unopened, the television silent. Time spent puttering, tending to flowers, observing the never-ending fluttering of birds at their feeders, listening to the gentle lap of waves in the Sound, have replaced my usual daily routines.

Fortunately, several days ago I had a deeply moving conver-sation with a colleague who had been a member of the delegation to El Salvador. We explored the difficulty of searching for, finding and finally speaking about, what is most meaningful in our experience – the moments, words, events which truly touch our spirit. Slowly, recognition that I am in mourning began to move its way through the encasing silence. Looking back, it is clear that the grieving began months, even years, before our departure from La Guardia Airport.

During the early stages of preparation for our trip, I had not expected to be a member of the delegation. Perhaps, as a con-sequence, I did not listen to the voices of the past nor anticipate the force their presence would exert when joined to the voices of the people of El Salvador. Nevertheless, for several days prior to our

departure I was exceedingly restless and frequently distracted.

Images of the women encountered in Renny Golden's book, *The Hour of the Poor, The Hour of Women* kept intruding in my thoughts: Reena, age 23, a leader in the development of Christian base communities in Usulutan, forced underground; Laura Lopez, martyr to her love for her people of Guazapa, shot in the back as she fled across the scorched fields of Valle Verde with her young daughter; Venancia, organizer of a brigade of trucks to bring food to the women and children of Morazan. The vivid memory of the 1980 assassination in El Salvador of Ita Ford, a Maryknoll sister and my college schoolmate, surfaced frequently.

We journeyed to El Salvador to listen and to learn; to foster academic connections where possible; to reflect on how our experiences might influence our work and our relationships at Sacred Heart University. But to grieve, to be transformed, to struggle to find a language to deal with the life of the spirit? I am not sure I willingly would have embraced such a goal.

I recall the first physical sensation of El Salvador – before the faces of the women and the children with their tales of separation and wandering once again came to the fore. I was awed by the presence and power of the hills and the mountains, the volcanoes and the rocks – the arena in which the people of El Salvador had fought, to which many were forced to flee and from which many ``disappeared" – the mountains that so often were hidden by the clouds, enveloped in the early morning mist, or covered during intense tropical storms, as if by a sheet of smoked glass. They were startling in their powerful and merciless beauty.

But this too is a diversion from the heart of the matter – the stories of the people of El Salvador. Almost immediately upon our arrival, we were to meet them. And for ten days we listened and learned. At a hacienda in Usulutan, we learned of the failed struggle to earn a fair day's wage, of the thwarted dream to secure a home on the land one's family had worked for generations. We observed the current struggle to farm without access to modern technology, to start a small business without access to markets; to be schooled without teachers, to prevent illness without health care. And we listened to men who lost everyone and everything discuss the possibility of establishing a homeland for their people – of living free from fear

without bearing arms.

Later, in repatriated communities of Salvadorans who had spent years in exile in Nicaragua and Honduras, we heard of the women's struggle to survive, to resist the power of guns and helicopters and armed militia to destroy their families and communities. We learned of the steps they had taken to provide a line of defense to protect the lives of their husbands and sons and brothers. We heard of their eventual flight into the hills; of the pain of childbirth under the welcoming protection of a tree; of the loss of a beloved child to measles for lack of medical care; and of the ``help of the Sisters" in their exhausting and terrifying journey across the border.

And everywhere, we were welcomed and embraced as sisters and brothers.

We felt the strength and determination of the people as they spoke of their return to El Salvador. With their elected representative, Soledad, acting as our guide, we witnessed the emerging development of a planned community: its homes, the clearings for the planting of corn and the grazing of cattle; the brick oven for the baking of bread; and the tree-stakes defining the perimeter of the new schoolhouse. And in one joyous moment, reminiscent of the ``oohs" and ``aahs" we usually reserved for an exquisite birthday cake or Christmas tree, we examined and applauded the installation of the first above-ground family toilet, requiring the use of lime and ash to assist in the decomposition of fecal matter.

Many other voices and images were still to come.

We witnessed the devastation of the National University of El Salvador, inflicted by the dual calamities of the 1986 earthquake and twelve years of armed conflict. Many buildings have been reduced to rubble. Students gather in available ``safe" spaces where some have the luxury of daylight while others resort to candles. Portraits of their dead comrades cover the walls of their auditoriums and public places, visible testimony to the political and military struggle. Yet it is here that 30,000 Salvadorans continue to seek a way to learn and to grow.

And it is here that the Rector, his spirit unbowed by age and years of exile, shared with us the ultimate pain of his tenure. ``As you must know," he said, ``there is no University without a library, and we do not have a library." Plunder and theft and mortar fire have brought a once-proud, 150 year-old university to the point where its leader

observed that it has become ``a university without an experience of its history."

However troubling our visit to the National University, there were further layers of pain and circles of human betrayal ahead. I now recognize that with our visit to the Jesuit-run University of Central America (UCA), a limit of personal endurance was reached. I continued to participate, but my body ached and my spirit flagged. It wasn't until days later that I was able to reflect on what I had seen.

I have read of torture and torment, and have listened to the stories of survivors of the inconceivable. Five years ago, accompanying my friend Tibor, on a rainy Passover evening, I walked through the section of Budapest that the Nazi's had set aside in 1944 as the ghetto for the Jews. Together, we gazed at the window of the room in which Tibor, his mother, and twenty-five others were housed against their will. We stood at the eternal flame in the courtyard of the ancient Synagogue, where the bodies of the dead were discarded – only feet from where he was rescued by invading Russian soldiers. It was a sacred moment. But on that brilliant, sunny afternoon at UCA, I was not prepared for the colored photographs of the bruised and mutilated bodies of the eight victims of atrocity. I was not prepared to defend all sensibility against the Michelangelo-like, life-size drawings of the dead on the walls of the campus chapel. And I began to despair.

There is still much to reflect upon, but I know despair cannot be attributed to the Salvadoran people with whom we met, for their stories do not end in death. Their journey began in the suffering born of ages of injustice, but they have passed through death and destruction to emerge again with renewed faith in God and hope for the future. They shared their bread and their lives with us – and they gave us the gift of love in the form of a cross. Amazing Grace? Amazing and abounding.

``With so much evil in the world," Elie Wiesel once was asked, ``how do you determine where to begin to fight it?" ``You fight it wherever you meet it," he said simply. And so now, it is time to put aside mourning. There is much work to be done, many stories to be told to keep faith with truth. It is comforting to know that we will be strengthened by the presence of the people of Calle Real, of Nueva Esperanza, of Ita Ford and Archbishop Romero – as surely as if they were walking by our side.

History and Oppression in El Salvador

by Charlotte M. Gradie

We didn't meet any historians on a recent visit to El Salvador, but everyone there had a story to tell. These personal stories were the closest we got to a national history of the past twelve years in El Salvador, which have been years of devastating civil war.

The historical roots of the conflict in El Salvador go back to the final decades of the last century when coffee production became profitable and producers began expanding their land holdings at the expense of the peasants. By the late twenties, a popular movement emerged to protest the inequities of an economic system in which a few families (the famous ``fourteen families'') controlled most of the wealth of the country. The resulting political instability led to the imposition in 1931 of a military government under General Maximiliano Hernandex Martinez. The following year was the year of the *mantanza* in which as many as 30,000 Salvadorans were killed in an attempt by the military government to repress any opposition.

By the 1970s a new series of popular uprisings revealed that Salvadorans were again ready to demand an equal voice in the political and economic life of their country. Peasants demanded land reform, workers higher wages. But once again the response of the government, still under military rule, was repression of anyone who demanded political or economic change. This led in 1979 to the formation of an opposition guerrilla movement, the Farabundo Marti Liberation Front (FMLN), and a counterinsurgency effort by the government. The conflict intensified throughout the eighties into a civil war, which ended just this year with the January 16 peace accords and a ceasefire on February 1st.

It was apparent from the stories we heard from many Salvadorans that El Salvador remains a deeply divided country. There is no consensus about the direction the political and economic life of the country should take, although now there is more willingness to talk rather than fight about these differences. Neither is there any

consensus about what might be the significance to national life of the past twelve years.

For the peasants, the history of the eighties has been a struggle for physical and economic survival. For Soledad, a leader in Nueva Esperanza, a community of repatriated refugees in the southeastern province of Usulutan, the eighties were the years in which she was forced from her home in Chalatenango, gave birth to a daughter under a tree, lost fifty relatives in the 1980 massacre at the Sumpul River, endured the death of her father who was ``disappeared" from a hospital bed, and lived in exile in Nicaragua. For the *campesinos* at Hacienda California, this was the decade in which they took possession of the land they had traditionally worked for the owner and which they are still fighting to retain and make profitable. For Juana of Calle Real, a community of displaced people on the outskirts of San Salvador, these were years of being chased from her home in Chichontepec and living in the jungle with little food and water, of losing a child to the measles for lack of medical care, and of finding refuge with FMLN guerrillas.

