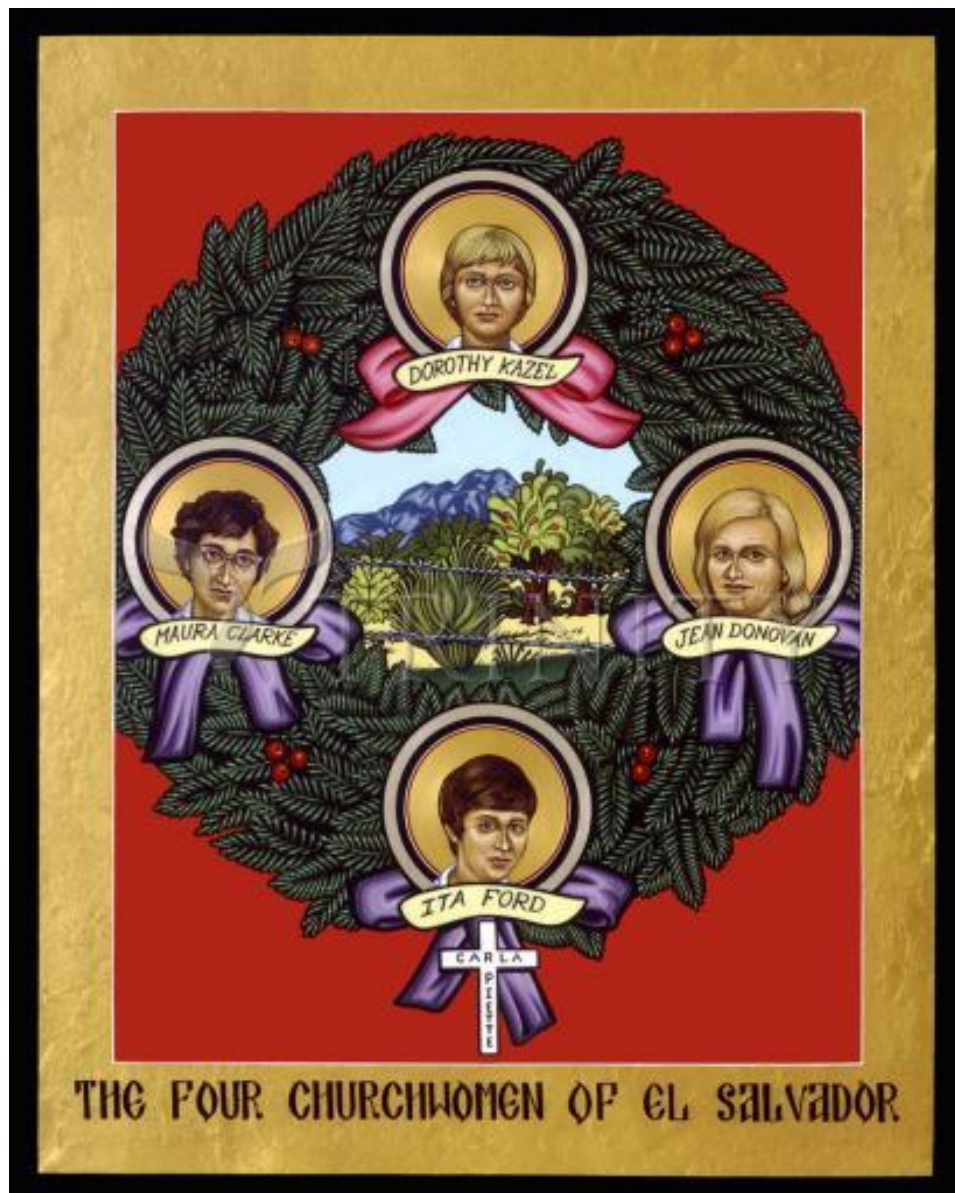


# Romeronews

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## Martyrdom Ita, Maura, Dorothy, Jean



## IN THIS ISSUE

### Roses in December

I

**Celebration in London**  
**Gemma Simmonds CJ**

II

**Commemoration in Rome**  
**Cardinal Michael Czerny SJ**

III

**The Case for Sainthood?**

IV

**To what do they call us today?**

**Justice for the UCA Martyrs**

**Book Review – Martyrdom**

**News in Brief**

- i) El Mozote**
- ii) Winds of Change**
- iii) 29 Years of Peace?**

**St. Oscar Romero Parish Liverpool**

**Books and Resources**

## Romero Week 2021

Once more our hopes to organise a full calendar of events for the Romero Week in March have been disappointed. We had expected to be able to re-schedule many of the events planned for the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2020, which were cancelled by last year's lockdown. But coronavirus continues to have an enormous impact on our lives both in the UK and across the world.

The events that are currently planned, either live or streamed are as follows:

**Saturday March 13<sup>th</sup> 11.00am**

National Ecumenical Service  
St. Martin in the Fields, London

**Wednesday March 24<sup>th</sup> 6.00pm**

Ecumenical Service  
Metropolitan Cathedral, Liverpool  
with Archbishop Malcom McMahon

**Saturday March 27<sup>th</sup> 12.30pm**

Romero Anniversary Mass  
St. George's Cathedral, Southwark  
with Archbishop John Wilson

## Roses in December

In dedicating this edition of Romero News to Maryknoll Sisters Ita Ford and Maura Clarke, Ursuline Sister Dorothy Kazel and laywoman Jean Donovan, we recall the title of the 1982 documentary "Roses in December" on the life and death of Jean Donovan. On the following pages we record tributes to them and reflect on their example.



*Clockwise from top left: Ita, Jean, Dorothy and Maura.*

The 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the martyrdom of the women was commemorated across the world,

In Rome, Pope Francis praised them at the end of his General Audience on the anniversary of their death, saying:

*"Today is the 40th anniversary of the death of four missionaries killed in El Salvador... they were kidnapped, raped and killed by a group of paramilitary forces. They were offering their services during the civil war and bringing food and medicine to those who had to flee, especially to the families that were the poorest. These women lived their faith with great generosity. They are an example for all of us to become faithful missionary disciples."*

Archbishop Miguel Cabrejos, President of CELAM, the Latin American Bishops' Council, declared "Today we wish to join the Salvadorean people in highlighting the remarkable service that the missionary martyr sisters rendered to the poorest, most marginalised and vulnerable people, with a total and disinterested dedication in defence of the lives of the victims of the armed conflict,

which generated so much suffering and mourned entire families of the beloved country of Saint Oscar Arnulfo Romero, especially refugees and the displaced”.

In El Salvador, the United States, Rome and London, more than 40 commemorative events were held. The London celebration of the women, “Roses in December”, was live-streamed from the Church of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, in Hayes, organised by the Conference of Religious of England and Wales, and supported by CAFOD, Pax Christi, and the Archbishop Romero Trust.

A recording of the beautiful service is available on the following link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=36DJNuZMXME&feature=youtu.be>

## Celebration in London

*The Service in London was led by Fr Paul Smyth CMF with the following inspirational reflection from Sister Gemma Simmonds CJ, (pictured opposite).*

From the earliest time in the church’s history the martyrs have been commemorated by consecrating altars that enclose within them the bodily relics

of those who died for their faith. There are no such altars for the women martyrs of El Salvador, but we come together this evening to venerate their memory and to acknowledge a church nourished on their blood and built on the strong pillars of their sacrifice.

