

Consensus

Volume 19
Issue 2 *Liberation Theology*

Article 3

11-1-1993

The March Toward Liberation

Brian Rude

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus>

Recommended Citation

Rude, Brian (1993) "The March Toward Liberation," *Consensus*: Vol. 19 : Iss. 2 , Article 3.
Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol19/iss2/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars Commons @ Laurier. It has been accepted for inclusion in Consensus by an authorized editor of Scholars Commons @ Laurier. For more information, please contact scholarscommons@wlu.ca.

The March Toward Liberation

Brian Rude

*Pastor, Division for World Mission,
Evangelical Lutheran Church In Canada,
serving The Lutheran Church of El Salvador*

Liberation is on the march. A liberation people is on the march. A liberation body advances steadily, led on by the liberating Christ, its head. Step by faltering, but faith-guided and confidence-gathering, step, the people march. And while the people march, they sing with conviction:

Chorus: A people who journey through this world,
All crying, "Come O Lord!"
A people who are seeking in this life
The great liberation.

We poor are always waiting for the distant dawn
Of a more just day, with no more oppression.
We poor have always put our hope in you,
O Lord, Liberator!

You saved our life from oppression and slavery—
Slaves of the law, serving always in fear.
We poor have always placed our hope in you,
O Lord, O God of love!

Chorus: Together as brothers and sisters,
Members of one church
We go along our journey
To the encounter with the Lord.

A long and tiring march,
All through the desert, under the sun.
We alone cannot advance
Without the assistance of the Lord.

United in one prayer,
United also in one song,
We will all live out our faith

With the assistance of the Lord.

The church is on the march,
Already heading to a new world
Where love will always reign
And where peace will also reign.

The imagery is clearly Exodus imagery. But the Exodus is not simply precedent, memory or model. And today's march is not an isolated march. The Exodus and today's march are one and the same. Today's marchers join ranks with those on the liberation journey of every time and place.

Journey To Repatriation

Let us focus on a particular moment and location within the movement of the grander march. The 1991 extended Passion journey—through grief to hope, through death to life, through crucifixion to resurrection—was a dramatic and memorable one for many Salvadorans. It was a homecoming journey, from exile to the promised land. It will, for years and generations to come, be relived with passion and hope, as are the liberation journeys recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures. Perhaps prompted by the well-organized returns of Salvadoran refugees from Honduran camps in recent years, perhaps having reached the limit of their tolerance for exile after an interminable decade, perhaps due to the intense longing to be on home turf once again, many groups of Salvadoran refugees in Panama and Nicaragua, and the remainder of those still in Honduran camps, began concretizing their dreams throughout 1990. These factors were strengthened by their strong sense of community which overcame, or at least reduced, their sense of vulnerability on returning to a land of war and governmental repression. And certainly these exiles were inspired with hope by their God of liberation.

After a journey cluttered with obstacles and imposed frustrations, 1991 became a year of fulfilment. Those coming from Nicaragua had to face the majority of these. The Salvadoran government required firm contracts to be in place regarding the land on which they planned to settle, and adequate pre-built housing, before approving their return. Without full government approval, the UNHCR (United Nations High Commission on Refugees) was not in a position to assist, nor were the exiles allowed to cross the border at El Espino, from Nicaragua into Honduras, on their overland route to El Salvador. After

several days of camping at the border, the Nicaraguan army forced them to return to Managua, where they no longer had even their refugee settlements to which they could return.

Further negotiations finally led to Salvadoran government approval and UNHCR support in a return by air. But the approval was offered with obvious hesitance, since the government's impression of those returning from Nicaragua, after having experienced ten years of Sandinista government, is that they are subversive and particularly threatening to Salvadoran national security. The reality is that they have learned their rights and their country's laws well, so that when the soldiers threaten and harass them, they stand up to the soldiers and intimidate them with charges of breaking the laws themselves by their unwarranted treatment of the refugees. On several occasions, soldiers have been sent scurrying to consult with their authorities, after being called to account for overstepping their bounds by the very folk whom they were trying to intimidate.

Those returning from Panama faced a challenging adjustment, moving from an isolated, tropical, oceanside jungle, where fishing had been their livelihood, to a desolate, treeless dustbowl, far from any fishing.