Others gave us more sophisticated interpretations of the events of the eighties. Apolo, a 28 year-old FMLN squadron leader, saw the war as the result of economic inequity. ``The rich people controlled the wealth" he told us, ``and the people didn't have the freedom to progress and express themselves. Only the rich could do this. There was no democracy for the poor." Apolo believed that government repression gave the people no option other than armed struggle, and that they soon came to regard the FMLN as the only power that could defend them and effect change. He had few illusions about the January peace accords. Only by continuing to maintain its military strength would the FMLN be able to press for its peacetime agenda of economic and social justice.

The Salvadoran military interprets the war in different terms. While acknowledging that problems existed within the political economy of El Salvador in the late seventies, General Mauricio Vargas, Army Chief of Staff, insisted that interventionism in the form of Marxist-Leninist ideology from Cuba, Nicaragua, and the USSR was most influential in causing the civil war. In his view, only education and a ``change in attitude" on the part of all Salvadorans will bring about peace.

Many Salvadorans, including General Vargas, spoke about the need to know the truth about the events of the past twelve years in their country. But in the context of oppression, the search for historical truth becomes a subversive process, as it exposes the unexpected connections among events of the past, and in spite of the peace accords, oppression remains very real in El Salvador. Political murders were reported while we were in the country and the presence of the military is everywhere.

More subtle forms of harassment take place as well, such as the refusal of the government to finance the University of El Salvador above 1979 levels and the obstruction of a $870,000 UNESCO grant for the university by the ministers of planification and education. There are no historians either at the National University or the Jesuit-run University of Central America to help Salvadorans gain a clear picture of their country's past. We were told that they had either been killed during the war or had left.

Today Salvadorans do not have an integrated sense of the past twelve years. Only individual stories and interpretations are to be had. But without a consensus on what constitutes the past and its meaning, it will be difficult for the country to agree on what direction the future must take.

Listening and Learning: Reflections on Commmunity

by Thomas J. Trebon

On my arrival in San Salvador there was such a cascade of sights, colors, sounds, voices – a blur, rushing by as I rode in a taxi from the airport. Only a few of the snapshots still hold in my mind: the ladies with colorful tops and shirts, walking along the roadway, with full baskets on their heads; the cattle grazing along the highway median; banana trees and papaya, and melon gardens; the familiar tin-roofed houses, clustered alongside very steep hills; the children running to a stopped car to sell cashews or coconuts or juices; the emerald green of the vegetation interspersed with that rocky soil thick with clay; the smell of mud earth as a shower cut through the heaviness of the day's heat; the glancing to and fro trying to take in every possible piece of

the kaleidoscope; the sting of the rain blowing through the open front window; the desire to get out and walk and feel more directly the people and the way of *life* of this culture.

6/15/92, Monday a.m.

Of great interest this morning was the conversation with the Vice Rector at the National University. She spoke of the ``social projection'' programs involving student work-study projects in the rural community. The program sounds very much like Tanzania's Nyerere's plans of the 1960s involving university students as a means of assuring that they did not develop feelings of elitism. The difference is that here the students are involved in connections with the rural peasants as part of the curriculum. We need to think of ways in which our students could be similarly involved in community volunteer projects.

During our trip to two clinics, one couldn't help being captivated by the children. One young boy in particular caught my eye. He was ten, I would guess, with a most striking and beautiful face. He sat on his haunches and watched us, moving away only when one of our group wanted to take his picture. He held a tin can wrapped in string with a kite attached. I had seen kites up against the hillsides; here was one of the flyers. The children looked cheery and bright, despite what the doctor told us about the high incidence of illness in this community. With 30,000 or so in 1800 houses, conditions could be anything but healthy.

I think we're all aware that El Salvador is teaching us a good deal about community. There is much emphasis on building group consensus and of recognizing the importance of the community. Most often it appears that a decision of any importance needed to be brought to the group for review. In our North American culture, we tend to rush to find a solution to problems, committing resources even if we haven't thought through the commitment needed. With regard to providing assistance to countries such as El Salvador, there is an honest sense of need and of giving on our part. But there isn't a clear sense of how our gift, our charity, our willingness to give away what are really cast-offs might contribute to a continuation of a dependency relationship. Furthermore, often we will act all on our own, believing that the authority or knowledge or goods we possess were sufficient to

enable a thing to be done. The reasons are good and even innocent. But perhaps a process whereby the group commits to a goal is a more effective one. I think we as a group will be more aware from now on of the importance of our development of community. There are ideas and lessons here beyond El Salvador – for teaching (and the relationship of student to teacher), and for administering (and the relationship between faculty and administrator).

6/17/92, Wednesday

As we entered Calle Real one of the children, a girl of 11 or 12, met our van and welcomed us. She had been waiting. She grasped hold of my hand and said ``*Hola! Buenos Dias.''* As we walked on to the village she held my arm as if to lead me to the house where our breakfast was to be served.

After our breakfast two of the women, the mother and one daughter, told the story of their experiences since the beginning of the struggle between the government and those leading the struggle against the government. It was a sad story, especially about the deaths of children and family members and friends. Tears came, to the mother and daughter, and to many of us. Maria Teresa Torreira, serving as interpreter, said how hard this story was to tell, and asked if we had a right to hear this story. This personal history is an exceptional response to the rhetoric we often heard of the reasons for the US government's involvement in the war on behalf of the Salvadoran government.

Here again we discovered the focus on community. But as far as I can tell there is no lessening of respect for an individual. For example, there is a cooperative system of making bread and having it available at low cost. But an individual is also allowed to bake and sell bread, on his own. There is respect for individual human rights as well as an emphasis on the importance of the whole. There are individual wages but there is also a complex system of making, distributing, and selling goods. The system seems to work well, at least at this scale. It is beyond a subsistence system, but probably not much. The critical values of community, justice, and peace are carried out in a communal context. The *mística* or consciousness of the group is extraordinarily strong.

On leaving El Salvador . . .

It has been a learning week. And not just about El Salvador, although certainly I have learned a great deal about the culture, people, government, education, and recent history of the country. But I've also learned something about what helps make a group successful in fulfilling its goals. As an outsider to some extent, but also as a participant in the group's activities, I saw good will, and effort in every instance to seek consensus, a hearing out of requests and points of view, and a caring concern for individuals. While remaining professionals, interested in pursuing their disciplinary interests, they also exhibited gentleness and openness to one another, colleagues and friends.

I'll probably continue to realize small bits and pieces of what I've learned from this trip – the tenacity of the peasant family in Calle Real, the determination of the Rector of the National University, the feeling of holiness at the sites of Archbishop Romero's death and of the assassinations of the six Jesuits and the housekeeper and her daughter; the size of the ``campus" of the National University and the enormous tasks needed to rebuild it, the level of pollution of the air in San Salvador, the small difficulties created by a curtailing or cutting off of electricity, or of water, of both, the ease with which children can smile when touched gently, or given a gift, or invited to pose for a photograph; or the pride expressed in their work by the young people who operate the woodworking ``factory" in Calle Real. Their pieces create a marvelous mosaic which we look forward to experiencing many more times in the future.

The Cross of Calle Real

by Gerald F. Reid

Calle Real is situated nine kilometers north of San Salvador, the capital of El Salvador. To the west of Calle Real looms the volcano of San Salvador and to the northeast, in the distance, rises the volcano of Guazapa. On the weekday morning we traveled to Calle Real the highway, broken by long stretches of gravel and dirt roadway, was choked with the traffic of cars, trucks, overcrowded buses, and pedestrians, most traveling south into the capital city.

Composed of numerous smaller communities, Calle Real numbers about 25,000 people, whose simple homes of concrete blocks and tin roofs stretch for several kilometers along the highway. Calle Real is what is known in El Salvador as a ``repopulated'' community. Its inhabitants are men, women, and children, most of them *campesinos* displaced from their home communities by the terror and violence of the recent civil war.