No such honour was done, no such acknowledgement made on the day when the violated and bullet-ridden bodies of Maura Clarke, Ita Ford, Dorothy Kazel and Jean Donovan were discovered buried in a shallow grave not far from the airport where they had last been seen alive.



Like many other women across the world who fall victim to the brutalities of armed conflict,

these martyrs for their faith were raped before they were murdered. It may seem strange, even shocking for me to dwell on this aspect of their death, but I do so in order to honour them.

The Catholic Church has laid great emphasis on virginity and the protection of chastity as a sign of holiness. Whether the virgin martyrs of early Rome like St

Agnes and St Emerentiana, nuns like St Therèse, the Little Flower, or young lay women like Maria Goretti, the emphasis has been on purity, with all the questions that that raises for many modern women about the glory and complexity of human sexuality and our concept of holiness.

We are not only here to honour the American missionaries to El Salvador. We are honouring also the many women: catechists, and those who evangelised simply through the witness of lives lived for others, who also died during the horrors of the military repression. Many of them were wives and mothers, others perhaps made different life choices, but their bodies were in every way sacred: blessed, broken and shared in their generous witness to justice and their firm resistance of evil. Three of the American missionaries were religious sisters, vowed to chastity. Jean Donovan was engaged to be married. The National Guardsmen who raped and killed them may well have thought that they were subjugating and humiliating these women, taking something away from them. But in perpetrating these appalling violations they were also uniting them in

the closest possible union with Christ himself.

Theologian David Tombs has written vividly of the custom prevalent in ancient Rome of sexually humiliating conquered kings and military leaders before executing them. He points to the fact that in the Gospel narratives Jesus is stripped naked no less than four times and paraded in front of hundreds of soldiers. He suggests the possibility that Jesus was sexually abused and humiliated as part of the preparation for his death. This would not be unusual when dealing with a high-status prisoner. The Romans liked to reduce his status as a leader and a man in order to terrify his followers into submission. In its subsequent depictions of Christ's crucifixion and suffering the Church has preferred to draw a veil of discretion over this brutal possibility, as it often draws a veil of discretion and forgetfulness over facts which don't entirely fit with our stylized notions of holiness. Whatever the factual truth of this, the ancient creeds also teach us that, in his humiliation and death, Jesus descended into hell. It was there that he was waiting to be met by the women we commemorate today.



They are not only remembered and venerated for the heroic witness of their death. They are remembered and venerated for the passion with which they gave their lives to the suffering people of El Salvador. It was a passion inspired by the courage of the religious leaders of the *pueblos* where they ministered. Shortly before her death, Maura wrote to a friend, '[The *campesinos*] are the most rugged and faith-filled men and women [...] It takes courage for them to continue any celebration of the word or meetings because anyone suspected of being [...] attached to the church is in serious danger [...] The poor really strip you, pull you, challenge you, evangelise you, show you God'.

The missionaries and *campesinas* had the courage to remain alongside the crucified people of El Salvador despite knowing the mortal danger to themselves. They entered into the worst hell that human beings can devise for one another in terms of cruelty, violence and deliberately inflicted poverty. It was here that they met the crucified Jesus. He himself tells us that whatsoever we do to the least of his sisters and brothers we do to him. If we allow it to, their need

strips us, pulls us, challenges us, evangelises us and shows us God. But few of us allow ourselves to be challenged and called in this way.



*Thanks to [futurechurch.org](http://futurechurch.org)*

Few of us find the heart, as Maura, Ita, Dorothy and Jean did, to give so much of ourselves to others or to Christ in others. These martyrs and their families were also stripped of justice in the aftermath of their death. The most shameful thing that happened to them was not the manner of their death but the way in which their own U.S. government, the Salvadorean government and some Church leaders were willing to compromise and deny the

reality of their own collusion with the deaths of these and other martyrs like Oscar Romero in order to safeguard what they thought of as the overriding value of their own political and ideological goals.

The death of the women martyrs of El Salvador lays wide open, even today, questions which continue to challenge us. Our rigid notions of holiness may lead us to forget the embodied beauty of the human person and the dignity that we all carry as children of God, irrespective of what happens to those bodies. Our desire to stay safe can lead us to make alliances that are profoundly ungodly, when all the while the poor come dangerously close to Jesus as he lives deeply immersed in the very margins of society.

Maura, Ita, Dorothy and Jean found among El Salvador's poor something worth living and dying for. Those who killed them thought they were taking away the value of their lives. What they and those who colluded with them did was to show for all the world to see the shining glory of those who dare to go down into hell with the crucified Jesus only to rise with him again for all eternity.

## **Commemoration in Rome Cardinal Michael Czerny SJ**

*For several years during the 1990s, Michael Czerny SJ worked as Director of the Human Rights Institute of the UCA in San Salvador, after the massacre of the Jesuit martyrs in 1989. Here is his homily from the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary Mass in Rome for the women martyrs,*

“If I should walk in the valley of darkness, no evil will I fear.” This act of faith from the Good Shepherd Psalm resonates with the greatest poignancy as we remember four generous missionaries who forty years ago braved the valley of darkness in El Salvador. Today we mournfully recall their violent deaths and gratefully celebrate the triumph of Life, life to the full.

On Good Friday the liturgy proclaims the Passion of our Lord and, knowing that he is risen, we meditatively re-live his sufferings and death with the hope of sharing in his resurrection. Today I will recount the passion and death of Jean, Dorothy, Ita and Maura as narrated by a Canadian missionary, Fr. Gregory Chisholm, now serving in Pucallpa in the Peruvian Amazon, probably the closest

we will ever have to an eyewitness account:

“On 27 November 1980 - 8 months after the martyrdom of St Oscar Romero - five top leaders of the Democratic Revolutionary Front in the government were kidnapped and murdered by a death squad. A 5-person ecumenical Church delegation from Canada and the U.S.A. went to attend their funeral, and I (Fr Greg Chisholm) was one of them. We arrived in the early evening of Tuesday 2 December at the brand new airport – it had opened ten months earlier – well outside the capital city.

Our delegation of six met in Miami on the way to El Salvador: besides Fr Gregory Chisholm representing the Inter-Church Committee on Human Rights in Latin America, there was Fr Jacques Couture, the Québec Minister of Immigration; Sandra Dunsmore and Jacqueline Levitin, YMCA Montréal; Rev. Robert Smith, United Church Minister from Vancouver; and Scott Evanson, translator.

As we passed through immigration and customs, there was an atmosphere of great tension and nervousness, with several people detained and

international journalists having their equipment confiscated. **In the main hall of the airport we met Sister Dorothy Kazel, an Ursuline nun, and a lay missionary from Cleveland, Jean Donovan, both U.S. citizens. They greeted us with kindness but were obviously very nervous; they were waiting for the (delayed) arrival of their good friends and fellow Americans, Sisters Ita Ford and Maura Clarke, Maryknoll Sisters who were returning from a short trip to Managua.**

We said our good-byes, expecting to see them the next day, and left the airport in a minibus sent by the archbishop's office to meet us. As we left the airport, we commented on how our vehicle was identical in every detail to that of the Sisters who were hoping to be leaving the airport less than an hour later.

