

Romeronews

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CONTENTS

Two Romero Trust events in December:
a commemorative mass and film screening

UN declares Romero Anniversary
“International Day for the Right to Truth and for the
Dignity of Victims”

‘Saint Romero’ of the World’s Nations

Jean, Dorothy, Ita and Maura Clare Dixon
remembers Jean’s visit to CAFOD in 1980

Oscar Romero - a litany for private devotion

El Mozote – a poem

Pope Benedict XVI visits Romero’s statue at
Westminster Abbey

Romero honoured by Ibero-American community

** BARGAIN OFFERS **

Their death occurred on 2 December 1980, nine months after the assassination of Archbishop Romero and on the eve of a civil war that engulfed the country for the next 12 years. The sisters were icons of holiness - martyrs whom we remember for their great courage and commitment to the poor.



Ita, Maura, Dorothy and Jean, Icons of Holiness

Saturday 4 December 2010 at 11.00 am

COMMEMORATIVE MASS

Ita, Maura, Dorothy and Jean

Icons of Holiness

A commemorative Mass will be held in London at 11.00 am on Saturday 4 December 2010 to honour the lives of Maryknoll Sisters Ita Ford and Maura Clarke, Ursuline Sister Dorothy Kazel and lay volunteer Jean Donovan, who were raped and killed in El Salvador thirty years ago.

Father Michael Campbell-Johnston will celebrate Mass at the Church of the Assumption & St Gregory, Warwick Street, London W1, (just behind Piccadilly Circus). Therese Osborne, a contemporary co-worker with the four women in El Salvador, will lead a reflection.

The Mass is organised by the Archbishop Romero Trust and co-sponsored by the Conference of Religious, CAFOD, Pax Christi, the Westminster Justice & Peace Commission and Progressio.

Tuesday 14 December 2010 at 7.00 pm

FILM SCREENING

“Monseñor:

The Last Journey of Oscar Romero”

The first London screening of a new Romero film will be shown in London on Tuesday 14 December 2010 at 7.00 pm. The venue is the Amigo Hall, adjacent to St George’s Cathedral in Southwark, London SE1. Admission is free but a collection will be taken up for the Romero Trust.

Film-makers Ana Carrigan and Emanuele Pasquale will introduce the film, which was made to mark the thirtieth anniversary of Romero’s martyrdom in March 2010.

The event is co-sponsored by CAFOD and the Embassy of El Salvador in London.

UN declares Romero Anniversary

“International Day for the Right to Truth and for the Dignity of Victims”

In November 2010 the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution by consensus declaring March 24th - the day of Archbishop Romero’s assassination - as the International Day for the Right to Truth on Gross Human Rights Violations and for the Dignity of Victims.

The resolution recognises “the important and valuable work of Monseñor Oscar Arnulfo Romero of El Salvador ... and his dedication to the service of humanity, in the context of armed conflicts, as a humanist dedicated to defending human rights, protecting lives and promoting human dignity,”.

The UN General Assembly has invited all Member States, organisations of the United Nations system and other international organisations to observe this International Day.



United Nations Logo

‘Saint Romero’ of the World’s Nations

The UCA, (the University of Central America), reflects on the UN declaration.

With the backing of 45 countries, the United Nations has declared March 24th “the International Day for the Right of Truth concerning Gross Human Rights Violations and for the Dignity of Victims”. This is a homage to Monseñor Romero and should fill us with pride as Salvadorans, and with a sensation that the world, in some way, has declared Monseñor Romero a saint. Now he is not only Saint Romero of the Americas, as Bishop Casaldáliga described him. Indeed, countries with little Catholic tradition such as Azerbaijan and India backed the proposal.

But our pride of having a Romero shining amongst the nations should be grounded with realism. The right of victims to truth concerns not only the past, but also the present. And truth is not only about investigating crimes, but also about addressing the

ideas and arguments that lead us to forget about people who are weak and poor. The Salvadoran state and government still have much to do to implement the recommendations of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, in cases such as Romero, the Jesuits and others. Many people who spoke of their ordeals said they did not want prison for the murderers of their parents or relatives. They just wanted to speak to them about their suffering as a way of ultimately being able to forgive them.

