

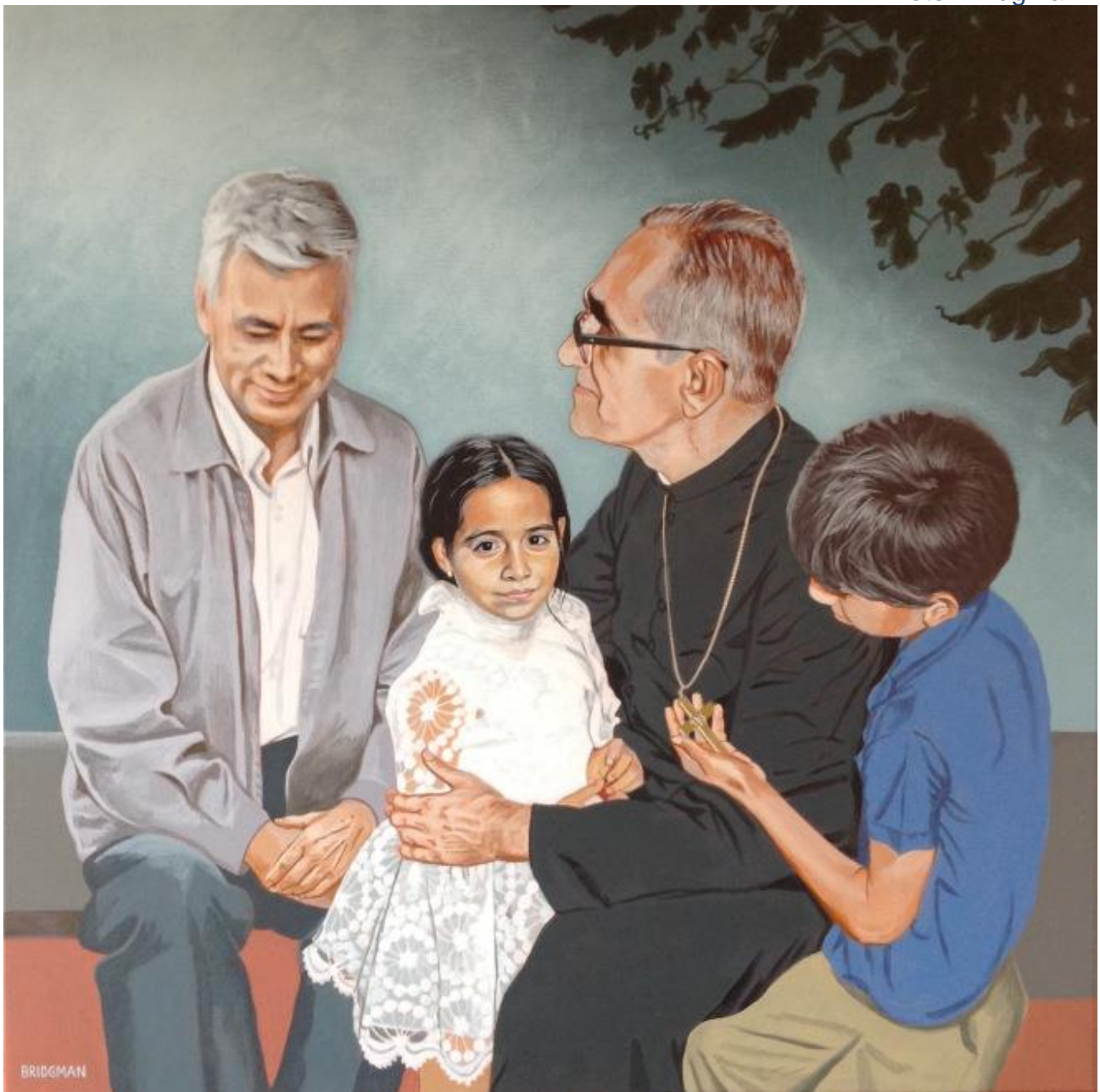
Romeronews

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Romero and Rutilio Saints of El Salvador

Peter Bridgman



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DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Saturday 10th August 12.30pm

**Mass to celebrate the 102nd birthday
of St Oscar Romero**

St George's Cathedral, Southwark
Principal Celebrant Canon Alan McLean
Followed by refreshments in Amigo Hall

Wednesday 18th September 7.30pm

**Performance of Portraits of Courage
Including Oscar Romero**

by the Eliot Smith Dance Company
St Mary's Cathedral, Newcastle

Wednesday 25th September 6.30pm

**Liverpool Romero Lecture
Given by David McLoughlin**

Theatre in the Cornerstone,
Hope University (Everton), Liverpool
Preceded by Mass in SFX at 5.45pm

6th – 18th November

Last Opportunity to Book !!

**The Romero Trust Pilgrimage
to El Salvador**

including the celebration events for the
30th Anniversary of the UCA Martyrs
(Anthony Coles with +John Rawsthorne,
Julian Filochowski and Clare Dixon)

Pope Francis at World Youth Day

In his address to the Bishops of Central America in Panama last January, Pope Francis urged them to look to the example of Saint Oscar Romero as their episcopal role model.

Dear Brothers, Meeting with you gives me the opportunity to embrace your peoples and feel closer to them, to make my own their aspirations, but also their disappointments, and above all the unshakable faith that restores hope and encourages charity. Thank you for letting me be close to that tested yet simple faith seen on the faces of your people, who, though poor, know that “God is here; he is not sleeping, he is active, he watches and helps” (Saint Oscar Romero, Homily, 16 December 1979).

In the seventy-five years since its establishment, the Secretariat of Bishops of Central America has sought to share in the joys and sorrows, the struggles and the dreams of the peoples of Central America. Many men and women, priests, consecrated and lay, have devoted their lives and even shed their blood to keep

the Church’s prophetic voice alive in the face of injustice, the spread of poverty, and the abuse of power.