> The army came and began to hunt the people [who were organizing for change]. The army said that they had to destroy them because they were bad, that they were going to destroy the country. Very soon they were coming with planes, they were bombing, so we couldn't live in our houses anymore. Everybody went to the mountains. . . . We [the women] went back to the houses, but the men didn't dare to go back.
>
> We were in the houses and working to have some food and feed the children, but in most cases it was very little. The soldiers kept coming. . . . They asked, ``Where are the men?'' Some said, ``They are working'' or ``We don't have husbands, we are alone.'' And the soldiers said, ``We are going to kill you because you are lying.'' We had to leave the houses, we couldn't stand it anymore. The army found us up in the mountains. . . . They started shooting at us, attacking us with grenades. Many of us were killed. It was a miracle that any of us escaped.
>
> (Rosa, June 17, 1992)

> We went from one point to another without having any place to be, until we heard about this community [Calle Real] and came here. We asked for help and to live in one of these houses. And that is the way we moved here.
>
> (Rosa's daughter, June 17, 1992)

Dolores Medina, a village of about 40 families, is one of the many communities that make up Calle Real. Here, we discovered, were some of the many poor Salvadorans possessing *consciencia*, a world view and an activism, born of their experience in the civil war, that seeks to understand the economic and social roots of El Salvador's problems and to struggle toward an alternative future for the country and its people. One example of this we witnessed was the cooperatively run carpentry shop of Dolores Medina. The *carpinteria* produces a variety of wood products, which it sells through a regional marketing cooperative. All decisions about production, planning, and wages are made jointly by the twenty or so workers who make up the *carpinteria*. With the profits earned the *carpinteria* pays its workers' wages, reinvests in the carpentry operation, and helps support various community services, including a day-care center. The people who do this work and make these decisions are, many of them, boys and girls – the youngest is eight and the oldest is just twenty-one.

Throughout our visit to El Salvador I was time and again impressed by the spirit and power of the Salvadoran people – their generosity amidst great poverty, their optimism in the wake of the most trying and terrifying experiences, their hope to change a society devastated by the fighting and bloodletting of twelve long years of civil war.

For me, this spirit and power was captured in one special moment when the young people of the Dolores Medina *carpinteria* presented to us and to Sacred Heart University a crucifix symbolizing their people's past, their present, and their hopes for the future (see the photograph on page 1). At the intersection of the stem and arms of the crucifix is their rendering of the Sacred Heart. The left arm of crucifix depicts their experience in the recently ended civil war: planes fly overhead, shooting, bombing, and destroying the people and the land below. The right arm contrasts the grim past with the people today – they are smiling, happy, and alive. Atop the crucifix are two individuals, one dark-skinned, the other light-skinned, hands joined in comradeship and community. Javier, the young leader of the *carpinteria*, explained that for them, community extended beyond Dolores Medina, beyond Calle Real, and even beyond El Salvador; in their eyes we, too, were a part of their community. The base stem of the crucifix represents their vision of tomorrow: it depicts a maturing

stalk of maize, the staple of life for most Salvadorans. The maize stalk grows forth from four seeds — community, solidarity, peace, and justice.

In El Salvador, the hope is for change that nourishes not only the body, but also the heart, the soul, and the future of the people.

A Thousand Times Heroic: The Children of El Salvador

by Scott Willison

El Salvador has a population of more than 5.5 million people and although 20% of the population lives outside of the country, it is considered to have the highest population density in continental Latin America. The country, covering 8260 square miles, is approximately the size of Massachusetts.

There are few places in El Salvador that you can go where there are not signs of the war. Throughout the cities and country- side there are the telltale signs: bullet holes, dysfunctional bridges and buildings, armed guards, dismembered individuals, and poverty. The war was the result of unequal land distribution. In simplest terms, it was a war between those who control the land and those who do not.

Since January of 1992 these two groups have been negotiating peace accords, and displaced people are returning to lands left vacant as a result of the war. Because the bulk of guerilla and national forces were made up of males over the age of fifteen, community development has fallen on the shoulders of women and children. As peace becomes a reality, more combatants will feel safe to come from their mountain encampments to join in the process of building a community. Many of the men will immediately begin farming cooperative land, trying to add to the already existing community resources. They will begin contributing to a community whose foundation is, in large part, its children.

Hello, My name is Javier and I am responsible for the wood shop. We make crosses, wooden boxes for tourists, and furniture. Forty percent of our profit goes to the

> health clinic and to the day care center. We know that someday we will have children, or that we will get sick, so we must support both of these programs. There are seventeen students working in the woodshop. The youngest is 8 years old and I am the oldest. I am 21 years old.
>
> (Calle Real, June, 1992)

> Hello. My name is Deema. I am responsible for teaching the group of teachers who will instruct the young children in reading and mathematics. We teach here in the open pavilion. Most of our books and paper supplies are limited. I am 16 years old.
>
> (Nueva Esperanza, June, 1992)

> Hello. My name is Marta and I am 15 years old. My job here at the clinic is to go to peoples' houses when they get sick. I am part of the diagnosis team. When people get sick I go to their home and take a sample of their feces. I look at the feces under this microscope and determine what is wrong with them, what type of bacteria they have. This way we will know if they need herbs, antibiotics, or something else. I learned this when I was in a refugee camp in Honduras.
>
> (Calle Real, June, 1992)

Having spent time in El Salvador, I realize that much of the country's fate is dependent upon Javier, Deema, Marta, and thousands of other children just like them. At a time in their lives when we would expect them to be exploring such novelties as dating, purchasing their first car, preparing for a university graduation or a number of other unique rites of passage reserved for adolescents, they are instead engaged in a social action agenda that goes far beyond that of most U.S. children of similar ages.

The strength and perseverance of the children exists even under conditions of immense turmoil and poverty. For example, the National Central America Health Rights Network report that 350,000 Salvadoran children have been wounded, orphaned or traumatized

during the twelve-year civil war, 62% of Salvadoran families have disintegrated due to the war, and that at least 600 schools were closed during the war.

Having met so many children who are so engaged in the struggle of life, liberty, and justice (concepts that I believe are often taken for granted by a great deal of United States' children and adults alike), I cannot help but think about how much we can learn from the Salvadoran people and in particular the Salvadoran children. Why are our grammar, secondary, and university schools not engaging students more in social action curricula? How often have our students been asked to make personal sacrifices for the betterment of the community or a particular individual? In principle, El Salvador's National University requires of its students 500 hours of community service before they are allowed to receive their bachelor's degree (war conditions have made this requirement difficult to document and fulfill). How many hours of community involvement do our students participate in without expecting money or personal recognition? What examples do our adults and institutions set?

In El Salvador rose bushes are planted to honor the dead, to denote the mourning of a loved one. Although a rose is a symbol of death, Salvadorans view a rose's petals as a living symbol of life. They see them as representatives of the beauty and contributions that the dead have given to the community. In El Salvador, dreams, goals, and commitments are passed down from generation to generation; when one person dies his or her cause is continued by many others. The Salvadoran people have a saying which when translated into English means, ``Salvadorans, a thousand times heroic.'' Without a doubt, the children of El Salvador are committed to continuing the heroic dream.

Reflexiones sobre ``La California''

by Maria Teresa Torreira

Era el 13 de julio y estábamos en un pequeño autobús camino de La California, enorme estancia hoy día en manos de militantes del FMLN con un futuro todavía muy poco claro legalmente, ya que aún

está bajo el nombre de una de las poquísimas familias dueñas de casi todo el territorio de El Salvador.

Iba a ser nuestro primer contacto con el campo, con los campesinos y con las nuevas ``comunidades" que se están creando formadas por gente desplazada, gente que tuvo que huir de sus casas, de sus villas, de sus pueblos para salvar la vida. Gente hoy día sin nada, pues han pasado años en Nicaragua o en Honduras en campamentos de refugiados, o huyendo por los montes de su misma patria para poder salvar su vida.

Yo llevaba un encargo en nuestra visita a El Salvador: adoptar una escuela elemental. Los miembros de La Hispanidad me habían dicho que querían hacer algo por los niños salvadoreños, ayudarlos de algún modo a educarse para poder tener un mejor futuro. Todos estaban de acuerdo en que yo eligiera la escuela que me pareciera más necesitada y precisamente la primera que vi fue la que al final elegí.

Quiero explicar la razón: Esta escuela está situada en la Hacienda La California. Es un pequeño edificio de madera, sin divisiones, como un cuarto único muy grande, y en malas con-diciones. Yo al principio creí que era un gallinero. No se me ocurrió que pudiera ser una escuela, pero lo es, y a ella acuden más de doscientos niños que son atendidos durante cuatro horas al día por dos maestras que intentan dividirse los seis grados diferentes que tienen que enseñar. Les faltan materiales; no tienen prác-ticamente nada, únicamente esperanza de que todo va a mejorar, y fe y orgullo en sí mismos, en su capacidad de resistencia, en su capacidad de trabajo, en su capacidad de salir adelante en medio de las peores condiciones.