We proceeded down the broad new highway, quite deserted and unlit. After about ten minutes, in an extremely dark section of the road, several heavily armed members of the national security forces emerged abruptly from a deep trench on the side of the road, stopped our vehicle, surrounded it and



aggressively demanded to see our documents. The driver of our van, secretary to Bishop Rivera y Damas, the acting diocesan administrator, demanded to know what this unusual intervention was all about. He said that we were Canadian visitors. Somewhat incredulous, the military asked directly if we were American citizens and demanded to see our passports. Once convinced that we were Canadian, they somewhat reluctantly let us pass.

A very short time afterwards, at this very spot, the same security forces stopped an identical vehicle for which they had obviously been on the lookout. Finding the four American missionaries in the vehicle, they beat them, raped them, and executed each one with a bullet in the head. They buried them in a shallow grave.

The next day the 3rd, after the very tense funeral of the FDR leaders and some threats of violence in the central plaza, we learned about the disappearance of the four women and their possible deaths. We called the U.S. Embassy for help and, the following morning, the 4th, Ambassador Robert White accompanied us to the airport. On the way to the

airport, at the side of the road, we came upon the sisters' abandoned and burnt-out minibus, and we took in all the details of the horrible scene. Upon arriving at the airport, Ambassador White was informed that the bodies of the Sisters had just been found in a shallow grave. He broke down with great grief and tears since he had known the Sisters quite well. He then left to recover the bodies...



*Monument marking where they were found*

Far away in Washington, a new government – that of President Ronald Reagan – had been elected a month earlier but not yet taken office. The same day the missionaries' bodies were found, Alexander Haig, recently nominated as

the next Secretary of State, made the shameless and absolutely unfounded suggestion that the Sisters had maybe “run a roadblock and been killed in an exchange of fire”. In fact, the completely burned-out minivan showed no signs of bullet holes whatsoever. In the same arrogant way Jean Kirkpatrick, recently nominated by Reagan as U.S. Ambassador to the U.N., just a few days before the death of the Sisters had said publicly that the human rights policy of the out-going Jimmy Carter regime “...would be thrown out into the garbage under the Reagan government”. Then, shortly thereafter she declared that the missionaries killed in El Salvador were ‘more political activists than religious sisters!’” Thus far, the account of Fr. Greg Chisholm, for which we give thanks to God.

But this is not the last word in the passion of Jean, Dorothy, Ita and Maura. While in 1984 four former members of the National Guard were convicted of killing them, 3 decades later, one of them confessed his participation in the crime to another Maryknoll Sister working in El Salvador. And he asked for forgiveness. So true vindication may come, not from

very imperfect human justice, but from divine reconciliation. This surely is a triumph of mercy, of light over darkness, of life over death.

“Today’s martyrs,” Pope Francis pointed out in April, “outnumber the martyrs of the first centuries.” The numbers attest to the enormity of the tasks of faith, love and justice in our world and, opposing them, the reactions of the forces of despair and violence. The Holy Father further commented and questioned, “It is interesting and striking to note how hostility grows to fury in the persecution of martyrs... How does one get to rage against Christians, against Christian witness and against the heroism of Christians?” Nearly three millennia ago, Isaiah prophesied:

*On this mountain [the Lord of hosts] will remove*

*the mourning veil covering all peoples,  
and the shroud enwrapping all nations,  
he will destroy Death for ever.*

*The Lord will wipe away  
the tears from every cheek;  
he will take away his people’s shame  
everywhere on earth,  
for the Lord has said so (Is.25:7-8).*

Echoing Isaiah, the Holy Father proclaimed that "...in persecutions there is always the presence of Jesus who accompanies us, the presence of Jesus who comforts us and the strength of the Holy Spirit that helps us to go forward. Let us not be discouraged when a life that is faithful to the Gospel draws persecution..." Jean, Dorothy, Ita and Maura were martyrs at a local, humble level, in their work with the poor, with the displaced, with the grieving. They witnessed to a loving God whose preferential love is for the poor and marginalised. They did so, not so much with words as by re-enacting and indeed re-incarnating what today's Gospel recounts: "The lame, the crippled, the blind, the dumb and many others were put down at his feet, and [Jesus] cured them" (Mt. 15:30). As Jesus did vis-à-vis the powerful of his time, the four missionaries also testified to those who have ears but do not hear the cry of the poor, whose arrogant and cynical eyes do not see the Kingdom of God at hand. Jean, Dorothy, Ita and Maura were evangelisers and are martyrs. Theirs, mysteriously but without doubt, is the triumph, because vigorous, courageous

acts of solidarity and compassion persist in dreadful, risky conditions; brutal crimes failed and fail to stop the evangelizing. Our loving Lord Jesus Christ continues to offer his life (even in this year of pandemic) in widespread suffering and too many deaths, but with the sure promise of overcoming death forever.

While celebrating here in Rome, sponsored by the Caravita community in collaboration with the JPIC commission of USG and UISG in Rome and the Romero Trust in London, we join in communion with a great Mass and celebrations of the martyrs in Chalatenango Cathedral and at the shrine in San Pedro Nonualco organised by the Cleveland Mission.

The Maryknoll Sisters are holding a liturgy in their New York motherhouse for families and friends of their martyrs and Maryknoll missionaries connected online around the globe, as well as Eucharists in Los Angeles and elsewhere in the U.S.A. In London the Romero Trust is holding a commemorative liturgy in conjunction with the Conference of Religious and CAFOD. In all these locations, we join together today,

mournfully to remember the passage of Jean, Dorothy, Ita and Maura through the valley of darkness and gratefully to celebrate the triumph of their faith and goodness and God's infinite mercy.

## The Case for Sainthood

*Rhina Guidos, author of "Rutilio Grande – A Table for All (see Book Offers) is editor and staff writer for the Catholic News Service in the U.S.*

The women arrived in the tiny country on the brink of war, each with a different experience formed in Catholic circles in various parts of the U.S.: Queens and Brooklyn in New York, Connecticut and Ohio. The Ursuline and the Maryknoll women religious came largely from working-class families and the lay missionary from the wealthy community of Westport in Connecticut. Though they only interacted with one another for a few short months, the single faith that united them led them to feed, clothe and provide refuge for hundreds battered not just by war but also hunger in El Salvador. On Dec. 2, Maryknoll Sisters Maura Clarke and Ita Ford, Ursuline Sister Dorothy Kazel and laywoman Jean

Donovan will be remembered worldwide on the 40th anniversary of what many increasingly consider their martyrdom. Their spiritual calling led them on that day in 1980 to a shallow grave, to share in the bloody and brutal history of tens of thousands of Salvadoran Catholics in the country who suffered rape, beatings and sometimes were ultimately killed for trying to help those around them. Their example, based on the teachings of the Gospel, some say, should now lead to a time of reflection and discernment about whether a canonisation cause should be opened for them.



*Tributes at the Maryknoll sisters' grave*

The canonisation of these four women is an idea whose time has come," said Carlos X. Colorado, a Salvadoran-born attorney who wrote and curated the prominent "Super Martyrio" blog that followed for years the canonization cause of El Salvador's human rights icon St. Oscar Romero. "They were killed the same year as St. Romero, in the same country and for the same cause," Colorado said. "If he was a martyr and a saint, it follows that they are, too, unless someone can prove otherwise." Colorado, who lives in the Los Angeles area, said that over the years, he has developed a personal devotion to the women and, as a law student, he published an article in a law review analyzing the U.S. trial of two Salvadoran generals believed to have played some role in orchestrating what happened to the women. And though Colorado has ties to El Salvador and the U.S., the appeal of the sacrifice of the four has sparked worldwide attention that has only increased with the years.

