

Romeronews

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ARCHBISHOP ROMERO TRUST

ROMERO WEEK 2023

Responding to the Cry of the Poor Today

The inspiration of St Oscar Romero
and the Martyrs of El Salvador



Saturday, 25 March at 11am

An ecumenical service to mark the 43rd anniversary of
the martyrdom of Archbishop Romero

at St Martin-in-the-Fields, Trafalgar Square, London WC2N 4JJ

Speaker

Maria Exall — President of the TUC

18—24 March

Speaker tour of **Birmingham, Canterbury, Cardiff,
Glasgow, Leeds, and Liverpool**

Speaker

Peggy Healy

— close friend and colleague of the Sisters martyred in
El Salvador in 1980, former Maryknoll Sister



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Registered charity number 1110069



The Archbishop
Romero Trust

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Romero Week Events 2023

43rd Anniversary of
St Romero’s Martyrdom

Guest Speaker Peggy Healy
Responding to
The Cry of the Poor Today

18th March – Cardiff

20th March – Birmingham

21st March – Leeds

22nd March – Glasgow

23rd March – Liverpool

24th March – Canterbury

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11am Saturday 25th March
National Ecumenical Service
at

St Martin in the Fields, London
Address delivered by

Maria Exall
President of the TUC

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A date for your diaries:
8th July – CAFOD Romero Trust
Pilgrimage to the Holy Island of
Lindisfarne

Further details on website
www.romerotrust.org.uk

Romero Week 2023

We are delighted to welcome Peggy Healy as our guest speaker at the Romero Week events this March, celebrating the 43rd anniversary of the martyrdom of St Oscar Romero.



There could be few people better placed or qualified to speak about St Oscar and the martyrs

of El Salvador and how they can inspire us to respond to the cry of the poor in the world of today. Peggy has deep and broad experience of community service, of advocacy and policy work on human rights in Latin America and globally.

For more than two decades, she worked as a Maryknoll missionary sister in the United States and in Central America, where she was a close colleague and friend of the members of her congregation who were martyred in El Salvador. After working as a specialist

paediatric nurse practitioner among poor, marginalised urban and rural communities in Nicaragua, throughout the repression and civil conflicts which raged across Central America. Peggy returned to health work in the South Bronx.

A graduate of Fordham University's School of Law, amongst her many achievements Peggy has received awards for her work as a peacemaker in Central America, for her service to survivors and families of those killed in the September 11 attack on the World Trade Centre and was honoured by President Clinton for her work in human rights. She holds an honorary doctorate in human rights.

From 2009 to 2021 she served as senior Vice-President for Canada and Latin America of Covenant House International, an agency dedicated to empowering young people, to survive and overcome homelessness, trafficking and abuse. Much of her work was focused on Mexico and throughout the region of Central America, enabling young people at risk to overcome adversity and to flourish.

National Ecumenical Service

We are pleased also to announce that the National Ecumenical Service to celebrate Romero Week will once again be held in the wonderful St Martin in the Fields Church in Trafalgar Square at 11am on Saturday 25th March.



This year the address will be delivered by Dr. Maria Exall who is currently President of the Trades Union

Congress. Maria is active in political and equality work including campaigning for trade union rights and greater workplace diversity. She also has a doctorate in Philosophical Theology from King's College and is an Honorary Fellow at the Centre for Catholic Social Thought and Practice in the Department of Theology and Religion at Durham University. Maria's wide experience makes her eminently qualified to speak on how we might respond to the cry of the poor today.



Mothering Sunday - Lent and Motherhood



In March 2022, to celebrate the Feast Day of St Oscar Romero, the Trust was privileged to host eminent Methodist theologian, Edgardo Colon-Emeric, as our guest speaker. We present here an abridged version of the address he delivered in London's Wesley Chapel on Mothering Sunday.

I came to the United Kingdom at the invitation of the Romero Trust to celebrate the witness of Oscar Romero. During the past ten days, I have felt like a little like one of John Wesley's Methodist itinerant preachers. I have been riding trains to preach and teach throughout England and Wales about the significance of the martyred archbishop's teaching for the church universal.

I must be honest. I had not heard of Mothering Sunday until I was asked to preach for this occasion. In the United States, Mother's Day is observed on the second Sunday of May. That celebration traces its roots to the twentieth century.

But Mothering Sunday has deeper roots. It is a medieval observance connected with Laetare Sunday. It marks a pause on the Lenten journey to Holy Week, a cancellation of fasts for the sake of feasts, an invitation to return to our mother churches. Today, this Methodist minister feels like he has come home. I have come to the rock from which I have been hewn, to the cradle of my faith, to my mother.

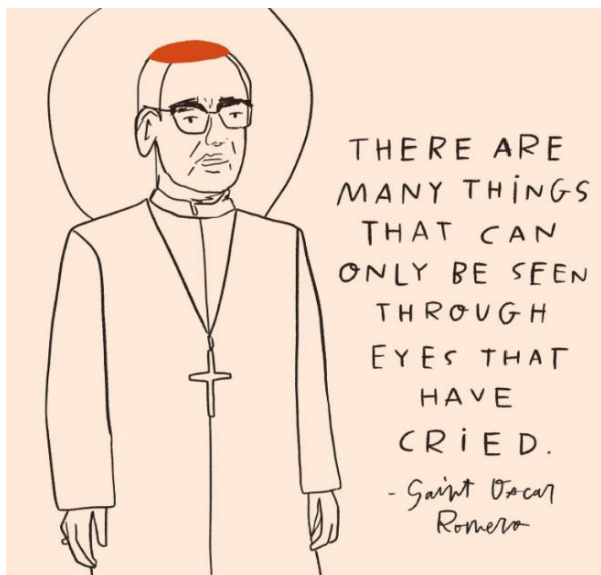
Mothering Sunday is a Lenten practice. It includes mourning and rejoicing, disillusionment, and delight. Indeed, the scriptures invite us to reflect on Mothering as a Lenten school of deep lament, fierce hope, and Marian hospitality. Mothering is a Lenten school of deep lament. Consider again the story from Exodus. The unnamed mother of Moses, knowing of Pharaoh's decree against the Hebrew children, hid him for the first three months of his life. No circumcision, no showing off the baby to neighbours, instead a desperate plan to send him down the river alone to face death or deliverance. How many mothers are making similar choices in Central America? How many unaccompanied minors handed over to elder siblings or

smugglers to escape the clutches of gangs? In Central America, in countries like El Salvador, mothering and mourning often go together. Oscar Romero was well acquainted with this sad pairing.

