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The Martyrdom of Monseñor Angelelli

The Popular Creation of Martyrs in Twentieth-Century Argentina

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Abstract

On August 4, 1976, police found the body of Enrique Angelelli, the bishop of La Rioja, Argentina, on a deserted highway. In the thirty years since his death, Monseñor Angelelli has developed a reputation as a martyr. This study analyses the evolution of his reputation in an attempt to understand the popular process of making martyrs. It examines the specific groups and individuals involved in the process, how they participated in memorializing efforts, and for what purposes.

Introduction

[1] In 1976, Argentina was in a state of shock. After more than a decade of political, economic, and social turmoil, the Armed Forces staged a coup on March 24 and installed a dictatorship. During the subsequent eight-year period known as the Dirty War, the military struck down the opposition wherever they saw or suspected them by killing, jailing, and “disappearing” thousands of people. The ruling Junta immediately turned its determined gaze upon the poorest province in the nation, La Rioja. For a number of years, the Bishop of La Rioja, Monseñor Enrique Angelelli, and his collaborators had been stirring up “trouble” in the desert, challenging traditional hierarchies and economic structures in the name of

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“liberation” and “justice.” What is more, this so-called “red Bishop” refused to follow the example of the rest of the Argentine Church and quietly watch from the sidelines while the military took control of the government.

[2] On the afternoon of August 4, 1976 police found Monseñor Angelelli’s body near his overturned vehicle on the highway leading into the capital city of La Rioja. They immediately concluded that he had died in an automobile accident, and declared the case closed. But was it? Whispers of “murder” and “martyr” began to spread within La Rioja and across the country. These voices of dissent remained hushed, however, until the military government crumbled in 1983. Three years later, in 1986, a court of law officially declared his death a homicide. That same year, Angelelli’s successor, Monseñor Bernardo Witte, began the ecclesiastical proceedings necessary to designate the fallen bishop a true “witness to the faith,” or martyr.

[3] This analysis of the campaign to commemorate Bishop Angelelli’s life and death illuminates the role of popular processes in the making of martyrs. The existing scholarly literature on modern martyrdom is scant, and for the most part examines the status of being a martyr rather than the process of creating one. Many scholars, such as Brian Wicker, take a theological approach in order to understand what the title means today, or, “how . . . to discover whether someone has or has not been given the vocation of martyrdom” (83). Unlike Wicker, I do not attempt to decide whether Angelelli was truly a martyr. Rather, the goal is to understand popular processes in the creation of contemporary martyrdom: who forwards it, why they do so, and what elements support or hinder such construction.²

[4] According to sainthood scholar Kenneth L. Woodward, “ancient tradition . . . holds that a cause for canonization must arise spontaneously among the faithful of the local church, and continue for decades to elicit their prayers and other demonstrations of devotion” (23). Only once a reputation for sanctity has developed independently can the local bishop initiate the official ecclesial investigation into the candidate’s life, works, and overall worthiness. Faithful followers make martyrs, then, through demonstrations of devotion; the Church merely accedes to the will of its members.

[5] This study begins with an examination of Monseñor Angelelli’s life and death in La Rioja, and concludes with an analysis of the grassroots campaign to make him a martyr. By observing how people in La Rioja and other parts of Argentina responded to the life and death of Monseñor Angelelli, it is possible to analyze exactly *how* a cause for canonization arises “spontaneously” – who the faithful followers are, and what methods they use to demonstrate their devotion.

Monseñor Angelelli in La Rioja

[6] La Rioja is a mid-sized, arid province in the Northwest of Argentina. It is one of the poorest parts of the country and has been since the civil wars of Juan Manuel de Rosas and Justo José de Urquiza and the end of the era of *caudillismo* in the nineteenth century. After the fall of *caudillo* rulers such as Juan Facundo Quiroga, the new, weaker leaders of La Rioja subordinated provincial economic interests to national ones in order to cull favor with the

² By taking this approach, I am following the social constructionist school of interpretation’s assumption that “knowledge” and “reality” are social constructs created by communities of like-minded peers. Thus the question is not “*Was* Angelelli a martyr?” but rather “*How* and *for what purpose* did his community construct his identity as such?”

central government in Buenos Aires. The provincial economy became one of regional subsistence, increasingly dependent upon funds from the National Treasury. This trend of dependency upon and subordination to the national government continued through the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. By the 1960s, the province had suffered a severe demographic exodus, and by 1970 nearly forty percent of the people born there lived elsewhere. In terms of population, commerce, agricultural production, and industrial wages, La Rioja consistently ranked below nearly every other province in the country (see Oliva).

[7] When Monseñor Angelelli arrived in La Rioja in August of 1968, General Juan Carlos Onganía was in the second year of his dictatorial rule over the nation, and Don Guillermo Domingo Iribarren governed La Rioja as Onganía's representative in the province. Iribarren, a local vintner from the interior of the province, came to power in 1967 with an elaborate plan to pull La Rioja out of its cycle of poverty, marginality, and emigration. His proposal included measures to decrease public employment, promote mining, solve the problems of land and water distribution, and create new opportunities for employment.

[8] Monseñor Angelelli also came to his post with La Rioja's economic situation on his mind, but his "bottom up" approach quickly came into conflict with Iribarren's "top down" policies. The new bishop was one of the leading proponents in the Argentine Church of Liberation Theology, drawing on the policies set forth by the Second Vatican Council of 1965 (in which he participated) and the Latin American Episcopal Conference meeting at Medellín in 1968. He advocated an "option for the poor," in which the Church actively aided the neediest groups and individuals in their struggle for survival and justice. As Daniel H. Levine observes, Liberation Theology called for a significant departure from the Catholic Church's traditional alliance with the conservative elite of Latin America. Angelelli applied the new doctrine in La Rioja by helping organize workers' cooperatives, leading campaigns against usury, and showing public support for workers' strikes and labor groups. Beginning in 1970, Angelelli relocated Christmas Eve mass from the Cathedral, where the better-off families had traditionally attended mass, to a spot under a tree in a poor neighborhood in the suburbs of the capital. In doing so, he symbolically brought the Church to its humblest members.

[9] Tensions between Angelelli and Iribarren, and the interests that each man represented, increased with time. In 1971, Iribarren suspended local radio transmission of Angelelli's sermons. In 1972, the provincial government jailed two of Angelelli's priests and held them on falsified charges of arms smuggling until the bishop organized a massive protest and enlisted a local lawyer to file a writ of *habeas corpus*.

[10] On June 13, 1973, a mob of people opposed to Angelelli's role in local politics and his reorientation of the local Church gathered to display their outrage. Led by members of the national group Tradition, Family and Property and the local group Renovating Crusade of Christianity, the mob forced the bishop to flee from the small town of Anillaco when he arrived to celebrate the festival of the local patron saint. The protesters accused Angelelli of "kidnapping" their priest, who had in reality spent the previous months in the neighboring province of Córdoba recuperating from eye surgery. Members of the mob shouted chants and insults over a loudspeaker, threw stones, and swarmed the church.