Pope Francis arrives in Panama

Among these prophetic fruits of the Church in Central America, I am happy to mention Saint Oscar Romero, whom I recently had the privilege of canonising during the Synod on Young People. His life and his teachings remain a constant source of inspiration for our Churches and, in a special way, for us as bishops. His episcopal motto, inscribed on his tombstone, clearly expresses the principle that guided his life as a pastor: to think and feel with the Church. It was the compass for his life and fidelity, even in times of great turmoil. His legacy can become an active and life-giving witness for us, who are likewise called to the daily martyrdom of serving our people. To

appeal to the figure of Romero is to appeal to the holiness and prophetic character present in the DNA of your particular Churches.

So I would like to focus this preliminary **“thinking with the Church”** along with Saint Oscar, on thanksgiving & gratitude for all the unmerited blessings we have received. Romero instinctively knew how to understand and appreciate the Church, because he loved her deeply as the wellspring of his faith. Without this deep love, it would be difficult to understand the story of his conversion. It was that same love that led him to martyrdom: a love born of receiving an utterly free gift, one that does not belong to us but instead frees us from any pretension or temptation to think that we are its proprietors or its sole interpreters. Martyrdom has nothing to do with faintheartedness or the attitude of those who do not love life and cannot recognize its value. On the contrary, the martyr is one who is capable of incarnating and living fully this act of thanksgiving. Romero “thought with the Church”, because before all else he loved the

Church as a mother who had brought him to birth in the faith.

A love flavoured by people:

This love, loyalty and gratitude brought him to embrace passionately but also with hard work and study, the currents of renewal authoritatively proposed by the Second Vatican Council. There he found a firm guide for Christian discipleship. He was neither an ideologue nor ideological; his actions were born of a thorough familiarity with the Council documents. Against this ecclesial horizon, thinking with the Church meant, for Romero, contemplating her as the People of God. Romero showed us that the pastor, in order to seek and discover the Lord, must learn to listen to the heartbeat of his people. He must smell the “odour” of the sheep, the men and women of today, until he is steeped in their joys and hopes, their sorrows and their anxieties (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 1), and in so doing ponder the word of God (cf. *Dei Verbum*, 13). His must be an approach that listens to the people entrusted to his care, to the point of identifying with them and discovering from them the will of God

who calls us (cf. Address at the Meeting on the Family, 4 October 2014). An approach free of dichotomies or false antagonisms, for only the love of God is capable of integrating all our loves in a single feeling and gaze. For Romero, in a word, to think with the Church means to take part in the Church's glory, which is to live, heart and soul, the kenosis – the self-emptying - of Christ. In the Church, Christ lives among us, and so she must be humble and poor, since an aloof, prideful and self-sufficient Church is not the Church of kenosis (cf. Saint Oscar Romero, Homily, 1 October 1978).

It is important, brothers, that we not be afraid to draw near and touch the wounds of our people, which are our wounds too, and to do this in the same way that the Lord himself does. A pastor cannot stand aloof from the sufferings of his people; we can even say that the heart of a pastor is measured by his ability to be moved by the many lives that are hurting or threatened.

We all know about Archbishop Romero's friendship with Father Rutilio Grande,

and how much he was affected by his assassination. It seared his heart as a man, a priest and a pastor. Romero was no human resources manager; that was not how he dealt with individuals or organisations, but as a father, a friend and a brother. He can serve as a yardstick, however daunting, to help us measure our own hearts as bishops.



Brothers, thinking with the Church means thinking with our faithful people, the suffering and hope-filled people of God. A Church that does not want her strength to be – as Archbishop Romero used to say – in the backing of the powerful or political leaders – but advances with noble detachment, relying only on the true strength born of the embrace of the crucified Jesus.

**CONVERSION, COMMITMENT AND
CONTRADICTION:
A REFLECTION ON
FRANCIS AND ROMERO**

Carlos Colorado, leading expert on Saint Oscar Romero and the creator of the excellent SuperMartyrio blog, examines the similarities between Pope Francis and Archbishop Romero

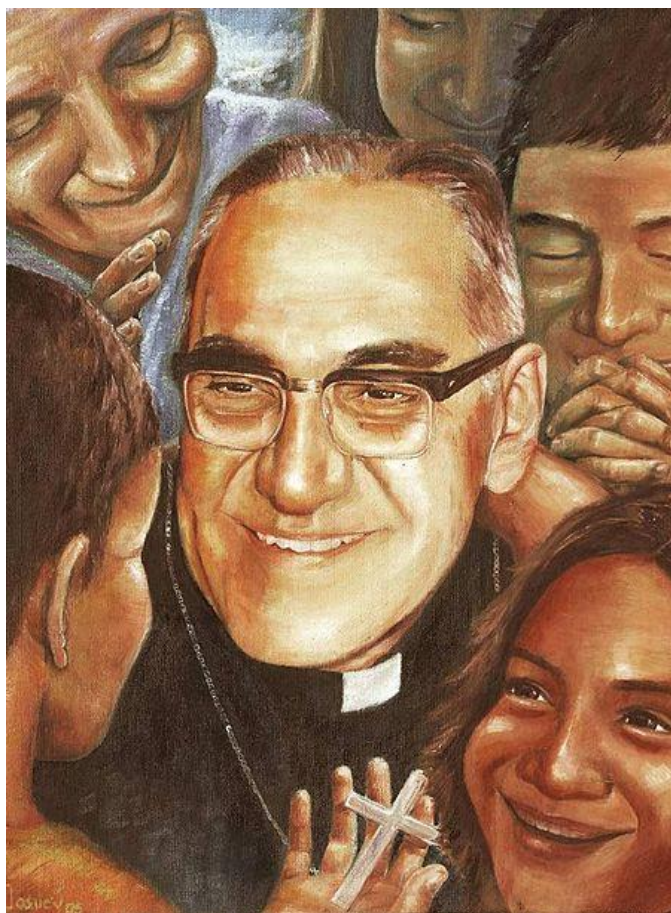
“Romero showed us that the pastor, in order to seek and discover the Lord, must learn to listen to the heartbeat of his people.” These are Pope Francis’ words to the Central American bishops at the World Youth Day celebration in Panama earlier this year. Then he added the classic Bergoglio phrase, “He must smell

the ‘odour’ of the sheep”—showing us that his message and the message of St. Oscar Romero converge very precisely. This is because the parallels between the two men are extensive and profound, and we can appreciate them if we focus on three aspects of these similarities. These are: the “conversion” or pastoral change when each man embarks upon his ministry, the pivotal moment in which each is called to serve, and the hostile reaction which both elicit from certain centres of power whose enmity is ferocious and incessant.