Romero became Archbishop of San Salvador during a turbulent time. Vast income inequality, failed attempts at land reform, and rumors of a Cuban style revolution sowed national unrest. Some expected the Church to serve as a bastion of national stability while others dreamed of a Christian guerilla movement. Many saw Romero as a safe choice for archbishop. Some greeted the news of his selection with dismay, others with relief. All misread the man and the moment. Only days after his installation, on March 12, 1977, his friend, Father Rutilio Grande along with Manuel Solórzano and Nelson Lemus were murdered while driving to El Paisnal. The violent event turned Romero into the pastor and prophet of a persecuted church until he was murdered at the altar on March 24, 1980. During his years of service, he protested the insults, beatings, kidnappings, and deaths perpetrated on his people. On many occasions, Romero's voice was heard

preaching suffering love, while wailing and lamentation were heard at the cathedral of San Salvador, as the church wept for her children because they were no more.

Mothering begets lament. Listen to the words of John, “standing near the cross...his mother.” Mary had experience of trauma. She was born to a people under imperial occupation; she knew poverty; she experienced the plight of the refugee; she underwent a parent’s worst fear, not just outliving her child, but seeing him killed before her.



Mary was a woman of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Of course, all this happened in accordance with the scriptures. Moreover, Mary had a choice. She could have slammed the door on Gabriel. She could have scolded old Simeon for his hard words “a sword will

pierce your own soul too.” She could have but she did not. Instead, she said, let it be with me in accordance with your word, and she pondered all these things in her heart because mothering is a Lenten school of deep lament.

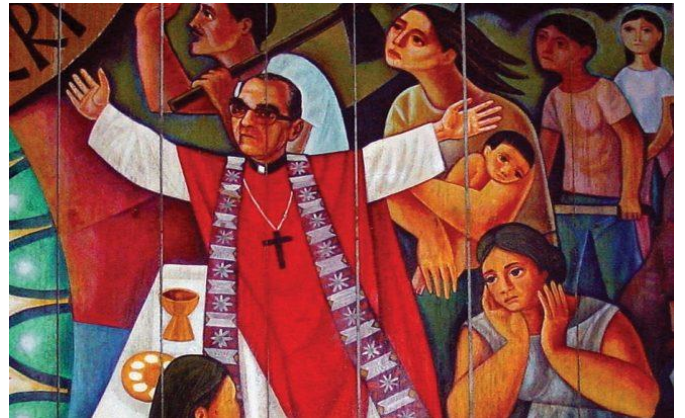
Mothering is a Lenten school of fierce hope. Hope is not optimism. The optimistic viewpoint comes from a calculus about the odds. The odds for Moses floating on the Nile were long. The odds for Jesus hanging from the cross were worse. There is no room for optimism at Calvary, only hope. Hope is hard. It is Abraham “hoping against hope” (Rom 4:18) that God could raise a people from his small, vulnerable family. At the same time, hope is light. It is Sarah’s Easter laughter at the birth of her son against all odds. Writing from a South African context, Alan Boesak speaks of hope as a mothering practice. “Hope has two beautiful daughters. Their names are anger and courage. Anger at the way things are, and courage to see that they do not remain the same.” The daughters of this mothering hope are born not of the flesh, or of the will of men, but of God; they grow in wisdom and stature as they nurtured in desperate

situations and social dead ends. A mothering hope recognises these daughters. Mothering hope is fierce. It fights with courage to affirm and defend life beginning with the most vulnerable.

The Old Testament lesson tells a story that seems lifted from news headlines: national greatness built from forced labour; refugees, a threat to national security; government officials carry out inhumane orders; women organise to defy unjust policies. In the first chapter of Exodus, we read of how the Hebrew midwives risked everything to defend the lives of other women's children. It is interesting that the Bible does not remember pharaoh's name, but the names of the women who stood up to him are memorialised: Shiphrah and Puah. They disarmed Pharaoh by using the prejudices of the nationalist narrative against him: the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women. The Bible justifies the midwives' actions with three words: they feared God. Mothering is a Lenten school of fierce hope for life.

Just over a month before his assassination, Óscar Romero gave a lecture titled "The political dimension of the faith from the perspective of the

poor." As Romero concluded his reflections, he said: "The early Christians used to say *gloria Dei, vivens homo* (the glory of God is a human being fully alive). We can make this concrete by saying *gloria Dei, vivens pauper* (the glory of God is a poor person fully alive)."



"We can make this concrete." As Christians, this is our responsibility. We draw on the ancient and modern wisdom of the church and make it concrete. In El Salvador, where the survival of the landless *campesinos* was under threat from a right-wing oligarchy, the glory of God is a poor person fully alive. In the United States, the glory of God is a black person fully alive. In Guatemala, an indigenous person fully alive. You are called to make this concrete in your community. Whose fullness of life is being compromised that needs to be defended? In the United Kingdom, you will have to tell me. The point is that

mothering is a Lenten school of deep lament and fierce hope, and that hope comes with beautiful daughters: anger and courage for the sake of fullness of life.

Mothering is a Lenten school of Marian hospitality. In the gospel lesson, we hear that John took Jesus's mother into his own home. Things may well be different in England, but there is little room for Mary in Methodist homes in Latin America. In Cuba, Methodist evangelists visit homes of new converts with trash bags in hand to clear out all shrines to Mary and the saints. In fact, I remember one dear sister, Leisy, telling me that when she sees a statue of Mary, she feels an urge to behead it. Most of us might not be quite so extreme but may still find it hard to take Jesus' mother into our homes. Mary looks, sounds, and smells just a little too Catholic for Methodist sensibilities.

On this Mothering Sunday, Romero would encourage Methodists to reconsider our hospitality and to make room for Mary in our lives. He is clear. "Mary has not saved us. Christ has." But Romero believes that "God wanted there to be next to Christ, the precious pearl, a

gold frame." Mary is the gold frame which God uses to adorn and present Christ. We do not need to set up shrines with statues or carry rosaries in our pockets to take Mary into our homes. We do not need to observe multiple Marian feasts or May coronations. These may help but they are not necessary.

What is necessary for making room for Mary is to learn her song, the *Magnificat*, and make it concrete. It means taking into our lips her "cry of holy rebelliousness," as Romero called it, and offering this cry as a protest and plea to the God who has the power to pull the mighty down from their thrones. Were Mary to sing her song in El Salvador or Russia, she would be labeled subversive and silenced. Mary should come with a warning label. Take her into your home at your own risk.

Mary's words to the angel at the annunciation were not a passive act of surrender. Her "yes" to God spoke for the longings of an entire people. "Come! El Salvador needs you. History needs you." Ukraine needs you. The UK needs you. Wesley Memorial needs you. Mary, we need you to teach us to sing your *Magnificat*. Teach us to be Mothers in

Israel. Marian hospitality allows us to welcome our mothers in new ways. The early Methodists recognised those women whose creative and courageous ministry supported the movement as “mothers in Israel.” Deborah the Judge whom God raised to rule Israel during a time of chaos and confusion was the first one called a mother in Israel; she has had many daughters among the Methodists. You know their names. They are written on gravestones across the road; they are engraved in our hearts.

