

Questions for Attorney General:

In a press conference not long after the assassination of the Jesuits, you talked about "an FMLN plot to assassinate the priests -- and that Archbishop Rivera y Damas and Auxiliary Bishop Rosa Chavez were next on the list." What is the basis of this charge?

In your letter to Pope John Paul II on November 18 you talk about "the Popular Church, which large sectors of society blame for the violence that has shaken El Salvador for many years and has culminated in the rebels' violent actions of this week (meaning the offensive)...."

Do you consider the Jesuits part of the Popular Church?
Do you agree with the large sectors of society, you mentioned, that they are responsible for the rebels' actions?
Do you believe the Popular Church is aligned with the FMLN?

You also say that you fear for the lives of some bishops..who have persisted in keeping alive this dubious ideology of the church of the poor."

Can you comment on this and specifically address who you believe would endanger these bishops?

~~Your letter also blames the Popular Church~~

- Who have you specifically questioned in this case?
- What is your view of the witness -
Is she credible? If not - why not?
Who briefed you on her interrogation?

On Wednesday, November 15 the military continued to patrol the area surrounding the UCA. That morning an officer told one Jesuit that in the afternoon or evening there would be "a lot of movement." It should be noted that since Sunday, November 12, San Salvador had been under a 6:00 pm to 6:00 am curfew. Areas of the city where the heaviest combat occurred were under a 24-hour curfew.

Some time between 2:00 and 3:00 am on November 16, uniformed soldiers entered the campus by the back gate and opened fire on the Pastoral Center, according to the eyewitness. During an attack which lasted from 30 to 45 minutes, the soldiers dragged the six Jesuits out onto the lawn, forced them to lie face down, and killed them, five of them with a shot to the head. Two of the priests were then moved back into the house, according to a reconstruction of the events by those with knowledge of the autopsy and who examined the scene shortly after the shootings. A cook and her daughter were also shot and killed in the room where the two slept. While the exact sequence of events is not known, the assassins also ransacked and burned an office in the Pastoral Center and sprayed parked cars with gunfire. The length of the assault and the amount of firepower used indicate that the killers did not fear detection or interruption by members of the Armed Forces guarding the area during the curfew.

Now some two weeks after the killings it is clear that the investigation is already floundering. Judge Ricardo A. Zamora, San Salvador's Fourth Penal Judge, has to date recorded only two testimonies. As you know, under the Salvadoran civil law system an investigating judge is responsible for gathering evidence in the case. Judge Zamora told an associate of the Lawyers Committee last week that given his already enormous caseload and the difficulties posed by the war, it would be very difficult for him to devote substantial effort to the case.

Especially disturbing to the Lawyers Committee are the pronouncements of El Salvador's Attorney General (Fiscal General), Mauricio Eduardo Colorado, whose office is responsible for prosecuting the case. On November 18, the Attorney General wrote a letter to Pope John Paul II suggesting that those members of the Salvadoran Bishops Conference who "persist in keeping alive this questionable ideology 'church of the poor'" be sent out of El Salvador. Stating that he was not acting in an official capacity but as a Catholic layman, Mr. Colorado said that while he intended to investigate the Jesuit slayings, it was better to head off the need for future investigations. In suggesting that clergy who support "a tendency called 'the popular church'" were in danger, Mr. Colorado inferred that forces of the Right were responsible for the Jesuit killings. Yet in a subsequent press conference the Attorney General said he had uncovered an FMLN plot to assassinate priests and that Archbishop Rivera y Damas and Auxiliary Bishop Rosa Chavez were next on the list.

In the two weeks since the Jesuit priests were killed there have been a number of official pronouncements made in San Salvador and Washington about the murders and official efforts to investigate these horrible crimes. President Cristiani has on several occasions pledged to prosecute all of those responsible to the full extent of Salvadoran law. He has said that "If there are people involved who turn out to be members of the Armed Forces then the weight of the law must fall on them."¹

While we welcome these public assurances by President Cristiani, we are concerned that the effect of his statements has been seriously undermined by contradictory statements made by other senior Salvadoran officials. Twice last week Salvadoran Foreign Minister Jose Manuel Pacas Castro told interviewers from U.S. television networks that in his opinion the Jesuits were killed by members of the Salvadoran left.²

¹Richard Boudreaux and Marjorie Miller, "Six Jesuit Priests Slain in El Salvador," *Los Angeles Times*, November 17, 1989.