I was a little boy in El Salvador when Archbishop Romero came onto the scene and, when Pope Francis ascended to the Throne of St. Peter 36 years later, I was astounded by the similarities. Both men were immediate sensations. I remember the overflow crowds in St. Peter’s Square for the entire first year of Francis’ papacy; his pontificate was a continual spectacle that the world could not take its eyes away from. He was a master of great symbolic gestures. Whether embracing a disfigured man, washing the feet of women and non-Christians or going to Lampedusa to show his closeness to

African refugees arriving in Europe, one had the sense that the Pope was abandoning all protocol and actually ministering to people. Similarly, Archbishop Romero immediately attracted great attention, closing all the churches and holding a “Single Mass” in the diocese on the Sunday after one of his priests was killed, cancelling all public appearances with the government until that killing was investigated and, as a result, being swarmed by overflowing crowds at the Cathedral.

Romero and his people by Josue Villalta



First, both men are “surprises in history,” in the sense that both turned out to be something entirely different from what people had expected them to be. Oscar Romero had been a quiet, conservative bishop, who was expected to restore a halcyon quietude to an increasingly restless archdiocese. Instead, Romero sped up the process whereby the Church became a voice of outcry and denunciation of injustices and social sin. Similarly, Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio had been viewed as a “conservative” Jesuit and, when he was elected Pope, some liberals even accused him of complicity with the Argentine dictatorships of the 70s and not having done enough to protect his priests. Like Romero, Francis turned out to be a consistent critic of market and military excesses, to the chagrin of many a right-winger.

“Regarding what has happened in my priestly life,” Romero wrote in a letter to the Vatican, “I have tried to explain it as an evolution of the same desire I have always had to be faithful to what God asks of me,” with variations explained by the requirements of different circumstances. “If before I gave the

impression of being more 'prudent' and 'spiritual,'" Romero explained, "it was because I sincerely believed that in that way I was responding to the gospel, for the circumstances of my ministry did not require such a pastoral fortitude that, I believe in conscience, they did demand of me when I became archbishop." (Correspondence to Cardinal Sebastiano Baggio, June 24, 1978.)

Strikingly, Pope Francis has explained his process in similar terms. "I trust that I've grown some, that I've sanctified myself some more," Francis said in a recent Mexican TV interview. "One changes in life. That I extended my criteria, that it is possible, seeing the world's problems I am more aware about things I wasn't conscious of before. No, I think in that sense there have been changes, yes." (May 2019 interview with Valentina Alazraki of Televisa.) Thus, in Francis, as in Romero, there is an acknowledged transformation—one hears this referred to as a "conversion"—which reflects a willingness to submit to the will of God. Speaking of Romero in Panama, Francis said that "it would be difficult to understand the story of his conversion" without understanding his

abiding love for the Church which made him "capable of incarnating and living fully this act of thanksgiving" (i.e., his martyrdom). Second, both men were put at the helm of troubled Sees. San Salvador in the late 70s was a hotbed of social conflict and increasing political discontentment; the Vatican after the resignation of Benedict XVI was rife with intrigue, financial corruption, the fallout of the sex abuse scandals and a generalized conviction of the urgent need for curial reform. After experiencing their processes of conversion, both Romero and Francis resolve to take the difficult road and not to shy away from confronting the problems head on. Romero defends the poor, condemns military atrocities and structural injustice, making the Church an instrument of prophetic denunciation, drawing the ire of the rich and powerful. Francis tackles curial structures that have become entangled with reactionary theological currents and clerical cliques, such that his attempts to rectify the structures creates a disturbance, like when someone attempts to straighten out a tablecloth but drags all the dishes on the table, irritating the other dinner guests.

In his discourse on Romero in Panama, Francis said that, “in a word,” Romero opts “to live, heart and soul, the *kenosis* of Christ.” Kenosis is a Greek theological term that describes Christ’s stripping himself of earthly comfort and privilege to do the will of God. We see this spirit in both Francis and Romero. Even at a very surface level, we see Romero take up residence in the cancer hospital, turn down bodyguards and tour the remote villages and hamlets of the poor. We see Francis shun the papal apartments and papal regalia and dispense with many formalities of his office. At a deeper level, both men usher in profound developments in their magisterial actions: Romero publishes four hard-hitting, deeply analytical pastoral letters, and Francis delivers groundbreaking documents such as «*Laudato Sii*» and «*Amoris Laetitia*», which make critics claim that they are not part of the valid magisterium.

The third and final way in which we see the parallels between Francis and Romero is in the extremely adverse reaction they engender within the Church. Romero had many colourful metaphors to encapsulate the

unexpected reactions he found to his ministry. “When one places one’s hand in a bowl of saltwater, if the hand is well, nothing happens,” he once explained. “But if the hand is cut or wounded... ah! the pain!” He postulated that, “when the truth is preached, when injustice and abuses and outrages are confronted by the truth, the truth will always hurt.” (May 29, 1977 homily.) Such reactions occurred both outside and inside the Church, including amongst his fellow bishops. Pope Francis has explained that, being present in the world, the Church is prone to having the polarization present in the world infiltrate the confines of the Church—and he cited Romero to make the point. (November 15, 2018 speech to the Pontifical Latin American College.)

Francis and Romero’s enemies within have been astute and adept at sowing divisions to undermine their work and at finding procedural conduits to these ends. Romero found himself threatened with an Apostolic Administrator *sede plena* - a co-pilot in the archdiocese vested with override powers - and also with investigations into his doctrinal orthodoxy, along with tons of letters

criticizing individual decisions and continually calling for his replacement. Similarly, Francis has been besieged with the ‘*dubias*’, purported “fraternal corrections”, and even calls for his resignation by a high-ranking former nuncio. He has faced continual criticism in blogs, social networks and from conservative publications, and has been declared an open target by the US political apparatchik Steve Bannon, in collusion with disgruntled former curial officials sacked by Francis.