[11] Angelelli's response to the protest reveals just how severe the tensions in La Rioja had become. The bishop closed Anillaco's church and placed the thirteen local leaders of the protest under interdiction. This ecclesiastical censure was one step short of

excommunication and barred the perpetrators from direct participation in most sacraments and from Christian burial. Angelelli also wrote to the Vatican, describing the events and requesting guidance. Pope Paul VI responded by sending a papal prelate, the Archbishop of Santa Fe, Vicente Zazpe. The Pope's choice of representative was probably indicative of his position on the matter, as Monseñor Zazpe was one of Angelelli's closest friends in the Argentine church. Zazpe affirmed, "the pastoral message of the Church of La Rioja is the pastoral message of the universal Church" (*El Independiente* 1973).

[12] Monseñor Angelelli was not only an important figure in the peripheral province of La Rioja; he was also one of the key leaders in nation-wide efforts to defend human rights. In late 1975, Protestant and Catholic leaders joined with intellectuals, professionals, and politicians to form the Permanent Assembly for Human Rights. Angelelli was on the coordinating committee for the organization. Along with other members, the bishop worked to document cases of disappearances, present legal petitions to civil courts on behalf of detainees, and write public letters to military leaders seeking investigations into the whereabouts of missing persons.

[13] The escalating struggle between the Church and government in La Rioja played out in the headlines of the two provincial papers: *El Independiente de La Rioja* and *El Sol de La Rioja*. Each side had connections with one of the two newspapers. The directors of the cooperatively owned *El Independiente*, Alipio and Mario Paoletti, Ricardo Mercado Luna, and Daniel Moyano, were close friends of the bishop. The owner of *El Sol*, Tomás Agustín Álvarez Saavedra, had business ties with Governor Iribarren. The writers of *El Independiente* frequently interviewed Angelelli, printed the text of his sermons, and generally praised his work. The writers of *El Sol*, on the other hand, seized every possible opportunity to criticize and defame the bishop. Less than one month after the clash in Anillaco, *El Sol* carried a headline reading "Bishop of La Rioja Accused: 'He is a Communist and a Terrorist.'"

[14] What had been a war of words became more sinister after the armed forces seized national power and installed a military dictatorship on March 24, 1976. At 1:00 a.m. on March 24, soldiers invaded the offices of *El Independiente* and arrested the assistant director of the paper, Mario Paoletti, the editing chief, Guillermo Alfieri, and the photographer, Plutarco Schaller. Mario's brother, Alipio, the director of the paper, happened to be in Buenos Aires at the time, and went into hiding to escape capture. The military proceeded to place the remaining employees under strict supervision, and censored all of the newspaper's subsequent publications.

[15] Following the coup, members of the church in La Rioja immediately came under attack as well. According to a letter dated June 17, 1976, from the priests of La Rioja to the national Episcopal Council, military forces in the province arrested three of their fellow clergymen on March 24, and continued to hold one of them in captivity.³ In the letter, the priests also called the Council's attention to scenes of torture inside the detention centers. They claimed that released prisoners told them that the interrogators "invariably" questioned them about Angelelli and even forced some to sign "false declarations" against the bishop and other members of the Church.

³ A copy of the letter from 37 priests of La Rioja addressed to "los Excmos. Rvmos. Sres. Obispos," dated June 17, 1976, was maintained in the personal files of Riojano activist Cesar Ledesma.

[16] In July, the military stepped up its campaign of terror against the Church. On July 18, unidentified members of the armed forces kidnapped, tortured, and executed two of Angelelli's priests, Gabriel Longueville and Carlos de Dios Murias. In the homily that he delivered at the priests' funeral, Monseñor Angelelli exhorted the people of La Rioja: "Open your eyes brothers! . . . Open your eyes to the sacrilege that has been committed, to the crime that has been committed!" (Centro Puebla-Oaxtepec: 44-48). One week later, men in disguise entered the house of the lay leader of the Rural Catholic Movement, Wenceslao Pedernera, and murdered him in front of his wife and children. Angelelli vowed to find and expose the killers, and immediately began to collect evidence.

[17] The bishop also understood the implicit threat to his own life presented by the murders of Dios Murias, Longueville, and Pedernera. He confided to his closest friends that the deaths had tightened the "spiral of death" that was closing in around him. In a conversation that Angelelli had with the secretary of the diocese, Juan Aurelio Ortíz, and a few other members of the provincial Church on August 3, 1976, the bishop "took an envelope and traced out circles where he located the recent crimes, the recent arrests, the death threats, and closed the circle putting himself in the center. It was what was known from then on as the theory of the spiral" (Rojo: 19).

[18] On August 4, 1976, Monseñor Angelelli was returning to the provincial capital from the town where the murdered priests had lived when the spiral finally closed. Police found his body near his overturned automobile and concluded that the bishop had died immediately when an explosion of the left rear tire caused his car to flip repeatedly, expelling him through the windshield. This remained the official story for a number of years, while the military dictatorship maintained their grip over the country, but rumors of the true cause of Monseñor Angelelli's death circulated throughout the province and nation.

[19] Angelelli's friends and followers took advantage of the military government's crumbling power in 1983 to challenge publicly the story of his death. On September 20, 1983, Judge Antonio Manuel Condado of La Rioja reopened the investigation into the bishop's death. The final confirmation that Monseñor Angelelli was a victim of murder arrived on June 19, 1986, with the conclusion of the judicial investigation. Judge Aldo Fermín Morales ruled, "the death of Monseñor Enrique Ángel Angelelli did not result from a transit accident, but from a coldly premeditated homicide that the victim himself had expected. (Expte. Number 23.350 – June 19, 1986 – "Homicidio Calificado y Tentativa de Homicidio Calificado"). The judge recounted a sequence of events and the evidence pointing to foul play, including: the fact that Angelelli had carried with him a file on the murders of his priests, Angelelli's passenger's testimony about the involvement of another vehicle in the crash, and the final resting position of the bishop – on his back with his feet together and his arms spread in the shape of a cross. Fermín Morales' report stated that the only signs of injury were the crushed bones in the bishop's neck and scrapes on his heels, indicating that he "was dragged to the place where he was found, allowing one to infer intervention after the accident on the part of its authors." The judge did not name any guilty parties, stating that it would be impossible to undertake penal action unless further evidence appeared regarding the "authors" of the crime. This judicial decision was crucial to building Monseñor Angelelli's reputation for martyrdom, as the death of a martyr must be intentional, not accidental.

The Foundations of Martyrdom: Public Memory

[20] Many of those who sought to keep Monseñor Angelelli alive in the public's hearts did so without referring to him specifically as a martyr. Initially, his followers probably refrained from using such a loaded word out of concern for their own lives, as any references to martyrdom challenged the official story of his "accidental" death. Even after the fall of the dictatorship, some groups chose not to call him a martyr. Instead, they focused on his life: his kindness, his courage, and his dedication to the poor. In so doing, they helped build his reputation for holiness and celebrated his memory without addressing the controversial issue of his death.