"The thing is that what we've discovered is that the admiration and devotion to these four has not waned 40 years later, and it is as strong or stronger than ever,"

said Julian Filochowski, chair of the Archbishop Romero Trust in London, named after St. Romero, whose voice and message the women often heard on the radio. In a November 20<sup>th</sup> interview with Catholic News Service, Filochowski said this year in particular, even with a pandemic looming in the global landscape, the women's example of living out their faith will be observed on a global stage. Masses, a musical tribute, and webinars about their lives, from London to Rome, and various cyber events in the U.S. will mark the occasion, which will include a blessing of the tombs of Sisters Ford and Clarke, the only two of the four who are buried in El Salvador. The blessing will be followed by a national Mass near their burial place in Chalatenango, where the Maryknollers served, and will be celebrated by the country's bishops to close out the jubilee year of Salvadoran martyrs that the country is observing.

"They were a mantle of mercy and compassion," said Bishop Oswaldo Escobar Aguilar, head of the Diocese of Chalatenango. "They were compassionate with the reality that was taking place in El Salvador."





*Bishop Oswaldo Escobar at the tomb of Maura and Ita in Chalatenango where they served.*

"Their example of protecting children, feeding and clothing adults and leading many to shelter, made such an impression on Bishop Eduardo Alas Alfaro, the diocese's first prelate, that he instituted the Day of Martyrs of Chalatenango to be observed on the day of the women's killing", said Bishop Escobar.

Though their actions, for many, are considered heroic, for a time there was the feeling that opening up a canonisation cause for the women "was unlikely to be fruitful," said Filochowski. Catholics who defended the poor in El Salvador often were accused of aligning with left-leaning politics instead of considering that they were following their religious beliefs in defending the life and dignity of the vulnerable. Bishop Escobar said even St. Romero faced opposition and attacks against his holiness for

decades, accusing him of pursuing political motives, instead of following the Gospel, when it came to his defense of the poor. So, everyone else, too, has faced a similar ideological uphill battle. But Filochowski said that St. Romero's 2018 canonisation and two upcoming beatifications in El Salvador may make this a "propitious" moment to ponder sainthood for the U.S. women who were killed for similar reasons.

El Salvador awaits the upcoming beatification of the Salvadorean Jesuit Father Rutilio Grande and two companions martyred in 1977. Father Grande was a friend of St. Romero's who defended rural populations. There's also the beatification of Franciscan Father Cosme Spessotto, an Italian missionary, who, like the women, left his native country to work with El Salvador's poor. He, too, spoke against injustices and was assassinated, killed point-blank in 1980, just a few months before the women.

Those like Colorado see many parallels in the way they all lived and died. "They should be recognised because they are women, and in El Salvador, women were killed for the faith alongside men in barbaric numbers, yet we think of

the Latin American martyrology (the list of martyrs) as a male institution. It is not," Colorado said. Even a symbol of a woman on a cross on a mural depicting the four U.S. women and St. Romero caused controversy, said Melissa Altman, a Maryknoll lay missionary, who helped with the work of art in the Salvadorean town of Zaragoza. "People in the parish said, 'This is not Jesus,' but the parish priest said, 'This is to honour (a previous mural) and also for the persecuted "mujer" (woman) in El Salvador,'" said Altman, explaining the artist had wanted to depict the persecution of women who stood for their faith. "When you look at history, you look at how many women were persecuted and killed for standing up for their faith," Altman said. "It's good he (the priest) stood his ground. It's a focal point." A photo of the four U.S. women recently appeared in a flier issued by the Diocese of Chalatenango in conjunction with the country's bishops' conference, announcing the national Mass for martyrs. The women were to one side of the central photo of St. Romero and the image of the priests awaiting beatification on the other side. The poster reads "our

martyrs, artisans of peace, justice and truth."

While three of the four were women religious, Donovan, a laywoman who had completed missionary training at a Maryknoll center, also illustrates how laywomen, too, paid with their lives for following the Gospel, Colorado said. "The presence of lay missionary Jean Donovan in the group is also a reminder that many laypeople -- catechists, delegates of the word, sacristans, volunteers and simple parishioners -- also shed their blood in this great persecution," he added.

Filochowski said the four are "very special witnesses" in a "cloud" of martyrs in the country and they represent the countless and "nameless women martyrs" who gave their lives helping others during the years of the civil conflict. He said he hoped that the 40 years after their death will mark a "kairos moment," a critical or opportune moment, to examine their "enormous courage and that they made a really genuine option for the poor."



## To What do they Call us Today?

*Washington-based couple Scott Wright, who works for the Columbans, and Jean Stokan, who works for the Sisters of Mercy, take inspiration from the witness of Ita, Maura, Dorothy and Jean. Article first published by ICN*

The date, 2 December, will mark the 40th anniversary of the martyrdom of four US church women who were assassinated in El Salvador that day in 1980. Maura Clarke, Ita Ford, Dorothy Kazel, and Jean Donovan: two Maryknoll sisters, one Ursuline nun, and a young lay person.

Today, 40 years later, we live in a very different world, where the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor are joined together. Nations have been planning for action on the climate crisis, which is creating extreme weather events, severe droughts and flooding, rising sea levels and melting glaciers, and disrupting food security. Today, 40 years later, 12 million Syrians - half the population of their country - are displaced from their homes, with 5.6 million fled to distant lands and as far as Europe, seeking refuge. They risk their lives on sea and on land and

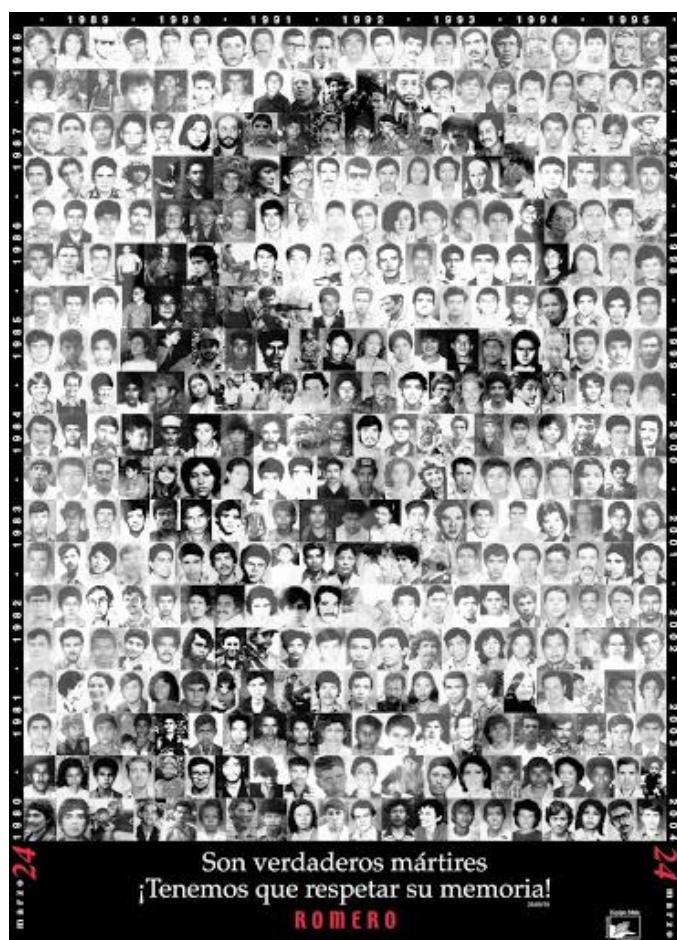
have been greeted with both generosity and with hatred. The same fears and threats hurled at European Jewish refugees seeking to escape Nazi extermination 75 years ago is being hurled at Syrian Muslim refugees today, in both Europe and the U.S.



