Maria Clara Bingemer and Peter Casarella, eds.

Witnessing: Prophecy, Politics, and Wisdom. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2014. Pp. iii + 176. Pb, \$35.

In 2014, we commemorated the martyrdom of six Jesuits who taught at the Universidad Centroamericana, along with their cook, Elba Ramos, and her sixteen-year-old daughter, Celine. Soldiers of the army of El Salvador shot them at point blank range. The military had hoped to kill two Jesuits in particular, Ignacio Ellacuría and Jon Sobrino. Ellacuría had been involved in efforts to end the spiral of violence that was consuming El Salvador; Sobrino was, and is, one of the most important proponents of liberation theology in Latin America. Purely by accident, he was out of the country when the military surrounded the Jesuit residence in San Salvador—otherwise, he would have shared the fate of his fellow Jesuits. About seventy thousand people died in political violence in El Salvador at the hands of the military, right-wing death squads, and, less frequently, leftist guerillas. In neighboring Guatemala, as many as two hundred thousand may have perished in a race-based bloodbath. Of course, the recently beatified Óscar Romero is the “proto-martyr” of the Latin American church, but thousands of other Christians have died in civil conflicts in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. These are the people Gustavo Gutiérrez frequently refers to as “those who died before their time” (Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Las Casas: In Search of the Poor of Jesus Christ* [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993]).

This excellent collection of reflections on witness and martyrdom by an array of scholars from around the world celebrates the blood-price of Christian witnesses in the modern world. Maria Clara Bingemer and Peter Casarella have gathered together the reflections of scholars from Latin and North America, Europe, and Asia. The first essay by Maria Clara Bingemer analyses the relationship between witness, martyrdom, and mysticism. She sees Christian witness as an expression of the love of others and compassion for the poor and oppressed that holds them together as members of the Christian community. Their courage is made possible by a faith and wisdom that ultimately defies words. The article that ends this collection is by Jon Sobrino. A man of refined intelligence and profound faith, Sobrino talks about his brother Jesuits who died in 1989. As well as being martyrs, they were also “Jesuanic” (that is, Christ-like) witnesses to the Reign of God. Like Romero, they are still alive each time their memories are evoked and affirmed with a simple Spanish word—*presente*. Sobrino’s article may send chills down a reader’s spine as it did mine.

All thirteen essays discuss the challenges Christians face in an increasingly immanent and secular world, in which acquisition has become the measure of

a person's worth rather than the depths of one's love for others. Christians are called to advocate for economic and political justice based on the intrinsic dignity of every human being. This message is the antithesis of a global world system predicated on an *odium iustitiae* (hatred of justice), seen in the murderous suppression of human life in both developed and developing countries. This hatred of justice is the lynchpin that facilitates economic oppression and political repression by elites who live cosseted lives in centers of power and retire to their gated communities at night. They refuse to look at the poverty around them as the result of the parasitic domination of millions that makes their elite status a possibility. Likewise, they refuse to listen to the cries of the poor, convinced that they lack the intelligence required to understand the suffering and injustice and suffering that is foisted on them as their lot in life, a message too often reaffirmed by the institutional church.

For Maria Clara Bingemer and for all of the authors in the anthology, belief requires speaking truth to power. Discipleship requires analysis, action, and the support of a believing community. Christians must advocate for economic and political systems that are based on the intrinsic worth of every human being—the very antithesis of a global world system actually predicated on an *odium iustitiae*. This hatred of the poor and oppressed provides a rationalization for the gross economic inequality and political violence of our world today. All of the authors of *Witnessing* draw on their experiences of courage and suffering as women, Filipinos, Latin Americans, or North Americans. Readers will find an array of encouraging and provocative ideas in each of the texts, from the liberating potential of folk Catholicism in the Philippines to the challenges of living in the midst of distorted affluence in developed countries.

For many, the “triumph” of free-market capitalism with its maniacal acquisitiveness and the increasingly authoritarian political structures is a cause for celebration. I teach in a secular university where some of my rationalistic colleagues firmly believe that there is a magical hand busily at work in the world of free-market capitalism. Discussion about ethics and the common good are no longer necessary, since market forces will ultimately sort things out. There is no need for puppeteers or strings in this neo-liberal world, just a few technicians to oversee the odd economic or political malfunction. As the varied authors of *Witnessing* make clear, refuting the neoliberal idolatry of our day is *the* principal task of the Christian, who may be called upon to die for the deeper truths of the Reign of God. Being truthful, and therefore prophetic, is the fundamental task of the contemporary Christian. As *Witnessing: Prophecy, Politics, and Wisdom* makes clear, there is no lack of courage in the Christian community today. If we listen to the voice of the poor and powerless attentively, we will have more than enough strength and wisdom to live out an

alternative, liberating praxis. These oppressed nameless ones gave Romero, Ellacuría, Ita Ford, and Maura Clark the strength to be martyrs. This short but powerful collection of essays lays out the nature and meaning of their deaths as martyrs. It is a welcome source of theological analysis that celebrates the liberating potential of witness and martyrdom in a suffering world.

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