Of course, Romero has been vindicated by history and, according to Francis, his safety net was his ‘Thinking and Feeling with the Church’ outlook, expressed in his episcopal motto, which assured his evangelical authenticity. To the bishops in Panama Francis said the Church “does not want her strength to be – as Archbishop Romero used to say – in the backing of the powerful or political leaders – but advances with noble detachment, relying only on the true strength born of the embrace of the crucified Jesus.” And so, if Pope Francis keeps walking with Saint Oscar, he will also walk with (and be protected by) Jesus.

The Beatification of Rutilio Grande and Companions

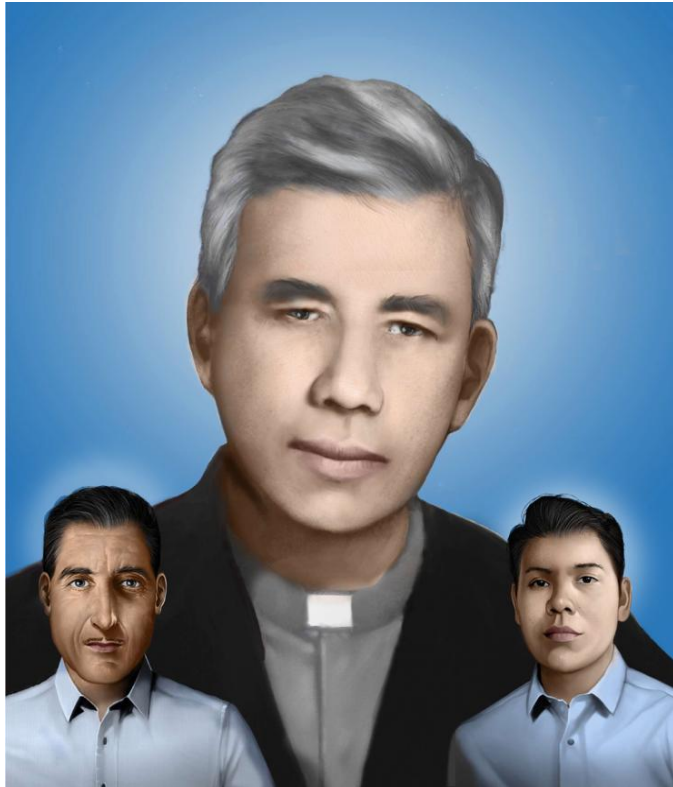
Julian Filochowski updates us on the progress of the Cause for Beatification of Rutilio Grande SJ, the first priest to be killed in El Salvador in 1977

Pope Francis exclaimed “You can’t understand Romero without Rutilio.”

The Jesuit priest, Rutilio Grande, together with his two lay parish helpers Manuel Solorzano and Nelson Lemus, was assassinated by a death squad as they drove from the parish house in Aguilares to the outlying village of El Paisnal to celebrate Mass on the afternoon of Saturday March 12th 1977.

The killing of his friend, Rutilio, had a major impact on Archbishop Romero. After praying over his still-bleeding body that Saturday evening the change that Romero was already undergoing inside himself was confirmed and crystallised. Archbishop Rivera, Romero’s successor, declared that after Rutilio’s killing Romero became filled with apostolic courage. Certainly, in examining Romero’s pastoral ministry there is a

neat and useful division to be made between 'the before' and 'the after' of Rutilio's murder.



SIERVOS DE DIOS

P. RUTILIO GRANDE S.J.

MANUEL SOLÓRZANO Y NELSON RUTILIO LEMUS

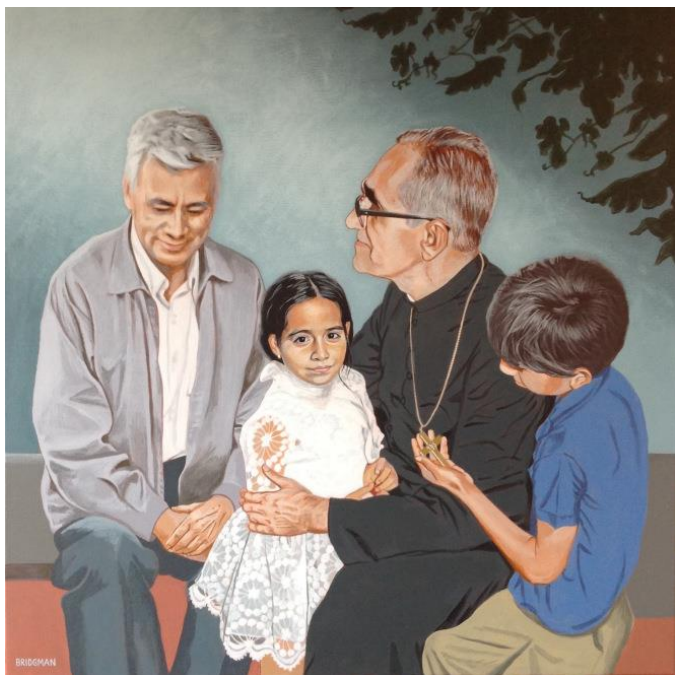
Archbishop Romero immediately recognised Rutilio as a martyr, killed out of a deep hatred for his justice-seeking sermons and the pastoral action he had promoted amongst the landless poor in Aguilares. Just as John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus, so Rutilio was in a real sense the precursor of Romero. But although the process to secure Romero's beatification began

back in 1990, Rutilio's cause was not launched until the arrival of Pope Francis - with his dramatic act in 'unblocking' Romero's paralysed cause held up inside the Vatican. Since then, Rutilio's cause has advanced rapidly in parallel with the beatification and canonisation of Archbishop Romero. It is now reaching its final stages and, as far as we can ascertain, there are no problems associated with Rutilio's cause, which also includes his two companions on that fateful journey to El Paisnal – the elderly sacristan, Manuel Solorzano, and 16-year old Nelson Lemus.

On September 19th the nine-member theological commission of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints will meet to make a judgment as to whether Rutilio Grande and Companions were killed 'out of hatred of the faith' – which means they are officially recognised as martyrs by the Church and recommended for beatification. The Cardinals of the Congregation will gather towards the end of the year, hopefully to confirm a positive judgment from the theologians. This would normally lead to a declaration from Pope Francis that the

beatification can go ahead. The ceremony is expected to take place in San Salvador in the early months of 2020.