I want to introduce you to a Guatemalan mother in Israel, Hermana Mercedes. I first met Mercedes when she registered for the Methodist pastoral formation program that I have been supporting in Central America for about a dozen years. Mercedes arrived in El Salvador with two things, a Bible with pictures of her children taped inside the cover and a dream of theological education. She knew her church would never ordain her. In the eyes of the church referees, she had accumulated multiple yellow and red cards against her. She was a woman; she divorced her abusive husband; she welcomed her pregnant unwed daughter back home.

Mercedes knew grief, but she also had fierce hope for herself and for her Guatemalan Methodist family.

As Mercedes studied, her theological voice became stronger. When the clarity of her preaching intimidated her pastor who was not theologically trained, she convinced him to go to school with her in El Salvador. When national leaders worried that Mercedes was introducing too many young women to theological education and that older pastors who could not easily travel to El Salvador were falling behind, she persuaded me to start a branch of our programme in the highlands of Guatemala. Three years later, when the Guatemalan programme graduated its entry class, Mercedes personally sewed the caps and gowns for the entire class of all fifty students. Mercedes is a mother in Israel, a Magnificat singer, a graduate of the Lenten School of Marian hospitality.

Mothering is a Lenten school of deep lament, fierce hope, and Marian hospitality. If you have graduated from this school, recruit. If you are enrolled in this school, study. If you have not enrolled, apply. Your church needs your

tears. Your nation needs your anger and courage. Our world needs more mothers in Israel.

The Life, Loss and Legacy of Romero

This is an edited version of a lecture given by Martin Maier SJ in Edinburgh in October last year to celebrate the fourth anniversary of the canonisation of Oscar Romero in 2018.

Archbishop Romero has changed my life. He brought me to El Salvador and today he brought me to Edinburgh. What most deeply impressed me in his life was the change that took place in him.



Martin Maier at the Romero Centre of the UCA

Archbishop Romero told this story at the funeral mass of Fr. Alfonso Navarro on May 12, 1977. Alfonso Navarro was the second priest assassinated in El Salvador. Romero started his homily with

a story about a caravan that was travelling through the desert and being guided by a Bedouin: “They had become desperate and thirsty and were searching for water in the mirages of the desert. Their guide said: Not there, over there. He had spoken these words so many times that the members of the caravan became frustrated, took out a gun and shot the guide. As the guide was dying, he extended his hand and said one last time: Not there, over there. He died pointing the way. This legend becomes a reality in our midst: a priest, Fr. Navarro, shot through the mouth, died forgiving and praying for his assassins.”

We remember Oscar Romero: a bishop, shot through the heart during the celebration of the eucharist, giving up his life for his people and praying for his assassins.

Oscar Romero points the way for us in the present situation of suffering and dismay, even here in Europe. He is a Jesuanic martyr, as Jon Sobrino put it. He points the way to change, to a poor church for the poor and to hope.

Let me start with a brief sketch of Oscar Romero’s life and a deeper analysis of his change. Born on August 15th 1917,

Oscar Arnulfo Romero y Galdámez was sent to study for the priesthood in Rome and was ordained in April 1942. He embraced a simple lifestyle; he was a popular preacher who responded with real compassion to the plight of the poor. Then followed seven years of pastoral famine in the capital city, San Salvador, as an ecclesiastical bureaucrat. Ordained Auxiliary Bishop in 1970, he gained a reputation as a stubborn and reactionary prelate. Seemingly unsympathetic to the new social justice thrust of the Latin American Church, he was suspicious of the clergy and the Base Christian Communities of the archdiocese working alongside the exploited rural poor, promoting social organisations and land reform.

A brief spell back in the countryside as Bishop of Santiago de Maria opened Romero's eyes as he reconnected to the semi-feudal misery and hardship of the campesinos and witnessed the murderous repression being suffered at the hands of the security forces. In February 1977 he was the surprising choice to be the new Archbishop of San Salvador.

A crucial moment in his process of change – some speak even of a conversion - was the assassination of the Jesuit Fr. Rutilio Grande together with his two companions Manuel Solórzano and Nelson Rutilio Lemus on 12th of March 1977. Rutilio Grande was assassinated by the rich landowners for his commitment to the poor and for social justice.



Monument to Romero and Rutilio in El Paisnal

It was tragic but also very significant that Rutilio did not die alone. His blood really mingled with the blood of the poor. When Romero stood that evening in front of the still bleeding corpses something very profound and overwhelming was happening in him. Oscar Romero was a friend of Rutilio but he had been critical about his pastoral commitment. He felt now that Rutilio was pointing him to a new way which was the way of Jesus. Archbishop Arturo Rivera y Damas, his

later successor put it in these words: "One martyr gave birth to another. Before the body of Father Rutilio Grande, Romero, on his 20th day as Archbishop, felt the call of Christ to overcome his natural human shyness and become an intrepid apostle. From that moment, Romero left the pagan lands of Tyre and Sidon, and marched boldly towards Jerusalem." And Pope Francis, in a meeting with Father Rodolfo Cardenal in October 2015 said, "Rutilio's great miracle is Mons. Romero."

Where before he had sought advisers from highly reactionary circles, now he worked most closely with precisely those whom he had, a few years before, regarded as suspect and had reported them to Rome. The rich, who before had been his friends, now, by and large, rejected him. We can read in his diary on 21 August 1979 after celebrating Mass: "At this Mass, I had a difficult encounter with a lady who said I wasn't the same as I used to be, that I had betrayed her. I absolutely refused to respond. I fully realise that this slander comes from all those who do not like it when the Church begins to impact on their rotten concerns."

The point I want to make is: change is possible. It is possible on a personal level, but it is also possible in the church, in society and in the world. With the universal synodal process Pope Francis wants a deep change in the church. This change is intimately linked with the option for the poor. Saint Oscar Romero points the way to a poor church for the poor.

Romero wanted a church similar to Christ, a church serving humankind and especially the poor and needy. So does Pope Francis. I am convinced that we can find much inspiration to build up a poor church for the poor from Archbishop Romero. According to him the church has to continue the life and the work of Jesus. For this she continually has to convert herself to the reign of God and the poor. This corresponds to Pope Francis' frequent call against ecclesial introversion and self-centredness - "making the Church constantly go out from herself, keeping her mission focused on Jesus Christ, and her commitment to the poor." (EG 97)

For Romero the church's outreach is first to the poor: "I have tried to state that the proper theological and historical criterion

of the church's praxis must be the world of the poor.” In a very similar way Pope Francis states: “It is no longer possible to claim that religion should be restricted to the private sphere and that it exists only to prepare souls for heaven. We know that God wants his children to be happy in this world too, even though they are called to fulfilment in eternity.” (EG 182)

A church faithful to the Gospel and to the way of Jesus enters into conflicts.

