Michael E. Lee, ed.

Ignacio Ellacuría: Essays on History, Liberation, and Salvation. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2013. Pp. vii + 309. Pb, \$40.

The best-known fact about Ignacio Ellacuría is that he was assassinated in 1989 at the Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas (UCA) in San Salvador, along with five other Jesuits, Julia Elba Ramos, a cook for the seminarians living near the UCA, and her teenage daughter Celina. As in comparable cases, it is quite easy to fixate on their deaths; to do so, however, is a mistake. Their real legacy is not that they died, but rather why they died. The very point that Ellacuría makes about Jesus is also pertinent for understanding his own life and death: “the ‘why did Jesus die’ is inseparable from the ‘why did they kill him.’ Moreover, the ‘why did they kill him’ has a certain priority over the ‘why did he die’” (232). The twelve essays in this volume can help English-speaking readers begin the process of coming to terms with Ellacuría’s life, thought, and death.

Michael E. Lee’s introduction helps contextualize the essays both thematically and historically. In terms of the former, he notes some of the key influences on Ellacuría’s thought (e.g., Karl Rahner and the Basque philosopher Xavier Zubiri) and provides an overview of his major philosophical and theological ideas. In terms of the latter, Lee highlights Ellacuría’s tenure as president of the UCA, in which capacity he led the university to a prominent role in Salvadoran society in the midst of the civil war. In addition to the introduction, Kevin F. Burke, SJ, one of the leading authorities on Ellacuría, provides informative introductory commentaries for each of the essays. Those commentaries further situate each essay within the broader framework of Ellacuría’s life and work. The essays themselves are organized into three parts, each of which contains four essays.

For an editor, the use of essays presents a few potential problems. First, out of the numerous essays Ellacuría wrote (it was his preferred genre), how do you decide which ones to include? As Lee himself acknowledges, for every essay that was selected there were other ones that would have been equally appropriate (17). Here it is important to keep in mind that the purpose of the book is merely to serve as an introduction to Ellacuría’s thought. The selected essays fulfill that modest, though important, goal. Second, how do you organize the essays? One approach would be to do it chronologically; the other is to do it thematically. Lee employs the second option. The danger with such an approach is that it could impose an order on Ellacuría’s thought that distorts its substance. Lee gets around that possible predicament by using insights from Ellacuría’s “Laying the Philosophical Foundations of Latin American

Theological Method" (63–91) as the book's organizing principle. In that essay, Ellacuría highlights three ways humans engage reality: being present within and thus aware of it, comprehending it ethically, and acting (80). Each of the parts, in turn, corresponds with those three forms of engagement. Part I is entitled "The Reality of History through Latin American Eyes," and its essays highlight the problems that flow from Latin America's colonial history, the importance of liberation within that history, and how both should impact philosophy and theology. Part II comes under the heading "Liberation: The Christian and the Historical." Its essays explore many of themes associated with liberation theology, such as the historical nature of salvation and the preferential option for the poor, which receives perhaps its most poignant articulation in Ellacuría's reference to the poor as "The Crucified People" (195–224). Part III is entitled "Saving History," and it includes essays that reflect on how the ongoing enactment of salvation in history may impact Christians, both personally and collectively.

The timing of this volume is prescient in that it corresponds to the initial years of the pontificate of Francis, who shares emphases that are similar in many ways to those of Ellacuría. To be sure, Francis himself is not a liberation theologian. Yet, owing partially to Francis's Latin American background and influences (e.g., Medellín and Puebla), there are similarities between the pope and the martyr. Both men want a church of and for the poor. They also advocate a more decentralized church with less emphasis on the church as institution and its accompanying clericalism. Ellacuría talks about a church that comes from the "base" (245), while the pope talks about the church coming from the "peripheries." Another significant similarity between the two men centers on the importance of Jesus and discipleship (or as the pope might put it, "missionary discipleship"). At the heart of Ellacuría's approach to theology is his insistence that any present attempt to explicate the Christian faith must take Jesus of Nazareth and discipleship seriously. One of the constants in the theological essays is the way Scripture, especially the Gospels, informs Ellacuría's theology. The best example of that tendency is the aforementioned "The Crucified People" in which he draws together the passion narratives and the Suffering Servant Songs from Second Isaiah to discuss what it means for the church to be the church in light of systematic oppression and violence. Admiration for Archbishop Óscar Romero is a final similarity between Francis and Ellacuría. Under Francis's leadership, Romero has recently been beatified and will soon be canonized. In his hauntingly beautiful "Monseñor Romero" (285–92), Ellacuría provides a fitting eulogy for a man he immensely respected. That essay is also an appropriate conclusion to *Ignacio Ellacuría*, as one martyr extols the virtues of another, leaving

us grappling with the ongoing importance of both of their lives and deaths. In doing so, we should recall Ellacuría's own words: an "essential factor of liberation theology is the giving of one's life for others but especially the most poor [...]. It is the offering of one's life out of love, in an incarnational way, to the most needy and oppressed" (131).

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