Hemos visitado después otras ``comunidades" en diferentes sitios del país y sus escuelas. Todas tienen grandes necesidades, todas merecen mucha más ayuda de la que nosotros podemos dar, pero tanto la de Nueva Esperanza como la de Segundo Montes como la de Calle Real tienen algo que no vi en la de La California: Sus mujeres. Hay muchas; muchas más que hombres, cosa lógica después de 12 años de guerra civil, pero además son mujeres extraordinariamente activas, organizadas y organizadoras. Así, unas, como en Segundo Montes han conseguido ayuda de la Comunidad Europea e incluso dos maestros enviados por España; en Nueva Esperanza también tienen ayuda pero además han organizado las madres a todos los niños, y así los maestros enseñan los dos últimos grados, y éstos a los dos anteriores y

así en sucesión descendiente. Todo el mundo está organizado, todo el mundo trabaja y todos se sienten orgullosos de su participación, de su cooperación, desde el más anciano al más pequeño.

Calle Real me admiró y como hispana, me sentí yo orgullosa del orgullo sano que ellos tienen. Tienen orgullo de lo que han sido capaces ya de hacer, y de lo que se saben capaces de hacer en el futuro. Ellos no quieren ayuda gratuita, pero sí que les ayudemos a vender los productos de artesanía que ellos fabrican y que de ahora en adelante tendremos en exposición y venta en nuestro escaparate de La Hispanidad.

La California es diferente. No es una comunidad formada por gente desplazada. Es una concentración de militantes del FMLN. Allí vimos más hombres que mujeres. Hombres extraordinariamente preocupados con que se cumplan los acuerdos de la paz, que se observe la ley que limita los latifundios, lo que les daría a ellos el derecho a llegar a poseer legalmente esta Hacienda que ellos y sus antepasados han trabajado. Son hombres que después de doce años de lucha aún no tienen confianza en el gobierno oficial, en el ejército y que se desarmarán lentamente y sólo a medida de que el ejército vaya disminuyendo sus tropas.

Tienen mujeres, claro está, pero la mayoría de las mujeres que allí vimos tenían ya muchos años y vivían cuidando a sus nietos. Muchas de las madres de estos niños, como Teresa, que vino con nosotros desde San Salvador hasta La California, trabajan en la capital para ganar dinero, y sólo en días libres viajan para ver a sus familias.

Los niños de las ``comunidades" me hizo efecto que no solo tenían madre, sino muchas madres. Creo que a los niños de La California les faltaban madres. Precisamente por ello es más importante la escuela para estos niños. ¡Ojalá podamos hacer algo por ellos!

Reflections on California

English translation by Maria Teresa Torreira

It was the 13th of July and we were in a small bus en route to La California, an enormous farm today in the hands of soldiers of the

FMLN with a still very unclear legal future, since it remains under the name of one of the few families who own almost all the land of El Salvador.

It was going to be our first contact with the countryside, with the peasants and the new ``communities" that are being created, made up of displaced people, people who had to flee their homes, their villages, and their towns to save their lives. People who today have nothing, for they have spent years in Nicaragua or Honduras in refugee camps, or fleeing through the mountains of their own country in order to survive.

I had a charge to carry out on our visit to El Salvador: adopt an elementary school. The members of *La Hispanidad* had told me that they wanted to do something for the Salvadoran children, help them somehow to get an education so they could have a brighter future. They all agreed that I should choose the most needy school, and precisely the first one I saw was the one I finally selected.

I want to explain the reason. This school is located on the Hacienda La California. It is a small wooden building, without divisions, just a very large room in very bad condition. At first I thought it was a chicken coop. It had not occurred to me that it could be a school, but it is. More than 200 children attend for four hours a day and are taught by two teachers who try to divide their time among the six grades which they must instruct. They lack supplies; they have practically nothing, only the hope that things will get better, as well as faith and pride in themselves, their capacity to survive, and their ability to succeed in the midst of the worst conditions.

Later we visited other ``communities" and their schools in other parts of the country. All have many needs, all deserve more help than what we can give, but both the schools of Nueva Esperanza and Segundo Montes, as well as the one of Calle Real, have something which I did not see in La California. Its women. There are many; many more than there are men, which is logical after twelve years of civil war. In addition, they are extraordinarily active women, organized and organizers. Thus some of them, as in Segundo Montes, have gotten help of the European Community and even two teachers sent by Spain. At Nueva Esperanza they also receive aid, but the mothers have organized the children so that the teacher instructs the two highest grades, who in turn teach the preceding two grades, and

so on in descending order. All of them are organized and are proud of their participation, of their cooperation, from the eldest to the youngest.

I admired Calle Real, and as an Hispanic I felt proud of the healthy pride they possessed. They are proud of what they have been able to do so far, and of what they know they are capable of doing in the future. They do not want charity, but rather assistance in selling the arts and crafts which they produce and which from now on will be on display and for sale in *La Hispanidad*'s showcase.

La California is different. It is not a community which consists of displaced people. It is occupied by FMLN militants. There we saw more men than women. Men who were extremely worried that the peace treaty be observed and that the law which limits land holdings be respected, giving them the right to legally own this hacienda which they and their ancestors have worked. They are men who after twelve years of fighting do not trust the official government or the army, and who refuse to disarm themselves until, in accordance with the treaty, the army decreases its number of troops.

Obviously, they have women, but the majority of the women we saw there were elderly and cared for their grandchildren. Many of these children's mothers, like Teresa who came with us from San Salvador to La California, work in the capital to earn money and only on free days can they come to see their families.

I got the impression that the children of the ``communities" not only had one mother, but many mothers, while the children of La California lacked mothers. This is precisely why school is more important for these children. I hope we can do something for them!

Health Care in El Salvador

by Anne M. Barker

My impressions about health care in El Salvador did not occur because of one instance but rather from an accumulation of reading, observing, asking questions, and thinking about the answers. Through this process, more questions are left unanswered than are answered. I

am hardly ``the voice of authority" despite these endeavors. However, lasting impressions about health care remain, as well as ones about the meaning of life, death, and illness.

Before leaving with the delegation, I read about health care in El Salvador. I was warned in these readings not to interpret the statistics literally but rather as a trend, because the methodology for collecting the statistics was limited. But one statistic stood out among the rest. Infant mortality, a universally accepted statistic that indicates the general health status of a country, was 65 deaths per 1,000 in 1988. This figure is 2-3 times higher than any other Central American country. Diarrhea, respiratory illnesses, and malnutrition are the primary causes of morbidity and mortality in El Salvador.

Health care in El Salvador is theoretically funded in three ways: private pay, the social security system for a few government workers, and the Ministry of Public Health for the remaining majority of the country. This last source of health care is impoverished and virtually nonexistent due to lack of supplies, medicines, and overcrowding. In response to this, community-based programs have developed to fill unmet needs. It was these community-based health care programs that we had the chance to see during our time in El Salvador.

Three communities we visited, Nueva Esperanza, Calle Real, and Segundo Montes City, had health care clinics. These clinics did not resemble clinics that I had ever seen before. At one, as we toured, the leader was wiping away the dirt and grime from a table which held the bandages. There were no blood pressure cuffs, no thermometers, no exam tables, and certainly no EKG machines in sight. The clinics are run by women, called ``health promoters," who learned first aid, herbal medicine, and treatment of injuries in continuing education sessions, mostly as refugees in Nicaragua or Honduras. As I talked with these women, most of them less than twenty years of age, I reflected on their history. Community-based health care workers and clinics were the target of governmental repression during the war. Giving out advice, medications, and tender loving care was seen as subversive. These women, for whom I felt a special affinity because we share the same life-work, literally risked their lives in caring for the people in their communities.

One group of young women had a story of great significance, not as an example of what they did not have, but as an example of what

they did have and the strength of their community. These young women were taught how to use a microscope and to detect and treat intestinal parasites. They went throughout the community, door-to-door, testing for parasites, treating individuals and families, and returning to treat their patients until the parasite was eliminated. For all of us, there is much to learn and emulate from this simple, yet effective model of community health care.

In comparison to these community-based clinics and health promoters, other health-care programs seemed disorganized and sporadic. In some areas, physicians visited the clinics to care for the sicker individuals. Patented medications were scarce; herbal medicines were somewhat more prevalent but also scarce. Hospitals suffer from poor reputations and most thought it was best not to seek health care from this source. The only mention of the Ministry of Public Health was about the vaccination program for children. It was described as disorganized and under-resourced. Further, not every community is as fortunate as the three communities discussed previously. For instance, at the Hacienda California, a community of farmers who have taken over the land previously owned by one of the oligarchy, when questioned about health care the answer was, ``There is none. The hospital is too far, the nurse too expensive, and no physicians are available. If one gets sick, one dies."

