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Book Review:

**J. Matthew Ashley, Kevin F. Burke,
Rodolfo Cardenal (eds),**

A Grammar of Justice:

The Legacy of Ignacio Ellacuría

Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2014, 283 pp.,
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Faith is not simply a matter of the heart and the head. There is an often-neglected side to it: the prophetic and liberating praxis of faith. This is the clarion call of the Jesuit priest Ignacio Ellacuría (1930–1989) for the creation of a just society in the world at large, but chiefly in El Salvador, that this book seeks to vindicate. Faith, in his eyes, is the favourable response to a stagnant social reality.

Ellacuría's legacy is aptly summarised in this fresh thought-provoking volume that the theological community at large and the people of El Salvador where he served as a Jesuit had been long waiting for. The very expression "a grammar of justice" - which is used as the main title of the book - captures the life and spirit of this theologian who died as a martyr just outside the Jesuit residence on the campus of the University of Central America on November 16, 1989.

This book seeks to do justice not simply in view of the massacre of the Jesuit community of the mentioned University, including the rector, Fr Ellacuría, but it particularly contributes to overcoming the suffering incurred, while instilling a strong sense of hope. In a stirring introduction, Kevin F. Burke SJ, who refers to Ellacuría as a "gift," says that "something deep in the human heart refuses to forget the martyrs, and remembrance serves as a protest against the repressive violence and against the whitewashing of the effects of that violence" (p. xi).

Since then, Ellacuría has achieved an international reputation as one of the most brilliant contributors to Liberation Theology and one of the most important Jesuits of the post-conciliar era.

The book is divided into four sections. Part I deals with the prophetic, liberating praxis of faith (pp. 1-85); Part II speaks of Ellacuría and the dynamism of a new theological method (pp. 87-144); Part III highlights the role of Church and academy in the Theology of Ellacuría (pp. 145-202); and lastly, Part IV treats Ellacuría and Justice in an unjust world (pp. 203-254). This book has sixteen essays and it also includes a list of contributors and an index at the end.

Part I begins with the sources of Ellacuría's "grammar" as he himself articulated them. In fact, the volume opens with two of Ellacuría's classic writings. The first is a prophetic letter on martyrdom addressed to Archbishop Oscar Romero. One finds here four aspects that Ellacuría appreciated in Bishop Romero. These include a much needed evangelical spirit for a true pastoral life; clear Christian discernment; an enthusiasm to build the Church and to build unity in the Church; and finally a disposition to meet those in the Society of Jesus who were truly spiritual and truly capable of serving Christ and the Church of El Salvador. The second is an essay called "Utopia and Propheticism from Latin America." In this document, Ellacuría encourages a concerted effort to dare to create a new approach to history in such a way that it prioritises a humanising dimension.

There are then two equally interesting reflections by his friend Jon Sobrino and the theologian most credited with the emergence of Liberation Theology, Gustavo Gutiérrez. Sobrino focuses on Romero's impact on Ellacuría, while Gutiérrez highlights the cost of being a disciple. Both are remarkable pieces to digest.

Part II explores the philosophical aspect, or rather, the vision of Ellacuría's significant contributions to the theological method. Here, one notices a remarkable contribution to the 'praxical' (*sic*) character of theology as well as to the influence of phenomenology on Liberation Theology. Part III examines two of the main audiences and *foci* of Ellacuría's work: the university and the Church. In this section of the book, one can notice a striking parallelism between Ellacuría and John Henry Newman. Nevertheless, in this light, Ellacuría's thought can be summarised in terms of a Church of the crucified people and a Christian university for a globalised world. Finally, Part IV turns to the "public" of civil society and addresses the social-ethical quest for justice in an unjust world. Emphasis is here laid on poverty and other global challenges.

J. Matthew Ashley concludes with a reflection on spirituality, discernment and the Good News. He opines that Ellacuría's theology does not start from books, but rather from his experience of people. His is an "incarnated spirituality"

where human beings must be situated in their social and historical dimension. Ellacuría's legacy could then be described in terms of discernment by which one allows oneself to be affected by Christ. Jesus then must be presented not only as Lord or Liberator, but as Good News.

Here, it is opportune to make a brief reference to a strong passage that captures Ellacuría's insistence on promoting hope:

The Church of the poor becomes the new heaven, which as such is needed to overcome the civilisation of wealth and build the civilisation of poverty, the new earth where the new human being will live in a welcoming and not in a degraded home... New human beings, for their part, keep on announcing, firmly and steadfastly although always in darkness, a future that is ever greater, because beyond all these futures, following one upon another, they catch sight of the God who saves, the God who liberates (p. 55).

This book is then a well-deserved tribute to Ignacio Ellacuría SJ whose determined character has not left his society unchanged. Jon Sobrino could not have expressed it better when he said: "Ellacuría was a person who in quite a trivialised and gray world, without utopias and dreams, could communicate light and inspiration." Persons like him "must be sought out like the precious pearl and thanks should be given when they are found" (p. ix). Indeed, this book emerges as an exercise in academic collaboration that helped all contributors to discover the many facets of "the gift." How inspiring is this work in exposing the legacy of Ignacio Ellacuría, a truly precious pearl contextualizing the kingdom of God here and now.

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