Today's victims deserve the truth too. Hungry children need to know that we are a country that consumes more than it produces and that the craving for consumption generates scandalous differences in wealth. Recognising the truth, whilst looking victims in the eye, must lead to change. Ultimately that's what Romero wanted. The truth of yesterday's victims makes us to scream "Never Again". The truth of today's victims asks us to plan the future with humanist reasoning, economic realism and a radical approach that eliminates poverty and injustice. The economy should recognise that the most profitable policy in a country like ours is to invest in people, their health, their education, their safety and all aspects that lead to a truly human development. That is the truth we owe our people, and that is the truth that Monseñor Romero would repeat today. He was a witness to the truth like Jesus of Nazareth and a witness among the nations of the right to truth of victims and poor people.

Jean, Dorothy, Ita and Maura – Rest in Peace

*Clare Dixon remembers
Jean's visit to CAFOD in 1980.*

One afternoon in late September 1980, a young American woman breezed into CAFOD's offices in

Central London. Jean Donovan had been working for almost two years as a lay missionary in El Salvador and she was in England on a brief holiday on her way to a friend's wedding in Ireland. Like many Americans of her age Jean was bright, confident and carefree – a real breath of fresh air.



Jean Donovan visited CAFOD in September 1980

But her apparently happy-go-lucky manner belied the stresses and strains of her daily life in El Salvador. Jean's visit to Europe was a short respite from the tensions and anxieties of the tiny Central America republic where the violence and repression of the armed forces were pushing the country inexorably towards full blown civil war.

The purpose of Jean's visit that day was to find out if CAFOD could provide support for her mission and the work that she was carrying out with children in a refugee centre in the little town of Zaragoza in the south of El Salvador.

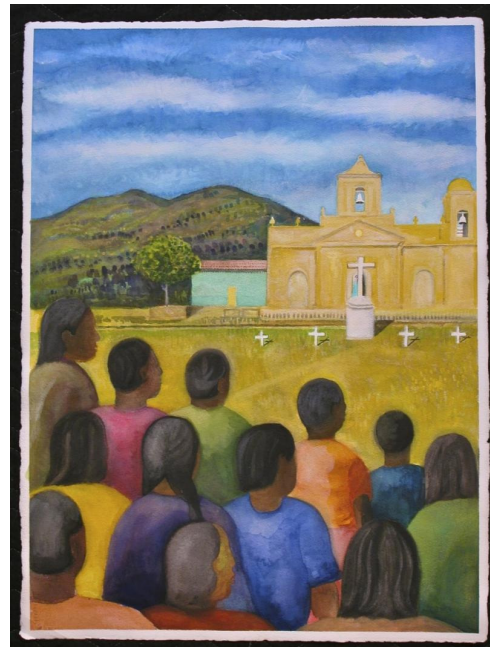
Many of the children were orphans or had been entrusted to the Church centre for safekeeping by their parents in areas of the country where military death squads had established a reign of terror. Jean's task, along with Ursuline sister Dorothy Kazel, was to care for and protect the children who had fled from the conflict-torn region of Chalatenango in the north of the country. Up in Chalatenango, missionary sisters Maura Clarke and Ita Ford of the Maryknoll congregation traced

and rescued the abandoned and orphaned children and, with Jean and Dorothy's help, got them to safety and sanctuary in Zaragoza.

Jean jokingly told me that she was able to carry out her work because she was probably one of the safest people in El Salvador: her blue eyes and blonde hair were an effective passport through military road blocks and checkpoints. But violence was never far away. Six months prior to Jean's visit to my office in CAFOD, Archbishop Romero had been gunned down as he celebrated Mass. Along with her co-workers, Jean had stood as guard of honour over Archbishop Romero's coffin in San Salvador Cathedral, as crowds of grieving mourners filed past to bid farewell to the man who had been the last protection between them and the carnage about to be unleashed on the country.

Jean and I were exactly the same age – 27 – and she had embarked upon her plan to work as a missionary at the same time as I had started working on the Latin America programme of CAFOD. We had a lot to talk about. Throughout Latin America, cruel military regimes and human rights violations were the harsh reality and El Salvador was no exception to the rule. Archbishop Romero himself was killed for his outspoken defence of the poor and his pleas for an end to the repression.

Jean's passion for her work and her commitment to the children and refugees from the violence were palpable. She had written to friends: "Several times I have decided to leave. I almost could, except for the children, the poor bruised victims of adult lunacy. Who would care for them? Whose heart would be so staunch as to favour the reasonable thing in a sea of their tears and loneliness? Not mine dear friend, not mine".