The first Salvadoran leg of the various pilgrimages, from airport to repatriation communities, was heavily militarized by the governmental Armed Forces, in spite of their promises to the contrary. This included numerous tanks at the entrance to the village nearest to one repatriation community, and in the village square, beside which the Thanksgiving Mass was to be celebrated upon the arrival of the repatriates—an arrival delayed several hours by such intimidation. The UNHCR was especially reluctant to allow the passage of the buses in such tense circumstances, until, as dusk approached, the refugees declared unilaterally that they would march in the last several kilometres on foot if they had to.

UNHCR conceded. The buses preceded to the town entrance, where they parked, blocking traffic, and a couple thousand repatriots and welcoming locals took to the main street, the town square and the church, in an animated, emotional demonstration. The Thanksgiving Mass went ahead, seven hours late, and in spite of the nervous reservation of the local priest. Throughout the Mass, the Armed Forces were blasting forth from loudspeakers in the town square, just outside the

church, with their own welcome and assurances of protection—from whom? the refugees wondered—unsuccessfully trying to disrupt the Mass. A huge banner across the main street reinforced their dubious welcome.

Numerous relocations were necessary after the initial settlements, due to the unsuitability of the land for cultivating, and the uncertainty of land contracts valid for only one year. Some of the relocation took place without permission, and was hampered by military roadblocks which prevented both the people and their construction materials from passing through, sometimes for several days. At one point, threats to the driver forced him to give up on getting through to the community. A peasant woman of firmer resolve took over the driver's seat and, though she had absolutely no experience with driving, began to move the truck through the roadblock, until the soldiers shot her tires flat. All of these communities face a major challenge of adaptation, considering that a significant percentage of their numbers were born and raised outside of El Salvador, who now "return" to a place they have never known, with citizenship in other countries. So, throughout their struggle to return, these determined people have been deterred, but not discouraged. And now the signs of hope and life far outweigh the threats of discouragement and death.

Though the decade in exile was troubled and painful, it was evidently not a lost decade. The exile itself becomes a seed for hope and new life, since it was a decade of inspired learning—learning to organize and live in community, learning to read and write, learning a host of trades and life skills. All of this they now bring with them, eager and ready to transplant these seedlings in their former soil, at the same time spreading the seeds for others to sow and tend and harvest.

A never-failing powerful impression is created by the spontaneous and enthusiastic welcome of these repatriates by the more settled neighbours living in the areas surrounding the new communities. They back up their moving words of welcome, official and personal, with active steps to incorporate the newcomers into their cooperative or village life, with the dedicated building of roads, and with assistance in construction and land preparation.

One community, appropriately named "Romero City", in a timely celebration—the March 24 overlap of the anniversary of

Monsignor Romero's martyrdom and the culmination of their pilgrimage with the Sunday of the Passion—rejoiced in the sure passage from death to the imminence of the resurrection, which all three events signify for these people of God. In one Thanksgiving service, three dignified peasant women presented their offerings in a moving ceremony. The first, carrying a pot of earth, spoke the following words: "Here Lord, I present to you as an offering this little bit of earth, which is the earth that will serve all of us, and the children, the whole community." The second woman brought a plant, which she offered with these words: "The harvest of our fruits, for the nourishment of all the people, is growing here. This is what we all need as Christians—only the earth and its fruit, to sustain us and our children." The third woman came with this offering: "Lord, here we present you, I present you, with these sandals, as a symbol of our journey in exile. It was with these that we were able to take steps to arrive at our promised land."

In the cultural presentations which followed, youth groups from both Nicaragua and Panama enacted the story of their exile and return in two separate "socio-dramas", each in several acts—the one profound and heart-wrenching, absorbing the spectators who watched with intense gazes, and the other a lighter, comical approach, inspiring repeated bursts of laughter.

It is an impressive and moving experience to receive these people on behalf of the church, and accompany them to their "promised land" and get caught up in their enthusiasm as they give thanks to our God of life and liberation in passionate Thanksgiving Masses. These are simple, humble folk, not recognized as players on world stages, but they have their influence. The reservation of the Salvadoran government in receiving them is evidence enough to indicate that these folk bring something new, or, more likely, a strong impulse to something already growing—something that signifies change, so unwelcome to those who wish to persist with current structures and privileges.

It may perhaps seem presumptuous to suggest that the reign of God is being established in these small "resurrection pockets" throughout the land of El Salvador, but without doubt there are many hopeful signs, not the least of which is the

hopefulness of the people, faithful and assured that God is indeed renewing God's creation among them and through them. The name of one community, "New Hope", aptly reaffirms this reality. Upon visiting such life-filled communities, one is inspired to proclaim with unfaltering conviction that "Christ is risen". And the entire people respond, affirming with equal conviction: "Christ is risen indeed".