[21] In December 1976, less than a year after the bishop's demise, with the dictatorship in firm control of the country and most of the press, the publishing company Patria Grande of Buenos Aires put out a collection of Angelelli's personal poetry. Members of the diocese of La Rioja compiled a collection of touching poems that the bishop had written in private and never intended for publication, as a "just homage" to their fallen friend. The book of poems was the only work related to the bishop to emerge in Argentina while the military remained in power. The fact that Patria Grande was able to publish the tribute to one of the government's most outspoken critics, however, suggests that its censorship was not entirely effective or omnipotent.

[22] After the restoration of democracy in 1983, it became safer to commemorate Monseñor Angelelli in public. The ten-year anniversary of his death in 1986 saw the reappearance of the bishop in the Argentine literary world. At the request of Monseñor Witte of La Rioja, the Editorial Claretiana in Buenos Aires published *Pastor and Prophet: Messages of Monseñor Angelelli*, a collection of the bishop's homilies, messages, and pastoral letters. In the introduction, Monseñor Witte expressed his hope that "the entire Christian village will receive this volume as homage to the remembered and venerated pastor who submitted his life to the service of this community, when we enter to commemorate the ten years of the culmination of the sacrifice of his existence" (6). The bishop never came out and directly called Angelelli a martyr or claimed that someone murdered him, but his use of the word "sacrifice" made his feelings sufficiently clear. Ten years later, in 1996, the publishing house issued a second edition of *Pastor and Prophet* for the twenty-year anniversary of the bishop's death.

[23] Church leaders were not the only ones who used Angelelli's own words to keep his memory alive. The editors of the provincial paper *El Independiente* followed their example, and commemorated the twentieth anniversary of the bishop's death by reprinting a number of his sermons. Throughout the months of July and August, 1996, the newspaper ran a series titled, "At Twenty Years: Monseñor Angelelli, a Passion For Life. Messages to the Heart of His Village," containing some of the bishop's most memorable teachings. *El Independiente* attributed the effort to an organization called the Commission of Diffusion, Homage, and Memory of the Church of La Rioja, but did not provide any specifics about the group.

[24] Other faithful followers of Angelelli combined commemoration with education. Administrators and teachers of the "Malvinas Argentinas" elementary school, in one of the poorest neighborhoods of La Rioja's capital city, participated enthusiastically in the efforts to maintain the memory of Monseñor Angelelli and continue his work. Beginning in 1995, the school conducted a month-long solidarity campaign every August bearing Angelelli's name and image. A flier distributed by the school explained that the bishop's example inspired the educators' efforts to collect donations of food and clothing for their poverty-stricken

students: “We want to maintain alive in our memory the man who chose the option for the ignored, for the unprotected, the marginalized, and who loved to the point of giving up his life.”

[25] The work of the Malvinas Argentinas educators was especially important because it passed on the memory of Angelelli to a generation of students that had been too young to know the bishop personally. In addition to a march, and a food and clothing drive, the school’s solidarity campaign included an exhibition of projects by teachers and students about “the life, works, and message of the man who was our pastor, Monseñor Enrique Angelelli.” Instead of receiving the message that the bishop had died like a martyr, the students of Malvinas Argentinas learned that he had lived like a saint.

[26] *El Independiente* contributed to the educational veneration of Angelelli a few years later. In 2001, the newspaper published a “Special Supplement” about Angelelli of forty-eight pages over five weeks, beginning on the twenty-fifth anniversary of his death. In the introduction, the authors explained that the point of the work was not to enter into the debate over the circumstances of the bishop’s death – at that point, many people still claimed that he died in an accident. Rather, they sought to educate the “young generations” about Angelelli’s life and his teachings in the context of the social, cultural, religious, and economic circumstances of his times. The authors also provided Church documents supporting his reformist pastoral stance, putting special emphasis on the Second Vatican Council’s option for the poor. While some of the articles within the supplement referred to Angelelli as a martyr, the emphasis throughout was on his life more than his death.

Enrique Angelelli: Bishop and Martyr

[27] The efforts to maintain the public memory of Monseñor Angelelli contributed significantly to the campaign to make him a martyr, forming the basis for other, more explicit demonstrations of devotion. Efforts to construct his reputation as someone who had died for the faith coexisted with and built upon endeavors to preserve the public memory of his life. By portraying the bishop specifically as a martyr, and not just a saintly leader, some of his followers focused attention on his death in order to remind the public of the horrendous crimes of the military. A closer examination of the variety of people and groups who contributed to the making of La Rioja’s martyr permits a deeper understanding of the process of constructing martyrs in modern society.

Anonymous Devotees

[28] Since Monseñor Angelelli had taken such a strong stand against the economic abuses of the local elites and the physical excesses of the military leaders, it was not safe to show solidarity with him or his cause while the dictatorship was in power. Those who wanted to pay homage to the bishop’s memory had to do so anonymously, or face reprisals. Shortly after Angelelli’s death, anonymous residents of La Rioja produced a flier entitled “Resistencia Riojana,” with the words “The Assassination of Angelelli” in capital letters on the back page.⁴ The pamphlet consisted of two pages of accusations against the dictatorship, with a concluding paragraph about the bishop. The flier argued that the “oligarchs” hated Angelelli because he worked to liberate the poor. In the last sentence of the flier, the author

⁴ Flier is preserved in the personal files of Cesar Ledesma of Radio Ciudadanos. The flier contains no dates, but a second flier that refers to the first one bears the date December 1976. From this, we can deduce that the first was written some time between August and December of that year.

described a cross, erected by “anonymous popular hands” at the site of Angelelli’s death, bearing the words “Enrique Angelelli, Bishop and Martyr.” This pamphlet (and the cross, if it did indeed exist) marked the first public use of the word “martyr” to describe the bishop.

[29] One reason some people worked so hard to prove that Angelelli was murdered was their desire to leverage his death as a condemnation of the military regime. A second flier, dating from December of 1976, made even more explicit the author’s attempts to connect protests over Angelelli’s death to protests against the dictatorship in general. The author began by claiming that the first flier had an “enormous repercussion” and that hundreds of copies circulated in offices and on the streets of the capital and throughout the entire province. After an extensive list of complaints against the government, the author ended by calling upon the people of La Rioja to express their discontent with the military directly, with a symbol, or in a “massive visit to the tomb of Monseñor Angelelli.” Like in the first flier, the author used a site associated with the bishop’s death as a symbolic and physical place for dissent. This time, however, the protest was not only against the Angelelli’s death, but was also against other perceived crimes of the government – persecution, imprisonment, and unemployment.