Mural depicting the death of the four women

Whilst Jean was in Europe, her companion Dorothy had tried to convey to her friends in the US just how frightening life in El Salvador had become: "Up in San Antonio they have chopped up women, you know, cutting off their breasts and spearing the kids in their wombs...I mean sick, sick stuff. Oh..it just makes you ill..You wonder – it's just so diabolical, it makes you want to weep..."

Jean talked to me of her wish to be able to prepare a Christmas celebration for the children in her care: the first Christmas that they would face without their parents and family around them. She left my office with the intention of collecting gifts of toys for the children and with the promise to write soon with a formal project request seeking help for the children.

I never received that letter: on 4th December 1980, just weeks after Jean's return to El Salvador, her battered, bruised and violated body, and those of her companions Dorothy, Ita and Maura were recovered from a shallow grave in the hamlet of San Pedro Nonualco where they had been brutally

killed two days previously. The deaths came at an inconvenient time for the United States government. They shone a light on the massive military assistance programme that the US was providing to the government of El Salvador; aid and weapons which were ostensibly intended to stem the tide of supposed communist influence in Central America, but which only managed to terrorise and brutalise the poorest communities who had the temerity to claim their basic human dignity.

The investigation into the crime, which was blocked at every turn by the Salvadoran and US authorities, eventually proved that the four missionaries – all US citizens – had been beaten, raped and shot by five members of the notorious Salvadorean National Guard. With US public opinion outraged by the killings, three days later President Jimmy Carter suspended US\$25 million of military aid to the Salvadoran government. But by 14 January, just days before President Ronald Reagan took his oath of office, Carter announced the resumption of military assistance citing “progress” being made in the case. In the aftermath of the killings Alexander Haig, US Secretary of State under Ronald Reagan tried to mislead the investigation and the American public by claiming that the women had died in an exchange of fire with the armed forces, whilst Reagan’s Ambassador to the United Nations, Jeanne Kirkpatrick, stated “The nuns were not just nuns. The nuns were also...political activists on behalf of the guerrillas”.

US Ambassador to El Salvador, Robert White, who knew the four victims and was convinced that they had been killed on the orders of government, was later to say “I regard the continuing cover-up on this case as one of the most shameful chapters in the

history of United State’ diplomacy”. White’s refusal to remain silent in the face of his government’s behaviour cost him his job, but he continued to work with the families of the victims and the Maryknoll congregation to push for justice. It was only in 1984 that five low-ranking soldiers of the National Guard were found guilty of the abduction and murder of the women as they drove from the airport towards San Salvador. In 1998, three of the soldiers were released for good behaviour. Two of the men remain in prison and have petitioned the Salvadoran government for pardon.

Repeated attempts by the families, and most notably by Ita’s brother, Bill Ford, to bring to trial the Salvadoran Minister of Defence and the Head of the National Guard thought to be responsible for ordering the killings, were constantly blocked. These two men, Eugenio Vides Casanova and José Guillermo García lived comfortably in exile in Palm Beach, Florida until October 2009 when, after an unrelated court case, the US Department of Homeland Security announced that it had initiated deportation proceedings against them for assisting in the torture of Salvadorean civilians.

But the deaths of Ita, Maura, Dorothy and Jean saw the birth of a solidarity movement in the United States, spearheaded by the Churches which played a huge part in finally bringing the civil war in El Salvador to an end in 1992.

On the thirtieth anniversary of the killings this year, the Maryknoll congregation and the families are preparing for a pilgrimage to El Salvador, to Zaragoza where Jean and Dorothy worked and to Chalatenango where Ita and Maura are buried, to celebrate the life and the enduring legacy of the women.

Just days before she was killed, Maura Clarke wrote what was to be her last letter to her parents. She included, prophetically, the following reflection from Thomas Merton which she said had “a lot of meaning for me these days”:

“My Lord God, I have no idea of where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end...But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it. Therefore will I trust you always. Though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death, I will not fear for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.”

Jean, Dorothy, Ita and Maura – Rest in Peace.

Oscar Romero Litany for Private Devotion

To which one responds quietly: “Pray for us”.

Romero of the Americas
 Bishop, Prophet and Martyr
 Homily of God the Son
 Icon of Holiness
 Option for the Poor Incarnate
 Scourge of Injustice
 Zealous Pastor for the Little People
 Unflinching Courage
 Voice of Truth amidst Cover-Up and Lies
 Beacon of Solidarity
 Defender of Human Rights
 Evangeliser for All Seasons
 Gaudium et Spes Personified
 Voice of the Voiceless in Life

Named of the Nameless in Death
 The Greatest Salvadoran of Them All
 Father of the Latin American Church
 Ecumenical Shepherd
 Patron of Justice and Peace
 Credible Witness of the Resurrection

El Mozote

A poem by Father Peter O’Neill



A memorial to the victims of the El Mozote massacre

Peter O’Neill, an Irish Franciscan priest, lived and worked for many years in Central America. His poem “El Mozote” recalls the village in eastern El Salvador where nearly 1,000 men, women and children were massacred in December 1981.