Meanwhile at the Jesuit Church of the Sacred Heart in Edinburgh there is already a beautiful relic of Rutilio Grande. It is his 1974 pocket diary and is displayed alongside a precious fragment of Archbishop Romero's blood-stained alb. This Scottish shrine was inaugurated and blessed by Archbishop Leo Cushley on Sunday March 24th this year, the Feast Day of St Oscar Romero.



Peter Bridgman's "Saints of El Salvador"

On the wall behind these relics hangs a painting commissioned by the parish from the artist Peter Bridgman, showing

Rutilio and Romero together with two young people. In troubled times these two contemporary martyrs inspire and energise today's Church. They will be venerated not only in Scotland but across the whole universal Church.

Oscar Romero An Unlikely Prophet!

Dr. David McLoughlin, Emeritus Fellow of Christian Theology at Newman University delivered this inspiring reflection at the ecumenical service in St Martin in the Fields commemorating the 39th anniversary of Romero's murder. The full version is available on the Trust's website.

As with Isaiah in his time so in every age we need men and women who open up for us the prophetic imagination of a Moses at the burning bush, or Hosea and Amos in a time of national crisis, and of Jesus in his time. Always the prophet speaks out in times of lament, of crisis, or accommodation, or forgetfulness when the original vision has grown dim and is now packaged into controllable parcels, when the access to the divine message

has become re-interpreted, controlled by elites, spiritual, political or academic.

The prophet is rarely obvious from their early life. Moses was a member of the elite ruling class, Isaiah is a court prophet without a king, an exile in Babylon along with Ezekiel. But they are called to see anew, to keep the prophetic imagination of exodus and covenant alive. To remember and encounter again the strange God, (*Yahweh*) ***I am who I am, I will be who I will be, I will be where I will be***, who from the beginning escapes definition and description, confinement or manipulation.

When Jesus started his ministry he faced a land where the rule of Rome underpinned and undermined the outwardly Hebraic traditions. But the Temple was compromised, the aristocracy were colluding with imperial authorities and the only reform movements were so pure that the people of the soil, the mass of peasant workers, could not follow their laws and dictates; e.g. the 300 plus priestly rules adopted by the radical Pharisees. There was a lot

of law, orthodoxy, right thinking, but the prophetic imagination had been lost.

Jesus very first public teaching in the synagogue at Nazareth proclaims his renewal of that prophetic imagination in his time. Luke has this already heralded by his mother to be and her old cousin Elizabeth when their two voices rise in a harmony of the prophetic imagination of their people. ***“My soul glorifies the Lord my spirit rejoices...he puts down he mighty from their thrones and raises up the lowly. The hungry he fills with good things the rich he sends empty away....”*** Mary’s *Magnificat*, which Oscar Romero prayed every day of his priestly life, renews the prophetic vision of her people and her son will flesh it out.

Oscar Romero is an unlikely prophet. His virtuous, cautious, studious formation in the seminary and University in Rome, with its in-depth study of a deductive theology, starting from abstract principles but with an inevitable and inexorable inner logic, lacked all passion or relevance. He and thousands of young seminarians learnt all the answers to questions no-one was asking. Alongside this he imbibed a spirituality that was

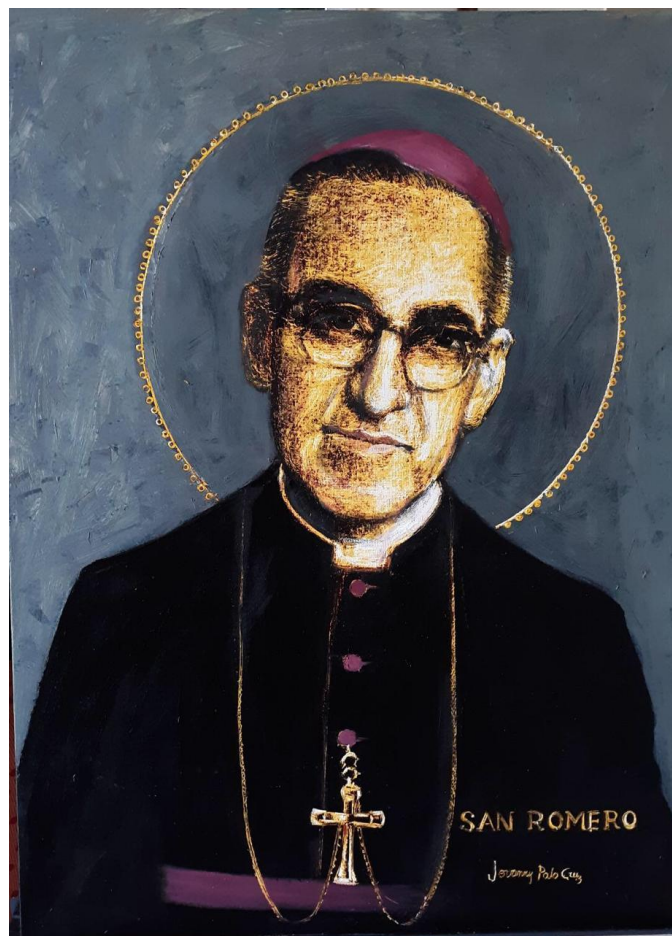
either the discipline and effort of mental prayer focused on heaven or else a gently affective and emotive focus on the lives of the saints and the motherly care of Mary, mother of Jesus, mother of the Church and of course Mother of the priest. But not the powerful prophetic Mary of the Magnificat, prophesying the bringing down of the powerful and the raising up of the destitute and powerless – a true daughter of Is-ra-el the people of the God. The strange free God capable of reversing things, capable of initiating the new.

The true life of a faithful servant of the church was neatly summarised in aphorism as: *Virtus stat in media via*—i.e. the good or the virtuous way is always the moderate, the middle way, between extremes; enthusiasm of any sort is to be avoided. This was the vision commended to Oscar for him to conform to in his training. This was the underlying meaning of the original interpretation of his motto *Sentire cum Ecclesia*. To think rightly, always, as the Church thinks.