The March Celebrates an Anniversary

Another journey, though more of a symbolic staging, is equally significant. It is a procession to celebrate the anniversary of Rev. Medardo Gómez's ordination as Bishop of the Salvadoran Lutheran Church. The meticulously-arranged cobblestones of the central street, stretching the steep length of this historically-rich community of Jayaque, could tell a colourful and gripping story. The menial footsteps of everyday living and perennial passage go unnumbered, and would go unnoticed except for the accumulated wear on both the stones and the stone-treaders. At times the road would have been transformed into a celebrative space, a fiesta for any one of many motives, open to all who would join in. At other times, it would have cradled a funeral procession, bringing a pensive pause to the day-to-day routine. Throughout its history, but with greater frequency and intensity in recent times, it has become a "via dolorosa", a way of suffering and agony, as innocent people have been dragged along it to their tortuous deaths.

But today, something quite different, something quite novel, has sprung to life. Today the streets are filled with a triumphal entry—hundreds of people overwhelmed with a powerful, life-giving sense of making this road—life's road—their own. It is not a mob scene. It is an orderly procession, with those carrying large ornamented palm branches lining either side of the street, and those carrying banners with prophetic messages filling down the centre. This is a pastoral procession of shepherds leading their sheep, pastors leading their flocks, a bishop leading his church. They are being led to the cross, and through the cross, to life. That the procession should be drenched in mid-worship by a baptismal downpour is understood as yet another symbol of God's regenerative love on their journey, reminding them of their integration into this body of Christ.

With his body, and with his blood, they are also nourished, together in community, in the course of the celebration, reassured of Christ's incarnational sacrifice which is accompanied by the promise of strength for this journey leading to life and liberation.

This pilgrimage is historical—never away from history, never removed from history, but always immersed in the day-to-day reality of the people on the march, or even of those simply observing the march. That today's pilgrimage should lead us through Jayaque offers significance to reinforce the importance of the historicity of the liberation march—though no more so than if we were processing through any other community in El Salvador, or in the world, for that matter.

Today's march takes us past the mass grave of 1,000 of the 32,000 slaughtered in the genocidal massacre of peasant and indigenous people in 1932 by the government troops of General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez. That today's procession should be led, impromptu and spontaneously, by a colourful troupe of indigenous dancers is another forceful, faith-filled statement of life and liberation. Today's march follows the route taken by Farabundo Martí, the rebel leader of that era, the last day before he was killed. This pueblo of Jayaque was the parish of Martín Baró, one of the six Jesuit priests martyred during the offensive of November 1989. Currently, it is a community struggling to build unity and understanding between Roman Catholics and Protestants in their joint struggle for life and liberation within history. At the same time, up to twenty fundamentalist groups in town encourage people to withdraw from history, reducing them to complacency and passive resignation in this life, and filling them with illusionary visions for the next. The pilgrimage is not ahistorical, neither in Jayaque, nor anywhere in El Salvador, nor anywhere else in the world. The Rev. Medardo Gómez, Bishop of the Lutheran Church of El Salvador, affirms the historic nature of the march:

God's spirit inspires and infuses us in the defeats, in order to raise us up, and in the uncertainties the Spirit gives us her light so that we might believe in the movement of the people which impels us, envelops us and involves us as witnesses of the time, as doers of the word, as citizens and believers, as patriots and Christians, which for us servants of Christ is not a duality since the Christian movement cares for and promotes the integral dimension of the Gospel

which touches the human and spiritual with essential interest, emphasizing its message in the consolidation of the objective, real and historic conditions which permit the approach of the reign of God.

Besides, the greatness of our church does not exhaust its possibilities for growth solely in the spiritual realm, but it is also strengthened more now with the verification of what we have lived through, throughout our historic process.¹

Zealous but misguided spiritualists call this political involvement, and balk at it, or even condemn it. Those actively opposing such historical (i.e., political) involvement of Christ's body today are those who seek to have, or defend those who seek to have, an exclusive, monopolistic control over that history. Perhaps what really frightens them into frantic opposition on this score is that, at base, they recognize the right, the obligation, of people to be involved with, to become subjects of, their own history, an involvement made all the more valid when enlightened by a faith perspective granted by their God of history. That all persons and communities should be equally subjects of their own history is a distressing idea, indeed, to those who seek to manage expanding chunks of history.

For today at least, the people of Jayaque and their supporters have made this road their own, and with vision toward the future, have full hope of making history their own.