[30] An article published seven years later in the newspaper *Somos* also referred to crosses erected at the site of Angelelli’s death, but detailed a battle over the gesture. According to the author of the article, Daniel Cecchini, someone had erected a wooden cross on the spot, but it only stood for a few days before someone else burnt it to the ground. Another anonymous person (or perhaps the same one who placed the original) then erected a cross of concrete, which others attacked with dynamite. The article contained a photograph of a third cross, this one of wrought iron, also placed anonymously. At its foot lay an automobile tire in perfect condition, with three white crosses painted on it. Cecchini claimed that people in La Rioja interpreted the gesture as a sign from a witness to the bishop’s death, who, afraid to speak up, wanted to let the public know that the story about the automobile accident was false, and that someone had killed Angelelli.

Political and Memorial Groups

[31] The public campaign to recognize Angelelli’s martyrdom began on the local level, after the return to democratic government, with a coalition of politically active groups in La Rioja. The effort also involved provincial branches of some of the major national organizations that had confronted the regime during the dictatorship, and that continued to work to hold members of the military accountable for their past abuses. Beginning in 1991, the Memory of the Martyrs Group of La Rioja started organizing commemorative events on the anniversary on Monseñor Angelelli’s death. The coalition brought together priests, members of the media, leaders of trade unions, human rights groups, and community, student, and political organizations.

[32] A letter written by the organization to a news outlet in 1993 provides information about the specific identities and affiliations of the members of the Memory of the Martyrs Group. Fr. Henry Praolini and Fr. Delfor Brizuela represented the continued presence and activism of Angelelli’s followers in the Church. The participation of Rubén Rodríguez of the radio program “Fantasma Negro” (Black Ghost) and Cesar Ledesma of the radio program “Por Amor al Arte” (For the Love of Art) demonstrated devotion to the bishop among members of the media. Javier Tineo represented the political party Frente Grande (Great Front), a left-wing political coalition that formed in the 1990s and united the Communist Party with

disgruntled members of the Justicialist Party who opposed President Menem's neoliberal economic reforms. Lucia Ávila of the Centro de Estudiantes del INES (the Student Center of the National Institute of Superior Education) brought the voice of the future generation of teachers. Oscar Bianchi came from the trade union ATP (the Association of Provincial Workers), and Rogelio Deleonardi represented the union AMP (the Association of Teachers and Professors).

[33] The Memory of the Martyrs Group also included members of one of the most important and influential human rights organizations in Argentina – the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. These mothers of “disappeared” children were among the first to protest the dictatorship, staging weekly demonstrations in the Plaza de Mayo facing the presidential palace in Buenos Aires beginning in 1977. They continued their activism after the return to democracy, demanding justice for their loved ones and for other victims of the repression. Marcela Brizuela de Ledo of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo's La Rioja chapter joined the group dedicated to Monseñor Angelelli, and Alfredo Olivera of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo Support Group participated as well.

[34] Through the years, the core members of the Memory of the Martyrs Group remained dedicated to the cause, and representatives of other organizations joined in the effort. Their goal was – and is, for they continue their work to this day – to maintain the memory primarily of Enrique Angelelli, as he was the most well-known and influential victim, but also of the murdered priests Gabriel Longueville and Carlos de Dios Murias, as well as lay activist Wenceslao Pedernera. The campaigners hoped that the example of these men would inspire hope, provoke further questioning of poverty and injustice, and help the people of La Rioja find the strength to continue working toward a better future.⁵

[35] For the first few years after the organization's founding in 1991, the Memory of the Martyrs Group organized a simple Way of the Cross ceremony (“*vía crucis*”), with various stations representing – instead of the traditional scenes of Christ's sufferings and death – the struggles of the community of La Rioja. Each participating sector of the community, such as youths, mothers, and workers gave a speech at a station to testify to their individual trials. The ceremony ended on a hopeful note, however, for the last two stations were democracy and resurrection. In this fashion, the Way of the Cross of La Rioja mirrored the more traditional one, but with Monseñor Angelelli in the role of martyr and savior.

[36] With each passing year, the Angelelli commemorations grew larger and more elaborate, drawing more and more attention to the campaign to build his reputation as a martyr. In 1996, to mark the twenty-year anniversary of his death, the group planned a series of activities that spanned the better part of a month. The celebration included a community meeting, a three-day congress attended by eight hundred youths in Chamental where Longueville and Dios Murias had lived, a solidarity campaign in the Malvinas Argentinas elementary school, a prayer vigil, a Way of the Cross ceremony, a march and bonfire, a student bike ride following the route of Angelelli's last journey from Chamental to Punta de los Llanos, and pilgrimages to places where the martyrs died. In preparation for the pilgrimage to Punta de los Llanos, Angelelli's followers built a hermitage on the site of the accident.

⁵ From the document “Punto de vista: A propósito del 19 aniversario del martirio de Mons. Enrique Angelelli. Ovillando la esperanza” in Cesar Ledesma's personal archive.

[37] Unprecedented numbers of lay people and clergy from all over Argentina and other countries joined in the pilgrimage to Punta de los Llanos on the twentieth anniversary of Monseñor Angelelli's death. *El Independiente* estimated the attendance at 2,000 participants, including the provincial governor, the current bishop of La Rioja, the bishop emeritus of Viedma, Argentina, five other bishops from Argentina, and more than one hundred Argentine priests, all from the same "leftist" pastoral line as Angelelli. Members of Carlos Dios Murias' family came from the neighboring province of Córdoba, and members of Gabriel Longueville's family traveled from France to attend the ceremonies. As in most of the other commemorative gestures and activities, the faithful who joined in the pilgrimage vowed not just to remember Angelelli and the other martyrs, but also to continue their work and their "option for the poor."

[38] Five activist bishops from other countries also arrived to show solidarity and pay their respects. Monseñor Samuel Ruiz came from Chiapas, Mexico, where he worked to help the indigenous peoples who formed the social base of the Zapatista movement. Monseñor Pedro Casaldáliga, an outspoken critic of the Brazilian military dictatorship and defender of the Xavante Indians, arrived from Mato Grosso, Brazil. Monseñor Austregésilo Mesquita Filho, another Brazilian exponent of Liberation Theology, traveled from Pernambuco, Brazil. Human-rights defender Monseñor Jorge Hourton came from Temuco, Chile. Monseñor Fernando Méndez, a Liberation Theologian who would renounce his position as bishop in 2006 in order to run for President, arrived from San Pedro, Paraguay.

[39] Father Miguel La Civita, of Chamental, La Rioja, distributed one of the most traditional types of holy relics at the pilgrimage – vials said to contain Monseñor Angelelli's blood. According to *El Independiente*, Fr. Civita claimed that a priest collected the blood from the place where the bishop's body had lain upon the highway (1996b). He gave vials to Monseñor Sigampa and the other bishops in order to "contaminate them with the courage of the martyr bishop." The veneration of relics is one of the oldest practices connected with Christian sainthood and martyrdom. According to the concept of "beneficent contagion," saints' holiness or virtue remains in their bodies even after death, and believers can tap into their power through contact with any part of the body. In addition to spreading Angelelli's valor to the other bishops, Fr. Civita may have been trying to lay the foundations for the occurrence of a miracle, one of the most important requirements for sainthood.