²PBS, MacNeil-Lehrer, November 17, 1989; Face the Nation, CBS, Sunday November 26, 1989.

(translation)

San Salvador, 18 November 1989

Your Excellency, Most Illustrious Eminence
Your Holiness JOHN PAUL II
Vatican City

Most Holy Father:

With a certain ignominy, because mine is a people steeped in the most profound cultural backwardness, where the horrendous and sacrilegious crime has taken place against six priests of the Society of Jesus, who in their way made the greatest efforts to pull our people out of that shameful historic backwardness; but with the great pride of being one of the vast majority of the long-suffering people of El Salvador, which protected by its armed forces has succeeded -- for now -- in defeating the atheist and communist forces, which without the slightest respect or consideration for the humble among our brothers, have tried, shielding themselves behind the defenseless civilian population, to subject this valiant and indomitable people of eminently Catholic tradition, to a totalitarian regime dependent on international communism; and due to my Catholic faith, which makes me a child of Your Holiness, I dare to direct this note to you, with the best intentions of seeking relief for those who at present suffer in their own flesh the effects of the savage onslaught of the eternal enemies of democracy, order, and peace.

I wish to ensure Your Holiness that in carrying out the charge which by the will of God and of the Salvadoran people has been conferred on me, I shall not rest or falter in investigating the opprobrious crimes that took the lives of the six Jesuit priests and their two employees, until ensuring that justice is done and that the assassins are punished, whoever may be responsible for this so very unspeakable act. I believe that this is the least I can do for the Society of Jesus, as an expression of undying and eternal gratitude for the blessing granted me by our Lord, of having received by primary and secondary education in a Jesuit school.

But in addition to ensuring Your Holiness my best efforts to clarify the facts surrounding this sad occurrence, I wish to express to you my utmost concern for the destiny and fate that other dignitaries of our Holy Mother Church may suffer. In this regard I wish to state to you that, as Your Holiness is aware, for some time there has been in this long-suffering country a so-called tendency "of the popular Church" which, for reasons that I need not go into at this time, has been attributed a large part of the blame, by large sectors of the population, for the violent

occurrences that have been devastating El Salvador for many years, and which have culminated in the rebel actions of this past week. This, dearly beloved Father, makes me, your most humble child, fear for the lives of some of the Bishops, who outside of the general context of the general policy of the Bishops Conference of El Salvador, have persisted in keeping alive this questionable ideology of the "Church of the poor," for we understand that our Holy Mother Church is one.

In light of the foregoing, and with all due respect for Your Holiness, I wish to suggest, dearly beloved Father, that for the security and well-being of the parishioners of El Salvador you remove these Bishops from Salvadoran territory, at least temporarily. Although my mission within the civilian branch of government of El Salvador is to investigate and apply sanctions to those who break the law, and although the Armed Forces are already securing the entire national territory, we believe that it is one thousand times better to avoid criminal acts than to investigate them.

Finally, I wish, dearly beloved and most respectable Holy Father, to make it absolutely clear that the request which I elevate for your most dignified consideration through this letter, is an act I undertake not as an official initiative of the Salvadoran government, nor even as a government official, but rather as a member of the Catholic Church, which I consider my wise teacher and my refuge in my tribulations, as a complement of our Lord, God Almighty.

I beg of Your Holiness that you have mercy on me, you most humble child, for having distracted your attention from your daily pursuits; but I am certain that Your Holiness, as a citizen of an eminently Catholic country, subjected for long years to a regime in which freedom -- especially religious freedom -- has been systematically combatted by the official apparatus, will understand our anguish and sorrow.

Appealing for the blessing of Your Holiness for this long-suffering people and for myself, your servant, I express to you my utmost consideration.

signature

MAURICIO EDUARDO COLORADO

"We can no longer allow there to be political parties that doubt whether the FMLN is trying to restrict the freedom of the Salvadoran people."