This was Romero’s experience: “The Church is respected, praised, even granted privileges, so long as she preaches eternal salvation and does not involve herself in the real problems of our world. But if the Church is faithful to her mission of denouncing the sin that brings misery to many, and if she proclaims her hope for a more just, humane world, then she is persecuted and calumniated, she is branded as subversive and communist.” It is very interesting that from ultraconservative people Pope Francis, with his clear criticism of our dominating neoliberal economic system which kills, is also accused of being a Marxist.

Once Romero described his duty as a bishop as “going around picking up dead bodies”. This fits with Pope Francis’ vision: “The thing the Church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity. I see the Church as a field hospital after the battle. ... to heal wounds. ... I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security.”

For Romero the option for the poor has to be the guiding principle for the necessary changes in the Church: “Incarnation and conversion is to get closer to the world of the poor. The most important changes in the Church in pastoral care and teaching, in religious and priestly life and in the lay movements will not come through introspection, but by turning to the world of the poor.” Pope Francis almost literally confirms this: “It is important for the whole Church that welcoming the poor and promoting justice should not be entrusted solely to ‘experts’ but be a focus of all pastoral care, of the formation of future priests

and religious, and of the ordinary work of all parishes, movements and ecclesial groups.”

An essential dimension of Oscar Romero’s conversion was his constant search for the will of God in the changing circumstances of history. Added to this is his belief and conviction that God shows himself in events today, he is at work in them. He believed this divine will could be read in the signs of the times. This is why in his second pastoral letter he says, “The changes in the world today are a sign of the times for the Church to grow in her own understanding. She knows that it is God who is interceding in current events in the world and that she must be conscious of these events in order to respond to the Word of God and act for and in the world.” This again fits with the synodal process Pope Francis wishes for the universal church, Romero often said: “The Word of God has to become incarnate in reality.” For example, he applied the texts of the Old Testament prophets denouncing injustice and exploitation in Israel in the name of God, to the situation of injustice in El Salvador Through the prophets,

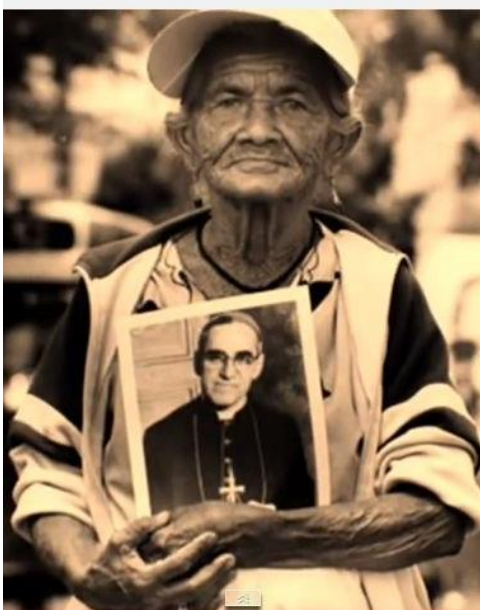
God demands the situation be transformed.

The reference point for any church reform must be the Gospel. Reform essentially means bringing the Church closer to the Gospel. Church reform means that the Church becomes more similar to Jesus Christ: A Church serving humankind and especially the poor, the needy, the marginalised. Church reform must always be a conversion to the Kingdom of God – to use the title of a book by Ignacio Ellacuría. A deep intuition of Pope Francis since the very beginning of his pontificate is that a reform of the Church necessarily goes through the poor.

It seems that a model and a major reference for Pope Francis in his project of a Church reform is Saint Oscar Romero. Already a few weeks after his election he had a meeting with Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia who was in charge of the canonisation cause of Romero. The Pope told him that this cause should be “unblocked” and move swiftly. Pope Francis sees Oscar Romero as a model of a bishop who smells like his sheep and who was fully committed to a poor church for the poor.

They are brothers in spirit and allies in the option for the poor.

Despite his respect for the poor, Romero had a distinct understanding of poverty formed by reality. For him, “sinful poverty” is the product of injustice which denies human beings the right to a life with dignity. This poverty is an indictment of society and situations of vulnerability. In his great homily of 17 February 1980 on the poverty of the beatitudes, he calls it evil-poverty. It has to be fought; it has to be eradicated. Romero did not romanticise poverty. He knew very well the frightening reality of poverty. He knew about the exploitation of women by men, the Latin American “machismo”; he knew the destructive effect of alcoholism and violence. The poor are also sinners and need conversion.



The poverty that Jesus refers to in the beatitudes is distinct from “sinful poverty”. Whilst it may have something to do with material poverty, Jesus refers more to an internal disposition, a tendency of the heart: blessed are the poor because they put all their trust in God. Romero unpacks this understanding of poverty in a meeting with some priests: “For my part, I said that it seemed to me that it all had to do with conversion; he who is converted to God and puts all his trust in God is poor, and the rich person who has not been converted to the Lord puts his trust in idols of wealth, power and earthly things. All our efforts should be directed towards our own conversion and converting everyone to this authentic poverty. Christ gives us a clue in saying that you cannot serve two masters, God and money.”

Romero also became aware that charity was not sufficient but that you also have to tackle the structures of society and the system. This is what Archbishop Helder Câmara from Brazil expressed: “When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why the poor have no food, they call me a communist.” Pope Francis

takes exactly this line: "Charity that leaves the poor person as he or she is, is not sufficient. True mercy, the mercy God gives to us and teaches us, demands justice; it demands that the poor find the way to be poor no longer."

What made Romero especially happy and joyful was his experience of God in the poor. How can this be explained? Simply by the words of Jesus that he is present in the poor, the hungry, the suffering and the marginalised. And that the one who sees him sees the Father. So Romero could say: "I came to know God because I came to know my people." And "The people are my prophet." "I have to listen to the Spirit who speaks to me through his people." And again "With this people it is not difficult to be a good shepherd."

The clearest indicator of the humanity of a society is how it deals with its weakest members. Therein lies the task for the Church in today's world, the claim by which she must also allow herself to be judged. Everywhere, the Church has to take the part of the weakest. In Europe that means quite specifically the refugees, the jobless, the homeless, the victims of sexual violence and

exploitation, the unborn children and those who are born and neglected, the abandoned elderly. To venerate Romero means to walk his way: to call injustice by its true name and to promote justice. "Raising Romero to the altar" has to go with raising the poor and the marginalised of this world to "a life worthy of a human being". Then, in his words, **"The glory of God is the poor person, fully alive".**

The Great 'O's Oscar Romero and Oliver Plunkett



"Two Martyr Archbishops with much in common" says Michael Woodward: poet, writer, retreat leader & admirer of Oscar Romero, in this appraisal of their life and mission.

Martyred Archbishops are vanishingly rare; for centuries there was only one, from Canterbury. Romero's connection with St Thomas Becket stems mainly

from both being murdered in Church, and the poignancy of Romero dying on the eve of Archbishop Runcie's 1980 consecration in Canterbury cathedral. My recent deeper discovery of St Oliver Plunkett (someone I only had a very vague sense of previously) has thrown up some stirring resonances between these two great 'O's, Oscar and Oliver. Even though 300 years and the Atlantic Ocean separates most of their lives, they share striking similarities in the depth of their devotion to their ministry, and details of their journeys.