As I listened to the people talk about health care, one thought kept filtering through my head: on one hand the government vaccinated the young against disease, and on the other hand the military massacred many during the war. This left me with the paradox of war and health care existing side by side, with opposing results on the people. Because of the war, the issue of health is not the only issue of life and death facing the people of El Salvador.

El Salvador – Present and Future

by J.M. Ventura

It is a hot morning, we have been less than twenty-four hours in the country of El Salvador. We have driven for a few hours to arrive at an occupied farm that farmers have taken over from the previous

owner. The gate is closed and we have to request permission to enter. We are going to talk to these farmers to find out their problems, their ideas, their aims. It is Saturday and the farmers have some important business to take care of. It is pay day, so we have to wait till they will be able to talk to us.

The Stick

They suggest though that we speak to somebody else: ``The Stick" (really the Spanish equivalent), whom we did not expect to find there, who supposedly is not even there. We are introduced to a young man, not 30 yet, trim, 5 and 1/2 feet, maybe 150 lbs. He wears boots, his pants are ripped, his T-shirt is also not of recent acquisition. The pants are olive-green, the color that many people in this country have worn for many years. He seems not sure of his role today. He does not look people in the eye, his hand grip is not very strong, he is nervous, as a matter of fact he would smoke very much, one cigarette after the other. But he is a very important person as we would learn later. He is the leader, the guerrilla leader, and he was not supposed to be there. In fact, while we were there we heard some airplane engine noise and men from his unit carefully came out to look where the airplane was. As the engine noise got louder and louder, they would disappear, making sure that they would not be observable from the air. Under the densely covered trees, or disappearing into the house, they just did not exist.

This is June 1992, 5 and 1/2 months after the peace accords that established that the guerrillas would concentrate in fifteen camps and that the military would concentrate in sixty-two camps. It became evident to us that neither one side nor the other was obeying that agreement. Even more, after we had spoken to the young man, we toured the installations and we found heavy armor spread all over the house and its surroundings, including a heavy machine gun with its ammunition, automatic rifles, and supplies – beans, rice, eggs, boots, and other necessities. But let's come back to our conversation we had with them. They, of course, spoke Spanish, and had a very moving story to tell.

At an early age, these people had to leave school, since they could not afford the add-on fees the teachers would request to keep

the school clean (about one dollar a month), and had to help their parent(s) in the fields to earn a living. They had no possessions and were looking forward to a miserable life working for the land owners at very low wages ($1.20 a week or exactly 50 colones). Therefore, it was easy to convince them of the ideal to build a better country, a more equitable society, and so they joined the ``others" and eventually ended up with the guerrillas.

They went into the mountains, became organized, were spread around, and took military actions against the army while living under strenuous and precarious conditions, moving from one place to the other, never staying long enough to be found out. The young commander told us that first his parents were killed by the military, then his brothers and sisters, and eventually his uncles and aunts and cousins. As a matter of fact we left with the impression that he was the only survivor of a relatively large family. He had fought for ten years, and was now looking forward to help his men (we saw about twenty to twenty-five on the farm), to get back into civilian life. The peasants would give them a thousand *manzanas* from this 4,000 *manzana* farm. The peasants already had given each one of the peasants a *manzana* for his own cultivation, and were cultivating the remainder of the farm as a collective.

The young man in front of us never spoke in terms of ``I." He always referred to ``we"; he was really an idealist, partaking with his people, his men, his country. It was very hard for us to get him to provide a personal note. He spoke not in anger, he never used the word ``revenge," he never despaired in his words or gestures. He was serene; he was even looking forward. At the end of our conversation, after three times explaining what he might do, what he would like to make out of the experience, he finally stated that his real aim was to study.

The behavior of this young man moved me tremendously, and I think that he certainly deserves to get a scholarship, but not to move to the United States. He is already almost 30 years old, and if he had to learn English, it would hold him back. He should get financial support to be able to study in a Latin American university, maybe in a country like Costa Rica which has no army and a rich cultural tradition similar to the Salvadoran culture. I am confident that any studies this young man will undertake will be satisfactorily completed in less than the

assigned time. He is a young man in a hurry, driven to do something for this people. It would be a great waste if this young man would not be helped to obtain a leadership position for the good of this country and his people.

The Boss

A few days later . . . after many interviews. It is Wednesday afternoon, and we are in the military barracks and headquarters of the Armed Forces of El Salvador. We had been given an appoint-ment to see the spokesman of the Armed Forces. We met a man in his late forties (he asked for his reading glasses during his speech), in fatigues, polished boots, stocky, maybe 5 feet 6 inches, probably 180 pounds, a man who had certainly a high rank, though he did not wear any stars or medals, but who had an entourage of other people with stars and medals who looked up to him. They were always at his disposal, and would jump whenever he wanted something.

We were in an auditorium, where we were given a presentation on the different components of the peace agreement. He used a slide (after his major had adjusted the overhead projector), with many different graphs that represented the different sub-divisions of the peace accords. It was all very polished, very professional. We also asked questions, and though the answers were eventually provided, they would cover a wide range of issues (for example, that the peace accords were negotiated between two parties, but imple-mentation depends on five different forces).

The spokesman used a very polished language; he was really an orator, using phrases that would show his high level of training, education, and love for his country. He used phrases like ``it is not this generation that can write the history of the past years of El Salvador. It has to be a new generation. . . the next generation which will be able to write our history." When asked specifically about the relationship with the United States, he pointed out that it was the mutual interest of the USA and El Salvador that brought about the collaboration of their governments. He pointed out that the United States was not in Panama to buy bananas, nor in El Salvador just to buy coffee. As *the* world power the United States had certain responsibilities, and those responsibilities were expensive.

Though he never admitted to it, I am confident that we could have had this conversation just as well in English and that his presentation would not have lacked polish and elegance even in this language. I am almost sure that he spent a significant time in a war college in this country and may have even earned a higher degree of learning. But we did not ask personal questions; we were there to listen to the spokesman of the Armed Forces, and what a spokesman he was! Armed Forces are much more visible in small countries as compared to the United States. Our dislike for armies may also stem from the association of their actions with violence (which we may find unjustified, while their leaders might consider them a political necessity). In any event, the delivery from their spokesperson needed to be listened to.

The Future

El Salvador in the year 2000. Maybe my hopes for the country are mere phantasies. Who knows how the year 2000 will come about in a country that has been ravaged by war, in a country that needs everything and anything, a country that has a population of 5 million and is the size of Massachusetts! But one thing that I have observed in El Salvador is a tremendous amount of hope, of desire to improve life, of eagerness to move on, and in this spirit I see the year 2000.

I see our young commander with a career, maybe law, maybe in letters, maybe in medicine. I see him as a leader, as a politician. I see him in the year 2000 running in a popular party and aiming to get a position to help his people to be in the forefront of events, to provide guidance for this country to improve itself, to gain its position in the league of countries. Probably he will be very nationalistic and rhetorically anti-American, but certainly he will be Salvadoran, a patriot.

I also see our spokesman for the military. In the year 2000 he is retired, and is the brain behind a minority party, a party that has not been able to regain power since the early nineties, a party that has strong ties to the United States, strong ties to the wealthy of El Salvador, and a party whose time has passed. But with people as polished, intelligent, and eloquent as our spokesman from the Armed Forces the party attracts voters who hope that words will become

actions and that there will be a faster track to get ahead to gain advances for El Salvador.

I hope that these two men will face each other, but in parliament and not on the battlefield. Let's help them so that this will be achieved in El Salvador, so that thousands of lives on both sides will not have been lost in vain.

The University that Refused to Die

by Minor Sinclair

Underneath the shade trees of the 150 year-old University of El Salvador, groups of three or four review their notes before class or talk easily. In the farther reaches of the university campus, young couples embrace, partially hidden by the corners of the buildings. In the columns of the university newspaper, articles decry rising tuition and dwindling salaries of the professors. A colorful mural depicts the 500 years of struggle against the European *con-quistadores* and their successors. The university appears vibrant and full of life.

As a group of twelve members of the faculty and administration of Sacred Heart University plus myself we visited the University of El Salvador (UES) for three days in June 1992. We saw another side of the University, one caught in a desperate struggle against the enemies of progress and education who have tried to destroy the University and against the cynics who see the University as a ``flophouse for *campesinos*"(William J. Dietrich, head of U.S. mission to El Salvador, interview, March, 1992) and hope for its demise.

A walking tour of the campus revealed the devastation of war and natural disaster: twenty-two buildings (60% of the physical infrastructure) bombed or otherwise destroyed, the pock-marked walls of classrooms, laboratories whose equipment had been stolen by the Army, and everywhere, the silent pictures of martyrs of the University. In the past fifteen years, the University has been occupied by the Salvadoran military four times, one rector has been machine-gunned to death, the entire University administration rounded up and jailed and the University itself forced into exile.