Hardly the cry of a prophet!

The theology of the Catholic Colleges and Universities of the time, which he

learnt, was in the form of theses, question and answers. However, the questions had no particular social, political, or economic context. In Rome students from all over the world, from Chicago, Coventry, Calgary, Calcutta, Kinshasa, Bucharest, Lisbon and even Ciudad Barrios - learnt the same questions and the same answers. Answers to questions that no-one in their own countries and communities and certainly none of the poor, the hungry, the destitute of the world were asking.



But over the years of working with very particular, very real, people in very

particular, real places Romero began to read the gospel **from their questions** and things began gradually to change. He began **to see differently** and **feel differently**. He had always worked with and for the poor, out of a deep and profound charity, out of love for them. But as a young busy dutiful priest and then administrator Bishop he had not asked the question:

Why are the poor, poor? what is it in society that allows a minority to hold such total power over the way things are, a monopoly over wealth and wealth production?

He had never considered the structural sin in his world. Indeed, initially he was afraid that such questions being asked by the Jesuit theologians, like Ignacio Ellacuría or Jon Sobrino, were too political and too materialist. The subtle carefully balanced **distinctions** of Aquinas and others between the natural and the supernatural, the body and soul, the Church and the World, the spiritual and material had in his formation been taught to him as **separations**. It would take time and new experience to see such separations as incompatible with

the incarnate presence of God's Word and Spirit within the world.

The depth of the conflict between the prophetic imagination of Jesus, his vision of God's reign, and the controlling manipulative oppressive powers of this world, had not yet become clear or painful enough for Romero. But his unexpected appointment as Archbishop, to the capital of San Salvador, brought him personally up against the extremes of wealth and poverty in a new way, and the death of his friend Fr. Rutilio Grande and his companions, and the lack of concern of the civil authorities made these question brutally near, like no scholastic theology thesis ever had. And now the other meaning of his motto *Sentire cum Ecclesia* - **to feel with the Church** - became more insistent.

And in the meantime, in the light of Vatican II's teaching on ***the Church in the Modern World***, and the Latin American Bishops teachings at Puebla and Medellin and their deliberate emphasis on a preferential option for the poor, his sense of the Church itself had changed. The emphasis had shifted from the right-thinking community under the

rightful authority of the magisterium, to feeling and thinking alongside and with the pilgrim people of God in their journey in history and in the midst of their joys and sorrows, their hopes and fears, in the context of political, social, and economic forces and structures that in some sense could be called sinful.

Now Oscar learnt anew from the prophets and above all from the Mary of the *Magnificat* and the Jesus of the parables of the bias of this strange liberating God.

The bias towards the oppressed, the frail, the nobodies, the widow, the stranger, the orphan, the powerless ones. Jesus' re-working of this prophetic imagination flamed out from the pages of the Gospels anew – with the power of his opening statement in the charter of discipleship, the Beatitudes –

“Blessed are the destitute for theirs is the Kingdom of God.”

They don't have to win or achieve it. It is theirs because God chooses to align God's strange self with them.

Oscar sees this is not just in heaven but is a real space here and now into which all are invited. A real space which Paul calls Grace. So different from the graces

Oscar had been taught about which would be drip fed to the virtuous.

If that is the case, if the God of Exodus, the God of Jesus, was to be experienced in transcendent freedom alongside the oppressed, then where should a bishop stand but alongside them in the space of grace. If all are created male and female in the image and likeness of God then to wound, oppress, and destroy one of the least of these little ones is to commit the greatest offence against that free creative liberating God. A far greater sin than the sins against any doctrinal orthodoxy, or sins of failure in one's private personal spiritual struggle, over which Oscar had been so scrupulous.

If the prophetic imagination of Jesus reveals a free self-emptying of the creator liberator God, to share the life and limits and hungers and fears of a Palestinian craft worker, what does that demand of a contemporary bishop? Romero in the last three amazing years of his life in an increasingly focused way lived out what pope Francis now preaches. Romero was the shepherd who smelt of his sheep and lived and prayed and **felt** with the church as a member of staff in a field hospital rather

than an ecclesiastical bureaucrat engaged in keeping a false peace, maintaining a blasphemous status quo.



In the prophetic imagination that runs throughout the Jewish Christian scriptures what we now call the preferential option for the poor, God coming again and again alongside the nobodies and declaring them is-ra-el, the people of God, is a golden thread. It is this thread that Romero grasps ever more tightly. He begins to know ever more deeply the nature of the strange

God of exodus as he gets to know ever more intimately his own suffering people. In doing this he leaves aside the simple certainties of the theology he learnt in Rome and faces what he called “the events of the week”. The realities before us, that no theology can anticipate or provide neat answers for. His radio homilies became one of the few ways that his people could find out what was really happening in their city, and their country; where a state- controlled press consistently produced, censored and deliberately slanted false news. Now the reality, the events of the week, was deliberately brought into tension with the prophetic imagination of the scriptures and of Jesus parables of God’s living presence, the Kingdom.

With Oscar’s help we could see what was real. We could imagine how under the God of creation and liberation, the God of the new, it might be different. And together we could work to realise that vision of God’s will for all people in our reality. Theology was now not so much right thinking, the right answers to those right questions, set down so clearly and tightly by the right thinkers who did our

thinking for us, but rather theology was shared, engaged, inspired right action emerging from the reality of the people's lives. For Romero this came to be to live in the style of Jesus. His life continues to provoke us to re-imagine this in new contexts.

That this caused a serious backlash both within the elites of his society, and among fellow bishops who had not gone through this conversion, we all know. Like Pope Francis after him he is called a Marxist and much worse. But then his Lord was called a glutton and a drunkard! In following through the prophetic imagination, that now inspired him, he began to see the mass of his own people as radically one with the crucified Christ; with the God who, as Paul tells us, out of love enters into the darkest that we can create or experience e.g. in Jesus the killing of innocent life by a corrupt state and the denial of the presence of the living God by religious leadership. After the cross there is no dark place anymore where God cannot be for us.