Since Peter and Paul were martyred in Nero's persecution, the memory of senior leaders giving their lives in service of their people has had a special power and resonance for their own communities, and for the wider world. It bears out Tertullian's prescient insight from an early African Christian community, that "the blood of the martyrs seeds the church." Wikipedia lists 16 martyred bishops, but oddly fails to include the 11th century St Stanislaus, a huge hero of Poland at home and abroad.

The Archbishops are a much smaller group. Just three to add to our two Great 'O's: a Frenchman, another Irishman,

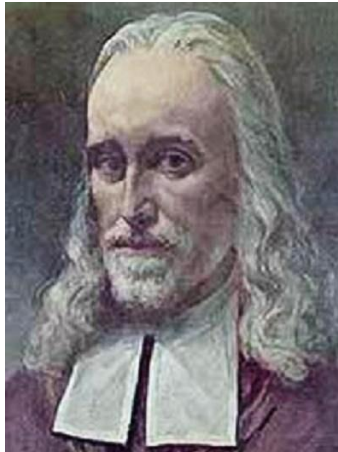
Dermot Hurley; and the one with the longest record of remembrance, St Thomas of Canterbury. It may seem that an obscure Salvadoran and an Irishman from a prominent family could have little in common. Outwardly perhaps so; but their paths in life crossed at an early age, in Rome, where both went for their priestly education. St Peter's Basilica was only consecrated the year after Oliver was born, in 1626.

Three centuries later Oscar went to Rome, frequenting the same buildings, walks and views. The two young men were similarly enthusiastic about their surroundings, both echoing Psalm 102: "For your servants hold her stones dear and have pity on her dust." They both held this same centre as uniquely important in their lives.

At the same time both faced serious hardships far from home and family. Oliver arrived in Rome after being robbed, kidnapped and imprisoned along the way. Having no funds, he was initially dependent on the support of the Irish community. Oscar suffered similar privations during the early years of World War Two, when his seminary had limited access to food, and he was imprisoned in

Cuba on his way back. Both identified consciously with those suffering at home and endured the pain of close family bereavements which they only heard about in letters.

Another similarity is a preferential option for the poor, lived out in practical ways.



Oliver Plunkett became an eminent professor of theology and then apologetics but gave priority to serving the sick in

the Spirito Santo hospital and other places. Romero stunned the wealthy families of San Salvador as Archbishop by opting to live alongside the Carmelite nuns running a hospice for the poorest people and was a frequent visitor to its patients.

In background they were quite different. Romero's origins were very simple, though a cut above the landless campesinos. His father was the local postmaster and telegraph operator, so he was brought up surrounded by words and the latest forms of communication. Oliver Plunkett was from aristocratic origins. His father was Baron of

Loughcrew and able to provide private tutoring. Intriguingly, both boys developed a sense of vocation at an early age, and they came to manhood against troubled backgrounds of social strife: the Ulster rising in Ireland, and La Matanza ('the Massacre') in western El Salvador. Similar numbers were killed in both places: ominous frames for their future lives.

A further interesting conjunction is their identity as secular (diocesan) priests, whilst forging strong links with different religious orders. Romero's local junior seminary was run by Claretians, whom he also befriended in Rome. There he attended the Jesuit-run Gregorian University, and his later life of ministry in El Salvador was intertwined with Jesuits, with whom he both sparred (as his ideas developed) and co-operated closely. Oliver Plunkett lived with an Oratorian community and knew Dominicans and Franciscans well in Rome. These relationships were put to the test in Ireland where he was drawn into several disputes around the legal title of property and land that both orders had owned. These, as well as knotty conflicts between Gaelic-Irish and Anglo-Irish

communities, he decided impartially on available facts, in eleven separate dioceses in turn. Within a year he wrote to Rome: "I found serious divisions in them, but by the grace of God, all is now quiet in the dioceses I have visited." His national reputation was made by brokering a peace agreement between the Dublin Government and the rebel Tories or Raparees: the descendants of displaced Irish who had resorted to bandit life, drawing punishments upon law-abiding Catholics. Archbishop Oliver knew where to find the leaders and, speaking in Irish, persuaded them to accept peace terms. "The province has not had greater peace in thirty years", he wrote.

For Archbishop Romero, the situation was fraught in different ways. He was promoted as a safe and compliant choice who wouldn't interfere with the repression organised by the Fourteen Families who controlled the land and wealth and government of El Salvador, and the paramilitary death squads who tortured and killed the organisers of countryside workers who dared to demand fairer treatment. The government, even some in the Church

hierarchy, thought Romero would stop priests from helping the poor to stand up for their basic rights. Instead, he understood (in the words of his brother bishops, words that would have fitted Plunkett well too) that living the Gospel truthfully meant "speaking the truth in an effort to construct fundamental peace in justice...announcing the Message of Salvation without flagging...denouncing with implacable vigour...injustice and abuses against human rights and the inalienable dignity of man, made in the image and likeness of God."

Like Archbishop Oliver, Oscar was often on the move, celebrating sacraments and supporting priests, religious and catechists. They both smelt strongly of their sheep. Both prized communication and were gifted in the written and the spoken word. Technology has left us the treasure of three years of Romero's Sunday homilies in his Cathedral, where he spoke to the nation on the radio, preaching the word courageously, and recording the latest murders and abductions. Oliver wrote copious letters to his contacts, often in Italian, providing a detailed account of his eventful ministry. Oliver had seven more years

than Oscar as an active Archbishop. Towards the end it was an equally hostile context in Ireland as in El Salvador, and Oliver was a hunted man, accused of ridiculous charges of plotting to kill King Charles II, and bring a French army to Ireland. Romero knew the same jeopardy, and was aware the hatred would not end in arrest and trial, but probably in his murder, like so many of his priests. He seems even to have seen his killer taking aim as he celebrated Mass in the Hospital chapel on March 24th, 1980.

Oliver had the experience of a lengthy imprisonment in Dublin and London where he ministered to many. His trial in Westminster Hall was a defective process that brought shame on the instigators. A death sentence was secured in spite of the facts, and on July 1st, 1681 Plunkett became the final Tyburn martyr. The magnanimity and graciousness of his lengthy speech from the scaffold made a lasting impression. Both leaders gave their lives as the ultimate expression of their tireless ministry to their people. They stand as models of following Christ through adversity to the end. Their legacies of

peace, justice and reconciliation stand out as increasingly complementary and powerful, against the aggressive, inhuman forces which cut short their earthly lives, and are so active in today's world.

Cardinal Gregorio Rosa Chavez

Ellen Teague reports on the latest revelations from El Salvador's Cardinal Rosa Chávez who retired last year as Auxiliary Bishop of San Salvador on



reaching the age of 80. Ellen's article is slightly adapted from the original version which appeared in The Tablet.