[40] The Memory of the Martyrs group continued to honor Monseñor Angelelli and the other victims every year, up to and including the commemoration of the thirtieth anniversary of their deaths in 2006. In addition to organizing the same types of demonstrations of faith held in honor of the twentieth anniversary, the members sought new ways to spread the message and memory of their beloved bishop. The community radio station "Radio Ciudadanos" – Citizen's Radio – led by Memory of the Martyrs group member Cesar Ledesma, hosted a series of multi-media exhibitions in schools, universities, and other forums around the capital city. In these meetings, Ledesma and others presented a video they had compiled of photographs and audio recordings of music, Angelelli speaking from the pulpit and in private, and people talking about Angelelli while he was still alive and after his death. The radio station also distributed DVDs and CDs of the same material to radio stations across the country.

[41] The Memory of the Martyrs group was the driving force behind many of the efforts to commemorate Monseñor Angelelli, but it was not the only organization dedicated to the effort. The Commission for Memory, Truth and Justice sought to gain definitive recognition

from the courts and the Church that someone had murdered the bishop. Another group from Chamental, La Rioja, adopted one of Angelelli's trademark phrases for its name, calling itself the commission "Hay que seguir andando nomás" – "You just need to keep going."

Biographers and Historians

[42] Provincial activist groups were not the only ones working to maintain public memory of Monseñor Angelelli and build his reputation as a martyr. One of the most traditional and powerful ways of preserving the memory of martyrs is to write the story of their lives. Biographers and historians publishing in local, national, and international spheres have written monographs about and including Angelelli. Since his death, numerous authors and organizations have published biographies of Monseñor Angelelli or collections of his writings, and many others have included his story in work on the Catholic Church in Argentina.

[43] A group outside of Argentina was the first to take advantage of the eroding power of the military and publish a collection of documents in promotion of Angelelli's martyrdom. The Latin American Evangelical Commission for Christian Education (Comisión Evangelica Latinoamericana de Educación Cristiana, or CELADEC) in Peru published *Monseñor Angelelli: Prohibited Martyr* in 1982. It contained sermons and writings by the bishop as well as poems and reflections on his death, including one article titled "They Killed the Pastor," written by a priest who had worked with him. One year later CELADEC published *The Church of the Poor*, by Rubén Dri, dedicated to "the memory of Mons. Enrique Angelelli, an example of a Pastor of the popular Church." Though this publication was not exclusively about the bishop, it did detail his struggles to reorient the Church and the circumstances of his death. Dri called Angelelli "one of the most significant people . . . assassinated by the military dictatorship" (101).

[44] Within Argentina, one of Angelelli's most dedicated followers has been human rights leader, and founder and director of the *Tiempo Latinoamericano* magazine and publishing house, Luis Miguel Baronetto. The native of Córdoba established the journal in October of 1982 in order to promote themes related to Liberation Theology, the school of theology within which Angelelli had been a key leader. Baronetto located the editorial offices in the "Casa Angelelli" of Córdoba, where the bishop had been born and raised. He also adopted a quote from Angelelli ("con un oído en el evangelio y el otro en el pueblo" – "with one ear in the Gospel and the other in the village") as the motto of the magazine, and dedicated numerous articles and even entire issues to his memory. In 1988, Baronetto published *Reports to Mons. Angelelli, with some notes for a biography of Enrique Angelelli*, an extensive collection of writings by and about the bishop. He also took it upon himself to write just such a biography, and in 1996 published *Life and Martyrdom of Monseñor Angelelli*. In *Reports to Mons. Angelelli*, Baronetto referred to him as "the first martyred bishop in the history of Argentina, as well as the first in the contemporary history of Latin America."

[45] Baronetto did not limit his commemorative campaign to the literary world. An advertisement on the back cover of the July 1985 edition of *Tiempo Latinoamericano* reveals that the *Tiempo Latinoamericano* Center began organizing yearly homage activities in Córdoba, in cooperation with other organizations such as the Bishop Angelelli Youth Commission, the Christian Community of Córdoba, and the Commission to Promote Homage to Monseñor Angelelli. The celebrations included artistic and musical performances, audiovisual presentations, debate, and communal reflection. To make information available

year-round, Baronetto also established an archive, documentation center, website, and library in Córdoba related to the bishop and other victims of human rights abuses. On the webpage commemorating the thirty-year anniversary of Angelelli's death, he states: "In our martyred bishop, we contain the multitude of brothers, sisters, and friends who, with the offering of their lives in the past decades, have borne testimony to the struggle for a new society" (n.d.).

[46] In 1986, on the ten-year anniversary of Angelelli's death, the Editorial Antarca of Buenos Aires put out a lengthy interview with Friar Antonio Puigjané, who had worked closely with the bishop. Puigjané had moved to Anillaco – the scene of the large protest against Angelelli in 1973 – at the bishop's request in 1972. The title, *The Accounts of Friar Antonio Puigjané: With One Ear in the Gospel and the Other in the Village*, concluded with the same motto of Angelelli's that *Tiempo Latinoamericano* had adopted. In the course of the interview, the friar spoke extensively about the bishop and his work. Puigjané confessed to visiting the site of Angelelli's death the day after he died, and collecting some of the blood-soaked earth to make more than a thousand relics.⁶

[47] Efforts to memorialize Angelelli in the written word were not limited to members of the clergy. One of the leading human rights activists in Argentina, Emilio Mignone, referred to Angelelli as a martyr in his landmark criticism of the Catholic Church, *Witness to the Truth: The Complicity of Church and Dictatorship in Argentina, 1976-1983*. Mignone recognized Enrique Angelelli's dedication to the poor as one of the exceptions that proved the rule, and used his death as an example of the Church's refusal to defend even its own members. He summarized the bishop's work in La Rioja, the circumstances of his death, and the campaign to beatify him. According to Mignone, "the Catholic Church in Argentina suffered a true martyrdom, denied by its maximum authorities. What a curious case of a Church that denies its own martyrs!" (229).

[48] It was not until 1996, twenty years after Angelelli's demise, when the first narrative biographies of the bishop appeared. Until that point, all the tributes consisted of collections of writing by and about the bishop, or included his story in a larger work, like Mignone's. Ricardo Mercado Luna, a lawyer from La Rioja, and one of Angelelli's closest friends, wrote a short booklet entitled *Enrique Angelelli, Bishop of La Rioja: Contributions for a History of Faith, Compromise, and Martyrdom*. Mercado Luna told the story of Angelelli's life, work, and death from a local perspective, citing his sources and defending his interpretations with a legalistic attention to detail and a witness's intimate perspective. He reflected on the responses to Angelelli's death throughout the country, observing that while the rest of the country and the world hurried to beatify the bishop, some sectors within La Rioja still harbored feelings of resentment and intolerance toward him. Regarding the local-level campaign to recognize Angelelli's martyrdom, Mercado Luna stated that the bishop's successor, Monseñor Witte, announced in 1986 the initiation of official Church investigations "as a first step toward his probable beatification."