As we ended our tour, SHU sociology professor Gerald Reid turned to me and said, ``Imagine what it would be like to teach here. Can you imagine it?"For those three days we tried to imagine what it

would be like to teach at ``the University which refuses to die," a name given to the UES after the military invaded and closed down the University in 1980. The University went underground with professors giving classes in secret locations.

The challenges facing the University are formidable. There are thirty thousand students, many of whom are ill-prepared for university-level education. Instructors earn on the average $150 per month and they too often lack adequate formal preparation (there are only two professors with masters level of training). We were incredulous to hear that the law school has just one computer for its seventy-three professors and three thousand students; our incredulity turned to shock when we were informed that the law school also has only one telephone. There are no funds for equipment, publications, conferences, or travel.

Yet, in our brief time on campus, we found the students highly motivated to learn, and not just about academic theories but also about their social realities. While we were there 300 students attended a three-day weekend conference at the University on economic and human rights. Another forum, this one on the role of the U.N. mission in El Salvador, brought out 150 students. A university ``field trip" to a repopulated community in the Department of Morazan drew eight busloads of students.

In the 1970s, the University of El Salvador was the most prestigious public institution in the region with the best library, top academic personnel, and a quality graduate school program. The UES has produced some of El Salvador's best thinkers, which includes, says Vice Rector Catalina Machuca with pride, the top leaders of the guerrilla insurgency.

Its own variant of university life sets the UES apart from comparable North American institutions. Unlike most U.S. schools, the rector, top administrators, and department deans are chosen by ballot by the university community. All students, faculty, and staff are entitled to vote. Critics consider the democracy on campus too drastic claiming, with some justification, that it has led to over-politicization of academic issues.

Just as their North American counterparts, Salvadoran academics struggle over the issue of academic freedom, but within a totally different set of boundaries. The UES has been one of the strongest

critics of the parade of military governments that ruled El Salvador from 1944 until recently. As El Salvador's guerrilla insurgency gained ground against the government during the 1980s, the university community has been repressed. Students have been killed for carrying a student I.D. and professors have been ``disappeared'' for writing articles against the regime. For months at a time, a military cordon encircled the campus and everyone who entered and left was searched for subversive materials.

Like their six colleagues at the Jesuit university in San Salvador who were assassinated in November 1989, UES academics have paid the price for pushing the limits of academic freedom. And in a strange way, they have a greater freedom than in the U.S. The UES is publicly funded, but according to the constitution, the university is autonomous. By law, the government cannot intervene into university affairs, although it has done so repeatedly.

The University of El Salvador is also deeply committed to the liberation of the poor from not only the chains of ignorance but also the shackles of structural oppression. ``Our finest education takes place in the poor communities,'' said UES rector Fabio Castillo (see the brief biographical description that follows this essay), describing their social outreach program known as *proyeccion social*. UES students are required to undertake 500 hours of internships which takes them to innovative dental clinics in poor communities such as Los Olivos, which the Sacred Heart delegation visited, or communities repopulated by returned refugees, or to provisional schools to assist the reintegration of the guerrilla ex-combatants. ``Field work'' is a major part of their pedagogy.

The Sacred Heart community has an opportunity to do more than ``imagine what it would be like.'' The visit of SHU faculty and administrators to the campus of the UES has brought the two universities into a dialogue which can reap benefits for both institutions in the years to come. SHU students and professors can be even more deeply exposed to a vision of a university which tries to do more than train graduates for the job market. Already, the UES has benefitted. SHU language professor Maria Teresa Torreira has arranged the donation of used language laboratory equipment to be sent to El Salvador.

For the students and faculty of the University that refuses to die,

their vision is to re-create the ideals of equality, liberty, and justice within society. The University is an educational center, but also is a laboratory for real democracy and critical debate about the needed structural changes in society. The University seeks to serve the poor by building links between the University and those efforts to transform society.

The Grandfather of Education

Fabio Castillo, a medical doctor who studied in Geneva, the University of Pennsylvania, and the University of California, is considered the ``grandfather of education" in El Salvador. As rector over the UES during its golden years, Dr. Castillo is credited even by his harshest critics for establishing the *Alma Mater* (as the UES is known) as the top academic public institution in Central America in the 1960s.

Dr. Castillo's own biography parallels the life of his native country. In 1960 he was named part of the three- man junta following a military coup that overthrew a repressive dictator. That junta itself was overthrown three months later when they called for free elections and Castillo was forced into exile. He returned to serve as rector from 1963-67 and from 1970 until 1972 when he was arrested and forced into exile for a second time.

After eighteen years in exile, Fabio Castillo returned to El Salvador and at the age of seventy-seven was re-elected to a third term as rector of the UES. ``Our mission is clear," he told us. ``We must rebuild the infrastructure and restore the academic excellence in all areas."

Castillo's conception of what academic excellence entails differs from that of others. Referring to the policies of the U.S. mission in El Salvador and of the Salvadoran government, Castillo said, ``There are those who believe that the goal of education for the masses is to train poor people for menial labor and to train a few others to supervise. We believe differently. All people should be taught to use their reasoning, to think critically, to build a society in which they

believe. That's our purpose here."

Searching for Truth in a World of Lies

by Robin McAllister

What was Sacred Heart doing sending a delegation of college professors down to El Salvador? Why not Poland, Haiti, or East Main Street in Bridgeport, for that matter? Could this trip, undefined for most of us as we began the trip, be justified in terms of the university's mission statement? What were we supposed to see and do?

I could not avoid seeing this whole trip from the point of view of a literature professor. So before I went on the trip I had already thought much about the history and situation of professors and teachers in El Salvador. I wondered what the proper role of a university and of university professors was in a society in which the army of your own country can mount an armed attack on your campus, kill your rector, occupy your buildings, blow up laboratories and fossil collections, sell not just rare books from the library, but even the glass panes out of the windows. Fabio Castillo the rector of the national university, the University of El Salvador, said to us, ``Is this your first trip to El Salvador? Then you know we have no university. Without a library there is no university, and we do not have a library." So I came to El Salvador ready to listen to stories about being a university professor in El Salvador.

My other perspective has to do with the attitude toward religion I encountered in El Salvador. They understand their war experience in the context of a religious experience. A refugee community in northern El Salvador, established two days after the murder of the Jesuit professors, took its name from one of them, Segundo Montes, and in a statement issued by this community describing themselves, I find an example of what I mean by an attitude toward religion I have encountered previously only in my own studies of medieval biblical interpretation:

La Ciudad Segundo Montes/Una Nueva Ciudad Bíblica. El Dios de la vida y el pueblo de la esperanza le van

> añadiendo paginas a la Biblia, a lo largo de esa historia de la salvación y de la liberación que sigue aconteciendo cada día; que seguimos realizando el espíritu y nosotros. Páginas vivas del Reino de Dios. Páginas absurdas quizás para el anti-reino. Y la Ciudad Segundo Montes – inaugurada en memorable fecha jubilar, a los 10 años del martirio de San Romero de América – es una hermosa nueva página bíblica, salvadoreña además, centroamericana, entrañablemente nuestra.
>
> (Dennis Leder, S. J., *La Flor de Izote*)

> [Segundo Montes City/A New Biblical City: The God of life and the people of hope continue adding pages to the Bible, throughout that story of salvation and liberation that continues taking place each day, which the Spirit and we seek to realize. Living pages of the kingdom of God. Absurd pages perhaps in the opinion of the Anti-Christ. And the city of Segundo Montes – inaugurated on a memorable Jubilee day, ten years from the day of martyrdom of Saint Romero of America – is a beautiful new Biblical page, Salvadoran besides, Central American, deeply and inherently ours.]

This statement places social and political struggle for justice in the context of a Crusade, a new Crusade to reverse many of the conse-quences of the original Conquistadores' crusades in Latin America.

At the time I'm not sure I was able to share this Salvadoran religious attitude. I am not in the habit of interpreting contemporary political events as if they were part of Sacred Scripture. If I were to understand the power of these ideas to change people, it would have to be from the perspective of a literature professor, not a pious *campesino*, much less a practicing believer in divine providence. So our subsequent visit to the Jesuit university, University of Central America, prepared the path for Dean Brackley's words to follow. Like Archbishop Romero and many other priests, nuns, and teachers, the

Jesuit fathers Ignacio Martin Ellacuria, Ignacio Martin Baro, Segundo Montes, Amado Lopez, Juan Ramon Moreno, and Joaquin Lopez y Lopez were not just priests and martyrs but intellectuals and university professors as well. The UCA is a beautiful suburban university high up the slopes of San Salvador volcano, an oasis of civilized, affluent culture, in the midst of an otherwise war-torn city. It is no more possible to imagine soldiers shooting down university officials here than imagining them storming and shooting through Sacred Heart University.