-- President Alfredo Cristiani, 11/12/89

President Cristiani appears on national radio and television broadcasts to announce the state of emergency. He specifically issues a warning to politicians of the Democratic Convergence that they would have to formally break with the FMLN rebels or leave the country. (Los Angeles Times, 11/13/89)

"It is very difficult for me personally to protect these dignitaries from this Communist avalanche, because in a church or public place anything can happen. . . Msgr. Rosa Chavez has had a participation, and his brother is known by everyone to belong to the guerrillas. Msgr. Rivera y Damas has had very controversial opinion and that puts him in grave danger."

-- Attorney General Mauricio Eduardo Colorado

Press conference held at the same time as the funeral of the six murdered Jesuit priests, 11/19/89
(Los Angeles Times, 11/20/89)

"People like Ruben Zamora [opposition political leader] who travel abroad and ask for a suspension of aid to this country fall in this category."

-- ARENA legislator Raul Alfaro Zamora (no relation to Ruben), clarifying who might fall under penalties in the just-approved penal code reform legislation
(Baltimore Sun, 11/24/89)

"Col. Mauricio Vargas, commander of the Third Brigade in San Miguel, says the situation in San Miguel is under control, but it is difficult because any person can have the appearance of a Marxist-Leninist."

-- TV 12, San Salvador, 11/19/89

Evening news report on the military situation around the country, including a brief interview with Col. Vargas

"They had to be taught a lesson. They had to be punished."

-- Leading Salvadoran businessman attempting to explain the right-wing view of the killings of the six Jesuit priests and two women on November 16th, as reported in the New York Times, 11/21/89

SELECTED QUOTES

"The terrorist offensive of the last week and a half is a result of a joint action of the FMLN and the Democratic Convergence [the party of Ruben Zamora and Guillermo Ungo]. The Armed Forces now have the moral justification to annihilate them."

-- Robert D'Aubuisson, ARENA party member
Radio Cadena Nacional (the government-controlled
radio news broadcasts), 11/21/89

"By means of a radio channel, during the entire night, hundreds of condemnations were heard against Humberto Centeno [labor leader], Ruben Zamora [political opposition leader], Guillermo Manuel Ungo [opposition presidential candidate] and other leaders of the [Democratic] Convergence and the FDR, to whom were attributed the responsibility for what the FMLN is doing.

"Men and women who spoke on the radio asked the government to bring to justice Centeno, Zamora, Ungo and other elements. Since their return to El Salvador, the subversives have oriented themselves more toward perpetrating acts of violence and every class of vandalism.

"There were also heard by means of the national radio broadcast condemnations and severe criticisms against the Archbishop Msgr. Rivera y Damas, and against auxiliary bishop Msgr. Rosa Chavez, because on Sunday, instead of evangelical words, they gave communist speeches in favor of the FMLN, the Convergence and FENASTRAS.

"Categorically, said these same condemnations, it is of the greatest urgency to remove the Jesuits from the country because arms have been hidden in the Catholic University for nearly ten years now. They identified the Spanish Jesuit priest Ignacio Ellacuria as the one chiefly responsible."

-- La Prensa Grafica, 11/13/89

The article reports denunciations made on the Radio Cadena Nacional, the government-controlled news radio, which began on November 12th and continued at least through November 21st. As in this case, the denunciations were often reprinted the next day as "news articles" in the Salvadoran newspapers.

"For a long time in this suffering country, there has existed a tendency called the Popular Church, which large sectors of society blame for the violence that has shaken El Salvador for many years and has culminated in the rebels violent actions this week. This, beloved Father, makes your most humble servant fear for the lives of some bishops. . . who have persisted in keeping alive the dubious ideology of the 'church of the poor.'"

-- Attorney General Mauricio Eduardo Colorado
Letter sent to Pope John Paul II (on official
government stationary), 11/18/89 CONGRESSMAN JOHN JOSEPH
MOAKLEY PAPERS
MS 100