[49] Members of the local intelligentsia were not the only ones to publish biographies of the bishop; journalist Fabián Kovacic from Buenos Aires authored *Thus in the Earth: A Biography of Enrique Angelelli*. Kovacic dedicated the book to Jaime de Nevares, Bishop of Neuquén, and included a prologue by Miguel Hesayne, Bishop Emeritus of Viedma. Monseñor Hesayne praised Kovacic for writing a "testimonial and pastoral" account of "a bishop [who

⁶ Perhaps Puigjané's confession explains the origin of the relics that Fr. Civita distributed ten years later, at the twentieth anniversary of Angelelli's death.

was] loyal to Jesus Christ, loyal to the Church, and loyal to the people”(7). According to Hesayne, “Enrique Angelelli, bishop and martyr, was a pioneer in Argentina, of a Church preoccupied not with itself but with the world and the history within which it moved.”

[50] As the years passed, more biographies and books about Angelelli appeared from religious publishing houses. Miguel Juan Bulos, a lawyer from the province of Paraná, wrote *Angelelli: The Beating of His Heart*. The Catholic Editora San Pablo of the international Society of Saint Paul issued Bulos’ work in a miniature book in 1999. In 2000, the Divine Word Missionaries’ Editorial Guadalupe published *Victims and Martyrs of the Decade of the Seventies in Argentina* by Pedro Siwak, with photographs of Angelelli and assassinated priest Carlos Mugica on the cover. In the introduction, Siwak argued for a new definition of martyrdom to include not just those who died for Christian faith, but also those who died “actively fighting for justice and for Christian values.” He included a lengthy chapter on Angelelli’s life and death, as well as a much shorter chapter about the other martyrs of La Rioja – Longueville, Dios Murias, and Pedernera.

[51] In 2001, Roberto Rojo, a lawyer and historian from La Rioja, wrote a biography titled *Angelelli: A Life for the Poor*. He dedicated the book to “all those who fought – and fight – for a better world,” demonstrating the manner in which the bishop had come to symbolize the struggle for political and social justice. Rojo brought the power of oral histories to his work, including extensive excerpts from more than fifty interviews he had conducted in the course of his investigation. Priests, journalists, family members, friends, and followers all provided testimony. Rojo also dedicated more attention than any previous biographer to the international, national, and local contexts of Angelelli’s life and death, in an attempt to explain what happened in La Rioja: how, why, and to what effect. In the conclusion of his book, Rojo asked: “Is Angelelli still alive? If so, where?” His answer – yes. According to Rojo, the bishop lived on in photographs displayed in the homes of his followers, in the memories of humble workers whose lives he touched, in schools across the nation bearing his name, and in the clergy continuing his work within La Rioja and across the continent.

[52] In 2005, the Divine Word Missionaries’ publishing house Editorial Guadalupe came out with a second book about the bishop: *Monseñor Enrique Angelelli* by Luís O. Liberti. Liberti provided a detailed theological interpretation of the connections between Angelelli’s pastoral stance and the Church’s mission as set out in the documents of the Second Vatican Council of 1962-1965 and the meeting of the Latin American Episcopal Conference in Medellín in 1968. In the concluding section of his study, entitled “The Martyred Church,” Liberti stated:

The testimony of the pastor Angelelli, of the layman Wenceslao [Pedernera], of the Fathers Gabriel [Longueville] and Carlos [Dios Murias], and of so many others, will continue resonating in the future ages of secular and ecclesiastic history. Their lives, delivered and scattered for a love of God and men, are living seeds, that the wind of the Spirit will spread without anyone being able to prevent it (466).

Journalists

[53] Biographers were not the only ones to commemorate Monseñor Angelelli in the written world; journalists within La Rioja and across the nation provided favorable coverage of the martyrdom campaign and made their own efforts to celebrate the bishop’s work. The newspaper most consistently and passionately dedicated to the cause was, and still is, *El Independiente* of La Rioja.

[54] The partnership between Angelelli and *El Independiente* began almost immediately upon the bishop's arrival in La Rioja in 1968 and continues to this day. Angelelli bonded with the newspaper's director, Alipio Paoletti, over their shared dedication to the poor and the working classes – in spite of religious differences between the Catholic bishop and the atheist, communist journalist. Prior to the coup of 1976, *El Independiente* provided almost daily coverage of Angelelli's actions and work, and published frequent interviews and excerpts of his sermons. Even during the years of strict censorship under the dictatorship, with the directors of the paper arrested or in hiding, *El Independiente* was one of the first to express doubt about the official story of the bishop's death, referring to his soul as “tragically disappeared.”

[55] With the return to democracy in 1983, *El Independiente* regained the freedom to express solidarity with the fallen bishop. First, however, the original staff had to reclaim their jobs from the workers installed by the dictatorship. In 1984, the founding members formed a group called the Commission of Press Workers of the Newspaper *El Independiente of La Rioja*, led by an ex-prisoner, photographer Plutarco Schaller. The group staged a public protest on July 27 and 28; on the first day they held a press conference, and on the second, a homage “to Monseñor Angelelli, and in him, to all those assassinated, disappeared, imprisoned, and pursued by the military dictatorship.”⁷ On this occasion, the protesting journalists used Angelelli as a symbol of the criminality and depravity of the military government, placing more emphasis on his death than his life.

[56] On other occasions, *El Independiente* struck a more balanced approach between commemorating Angelelli's exemplary life and using his death as a vehicle to express other grievances. The newspaper provided detailed descriptions of the events held by organizations such as the Memory of the Martyrs group, with favorable coverage and headlines such as “The Admiration for Mons. Angelelli Remains Intact” and “In Honor of the Martyr” (1995b). Every year in the weeks surrounding the anniversary of the bishop's death, *El Independiente* published numerous testimonials about his life and his martyrdom, as well as excerpts from his most famous sermons. For the twentieth anniversary of his death, the newspaper ran a series of articles titled “At Twenty Years: Enrique Angelelli, A Passion for Life.” Under the headline “Who Do They Say I Am?” the paper published descriptions of the bishop from those who knew him firsthand, both laypeople and clergy. The thirtieth anniversary of Angelelli's death, in 2006, saw a similar deluge of coverage from *El Independiente*, including frequent references to the bishop's martyrdom.

[57] When a new local paper, *Nueva Rioja* (New Rioja), opened in 2003, it also promoted Angelelli's reputation as a martyr. For example, the headline on the cover of its August 4, 2006 edition read: “Thirty Years Without Angelelli: La Rioja Remembers Its Martyr.” *Nueva Rioja* devoted the first seven pages of that day's edition to stories about memorial services, interviews with the bishop's followers, criticism of the national Church for its belated recognition of his homicide, and information about the progress of a new judicial investigation into his death. The newspaper placed a banner above the pages, reading: “Angelelli: Thirtieth Anniversary of his Martyrdom.”

⁷ Cf. “Declaración de la Comisión de Trabajadores de Prensa del diario El Independiente de La Rioja, cesantados por la dictadura militar.” From the personal archive of Cesar Ledesma.