*Ita Ford graduation photo*

The challenges we face today are different from the challenges we faced 40 years ago when the four church women died. They call for new perspectives and new structures, new vision and new social movements to adequately respond to the need for justice for present and future generations. Still, the witness of the four church women continues to speak to us today. For us who remember them, and remember that day, it has

been a long journey, walking with the poor of Central America and Mexico on new paths yet to be forged. The passage from John's Gospel comes to mind: "Unless a seed fall to earth and die, it will bear no fruit; but if it die, how great the fruit!" **Throughout these years, we have kept the memory of the martyrs alive, and have asked: What do they require of us today?**



### *Romero and the Martyrs of El Salvador*

We think especially of Archbishop Oscar Romero, martyred on 24 March 1980, and the Jesuit martyrs of the University

of Central America, along with Celina and Elba, martyred on 16 November 1989. We think of Rufina Amaya, the sole survivor of the El Mozote massacre that killed a thousand people, and of Maria Julia Hernandez, who refused to let the world forget what happened there. We remember so many who generously gave of their lives during 12 years of war in El Salvador, and in the years after.

But on 2 December we remember in a special way the four church women, and ask, "What would they be doing today, if they were living in our times?" And what ought we to be doing? What insights do their courage give us into how we ought to respond today to a myriad of challenges: the migrants dying on the migrant trail and in the Arizona desert; the growing divide between rich and poor; global warming and climate catastrophes; the violence and racism in our inner-cities and prisons.

It has been 40 years since the four church women were killed. Then they served the poorest of the poor, families and children displaced by death squad and military violence, refugees fleeing the countryside to refugee camps set up



by Archbishop Romero in the churches and seminaries of his archdiocese. We don't have to look far to know how they might respond today. Because they chose to live in the midst of war and cried out for an end to violence; they saw the victims of torture and cried out for an end to torture; they offered food, shelter and medicines to the families displaced by the war and offered refuge, risking their own lives; they took sides with the poor and cried out for justice. In life and in death, they shared the same fate as the poor. They were prophets of a future not their own. They were seeds that fell to earth and died.



*Jean and Dorothy in their Guatemalan shirts*

Today, if they were living, we are certain that they would be found advocating on behalf of refugees and opening our borders to victims of wars we have waged in the Middle East and Afghanistan.

They would be there with the young people of El Salvador and Honduras, Guatemala and Mexico, fleeing the gang violence in their neighbourhoods - a violence that is fast approaching the levels of violence not seen since the years of the war in El Salvador, almost a thousand people a month. They would be at the U.S-Mexico border offering hospitality to those unaccompanied minors and mothers risking their lives only to be detained and deported, or often to die in the Arizona desert. They would be protesting in front of immigration detention centers and calling for a more just and humane immigration policy, welcoming the stranger in our midst. And they would be in the streets questioning the violence of pouring more dollars and more weapons to build up our military and wage more wars, just as we did in El Salvador 40 years ago.

They would be in the streets calling for an end to war - wars based on lies and deception, like the war in Iraq - and to the abominable practice of torture overseas and in prisons closer to home where tens of thousands languish months and sometimes years in solitary confinement.



We remember the martyrs, and the crucified peoples, and never let us forget our responsibility to challenge a world that institutionalises violence and greed. Our hearts go out to the peoples of El Salvador and Honduras, Guatemala and Mexico, as they struggle with basic issues of survival and rebuilding of their lives after so many disasters: hurricanes and earthquakes, but also violence and poverty. We pray for an outpouring of compassion and solidarity, that we may continue to address in systemic ways the underlying human failings - structural poverty, racism, violation of human rights, destruction of the environment - that these and other natural and human disasters unmask with such brutal clarity.



*Maura Clarke*

We think of Archbishop Romero's words about the resilience of the poor, when he spoke about the capacity of the Salvadoran people to overcome suffering

We both remember these years with a mixture of emotions - sadness as well as gratitude-but mostly gratitude.

- and bear witness to hope. Let us continue to encourage a spirit of solidarity with the victims of natural and human disasters - wherever they occur - and help create conditions of dignity and hope for the future. May the witness of the four church women and the love they have sown over 40 years be like a scattering of seeds, bearing fruit along the way as we continue the journey together. We ask as well for your prayers, for our daughter to whom we gave the name "Maura," - to remember in a special way the witness of Maura and the other church women and the Salvadorean people they served - and for all of our families and children. We honour and celebrate the solidarity of these 40 years by ending on a note of hope. Like that seed that falls to earth and dies, may we also become a scattering of seeds. May each of our humble attempts to bring a greater measure of justice and peace into this world, to speak truth to power and raise up the oppressed, be like the seed that falls to earth and dies - in order to bear fruit!



## Justice for the UCA Martyrs

*In the last edition of Romero News Francis McDonagh reported on the Madrid trial of one of the suspects of ordering the UCA massacre in 1989. Here are the reactions to the verdict.*

On 11 September 2020, the hearing for the reading of the judgment for the trial of the massacre of the six Jesuit priests and two women in El Salvador on 16 November 1989 took place. The Court unanimously convicted the defendant, Colonel Inocente Orlando Montano, as bearing criminal responsibility for five crimes of murder as a terrorist act.



Montano (pictured) was sentenced to 26 years, 8 months and 1 day of imprisonment for each of the five

crimes. In total he was sentenced to 133 years, 6 months, and 5 days in prison, of which he will serve a maximum of 30 years of effective punishment as mandated by Spanish criminal law.

The judgment cited the 1949 Geneva Conventions, applicable in situations of international and domestic armed

conflicts, to enshrine the principle of civilian immunity, whereby the civilian population must not be subjected to any attack or violence. In this sense, the Court emphasised that the eight murders were committed with the purpose of causing terror among the civilian population in the context of the Salvadoran internal conflict. According to the judgment, the reason why the members of the High Command decided to commit such a crime was the fact that killing the Rector of the University would destroy any remaining hope or path for dialogue and it result in social confusion and terror regarding the present and future of Salvadorean society. The judgement stated that the High Command of the Salvadorean Armed Forces was the group which jointly took the unanimous decision to execute the Jesuit fathers and their women colleagues through the command unit of the Atlacatl Battalion.

Almudena Bernabéu (pictured overleaf), the lawyer leading the private prosecution on behalf of the Jesuits' families and Director of the Guernica Centre for International Justice, said:

“This important judgment brings justice and hope to those who have not stopped looking, the families of the victims, and the Salvadorean people. Furthermore, it confirms something that those of us who believe in universal justice have been longing for: that it is fundamental that laws provide access to justice for victims of international crimes and human rights violations who, as in the case of El Salvador, have found all doors closed. With this judgment, once again, the Spanish courts are giving hope to thousands of people. We hope that this effort can be replicated in El Salvador and that it will be the beginning of a real transformation in the country so that events like this will never happen again”.