The Internal March Toward Liberation

There are periods when the physical, marching aspect of the process and progress toward liberation is necessarily, or circumstantially, suspended, or at least confined, spatially. But the "march" goes on internally.

A compelling sense of a passion for liberation is caught from one who suffered a more literal imprisonment, without charges, but simply for his affiliations with the Lutheran Church and with the University of El Salvador. He was incarcerated for seventeen months in a Salvadoran prison. "The light of liberation is a strength one carries within," asserted Jose², shortly following his exoneration and release in the spring of 1991. He continued to explain his position:

It cannot be taken away forcibly. Neither blindfold, handcuffs, interrogation, torture, nor prison walls can destroy, or even diminish, one's freedom, or one's passion for liberation. One of the elements which nourishes liberation within one is a growing awareness

of reality, an expanding conscientization. In my case, that process was accelerated, going to my imprisonment. My conscientization and awareness, and therefore my sense of freedom, grew in the prison setting, and I became more convinced that it could never be taken from me.

My frustration was that I felt restricted in terms of how I could implement that freedom for the sake of the larger struggle for liberation. Such a sense of freedom is a passion that can't be hidden or buried inside. Personal liberation sparks a vision for a broader, societal liberation, and demands involvement in the struggle to achieve that. We did what we could inside the prison—denouncing and demonstrating against violations against human rights, by holding hunger strikes, and sometimes we would smuggle out such messages for publication nationally and internationally.

Another element which sustains one's sense of freedom is the awareness of not being alone, the certainty of being accompanied. One is surrounded by one's friends and colleagues, those with similar experiences, those suffering similar circumstances. Such a community provides presence and interaction, even if limited, and joint implementation of visions held in common. International solidarity and advocacy are also an invaluable resource in securing the stability of one's sense of liberation.

In the case of El Salvador, one is also assured of a strong and well-organized front fighting toward the same goals as the general impoverished population, in the social, economic, political, cultural and spiritual spheres.

When asked if he knew of anyone who had once had, and then lost, that liberated sense, he could think of only one example—that of the single political prisoner who had not been released in the 1986 general amnesty. After many long months of imprisonment surrounded by unconscientized common criminals,

it wasn't just that he was inside the prison, but that the prison got inside him. The prison culture eroded the vision of liberation which had once filled him. Months later, when other political prisoners were again incarcerated with him, in spite of regular contacts, their passion could not be reinstalled in him.

This pervasive, unquenchable hope, this refusal to submit to discouragement and despair, is an evident quality which makes a strong and lasting impression on visitors who come from North America or Europe. Ironically, hope is a gift offered to visitors from the north by those struggling in El Salvador, when the opposite would seem the more likely. When asked how hope could be sustained so strongly and durably in the

face of such odds, one committed Salvadoran's response was: "Despair is a luxury of the first world. We cannot afford to give up. Our survival depends on sustaining our hope-filled struggle. Our children's survival depends on our not giving in to despair."

Bishop Gómez affirms this undying hope:

Our history of suffering began to create conditions of injustice 500 years ago, but our people never lost the hope of recovering their legitimate rights, of reconquering their land of which they had been dispossessed. Generation after generation has maintained the longing for freedom, and just as we always believe that the coming of the Lord is a reality, in the same manner, the thought of a better tomorrow has been preserved.

The hope of achieving these favourable conditions for our Salvadoran people is something which has made us remain active, waiting for the fulfilment which God offers us through the song of Mary, in which she says that God will raise up the humble and fill the hungry with good things.

The resistance which God has given us during these many long years has been one of the most precious gifts of our people. Now, in the period of transition to peace, we must fortify this resistance, in order that this dream, so longed for, might soon be culminated. A dream which has been the motive for the sacrifice, patience, and valour of the Salvadoran liberation movement, whose roots have stretched for up to five centuries.

Upon revealing this extraordinary feeling of hope which should serve us all— as much our people as our brothers and sisters of international solidarity, I want to thank God for those with whom we have journeyed together in this stage of the "via crucis"—the way of the cross and of Calvary.³

Once one has been genuinely impassioned with the hope of liberation, it is an enduring quality indeed. Those who have had a taste of more concrete liberation vow never to go back, never to resubmit to alienating systems of domination and repression. Such is the awesome attitude of Nicaraguans who are prepared to struggle tenaciously to preserve the gains achieved in their Revolution—gains which signify life and liberation for them, such as accessible health care and education and access to the land. When these gains are threatened by unfavourable, retrogressive legislation, the once-liberated population is prepared to struggle to the death to preserve the level achieved.