Rome was “misinformed” about Romero, says Cardinal.

In a recent book, focusing on his five decades in the Salvadoran Church, the country's first cardinal and collaborator with Archbishop, now Saint, Oscar Romero, tells of defamation against Romero and against himself, including one bishop who said, in notes to a

Vatican ambassador, to not even "think of giving me a diocese." He says that, "for 20 years, Rome was misinformed on the matter of Romero".

'Conversations with Cardinal Rosa Chávez' records interviews turned into a book, in Spanish, by Fr Ariel Beramendi, a priest who works on Spanish-language communications at the Vatican. Salvadoran Cardinal Gregorio Rosa Chávez (80), who was auxiliary Archbishop of San Salvador and who retired last October, said he believed his account should be on the record because there is confusion and even attempts at erasing or offering a different version of what happened when it came to St Romero's conversion, his assassination and that of Fr Rutilio Grande, and the role of the Catholic Church in El Salvador's peace accords, whose meetings he attended.

Cardinal Rosa Chávez described the last four decades as a time of persecution against members of the Catholic Church who stood up for the poor and against injustice. He described the evening of the "red martyrdom," 24 March 1980, when St Romero was assassinated, and the saint's "white martyrdom," a campaign of

calumny against the future saint from inside the Church. He recalled that after Romero's killing, "I saw Archbishop Romero on a stretcher with his purple priestly vestments, lifeless, a serene face, but when I went out into the streets, I heard celebratory fireworks in the affluent parts of the city."



+Gregorio Rosa Chávez with Clare Dixon and Julian Filochowski when he was made Cardinal

Julian Filochowski, co-chair of the Archbishop Romero Trust, told *The Tablet*: "In the difficult civil war context, as Auxiliary Bishop of San Salvador, Bishop Rosa Chavez played a prominent role in propagating Archbishop Romero's teaching on human rights and social justice when it was being side-lined. Whilst various episcopal colleagues and successive Papal Nuncios wanted to minimise Romero's killing, he worked

hard to ensure Romero's assassination was recognised in the Salvadoran Church, and far beyond, as true martyrdom."

Clare Dixon, CAFOD's Head of Latin America region, commented: "For more than four decades Gregorio Rosa Chávez did his utmost to ensure that the legacy of Archbishop Romero should not be erased. This earned him the contempt of conservative sectors of the Church but won him respect and acclaim amongst the Christian communities who venerated Romero. His courage, faithfulness and witness to Romero were celebrated by the Church throughout Latin America where he was repeatedly elected to represent the region as President of Caritas. Pope Francis recognised and rewarded his persistent championing of Romero when he created Rosa Chavez as Cardinal in 2017."



UCA Martyrs Celebration

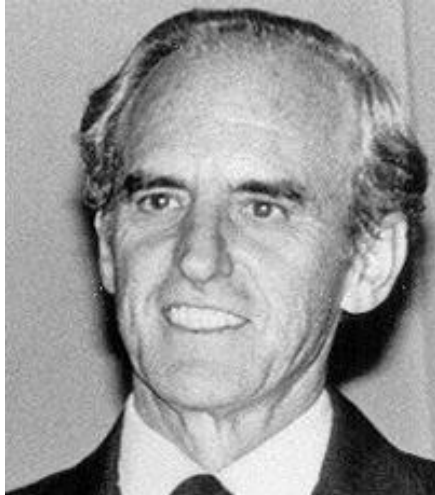


"Because the struggle is just, hope does not waver". Remembering the Anniversary

November 16th 2022, saw the 33rd anniversary of the killing of the six priests and their two women assistants at the UCA Jesuit University. "Leave no witnesses" was the order that the soldiers received as they set out for their deadly mission. Details of the military's plotting before the night of the murders have emerged recently in the daily newspaper El Mundo.

Two hours before the Atlacatl Battalion's raid on the Jesuit University residence on the afternoon of 13 November 1989, Fr Ignacio Ellacuría, Vice-Chancellor of the University, had returned to El Salvador from a visit to Spain. And as he arrived at the UCA the Treasury police stationed at the entrance reported his entry. That is

why the military raid on 13 November makes sense, as the soldiers wanted to make sure that 'the target' had entered 'the cage'.



Before the arrival of the military who were to carry out the raid, Fr. Ellacuría met for a few minutes with

the Jesuit provincial, José María Tojeira. As the soldiers entered aggressively Ellacuría rebuked the officer in charge and demanded a special warrant to carry out the search and refused to give them permission. The military ignored him and proceeded to carry out the search, purportedly for weapons which did not exist.

The guerrilla offensive that had begun on 11th November was putting the government and, above all, the armed forces in a tight spot. The new government that had taken office on 1st July 1989, headed by businessman Alfredo Cristiani, had been considering a negotiated resolution to the war since before taking office. This is where

Ignacio Ellacuría's mediation played a key role. Contacts to initiate a process of dialogue and eventual negotiation between the government and the guerrilla movement began early on. But the talks got bogged down when the issue of the 'Armed Forces and their purification' came up.

The military masterminds behind the assassination of Ellacuría and his companions were clear that the guerrilla offensive increased the pressure for negotiation, and that if this took place they (the high-ranking military) would be the losers. In their rudimentary analysis, the military leaders understood that Ellacuría was playing the role of 'reliable interlocutor' for both Cristiani and the insurgent leaders.

Military attacks on the Jesuits in El Salvador had been going on since the early 1970s. And against Ellacuría in particular. There is a detailed record which shows that the massacre that took place on 16th November 1989 was the inevitable outcome of an obstinate hatred that the enemies of intelligence and good reasoning were finally able to carry out.

The notes that Colonel Guillermo Benavides took of the two decisive

meetings of 15 November, in which he and the top military chiefs were present, are a palpable example of the 'state of mind' of the military and evidence that their handling of the war situation had spun out of control.

At the first of these meetings, all the top military commanders were present and expressed their views on the situation. It was at the second meeting that the head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, René Emilio Ponce, gave the order to Benavides to assassinate Ellacuría and leave no witnesses.

On the night of 15 November, at around 7.30 p.m., a group of military chiefs, including the 'high command' of the time, discussed the military situation created by the guerrilla offensive, and one of their conclusions pointed to Ignacio Ellacuría and his importance. According to the testimony of Ricardo Espinoza Guerra, the lieutenant who directed the operation to exterminate the Jesuits, at 11:15 p.m., Colonel Guillermo Benavides ordered the assassination of the Jesuits.

On 14 and 15 November, Ellacuría tried to communicate with President Alfredo Cristiani, but his attempts remained

unsuccessful. After the search on 13 November, Ellacuría told the other Jesuits in the residence where they were staying that if they did not feel comfortable they could leave for Santa Tecla. Only Rodolfo Cardenal opted to leave and that is why he survived the massacre in the early hours of 16th November. Rolando Alvarado, Ellacuría's personal assistant, did not live at the UCA but was with the Jesuits there until 5 p.m. on 15th November. The Jesuit provincial, José María Tojeira, lived about 40 metres from the UCA residence, and it is assumed that the military was not aware of that which is why they did not go after him.