But Montano was the only defendant from the Salvadorean high command on trial in Spain. The rest of the high-ranking officers implicated as intellectual authors of the massacre have always been protected from extradition by the Salvadorean courts. In spite of this, the Jesuits in El Salvador and their lawyers

have made calls following Montano's conviction for a long-stalled criminal prosecution on Salvadorean soil to actually proceed.

They state: ‘The Society of Jesus and the UCA will take the appropriate and necessary legal actions in favour of justice, social peace and reconciliation around the right to the truth. As Pope Francis affirms in his last encyclical, “the peace process is a constant commitment over time. It is a patient task that seeks truth and justice, honours the memory of the victims and opens, step by step, a common hope, stronger than revenge”. And justice in the case of the murders of Elba, Celina and the Jesuits is an important step to banish impunity and establish respect for the human dignity of all Salvadoreans, especially victims of any type of abuse.’

*Click link here to a short video of the case*  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SuCljWowJ9A>



*New Mural of the Martyrs of the UCA*

## Prayers for Romero Week

*Romero Trustee, David Skidmore, reviews the newly published study by former editor of The Tablet, Catherine Pepinster.*

### **Martyrdom: Why Martyrs Still Matter.**

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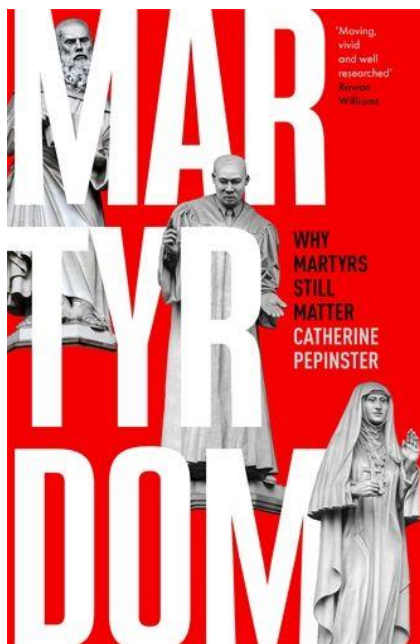
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‘What do we want from martyrs?’, asks Catherine Pepinster in this fascinating book. She concludes that ‘we want their ordinariness, as a reminder that it is possible for us to become extraordinary’. She has read widely and consulted an impressive range of experts. After an introductory overview of martyrdom the book is divided into two main sections. Four chapters of Chronology examine martyrs in four periods: the Early Church, the Reformation, 20<sup>th</sup> century

Totalitarianism, and ‘Today’ when persecution has become global. The seven chapters of Part 2 (Themes) look at martyrdom through various prisms. I found the chapter on ‘Women’ particularly thought-provoking and interesting in the light of the address given by Sister Gemma Simmonds at the service commemorating the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the murder of the US church workers in El Salvador. The example of Margaret Clitherow is used to illustrate the particular pressures women martyrs may face – particularly if they are mothers. The author often raises wider questions – for example, ‘are all martyrs mad’ or are their actions ‘rational’? Was Emily Davison a martyr who gave her life for the Suffragette cause? The chapter on ‘Race’ also works well as it looks at the lives and deaths of figures including Martin Luther King and Steve Biko. These questions help us to see that more recent theological reflection on martyrdom has a special resonance in Central America; for Karl Rahner the ‘classical’ understanding of martyrdom as the free acceptance of death arising from hatred of the faith should be extended to include ‘a death suffered in

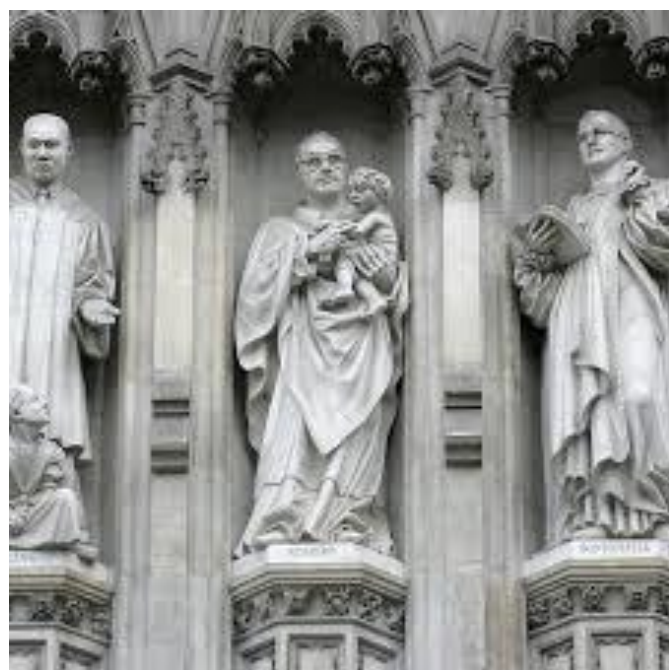


active struggle for the Christian faith and its moral demands'. For Jon Sobrino those who struggle in solidarity with the poor (the 'crucified people') and lose their lives as a result are also martyrs.

This leads to the chapter on St Oscar Romero which will be of most interest to readers of *Romero News*. The summary of the Archbishop's life and death will be familiar enough but it is well done. Pepinster's approach is especially interesting for me as an Anglican associated with the Cathedral and Abbey Church of St Alban. She entitles the chapter 'Romero – the martyr who bridged a divide'. She reminds us that Robert Runcie, who had been Bishop of St Albans, was enthroned as Archbishop of Canterbury the day after the news of Romero's assassination was received. The resonance with the murder of Thomas Becket, an earlier Archbishop of Canterbury, was inescapable. It was the Church of England, too, which included 'Oscar Romero, martyr' in its Calendar, and installed statues of Romero long before he was canonised by the Catholic Church; Romero is one of the seven martyrs on the Nave Screen in St Albans Cathedral and one of the ten Modern

Martyrs standing above the Great West Door of Westminster Abbey. (One of the many excellent photographs in the book shows Pope Benedict being shown the Romero statue by Dean John Hall).

*West Door of Westminster Abbey*



*Romero between Martin Luther King and Martin Bonhoeffer*

The experience of the Romero Trust bears out the author's suggestion that Romero is 'an ecumenical saint for our time'. In addition to Catholics and Anglicans members of other churches attend the annual ecumenical service at St Martin-in-the-Fields. Chapters on martyrdom and patriotism explore the experience of England and Poland through an examination of King (Saint?) Charles I, Maximilian Kolbe and Fr Jerzy Popieluszko. These chapters usefully



pick up some of the earlier theoretical discussion of the nature of martyrdom. Does the life lived before the moment of death determine whether the martyr's crown can be awarded – for example, can someone who expresses anti-Semitic views be 'redeemed' by the manner of their death?