Church Leaders

[58] The Church's response to Angelelli's death and the issue of his martyrdom reflects the deep splits among members; some committed to the progressive stance of the Second Vatican Council and Conference of Medellín, while others cooperated with the military dictatorship. The controlling minority, including the president of the Argentine Episcopal Conference, Cardinal Primatesta, sought to maintain the Church's conservative roots. They actively supported the dictatorship, and even after the return to democracy they maintained the official story of the car accident, doing little to preserve public memory of Angelelli. The majority of the ecclesiastical leaders remained silent out of ambivalence or fear, and refused to speak out either in favor of or against Angelelli. Other members of the Church, however, were among the most active defenders of Monseñor Angelelli during his life and promoters of his memory after his death.

[59] Monseñor Vicente Zazpe, Vice President of the Argentine Episcopal Conference and Archbishop of Santa Fe, was one of Angelelli's closest friends, and showed his solidarity with the bishop in numerous ways. He defended Angelelli against his critics after the uprising in Anillaco in 1973, declaring that the Pope approved of the bishop's actions and his pastoral line. Zazpe also presided over the services at Angelelli's funeral, attesting that the bishop had received enough threats and warnings to anticipate his own death. Zazpe had the "misfortune" to suffer a car accident himself, in August of 1982, from which he never recovered fully. He died of coronary complications in January of 1984, a victim of continuous and systematic persecution by the armed forces in the last year of his life, according to a priest close to him (*La Nación*, 23 January 2004).

[60] At Angelelli's funeral, Father Mariani from Córdoba gave a speech in the name of priests from outside La Rioja. He described the bishop as having been "crucified," implying that Angelelli had died a Christ-like death at the hands of his enemies. In his tribute, Mariani contrasted Angelelli's "forces of life . . . and light" with the "forces of death . . . vengeance . . . and fear" that killed the "witness to our faith" (Anonymous 1976b). In describing the bishop and his death in this manner, Mariani and his fellow priests were the first to apply publicly the language and theology of martyrdom to the situation, but they stopped short of using the terms "murder" or "martyr."

[61] One year after Monseñor Angelelli's death, a member of the local church became the first person to refer to him as a martyr in a public setting. The new bishop of La Rioja, Monseñor Bernardo Witte, invited a member of the church to give a sermon in honor of the fallen bishop. Midway through the sermon, the speaker referred to Angelelli's death as "a true martyrdom," and quoted the allegory of the grain of wheat from the Book of John:⁸ "Jesus answered them . . . 'Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.'"⁹

[62] Jaime de Nevares, Bishop of Neuquén, Argentina, was one of the earliest leaders of the campaign to establish Enrique Angelelli's martyrdom. Monseñor de Nevares organized a three-day homage to Angelelli in Neuquén on August 4-6, 1983. He reportedly invited all the

⁸ Text of the sermon from the personal files of Cesar Ledesma.

⁹ This allegory is the most frequently cited passage in association with martyrdom: in May of 2000, Pope John Paul II opened his ecumenical commemoration of the witnesses to the faith – martyrs – in the twentieth century with the same exact lines.

bishops in Argentina, as well as some from Uruguay, Brazil, Paraguay, Bolivia, and Chile. The commemoration consisted of a mass conducted by various bishops and priests on the first day, a panel-debate among the bishops on the second, and a popular festival to close the final day.

[63] Apparently, the objective of the three-day commemoration in Neuquén was not simply to remember Monseñor Angelelli, but also to protest his death as publicly as possible. On August 5, 1983, the Buenos Aires newspaper *El Clarín* published an article titled “Protest Over the Death of the Ex-Bishop of La Rioja.” It reported that Monseñor de Nevares held a press conference on the first day of the event, along with another Argentine bishop from Quilmes. Other participants were the bishop of Salto, Uruguay, Marcelo Mendiharat; Nobel laureate and human-rights activist, Adolfo Pérez Esquivel; and two members from Angelelli’s diocese of La Rioja: Fathers Antonio Puigjané and Ceferino Miazzi. At the conference, the clergy and Pérez Esquivel called upon the Argentine justice system to recognize the crimes committed against the bishop of La Rioja and other victims of the military regime.

[64] Coverage of the press conference in Neuquén reveals that people were not only questioning the circumstances of Angelelli’s death, but also were beginning to explore the causes and significance of the tragedy. In November 1983, the Neuquense magazine *Comunidad* ran an account of the commemoration as its cover story (26-30). The article contained the transcript of the press conference, including questions and answers. Those who participated in the roundtable discussion apparently welcomed all questions, even those that faulted the actions of the Church.

[65] The argument that Angelelli had been killed for helping the poor and denouncing the crimes of the military opened the rest of the Church hierarchy to a number of unfavorable comparisons. The reporters at the press conference did not hesitate to criticize the postures adopted by the Church toward the bishop’s death and other human rights abuses committed during the dictatorship. According to *Comunidad*, journalists from sixteen newspapers across the country attended the event. One of the first questions they posed to the panel was: “Why has the Church been silent about Angelelli’s death all these years?” Fr. Puigjané answered that it was partly out of fear, partly out of ignorance. Those who suspected that it was murder were afraid to suffer the same fate, and those who accepted the story of the accident saw no reason to protest.

[66] Another reporter extended the scope of the criticism, asking why the Church had not done more to denounce the thousands of crimes committed against the people of Argentina in general. Fr. Roberto Queirolo answered that many Church leaders had tried to protest, but the military’s strict censorship silenced their efforts. He then proceeded to admit “not as an Argentine priest, but as Roberto Queirolo,” that he believed that the bishops should have spoken out more and been firmer from the beginning.

[67] Fr. Queirolo did not leave his admission of the Church’s wrongdoing unqualified. He reminded the audience that louder protests might have done more harm than good, observing that, before Angelelli died, many of the messages that arrived at the bishop’s office from arrested prisoners pleaded with him to stay quiet. Queirolo claimed that the people in the jails begged: “Please tell Angelelli not to name us in his homilies, because every time he names us and prays for us they give us one that leaves us half dead” (*Comunidad*: 28).

Reflecting upon these words, Queirolo suggested that discretion was sometimes the better part of valor.

[68] In organizing the commemorative activities, Monseñor de Nevares played a key role in proving that Monseñor Angelelli's death was not accidental. Less than two months after the events in Neuquén, a local magistrate in La Rioja reopened the investigation into the bishop's death. Jaime de Nevares' efforts in this area were important because only people who are murdered can be martyrs. De Nevares was also one of the first people to speak out and call Angelelli a martyr in public, even before the military handed over power.

[69] The two bishops who led the diocese of La Rioja after Angelelli worked hard to both memorialize their predecessor and maintain his work. Angelelli's immediate successor, Monseñor Bernardo Witte, set into motion the official ecclesiastical process of sanctification at the earliest possible moment. On August 2, 1986 – two days before the ten-year anniversary of Angelelli's death – Witte declared that the moment had arrived to investigate the bishop's life, work, virtues, and reputation as a saint or martyr. He established a commission of clergy and laypeople to carry out the research and compile the report.