It was due to great good fortune that, thankfully, both Fr. Tojeira and Fr. Cardenal survived to tell the tale.



The candle-lit procession to mark the 33rd anniversary of the UCA martyrs

Pope Benedict and Saint Romero

As we mourn the death on 31st December of Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI, we are also reminded that in 2007, during a conversation with reporters who accompanied him on his flight to the CELAM conference in Aparecida, Brazil, Pope Benedict described Archbishop Romero as a “great witness of the faith.”



Pope Benedict added that the cause for his beatification had become complicated because “a political party wrongly wished to use him as their badge.” Pope Benedict added his own opinion that Archbishop Romero “merits beatification, of that I have no doubt”.

On his historic visit to Great Britain in 2017 Pope Benedict looks up at the statue of Archbishop Romero, one of the martyrs of the 20th Century, above the Great West Door of Westminster Abbey accompanied by the Rt Rev John Hall, Dean of the Abbey and great admirer of Saint Oscar.

EL SALVADOR UPDATE

With thanks to El Salvador Perspectives

2022 was an exceptional year for El Salvador. Exceptional because the country lived under (and continues to live under) a State of Exception, in other words, a State of Emergency, since the end of March 2022, which the government proclaimed as an all-out war on gangs. At the end of 2022, homicides were at all-time lows in the country, the country was firmly under control of a single person, president Nayib Bukele, and the number of persons held in Salvadorean prisons was at an all time high, giving El Salvador the distinction of imprisoning a greater percentage of its population than any other nation. Local and international human rights groups denounced the excesses of the State of

Exception, but neither the government led by Bukele nor the general public seemed to care.

2022 was not the year of Bitcoin that Bukele had been proclaiming twelve months ago. Despite Bitcoin's status as legal tender in the country, use of the crypto-currency in El Salvador by the vast majority of residents is minimal. The country's investments in Bitcoin have lost more than 60% of their value against the US dollar, El Salvador's other currency. The billion-dollar Bitcoin "volcano bond" offering announced by Bukele in November 2021 never took place.

In 2022, El Salvador's relations with the US continued to deteriorate as the US sanctioned more members of El Salvador's government, the economy returned to pre-pandemic growth levels (not very strong), and inflation hit El Salvador like the rest of the world. More tourists were arriving in the country, whether drawn by the surf, by Bitcoin buzz, improved security, or just successful marketing. In 2022, Nayib Bukele announced he would run for re-election in 2024, a move which most

independent legal experts assert violates the country's constitution. 2023 will be dominated by the political campaign of Bukele and his Nuevas Ideas party because every elected office in the country will be on the ballot in the opening months of 2024. Their electoral campaign will also take place in the US and globally since the Salvadoran diaspora will be able to vote by internet for the first time in 2024. At this point, no political movement has arisen which represents a credible challenge to the domination by Bukele of the country's politics. At the end of the year, president Nayib Bukele's approval rating among the Salvadorean public was 88%.



The beauty of El Salvador comes as a surprise to many visitors

Oscar Romero Award Trust

Are you a teacher? Are you involved in education? If so, perhaps you would like to be part of an inspirational project to support schools to embed the key principles of Catholic Social Teaching in their ethos and culture, so that all within the school can experience life to the full.



The Oscar Romero Award
'Aspire to be more'

The Oscar Romero Award Trust is looking for Trustees to support and develop their work of outreach among Catholic schools by **empowering young people and staff** to become true agents of the change they want to see in the world by putting their **faith into action**. For further information and an application pack contact:

contact@romeroaward.co.uk

www.romeroaward.co.uk

Date for your diaries



CAFOD

Pilgrimage to Holy Island
in partnership with the
Romero Trust
Saturday 8 July 2023

10:30am - Meet at Purdy Lodge café, A1, travel in convoy to Holy Island causeway.

11am – Meet at Holy Island causeway to walk & reflect. Approx. 2-3hr walk. Non-walkers are welcome to join us afterwards meeting at St Mary's church
**non-walkers welcome at St Mary's from midday*

Picnic Lunch on the green

3pm – Mass in St Aidan's Church

4pm – Depart from Holy Island

For more info please contact:

Mark Maughan at

mmaughan@cafod.org.uk

07779804243

PILGRIMAGE TO EL SALVADOR NOVEMBER 2024

Since 2010 the Romero Trust has organised four pilgrimage tours to El Salvador, each with some thirty participants. Each visit has been a unique and unforgettable experience for all the pilgrims.

We are often asked when we might organise a further pilgrimage. Indeed, for us it has been more a question of “if” rather than “when”, particularly in post-COVID times and now that life has become ever more expensive.

But we feel that if there was interest we may be able to organise a further visit to this most beautiful and inspiring land, and meet the people for whom Sat Oscar Romero and so many martyrs offered their lives.

If you think you would be interested in joining a pilgrimage to the land of Romero, please let us know at:

romerotrust@gmail.com



New auxiliary bishop-elect Philip Moger prays at the Romero Cross, Southwark

MARTYRS OF EL SALVADOR PRAYER CARDS

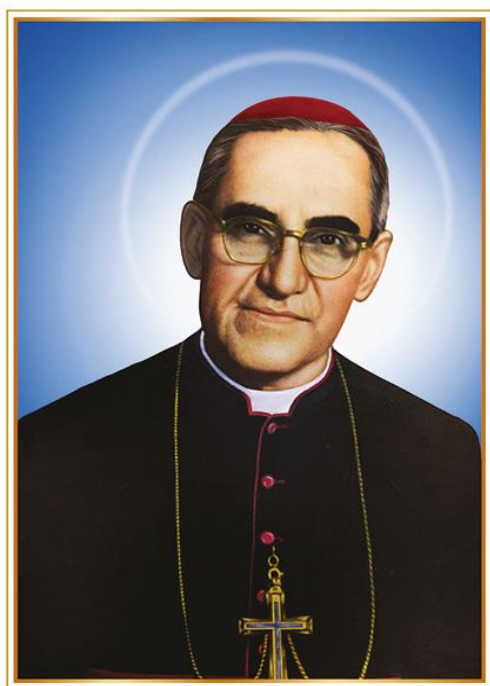


The Romero Trust has produced prayer cards of this beautiful portrait of Rutilio Grande and his companions, Manuel Solórzano and Nelson Lemus, by Salvadorean artist Cristián Lopez.

We also have available prayer cards of the “Great Amen” by Peter Bridgman.



And the official portrait of Saint Oscar Romero is still available from the Trust.



ST OSCAR ROMERO
BISHOP AND MARTYR

Individual prayer cards are free of charge, just send us a self-addressed envelope. For bulk orders the charge is £10 for 250 cards.