The March in Review

Such is the march toward liberation. For liberation is a march, a procession, a progression, a pilgrimage. It is always in motion, never static. It is always active, never passive, drawing in spectators with its captivating energy and its urgent relevance. It is always in community, never solitary. The isolated are sought out. The weak are encouraged or carried, never abandoned. The march proceeds with leadership and direction toward the goal of life. It is never an aimless, purposeless wandering. It attracts the attention of all, from the wary, armed guardians against liberation lining the parade route, to the global spectrum—both the detractors from, and the promoters of, the life and liberation celebrated in such demonstrations.

The pilgrimage is propelled by the sense of the community gathered under God, and it is led along by the fire and the cloud, the subdued visible expressions of the often hidden God of life and liberation. It is sustained by the cloud of faithful witnesses, both living and resurrected, and motivated by the blood sacrificed by a long heritage of martyrs. The pilgrims are undaunted by the premonition that their own blood might be spilled in violent sacrifice and added to that of the sacrificial Lamb and all who have followed faithfully in his steps, unto death, thus procuring life and liberation for yet others who have been enslaved.

Liberation in Review

Liberation is a concept imbued, on the one hand, with life and promise, yet on the other hand, with threat and the spectre of toppling empire. The first understanding is the vision of those obviously enslaved to and impoverished by imperialist systems. The second understanding is the paranoia of those made secure by those same systems, though they too are enslaved by them, albeit in a more welcome, far less obvious, odious and despicable fashion. Those who constitute and maintain these systems do not seek liberation from the systems. Any attempt to change the systems, or to seek liberation from them, is labelled subversion, and elicits the ugliest, most inhumane responses in a desperate attempt to preserve the wealth and power afforded by the systems.

When, to such a loaded term, is added the word “theology”, then the red flags of heresy can be seen waving furiously

and outrageously in the eyes of the “secure”. For theology—God—has always been assumed to be on the side of the “peace” and “order” provided by their systems which were established (God-given) to preserve the right to the accumulation of property, rather than the right to life for all. God has simply been coopted. This is the assumed nature of God for those viewing the world from lofty positions.

So liberation, approached from either perspective, as promise or threat, is an impassioning concept. It has potential either to empower or enrage. In the crucible of history such processes are inevitably intensified.

Because of this impassioning quality, and because of its intimate link to the historical reality which impels it, liberation theology must be experienced, not simply studied. It is appreciated more fully through immersion than through analysis. It is practice, not theory, reality, not hypothesis, that impassions. The praxis cycle of action and reflection cannot fully be embraced from a distance, but only from within the crucible. And while the passion for liberation can be witnessed from within, it can only be fully absorbed by, and fully absorbing of, those who have suffered oppression, impoverishment or marginalization, and thus been imbued with the longing for liberation. On the opposite pole, the impassioned struggle against liberation is incomprehensible also for any who have not felt their fragile life security systems about to collapse around them because of the threat of “liberation theology”.

Primarily for these reasons I opted to embark on a journey toward immersion in the liberation march, as much as is possible for a comfortably secure, cautious northerner, rather than into the sacrosanct, but unavoidably isolated, halls and walls of graduate study. I do not rule out the value, nor the possibility, even probability, of my engaging in such formalized study. However, at this point the flesh and blood step is prior and paramount for me. From my touch-down-and-fly experience of global Lutheranism, El Salvador seemed a suitable place to begin that immersion. The voice of a contemporary prophet beckoned me to experience the theology of life and liberation within the context of the Salvadoran Lutheran Church and its prophetic and pastoral ministry. That voice rings out with faith along the march toward liberation:

We, members of Christ's church, who have lived the exodus as his children, the pilgrimage of the Salvadoran people, can exclaim that God has always been with those suffering most, the most needy, being our refuge, our shield, our salvation. That is why we have delivered ourselves into God's hands, and live and work under God's power, being motivated to seek the justice desired for the peace of our people.

With the signals which the All-Powerful has given us, no one can deny that God has been with us. No one can dispute that God has heard our cry. No one, absolutely no one, can manipulate the name of God against the poor. No one can hide the reality that God, with God's power, has come with our people.⁴

Canadians Marching For Liberation

What might the church on the march toward liberation in places like El Salvador mean for the church in Canada? On one level, it will bring back familiar images and rouse familiar emotions for many, especially refugees, immigrants, and various marginalized groups in Canada, who have themselves experienced such a trial-filled, yet hope-filled, march through the desert to the promised land. There are still many on that journey. The capacity of these people, whether their march was weeks or decades ago, to identify with today's marchers is a treasure the church cannot afford to ignore. It needs to be tapped. On another level, what might have seemed like arrival to many of these pilgrims has allowed them to settle in comfortably, succumbing to a pervasive complacency, declining any invitation to accompany others on their urgent, contemporary march. We need to help these pilgrims to understand and to re-vision the mission of the church more as struggle than as siesta. On yet another level, one much more troubling, the church is called to assess the degree to which it has been coopted by the Empire and the level of its complicity in the imperial systems. In what ways is the church linked with forces thwarting the march toward liberation?