[70] Monseñor Fabriciano Sigampa, who replaced Witte in 1992, demonstrated his dedication to Angelelli on numerous occasions. He presided over memorial services on the yearly anniversary of the bishop's death, stating in his 1995 sermon: "We know how Monseñor died and we know that he signed and sealed his death with his blood by leading a coherent life until the end" (*El Independiente*: 1995c). One year later, he confirmed to reporters: "I was not just with Angelelli then, I am with him now" in response to accusations of vacillation and disloyalty to Angelelli's legacy (*El Independiente*: 1996b).

[71] Bishops from outside of La Rioja, and outside Argentina, expressed solidarity with Angelelli and helped build his reputation as a martyr. They used their presence at memorial events, as well as their sermons, letters, and publications, to demonstrate their admiration of Angelelli and his work. One of the foreign bishops at the head of the movement to promote Angelelli's martyrdom was Dom Pedro Casaldáliga, bishop of São Félix de Arogaia in Mato Grosso, Brazil. On the sixth anniversary of Angelelli's death, in 1982, he published a poem entitled "For Enrique Angelelli, Pastor of Earth Inside, Prohibited Martyr." The elegy mourned the bishop's death and celebrated his life, incorporating quotes from Angelelli's sermons and personal poetry. In lines addressed to Angelelli, Casaldáliga stated: "we want the Church of fear to recuperate the voice and pace, clothed in the stole of your blood, clothed in the rivers of blood, of sobs of absences of so many of your children." The Brazilian bishop saw in Angelelli's martyrdom an opportunity to cleanse and reorient the Church, to recuperate its purity and its mission to help the poor and the defenseless.

[72] In addition to such support from the higher levels of ecclesial hierarchy, efforts to promote Angelelli's reputation as a martyr were even more widespread among priests and other members of the clergy. Angelelli's secretary, Fr. Juan Aurelio ("Alilo") Ortíz, retired from his Church post during the dictatorship, but maintained his dedication to the bishop and his memory. Ortíz participated in many of the memorial activities, gave interviews to journalists and historians, and provided evidence about Angelelli's death for judicial investigations (*Nueva Rioja*: 2006b). Fr. Arturo Pinto, Angelelli's passenger in the automobile accident, also retired from the priesthood and provided – and continues to provide – testimony to numerous courts and commissions about Angelelli's last minutes (*Nueva Rioja*: 2006a).

[73] Priests throughout Argentina cited Angelelli as inspiration for their own pastoral work. In 1982, the priests of Goya, in the province of Corrientes, wrote a poem, "To Enrique," including the lines: "Testimony of the living God, your death affirms my song: that it is now possible to transform this world." They dedicated the verses "to Enrique, martyr or witness of the faith in La Rioja, earth that was the cradle of many witnesses of the faith and of argentinidad." Fr. Roberto Queirolo of Chamental, a participant in the 1983 press conference hosted by Monseñor de Nevaes in Neuquén, stated then that Angelelli "was a true witness of the Gospel." Fr. Delfor "Pocho" Brizuela of Chamental called Angelelli "a morning star of the dawn" in an article in *El Independiente* on the nineteenth anniversary of the bishop's death (1995a). One year later, Fr. Juan Carlos Di Marco, who had worked with Angelelli in La Rioja before relocating to the Dioceses of Iguazú in the province of Misiones, thanked Angelelli "for his testimony, which gives us the courage to follow Jesus" (*El Independiente*: 1996a).

[74] Even the highest authorities of the Argentine Church, those sectors most resistant to Angelelli's pastoral line, have recently begun to refer to Angelelli as a martyr. On the thirtieth anniversary of the bishop's death, Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, president of the Argentine Episcopal Council, delivered a homily in the Cathedral of La Rioja. At the end of his address, Bergoglio stated: "One of the first Christians had a nice phrase, 'blood of martyrs, seed of Christians.'" This was a monumental admission for the Church, as the use of the word "martyr" both implied that someone had killed Angelelli, and confirmed that Angelelli's dedication to the poor and oppressed was a true expression of Christian faith.

Conclusion

[75] Studying the life, death, and martyrdom of Monseñor Enrique Angelelli, bishop of La Rioja, helps illuminate in many ways both the history of Argentina's Dirty War and the making of martyrs in the twentieth century. First, it relocates historical examination of Argentina away from the "center" of Buenos Aires to the "peripheral" province of La Rioja. In spite of poverty and isolation, national and international developments such as the spread of Liberation Theology following the Second Vatican Council, the rise of state-sponsored terrorism, and transitions between democracy and dictatorship reached one of the most traditional, "backward" provinces of Argentina.

[76] La Rioja's geographic and cultural distance from Buenos Aires produced a noteworthy phenomenon: when changes on the national level reached the province, the absence of close control from central civic and religious institutions amplified their effects. This occurred in both the actions of Angelelli's Church and in the mechanisms of state repression. For example, Angelelli went further than perhaps any other Argentine bishop in adopting the teachings of the Second Vatican Council and Conference of Medellín, and actively reorienting his diocese toward the service of the poor. The security forces in La Rioja also went further than their counterparts in other areas; according to one historian, they killed and "disappeared" a higher percentage of the population of La Rioja than of any other province (Kovacic: 153).

[77] The campaign to shape public memory of Angelelli sheds light on the popular process of making martyrs. Examining the specific groups and individuals involved, how they participated in memorializing efforts, and for what purpose, helps explain the functions and mechanisms of martyrdom in the twentieth century. The religious leaders, journalists, and educators who paid homage to the bishop without emphasizing his death drew on the

exemplary power of saints, using him as a model of ideal Christian behavior. Their efforts to commemorate Angelelli's dedication to the poor provided the foundations of a reputation for holiness necessary to official canonization proceedings.

[78] The people interested in promoting Angelelli's martyrdom had an even harder task: they not only had to prove that the bishop led the life of a saint, but also that someone killed him for that very reason. The first step was to break down the wall of lies surrounding the circumstances of his death, because the death of a martyr must be intentional and motivated by a hatred of the faith. By promoting the persona of "Enrique Angelelli: Bishop and Martyr," his followers could simultaneously celebrate his pastoral approach and devotion to his flock, while also criticizing the depravity of his killers.

[79] Finally, we return to our original questions: Who has the power to transform a victim of murder into a martyr? How does this occur? In the case of Monseñor Angelelli, it seems that the answer can be found in the streets, schools, and newsstands of La Rioja. The local residents and clergy have been the driving force behind the effort to keep the memory of Angelelli alive. Their passion was strong enough to survive the years of silence and repression during the dictatorship. It spread the bishop's memory and message to other provinces, and other countries. The impetus to celebrate Angelelli and validate his pastoral stance has slowly moved up the ecclesiastic ladder of command, beginning with a few priests and bishops, and eventually reaching the President of the Argentine Episcopal Conference. The people of La Rioja have chosen Angelelli as their martyr; now only time will tell whether the rest of the Church will follow.

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