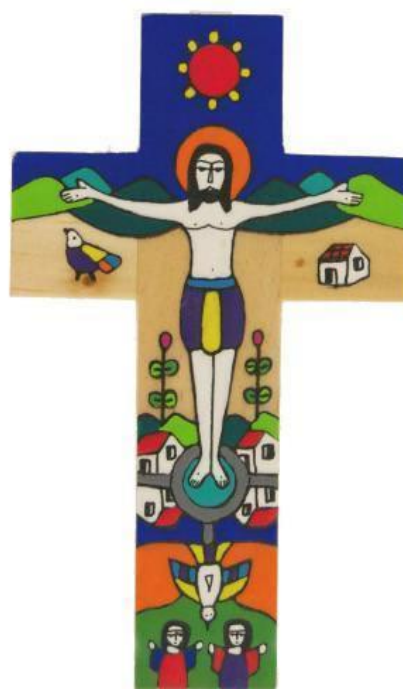
It will be this theme that the great liberation theologian Jon Sobrino, once criticised by Romero and latterly his friend, supporter and collaborator, will

take up and develop in some of the finest theology written in our times. In doing so he turns the prophetic imagination of Oscar, lived generously till a brutal death, into a great cry of hope for us and our world. And invites us to see, and feel, and engage together anew.

I end with the words of our Saint:

"I ask all of you, dear brothers and sisters, to view these things that are happening in our historical moment with a spirit of hope, generosity, and sacrifice. And let us do what we can."

May it be so!



Question:
Did Archbishop Romero say it?

Carlos Colorado investigates:

“If they kill me, I will rise again in the people of El Salvador.”

It is one of the most famous statements attributed to Oscar Romero and it is the subject of a historical dispute and a bit of a literary mystery, which newly discovered documents may help to clear up. The day after Romero was killed, the Mexican newspaper *Excelsior* carried an interview that had reportedly taken place two weeks before, in which Romero spoke about his potential assassination. Here is the key paragraph: -

“I have frequently been threatened with death. I ought to say that, as a Christian, I do not believe in death without resurrection. If they kill me, I will rise again in the people of El Salvador. I am not boasting; I say it with the greatest humility. I am bound, as a pastor, by a divine command to give my life for those whom I love, and that is all Salvadorans, even those who are going to kill

me.....Martyrdom is a grace from God which I do not believe I deserve. But if God accepts the sacrifice of my life, then may my blood be the seed of liberty, and a sign that hope will soon become a reality. Can you tell them, if they succeed in killing me, that I pardon and bless those who do it. But I wish that they could realise they're wasting their time. A bishop may die, but the Church of God, which is the people, will never die.”

He is saying he forgives his future killers, offers his life for the liberation of El Salvador and, in an oft-quoted turn of phrase, declares that, *“If they kill me, I will rise again in the people of El Salvador.”* Many people today say that that prophesy has come true: the spirit of Oscar Romero is indeed alive in the Salvadoran people who loved him so much. Nevertheless, the statement with its slightly messianic overtones is not at all what might have been expected from Archbishop Romero.

The documentation supporting Romero's canonisation cause, which was submitted to the Vatican in Rome, dismissed the phrase as apocryphal. And the Italian academic Roberto Morozzo della Rocca, the historical

expert on the case, argued forcefully that Romero did not utter the words attributed to him; and that, in fact, it is unlikely that the interview ever took place at all. Morozzo maintained that the sentiments attributed to Romero in the interview were directly contrary to other things Romero had spoken and written at the time. Morozzo also pointed out that there is no record that the interview took place, that the newspaper which published the interview had other reporters assigned to cover Romero (different from the correspondent who claimed the interview), and that the said journalist, whose name was José Calderón Salazar, had previously published a text containing very similar words to the ones he later attributed to Romero.

Romero was dead by the time the interview was published and thus he was unable to confirm or refute it. Calderón, the journalist, died in 1994 and there is no record of him speaking to the questions that have arisen about the text, or even discussing the interview at all. The “interview” is said to have occurred during a telephone call, and thus, given the state of technology at that time and in that place, no recording was made, and

no notes have survived. Therefore, establishing the truth of the matter has been largely a matter of extrapolation and interpretation.

The two strongest arguments, raised by Professor Morozzo, both cut against the authenticity of the interview. First, Morozzo pointed out, Romero was on record as saying the opposite of what the interview says. Specifically, where the interview has Romero predicting he “will rise again in the Salvadoran people,” and that he hopes his potential death will be “a seed of freedom” and for the liberation of El Salvador, Romero’s handwritten notes, from a retreat he attended only a few weeks before, strike a different note. Romero commits his life—and his death—to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and he adds:

Nor will I give it an intention, as I might wish, for my country’s peace and for the flowering of our Church, because the Heart of Christ will know to give it the purpose he wishes.

The second major strike against authenticity concerns the credibility of the Guatemalan journalist. Morozzo finds that Calderón was accused of fabricating a story before. More troubling, Morozzo

discovers that two years earlier, when the journalist claimed he was receiving death threats, he wrote words very similar to those he attributed to Romero. Among other things, this earlier writing stated that Calderón had been threatened with death, said that Calderón forgave his would-be assassins, and highlighted the prospect of resurrection arguing that physical death would not truly be the end—all sentiments Calderón later attributed to Romero. In fact, Morozzo found Calderón so unconvincing that he even doubted that Calderón ever communicated with Romero at all.

In that regard, however, newly discovered files from Romero's archdiocesan archives establish that Romero and Calderón **did** communicate, and that Romero had given Calderón at least one exclusive interview before—in September 1979, some six months earlier than the supposed interview in question. Even more dramatically, Romero complimented Calderón for the truthfulness of the earlier report, and the accuracy with which he transmitted Romero's words. "I have read your articles," Romero wrote to Calderón on

September 24, 1979: "they realistically express the situation in our country, for which I am pleased to thank you for the publication of the truth of what is happening, since you dignify yourself as a journalist and you become a communicator who orients his readers."

The correspondence further reveals that, when Calderón wrote to Romero, he quoted the language from his own earlier publication in reaction to the reported death threats, including the passage about resurrection.