That question is a difficult one to answer, or even to ask honestly, unless one steps out, for a moment, from the privileged position of the institutional church. It requires seeing the world, and the church's role in it, "from below". That quest could take one to the Third World—meaning the impoverished, enslaved Third World, and not the tourist circuit—as

it has done for growing numbers of Canadians. But more accessible, although perhaps less glamorous, immersions are equally effective. One Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America initiated a full-time travel seminar program in 1991 designed to bring church groups to native communities, urban slums, etc., with this purpose in mind. While such experience and observation through a study group provides for higher-profile contacts and an ongoing process of group reflection and interaction, more personal and individual contacts, leading to steadfast friendships, are also invaluable for heightened motivation and enduring commitment. Struggling for liberation as a cold and objective issue can quickly lose its appeal. Marching toward liberation alongside living and impassioned, heart-to-heart friends is a much more sustaining approach, inspiring greater self-sacrifice as well.

The march of the church, as well as being a march forward toward liberation, is also, especially for the wealthier church of the north, a march downward, an incarnational march.

The horror of the circumstances in El Salvador has moved [that segment of] the church [that is] already poor, to make a "preferential option for the poor." The church, in working with the poor, is a church of downward mobility, concerned about being faithful to the poor, the oppressed, the victims, the marginalized, and little concerned about being credible or respectable in the eyes of the wealthy and the powerful. That commitment puts them under suspicion of subversion by those same *status quo* elements of society, who often consider the church to be enemy, and treat it accordingly.

The church in Canada, more established and wealthier, is generally upwardly-mobile— as entire institutions, as congregations, and as individual members. Credibility and respectability in the eyes of government and business structures are important, whereas evaluation by the poor, who are rarely present, is seldom taken into account. . . .

While the church in El Salvador learns to live with vulnerability, embracing risk and self-sacrifice, the church in Canada preserves its security, with organizational structures [constitutions, bylaws, guidelines], theology, buildings, finances, budgets, agendas, traditions and membership records. All of these can easily become walls that separate us from the marginalized and prevent us, or protect us, from engaging them in their own worlds.

The theology of life and liberation permeates the church in El Salvador, confronting the forces of darkness and death. In Canada a theology of security and preservation often keeps us from seeing

those stark realities experienced by so many, and keeps us from hearing their cries.

Bringing the passion for life and justice of the Salvadoran church to the church in Canada means offering an invitation, presenting a challenge to hear these cries of God's people, to become risk-takers prepared to confront the various death-dealing injustices that provoke those cries.⁵

Bishop Medardo Gómez, in leading the Lutheran Church of El Salvador in its march toward liberation, speaks passionately of the "theology of life", a phrase which he uses to avoid the stigma which for some is associated with a "theology of liberation". But then to clarify that he is not thereby rejecting liberation theology, he stresses emphatically, "If it's not liberating, then it's not theology. Our God is a God of liberation."

God through dedicated servants like Bishop Medardo Gómez carries on the mission of proclaiming and practising the Gospel of life and liberation throughout the world. This proclamation and mission are addressed to the oppressed and to the oppressors, to all who might be inclined to hear. The proclamation and mission provide an invitation. It is an invitation to accompaniment. Accompany the poor and marginalized, accompany this people, all God's people, on their march toward liberation.

Notes

- ¹ The Rev. Medardo Gómez, from a sermon delivered 6 August 1991, on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of his ordination as Bishop of the Salvadoran Lutheran Church, in San Salvador, El Salvador, coinciding with San Salvador's patron festival to "El Salvador del Mundo" ("The Saviour of the World").
- ² "Jose" is a pseudonym. The quotations are paraphrases of statements made by the individual in an interview conducted in July, 1991, following his release from prison.
- ³ The Rev. Medardo Gómez, sermon, 6 August 1991.
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ Brian Rude, "The Challenge of El Salvador", *The Practice of Ministry In Canada*, 7/5, January 1991, 10-11.