And yet, as you walk through the reception area of the administration building to visit the dormitory where these professors and priests were shot, you pass by several display cases. A library exhibit? No. You see books with their pages drilled by M16 bullets, shattered, bindings exploded. You see what could be the debris of any professor's desk or pockets, and you see little glass cups, like dishes in a laboratory, full of dried blood and grass from underneath the bodies of the martyred. Everything about this university looks like a contemporary middle-class private university in the United States, but here professors have actually given their blood and their lives in order to profess the Word as they were witness to it. How could a professor from an American university begin to relate his teaching to a mission like this?

There are a couple of photograph albums at the reception desk for visitors to look at that not many university public relations offices would recommend for prospective students and their parents. Unless you are a homicide detective or a police coroner doing autopsies, you have probably never seen snapshots like these autopsy and crime scene photographs, more ghastly, and sad, and frightening in the way they draw our shocked attention to them than any obscene photograph or slasher movie you might imagine, and yet, as we gaze at these *memento mori*, we may begin to see the human image in all its dignity and beauty re-emerging out of the grotesquely shattered and distorted human visages left by death. In some photographs lumps of human brains lay piled together on the grass. Some say the soldiers deliberately removed the brains from the skulls and threw them on the ground to signal their contempt for these men as intellectuals and professors. These photographs are not just a journalistic record of an historical event, but witnesses to a martyrdom and relics with power

to enlighten and heal.

As I remember the way Dean Brackley, a rector at UCA, explained it, the mission of the university is to the poor in the search for social justice. It does this by teaching students to seek the truth. But how, he asked, can you search for truth in a society that systematically lies and distorts the truth, a society in which the guns and bullets of state repression silence students, teachers, and priests? The intellectual sees truth from the perspective of a helicopter, while the *campesino* sees the world from the perspective of a tiny window in his hut. The only way the *campesino* has to understand experience and seek the truth is to tell his or her story of what has happened to him or her as a person. If the State can use terror and repression to stop people from telling their stories, they can never escape their subjugation and tell the truth. The university professor should help the student see the significance of his or her own story by relating it to larger contexts of truth made available through education. To listen, to witness stories, to seek a connection between them, to seek the significance of each of them as part of a larger pattern – is this the mission of a priest, a professor, or just any thinking and caring person?

Mística

by Lauren Kempton

Just what is the meaning of this word *mística*? Sitting in a circle in a meeting room in San Salvador I asked Mirna Anaya, widow of Herbert Anaya, the former president of the non-governmental Human Rights Commission of El Salvador. Mirna looked at me directly and said, ``*Mística* helps me to understand the Resur-rection. I know their work [the martyrs'] is still going on."

Still going on. Where had I heard that before? Two weeks prior from Jennifer Casolo, who said that during her imprisonment and torture in El Salvador she had seen the faces of all those men and women she knew had died fighting for peace, *por la paz*, in their beloved El Salvador. In my mind's eye I was beginning to define *mística* as a living church, a sense of community.

Our Sacred Heart delegation traveled to Nueva Esperanza, a repatriated community in the Usulutan province of El Salvador. Soledad, the community leader of internal relations, greeted us with the words, ``Your visit gives us courage for it comes from the heart." She explained the decision to return to their land from exile was a community decision reached after a reading of Jeremiah: ``I will enable you to return to your land." So from Soledad *mística* broadened to include a sense of community based on the Bible.

The next day we had a private audience with Monsignor Arturo Rivera y Damas, the Archbishop of San Salvador. I respectfully asked of him, ``Can you define *mística*?" He answered slowly and thoughtfully to the accompaniment of chirping birds and buzzing helicopters. ``*Mística* is hope. It is a great sense of the popular religion, a sense of devotion. As St. Paul said, `Patience engenders persistence.' The Salvadoran people will not be beaten down. They are a persistent people. So in our parish system, `*pequeñas comunidades*,' small faith communities reflect the word of God in the reality in which they live."

Again my definition had broadened, this time assisted by the highest Catholic leader in El Salvador. *Mística* then is how the Salvadorans name the most profound dimension of their struggle. It is an intrinsically Latino concept and an integral part of the history of the Central American popular struggle. As Renny Golden stated in *The Hour of the Poor, The Hour of the Women*, ``*Mística* is the soul of the poor uniquely revealed in women. When the poor evangelize the poor a new church is born." *Mística* is a way of life and a way of being. It is the communities. *Mística* is the Christian-based communities; it is a sense of social cohesion.

Mística is the poor of Central America. It is the women. It is the communities. It is a Christian-based faith born of struggle. As Soledad of Nueva Esperanza said: ``We are a people who really believe in God, and that faith has kept us."

Different Worlds, Different Arms

by Dominick A. Sacco

It was a hot Sunday morning in June, the last day of our group's research in El Salvador. We had left the rough hills of Morazan the day before and this was the first opportunity to explore downtown San Salvador. ``*¿Dónde está estación policía?*'' I asked a cabbie. He replied it was only a three block walk, directing us to the police station, just like a New York cab driver. My roommate accompanied me since it wasn't considered safe for foreigners to travel alone.

Enroute we saw a *Policía Nacional* and again inquired as to the whereabouts of the police station. His shoes were spit polished, his olive drab uniform was clean and pressed, he carried an automatic rifle and pistol – and he gave specific directions. Arriving at a fortress-like structure covering a full block, I inadvertently went into the wrong door. After identifying myself, an off-duty officer directed me to the main entrance saying, ``*Solo los dormitórios están aquí.*''

Beyond the open main gate, we saw a long *Información* desk, manned by another neatly dressed officer. ``*Soy de la policía de Nueva York, un teniente retirado,*'' I said. ``*Quiero cambiar mi sombrero y patches por suyos, para mi hijo, un policía allí ahora.*'' (I am from the New York Police Department, a retired lieutenant, I said. I want to exchange my hat and patches for yours, for my son, a policeman there now.) His superior, seated to the right, wearing a three bar insignia (probably a major and the platoon commander), dressed in an elegant uniform, overheard and interceded. I showed him my New York Police Department shield and ID card. He smiled and told me in Spanish that they were only issued one hat, but that he would be able to exchange arm patches. He summoned a young man in army fatigues, gave him instructions, and told us to go with him.

As we followed the young soldier around the corner to an office building, a heavily armed officer came running after us, shouting and waving. We were apprehensive, but then saw the police hat he was waving and assumed he wanted to trade with us. After exchanging hats, we embraced. The officer went into the building, and returned a few minutes later with two patches in his hand. He was smiling.

II

I met Deimas on Wednesday night at a celebration in the central plaza for FMLN wounded heroes returning from Cuba. Wounded

guerrillas in combat fatigues and the people of San Salvador in FMLN red T-shirts, headbands, and hats, hugged one another and danced in the plaza. Deimas' leg was shot during the war, and even after he was operated on and his leg stretched eight centimeters, he still limped. ``But not as much as before," he said. I met him through friends of Minor Sinclair, our guide, and over a few beers, I asked him where I could buy a hat like his. He took off his hat, signed and dated it, then handed it to me. I offered him money, my expensive Guayabera shirt or even my shoes, but he refused everything. Later, I told him our delegation was visiting the Segundo Montes cooperative in Morazan on the weekend. Deimas said he too was going to Morazan, and he might see me there.

Sure enough, at an open air market in Segundo Montes, I saw Deimas again. I think he was purposefully waiting for our group. Fortunately, at this time, I had an NYPD hat accessible, and I gave it to him. He placed the cap on his head, smiled, reached out his arms. As we hugged, the reality of the peace accords struck me: I had embraced a revolutionary on one day, and a twelve-year Civil War adversary the next.

I've already discussed the National Police's heavy weaponry. In contrast, the quarters of the security police in the Segundo Montes cooperative was a tin and wood shack without electricity, plumbing, communications, or arms. The only uniform the police had were hats. One old hat was hanging on a nail and I bought it from them. But I must have given too much because later, the senior officer caught up with me and presented me a new hat. These officers carried no arms at all.

Different worlds, different arms.

Notes on Traveling/Transience/Home: El Salvador, June 1992

by Louise Spence

We may have gone to study the people of El Salvador, but in many ways, *we* were the center: people were gathered together for us, answering our questions, ``at home" for us. I wondered often about

our intervention. First at the Hacienda California collective — the spontaneity and difficulty of the memories provoked by our presence; in another new community, Calle Real, the charming combination of modesty and pride of the young people in the *carpinteria* explaining their cooperative to us; then later the contrast of stories being told ``once again," though no less sincerely, in Nueva Experanza and Cuidad Segundo Montes. On a larger level, our military, economic, and political intervention in the daily lives of Salvadorans, in their homeland: What has that done to the social construction of nation and boundary? The political and cultural dimensions of identity-formation? We heard often that the population of El Salvador is 6 million people, 5 million in El Salvador and 1 million in the U.S.