Can a true martyr actively seek death or must it simply be accepted as a consequence of fidelity to Christ? At the start of the book Pepinster poses the question: why precisely do we venerate Edmund Campion as a saint and martyr but condemn Khalid Masood who told his children that he was 'going to die fighting for God' before driving into pedestrians on Westminster Bridge and killing a police officer? And what of Dietrich Bonhoeffer whose statue accompanies Romero's in St Albans and Westminster? The author acknowledges his exemplary Christian witness in the face of the unspeakable crimes of the Nazis but asks whether he was executed not because he was a Christian but 'because he was embroiled in a plot to assassinate Hitler'. I am unconvinced that 'the Christian message of love and peace' is

jeopardised if Bonhoeffer is acknowledged as a martyr.

I enjoyed the chapter on culture and martyrdom and liked the exploration of the ways in which artists – including Gentileschi – have depicted martyrs, and dramatists have probed the ethical dilemmas posed by martyrdom (for example in Eliot's last temptation 'to do the right thing for the wrong reason' and Shaw's *Saint Joan*). But for me the chapter on the revival of the shrine and the power of pilgrimage is the most rewarding. Jeffrey John (who is leaving St Albans after seventeen years as Dean) was one of the people interviewed for the book. For him 'the communion of saints is an experience, not just a theory'. Pilgrimage is important because it connects us to the martyr – whether Becket in Canterbury, Alban or Edmund in the cities that bear their names, or Romero in San Salvador.

The concluding chapter suggests that martyrdom is a fluid, evolving idea. For me, Pepinster has succeeded admirably in her task of explaining 'why martyrs still matter'. Places of pilgrimage and the martyrs they venerate 'provide a thin veil between this earth and the next'.

## St. Oscar Romero Parish Liverpool

*Liverpool-born Romero Trustee Stephen Davies reports:*

Advent saw the second parish in the North West of England dedicated to St Oscar Romero. Two years ago, the Catholic community in the southwest of Blackburn in Salford Diocese took the Salvadorean martyr as its patron.

Now, with the amalgamation of the parishes of Our Lady Star of the Sea and St Thomas of Canterbury, Seaforth and Waterloo along with St Edmund of Canterbury, Waterloo, a new patron for the parishes in north Liverpool was needed.

Despite being eight centuries and ministering thousands of miles apart, St Thomas of Canterbury and St Oscar Romero are profoundly linked. Both bishops were martyred by their political leaders for speaking truth to power. St Thomas a Becket's successor, Robert Runcie (who grew up just down the road from the newly named parish), was installed as Archbishop within hours of the martyrdom of St Oscar Romero.

Parish priest, Fr Dominic Curran, says,

'Romero was a true successor to the Apostles, following in the footsteps of so many faithful, brave preachers of truth, such as Saints Edmund and Thomas of Canterbury.'



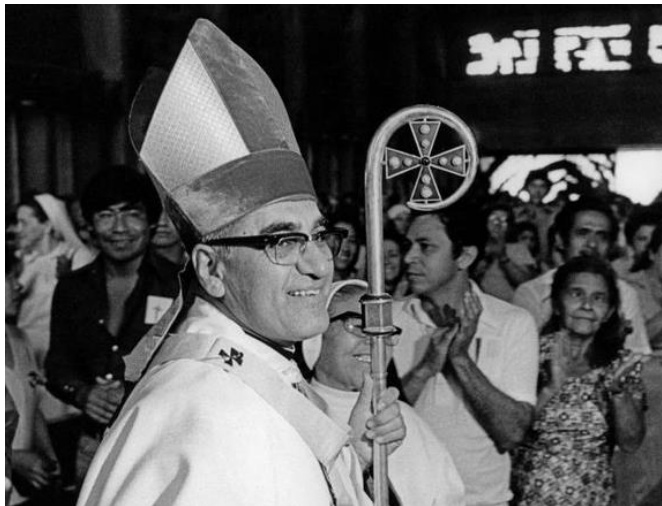
*Father Dominic with a Romero Cross*

As such the Patronage of Saint Oscar Romero will enrich and challenge our community to serve God's Mission in our communities of Seaforth and Waterloo'.

The North West of England has a long history of martyrs, such as Saints Edmund Arrowsmith and Ambrose Barlow, witnessing to their faith and ultimately costing their lives.

The Archdiocese of Liverpool's links to St Oscar Romero stretch back to when he was still alive, and the cathedral now houses a bust and relics of the saint.

Parishioner Annette Bolger says ‘the new name of the Parish of Saint Oscar Romero is brilliant because he was such a caring man and I hope it inspires the parishioners to follow his example.’



## News in Brief

### EL MOZOTE

Between 11 and 13 December 1981, the Salvadorean Army killed 978 people, including 533 children, in the town of El Mozote and surrounding areas. It was the worst single massacre in Latin America of the twentieth century. Almost 40 years after the massacre, the memory of it continues to shake Salvadoreans. The Atlacatl Battalion, the same US-trained military force which murdered the

UCA Jesuits, was sent to the Mozote area to fight leftist rebels. The army took unarmed civilians out of their homes in the middle of the night and executed them en masse. Many women and girls were raped and tortured before being murdered.

On 21 September 2020, a judge appeared before the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the Armed Forces in San Salvador with a court order to inspect the military archives on the 1981 El Mozote massacre. A group of soldiers obstructed the judge's entry, openly disobeying the court order. The judge tried to carry out the inspection in six other military barracks during the following weeks, but on each occasion the soldiers denied him access.

This was a major setback for Salvadorean human rights groups who are demanding justice in the face of one of the most brutal episodes of the country's 12-year civil war. The contempt of the military also means that President Nayib Bukele has failed to honour his commitment to ensure full access to military archives. Almost 40 years after the massacre in El Mozote, the victims are still waiting for justice.

## WINDS OF CHANGE

The election of Joe Biden as President of the United States raises hopes of change for the better in relation to El Salvador.



He is expected to embark on a policy agenda for Central America that many Catholic organisations in the U.S. have long supported. It involves a \$4 billion plan to eradicate conditions that drive immigration, including spurring economic development as well as combating violence and government corruption. The plan stands in deep contrast to the Trump administration's strategy in the region: the building of the border wall and the mass expulsion of migrants from the region.

Under Trump, policy toward Central America focused on threats against the region's political leaders to halt would-be migrants to the US or lose economic aid. Trump pressed Mexico to enact harsher

policies for migrants passing through the country on their way north, including large-scale deportations for those from Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador.

Biden, in contrast, speaks of a plan that focuses less on enforcement and more on improving the economic lot of those who live in the region. "Currently, the region faces enormous challenges from violence, transnational criminal organisations, poverty, and corrupt and ineffective public institutions," the Biden team said in its published plan to strengthen ties with Central America. "This is forcing too many families, unaccompanied children and adults, to make an untenable choice: leave behind everything they know and undertake a dangerous journey to seek a better life or stay and live under the constant threat of violence, persecution, hopelessness, or even death."

If high unemployment, low education rates and institutional corruption didn't already provide an uphill battle, Covid-19 has further lashed the region's economies, along with a series of tropical storms that destroyed crops and infrastructure. In December a letter to

Biden from Cardinal Ramazzini of Guatemala, and Bishop Mark J. Seitz of El Paso, Texas, asked the new administration to change course. Though it's a momentous task, it's one that Biden tackled with some degree of success as vice president in the Obama administration, so hopes are reviving.