How can my eyes look wise
 When shining in them is death’s parapet?
 How can my face be young
 If stung
 By death-squad’s bullets?
 Bodies buried under shallow mound,
 Strown on unconsecrated ground
 And not in blessed grave?
 There are no mother’s tears
 To shed on biers
 Of disappeared.
 No ‘Dies Ire’ can be sung.
 No memory of their good deeds
 tripping off the tongue.

I'll ignore
 The distant shore.
 Am I alone with thousands dead
 inside my head?
 Am I such a wretch that none can stretch
 Their hand to succour me
 And swim with constancy
 Together on the upset sea?
 Are man and woman placed upon this earth
 For birth and death
 And nothing in between
 Except
 The power of one
 Who uses gun
 To settle civil and religious strife?
 And then
 When young and old
 Are lifeless, loveless bodies growing cold
 Recites
 'The sword is mightier than the pen'?

Peter O'Neill OFM, 1995

Monseñor Romero over the west door of Westminster Abbey.

In May 2007, the Pope described Romero as "a great witness of the faith, a man of great Christian virtue who worked for peace and against the dictatorship." He added, "That the person himself merits beatification, I do not doubt."



Romero's statue was unveiled in 1998 and stands alongside those of other twentieth century martyrs above the west door

Pope Benedict XVI visits Romero's statue at Westminster Abbey



The Dean of Westminster, John Hall, points out to Pope Benedict XVI the statue of Archbishop Romero at Westminster Abbey

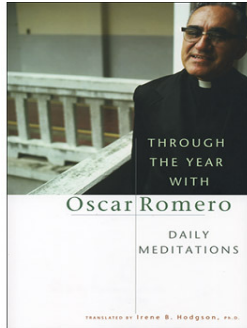
During Pope Benedict's visit to Britain in September, he was able to view the statue of

Romero honoured by the Ibero-American Community

Enrique Iglesias, the General Secretary of the Ibero-American Secretariat, has declared the life and work of Monseñor Oscar Arnulfo Romero a "humanistic legacy for current and future generations...not only in El Salvador, but in the whole Ibero-American Community". Speaking in Madrid on 30 October 2010, Iglesias described Romero as "the greatest patriot that El Salvador has ever had". The Ibero-American Community brings together the governments of Latin America with those of Spain and Portugal.

BARGAIN OFFERS

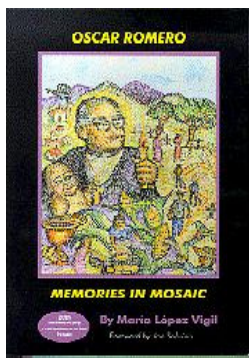
Through the Year with Oscar Romero: Daily Meditations



(£9 incl p & p)

In these powerful and moving selections from his broadcasts, Romero invites us each day to move into the 'intimate space' of our conscience, to encounter ourselves there, and then to go out to create a more just world. Beautiful and inspiring extracts.

Oscar Romero: Memories in Mosaic



£9 (incl. p & p)

The story of Archbishop Romero, told by those who worked with him, lived with him and prayed with him. One of the best books on Romero.

Oscar Romero and the Communion of the Saints

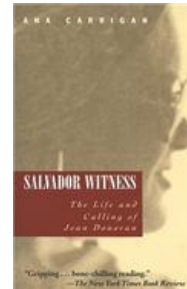
OSCAR ROMERO
and
The Communion of Saints



SCOTT WRIGHT
(£9 incl p & p)

One of the special joys of this biography is its inclusion of many rarely-seen photographs, taken by Octavio Durán, a Franciscan friar, who served as Romero's personal photographer.

*A Salvador Witness,
the Life and Calling of Jean Donovan*



(£10 incl. pp)

A Salvador Witness looks at the life of Jean Donovan and her journey to life as a missionary in war-torn El Salvador. A really good read if you want to be inspired.

The books may be ordered from the Archbishop Romero Trust, 8 Dean's Mews, London W1G 9EE or by email: romerotrust@btinternet.com

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