The ``inherently bifocal approach" of travel (to borrow a phrase from James Clifford) forced us to rethink concepts like transience and home: in Morazan, some of us decided that we wanted to return to our hotel in San Salvador — a place that already had a history and comfort for us — its lobby and restaurant meeting spots, our rooms and baths. And the women in Calle Real, after describing with tears the dislocation of their families during the war, the tumultuous founding and the incredible support and hope of their community (their health-care clinic, day-care center, the education, autonomy, and ambitions of their children, the apprenticeship program, and workshops that distribute half their profits to social services), saying that they would like, eventually, ``to go home" to Chalatenango.

Our informants were transients, too. For us, travel meant research, cultural encounters, exploration, transformation, a purposeful and self-conscious placement and presence; but for others, it meant exile, rootlessness, transience, transplantation, and loss — moving across borders, with little comfort and safety. Traveling is a dialogue between similarity and difference, belonging and displacement. At ``home": migrant laborers, mobile workers, homeless people: travelers, too, with high rates of TB and low life expectancy. The back-and-forth migrations of Mexican-Americans; Puerto Rican commuters returning to the island with their kids dressed up to visit *abuelita* (a celebration of intimacy and proximity); Nuyoricans who ``return" for winter vacations, bereft of *Isla* heritage, only imagining how it was. L.A. is really El Salvador's second largest city.

To be in transit: places of departure, arrival, transitions. An

investigation would have to consider the political, cultural, and economic determinations of travel, as well as differing notions of settlement and return. Expatriate, refugee, exile, immigrant . . . A round-trip ticket? Different degrees of ease and privilege? A mural at the National University commemorates 500 years of resistance.

II

We were greeted by the Marlboro Man, Dunkin Donuts, ``*Vive el sentir de Pepsi,''* and Radio Venceremos playing rap music.

Going South, a Salvadoran ``returning" with a cooler of North American beer and on the ``return trip" an elderly lady who didn't know how to fasten a seat belt and had never seen yogurt before (``Kids" brand, made in El Salvador).

To understand how the global is localized, we must consider the process of hybridization, of between-ness, historically connected spaces and culture flows. Salvadorans are recipients of Hang-ten and UCLA T-shirts, *Magnum, P.I., Arma Mortal 3, and El Mundo Segun Wayne*. We came home with FMLN caps and shirts, painted crosses, other people's stories, memories. Daily experience is a complex history of traveling cultures and transnational influences.

Some of the women of the Calle Real community were going to prepare lunch for us and asked the priest who had invited us for suggestions on what to serve. When he asked, ``What do you do best?" they answered unanimously, ``Pizza!" and then questioned, ``Do gringos like pizza?"

In 1989, Jorg Schoneberg traveled home to his family for Christmas vacation and came back to New York with a piece of the Berlin Wall (``This is not from Macy's!"). We are all familiar strangers, so to speak. We hold on to, perhaps fetishize, not only another's culture, but ``elsewhere."

One's home is someone else's elsewhere (less a place than a way of seeing).

III

Memory and questioning, encounters and exchanges, are crucial elements in the constitution of identity. Travel transmits not only

continuity, but also disruption. Back home/in New York/centered: the devastation of the poor of my city had begun to slip away during my travels, only to return again on the subway home.

In a poor country, whoever controls the land and the means of production, also holds the means of coercion. Power becomes antagonist. The struggle for political agency in El Salvador often involved leaving home/traveling/transience: ``going to the moun-tains" or fleeing the country, the mobility (and perplexity) of home and border – a culture of resistance that attempts to pry open the boundaries of domination.

Soledad, one of the elected leaders of Nueva Esperanza, told us that when her community repatriated from Nicaragua, they were met at the airport with a banner, ``WELCOME, SALVADORANS, TO YOUR HOMELAND," behind which stood five tanks and a squadron.

On the way to visit the American Embassy, we saw private homes with armed guards and rimmed with razor wire. Curiosity about the people living there brought me back to me. I am clearly a *gringa*, a site from which I need to take responsibility, a location which has shaped my awareness, understanding, appreciation, my own allegiances and alienation. The challenge is to reconceptualize these experiences in multicentric terms, to understand the boundless defiance of political struggle and cultural re-mapping, the arbitrariness of boundaries and the arrogance of naming and placing, the breadth of the meanings of ``freedom," *la frontera*. Perhaps this will help us to understand U.S. cities and why they burn.

A Plea for Justice in El Salvador

by Ralph L. Corrigan, Jr.

I

We heard your story from a Padre you must have loved.
He told us how you lost your mother that day
In the mountains. He said you were only eight years old,
And when the men in uniforms grabbed your mother,
Throwing her to the ground to rape her, how you ran terrified,
The screams of your mother ringing in your ears.
But you must have turned momentarily, when the soldier,
With the dreaded Atlacatl insignia on his arm,
Ripped your mother's lips from her face with his knife.

I can understand how that moment, and what happened
Directly after, when the men plunged their bayonets
Into your prostrate mother . . . once . . . twice . . .
three times . . .
Ten times . . . yes, a full twenty-seven times, traumatized you,
Left you without eyes with which to see . . . for years.
I wonder how you knew it was twenty-seven times?
I think it would be important for you to know that,
But how did it happen? Did you creep back
Through the thickets of brush and trees in the darkness
When the army men were off to some new diversion,
To kneel over the lifeless body of your mother,
And count the wounds?

So it is easy to understand how growing up a refugee
In a strange land you moved into a separate world of visions –
Of radiant, clear, strong colors, placed ever so carefully
Here and there on those canvases in your mind.
A full two hundred, your Padre said. And every one complete.
He said you could call up each and every painting,
Recounting the contents to your startled listeners.

So I understand. I know how coping with death takes many forms.
But to create two hundred paintings in your head!

II

But this is not your whole story. This is only the part
That tells us who you were when you arrived at the *carpinteria*.
For years, the world had grown dim to your eyes,
And only in the confines of your mind could you see
The lines so sharply etched, the reds, yellows,
Greens and blues, juxtaposed just so.
Your Padre told us when they realized you couldn't see,
They went ahead and ordered glasses, in an aviator style.
I wonder what you must have thought when you placed those
Miraculous lenses on that first time? We know what happened.
Padre told us how you took up brush, letting the deep colors
Drain from your mind over the surfaces of those cards,
And boxes, and crosses. Explosions of color and design,
Your talent astonishing the good Padre of the *cooperativa*.

So when you were holding the hand of your girlfriend,
And you met those four ex-army thugs at dusk on that dirt road,
I think perhaps you must have wondered if your mind
Was playing tricks on you. It must have thrown you
Back momentarily to an earlier, darker time,
That lay hidden beneath all those canvases,
Back to that fatal mountain scene of years ago.

``I want your shoes," one said, and so, unwillingly,
You gave them up, not wishing to create a scene.
Another said, ``I want those glasses," pointing to the Padre's gift.
You must have known who he was, must have shuddered
At the terrible knowledge of his reputation among your people.
And you, thinking to yourself, no . . . these glasses are my life.
So you said, ``no," surrounded by the four ex-combatants,
Your girlfriend's eyes darkening with fright.
But what could you have been thinking when you said ``no"?
What moved you to stand and face your tormentors?

Was it the spirit of Romero? of Ellecuria and Segundo Montes?
Was it the spirit of all the war-wounded, saying in solidarity, ``No!"

And how did it feel when that cold steel entered your stomach,
Just before it slashed upward through your heart?
You must have felt the sharp steel plunge through
The thin wall of muscle, just before your eyes
Rolled upward never to see again, the blood curling
Past your teeth as you crumpled toward the ground.

III

``This is what happens in El Salvador," the good Padre said,
His eyes scanning our group. ``Yes, this is the reality of
The peace accords." And the Padre's story is not over yet.
Only the part about the young boy's death.
But perhaps, gentle reader, you do not want to hear,
About the Padre's frantic attempts to see justice done.
``There's a killer free in our midst," he said. ``And we have
No idea who he will kill next. We only know
He's killed before, and surely, he will kill again."

And what to make of the remarks of the *policía*?
``Padre, you have no witnesses," they said. Repeatedly,
To the Padre's pleas for justice, he was told,
``It didn't happen. You have no proof."

No . . . no proof. Only the body of a poor,
Salvadoran artist from your *carpinteria*,
And the colors that spun from his visionary brushes.