## IN DEFENCE OF DEMOCRACY

On 16<sup>th</sup> January El Salvador celebrated the twenty-ninth anniversary of the signing of the Peace Accords in 1992 which brought to an end the cruel civil war which had wracked the country for more than a decade at the cost of more than 40,000 lives. Since then, the country has moved slowly towards a progressive strengthening of democratic systems and, despite stark and profound disagreements, all governing parties, of whatever political colour, a recognition of the separation of powers and the legitimacy of political adversaries.

This year's anniversary brought a display of unusual unity and an unprecedented declaration from across the political and social spectrum which denounced the dismantling of the checks and balances

of democracy, the blatant corruption and authoritarianism of the current President, Nayib Bukele, (whose behaviour echoes that of his ally, former President Donald Trump). The declaration entitled "In Defence of Democracy" was signed by 184 leading national figures, such as Cardinal Gregorio Rosa Chavez and Bishop Oswaldo Escobar, among many other leaders of faith communities, academics, political, social and cultural celebrities and representatives of the business and legal sectors.

The signatories called on the President to stop attacking democratic institutions, to promote national unity, to respect the freedom of the press and free expression. They demanded that the armed force and national police respect the Constitution and human rights, that public servants obey the law and that members of the National Assembly defend the Constitution and legislate in the interests of the population and in support of the rule of law.

Municipal and parliamentary elections are to take place across the country on 28<sup>th</sup> February. With this declaration it appears that the battle lines are being firmly drawn.

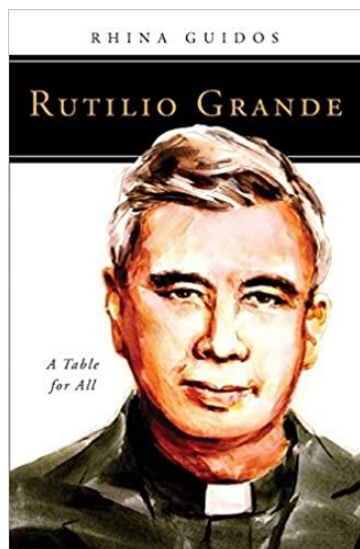


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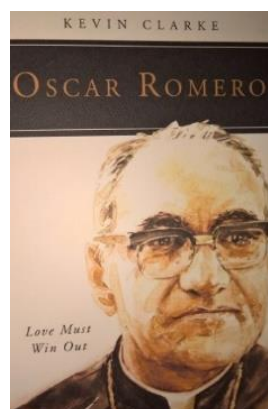
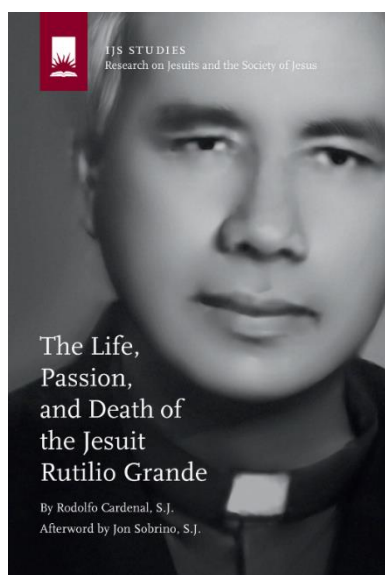
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Jon Sobrino SJ.

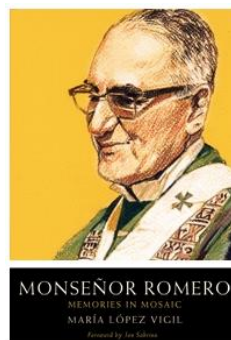
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**Oscar Romero – Love Must Win Out** by Kevin Clarke. An excellent and very readable short introduction to the life and times of

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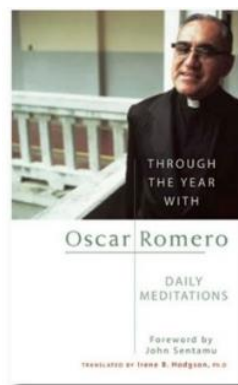
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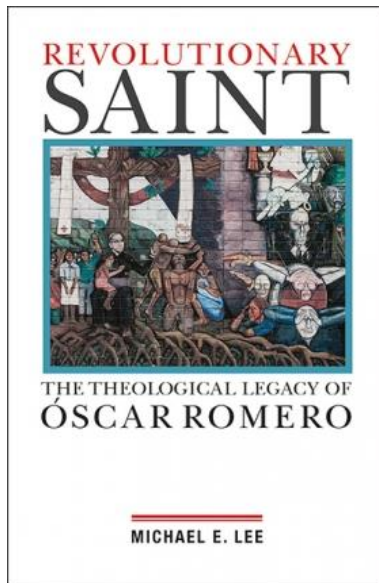
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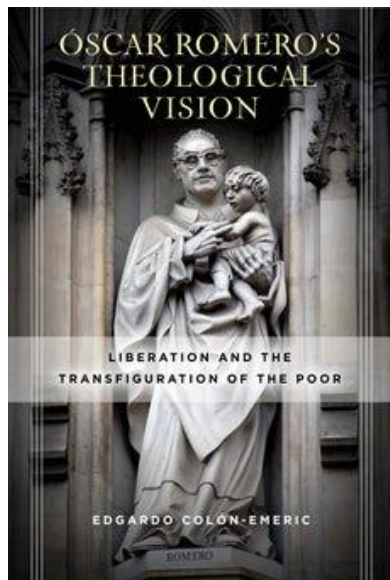


**Revolutionary Saint – The theological Legacy of Oscar Romero**  
Michael E. Lee.  
Orbis Books.  
Highly recommended!

Available in bookshops at £20: from the Romero Trust at the special price: **£13 (incl. p&p)**

### **Oscar Romero's Theological Vision**

by Edgardo Colón-Emeric:



Throughout this remarkable book the author takes us ever deeper into the theological development of the martyr bishop Saint

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A range of inspiring documentaries and feature films are available, free to view, on the Romero Trust website.

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**Roses in December:** *A moving account of the life and the death of Jean Donovan, as remembered by her friends and family.*

**Righting the Wrong:**

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**Find all the videos on:**

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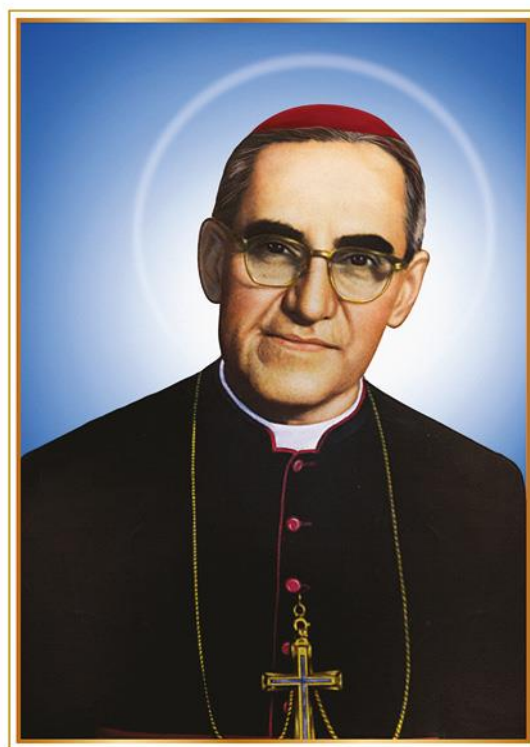
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# *Ita, Dorothy, Maura, Jean*