RESOURCES

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

We particularly recommend:

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: *An excellent overview of Romero's life and martyrdom. and the long process after his death leading to his canonisation by Pope Francis in 2018. The Romero Trust shares the view that this is the best Romero film currently available.*

Find all the videos on:

<http://www.romerotrust.org.uk/videos>

CARDS, BOOKS AND RESOURCES

All available from

romerotrust@gmail.com

or by post

Archbishop Romero Trust

PO Box 70227

London E9 9BR

BOOK OFFERS

‘Rutilio Grande - A Table for All’

by Rhina Guidos. A

short and well-written

biography

which

beautifully

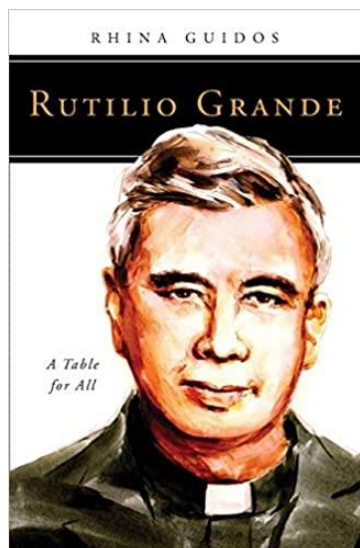
captures the

life and

ministry of the soon-to-be-Blessed

Rutilio Grande”.

£9 (incl. p&p)



The Life, Passion and Death of the Jesuit Rutilio Grande 482 pages

This is **THE definitive** biography of

Rutilio by his

colleague,

historian and

theologian

Rodolfo

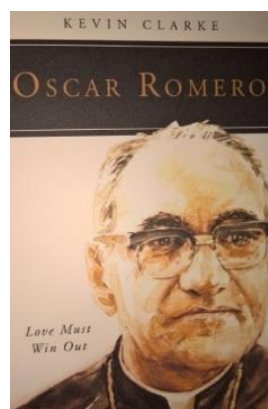
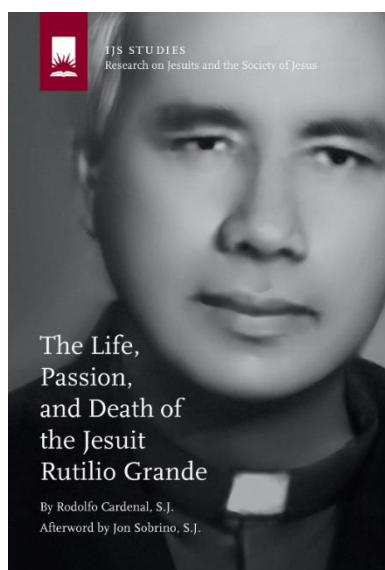
Cardenal SJ.

With an after -

word essay by

Jon Sobrino SJ.

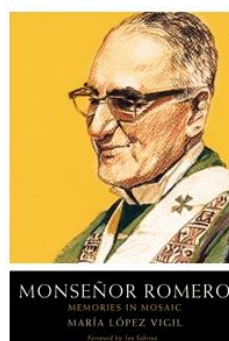
£16 (incl. p&p)



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

Archbishop Romero.

£8 (incl. p&p).



Oscar Romero: Memories in Mosaic

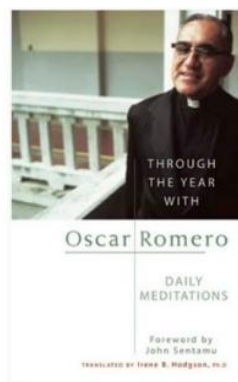
Romero remembered by the people who worked with him, lived with him and prayed with him

compiled by María López Vigil.

Arguably the best book on Romero.

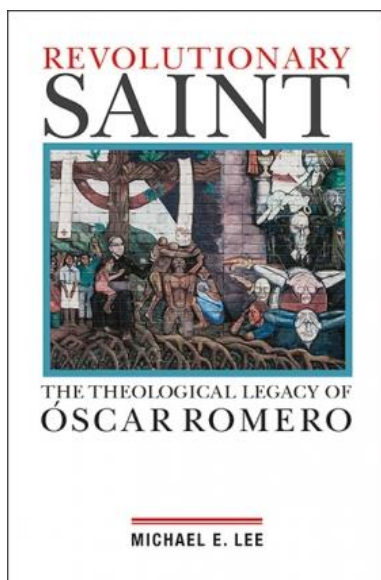
Unput-downable. Highly recommended.

£16 (incl. p&p)



Through the Year with Oscar Romero: Daily Meditations

Powerful and moving selections from Saint Oscar Romero's homilies. **£9 (incl. p&p)**

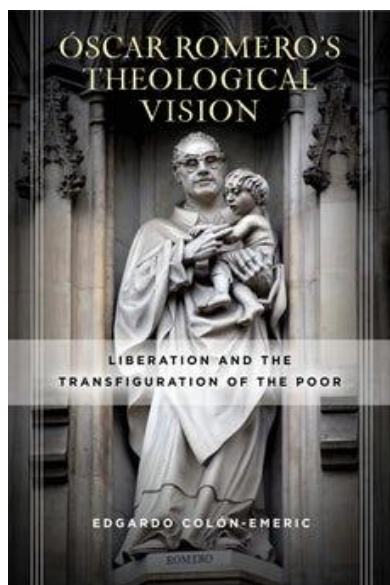


Revolutionary Saint – The theological Legacy of Oscar Romero
Michael E. Lee.
Orbis Books.
Highly recommended!

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

Oscar Romero.

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Thank you so much for your continued support. Your donations help produce this newsletter and put on events such as Romero Week, the Romero Lecture, and to work for the canonisation of the Martyrs of El Salvador.

The Trust's reserves are modest, and we rely entirely on volunteers to carry out our work. If you would like to make a donation, we would be hugely grateful. Please send cheques payable to the Romero Trust to our PO Box address:

**Archbishop Romero Trust,
PO Box 70227, London E9 9BR**

or give online at our website – www.romerotrusted.org.uk

Please remember that if you Gift Aid your donation we can claim an extra 25%.

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A public lecture hosted by Campion Hall & the Laudato Si' Research Institute

Dr Jan Graffius

Óscar Romero: The Witness of Relics

Since 2007, Janet Graffius has been working in El Salvador conserving and displaying the relics of Archbishop Oscar Romero, and of the Jesuits and their associates who were murdered in 1989. Her work, at times harrowing, has thrown up some extraordinary insights into the life and death of Romero, and many others who lost their lives to the death squads in that brutal civil war. In this lecture, hear how curatorial and conservation techniques have given these extraordinary artefacts a voice, revealing some hitherto unknown insights into the last seconds of Romero's life.

Date: Friday 24th March 2023

Time: 17.30–18.30 GMT

Venue: Pichette Auditorium, Pembroke College, including a free drinks reception after the lecture

Register for free to attend or to watch live online:
lsri.campion.ox.ac.uk/events



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