Additional insights emerge from an almost forgotten publication, a short volume of poetry published by Calderón in 1985 called *Óscar, Compañero* ("Oscar, Companion") which he dedicated to Romero. In it, Calderón reveals additional snippets attributed to Romero, which suggest that he and Romero spoke frequently in March 1980, including on the Friday before Romero was killed (Romero was assassinated on a Monday). Clues about Calderón's possible motivation and intentions emerge from a deeper look at Calderón's background. He was a poet, politician, columnist, author and journalist; but Calderón initially wanted to be a priest.

He attended a seminary in San Salvador in the 1930s. He later became a Christian Democrat politician, being elected to the Guatemalan Legislative Assembly in the 1950s. He wrote several books, some of which were of Catholic interest, such as a volume called “The Vatican and World War II”. As a journalist, he covered the Church persecution in Guatemala and El Salvador in the late 1970s.

As an American lawyer, I have been trained in the fact-finding approach for proving an accusation that analyses whether the accused had the “motive, means and opportunity” to perpetrate the act he is accused of. Using this technique, I conclude that the accusation that Calderón fabricated the Romero interview is not very convincing.

He did not have the motive. In fact, his life story and track record show that he was very sympathetic to Romero and that he wished to convey Romero’s message accurately. Indeed, in his correspondence with Romero, he states as much; and Romero praises him for doing so in a truthful and accurate fashion. The posthumous tribute that he published after Romero’s death further shows his devotion to Romero.

While Calderón did have the means to falsify the story (all it requires is the willingness to do so), the analysis must be weighed against the fact that Calderón also had the means to report the story truthfully; that he had the specific means to do so—namely, access to Romero, which the September 1979 exclusive interview demonstrated that he had. Additionally, Calderón’s disclosure to Romero of his earlier writing when he, Calderón, was facing death threats shows the potential means by which those ideas could have entered into Romero’s thought process.

Finally, Calderón did not really have the opportunity to falsify the story. Romero was killed on the evening of March 24 and Calderón filed his story on the same day. He would have had but scant hours to decide to fabricate the story and concoct the set-up before all the details of the assassination were known, which strikes me as unlikely.

In conclusion, as Julian Filochowski likes to say, **while we cannot prove the interview took place, it seems more clear now that neither can we prove it did not take place.**

**Oscar Romero's Theological Vision:
Liberation and the Transfiguration of
the Poor**

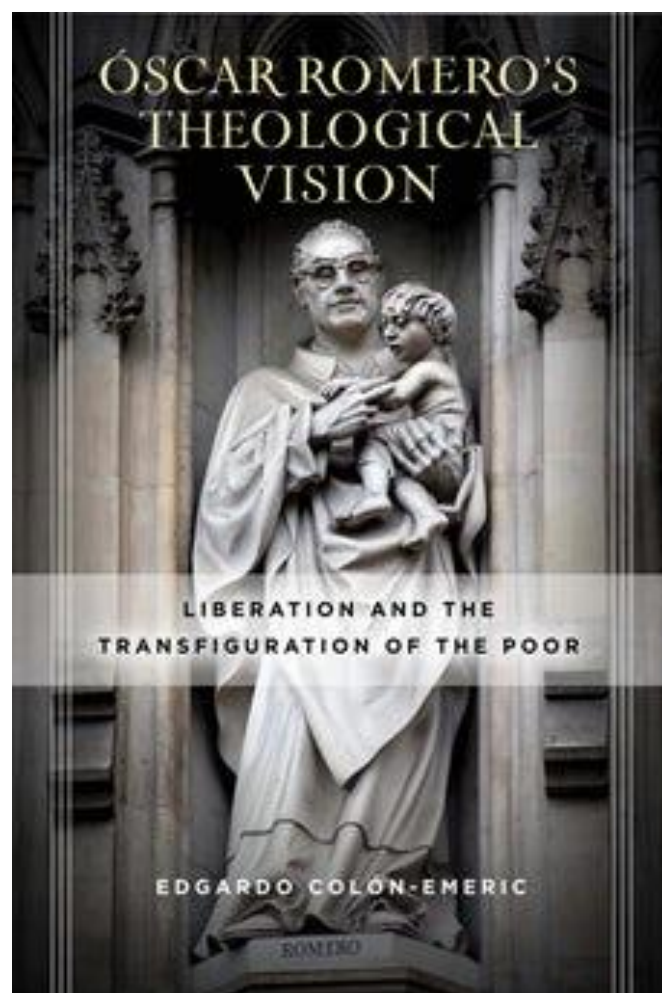
By Edgardo Colón-Emeric

University of Notre Dame Press – 400pp

David McLoughlin reviews the latest study of Saint Oscar Romero and the lived example of his option for the poor.

Throughout this remarkable book the author takes us ever deeper into the theological development of the martyr bishop Saint Oscar Romero. To do this he has put himself under the discipline of working through the multiple volumes of Romero's Sunday Sermons, his recorded talks, correspondence, and spiritual notes, and has followed the trail of the Salvadoran's own reading, pastoral practice and liturgical service. This is done with a remarkable generosity, humility and sensitivity by a Methodist pastor and professor who heads up the Centre for Reconciliation at Duke Divinity School and who teaches widely in Latin America, especially in courses of theological formation for Pastors in local churches in Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador and

Panama. His knowledge of the development of Christian life in South America in the last hundred years is magisterial.



To explore Romero's theological vision he focuses on a number of key themes at the heart of which is the national celebration of the feast of the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor. This is mediated through Romero's developing preaching on the feast over his entire ministry, from his first sermon in a parish in 1946 to his last as Archbishop in 1980.

This focus enables Colón-Emeric to weave a rich tapestry of theology, social engagement, and transformative practice, having at its heart a renewed understanding of the revelation of God's glory in the crucified Christ whose broken image enables a more radical identification with that same image in the face of the poor and the oppressed of El Salvador.

In the process we are introduced to refreshing re-readings of patristic, classical, medieval and modern theology. He provides a stimulating re-appraisal of the mission of preaching and the call to all to become "*Microphones of God*" rooted in a close analysis of Romero's own unique homiletic practice and radio ministry. He shows a subtle and discerning awareness of the differing genres of theological discourse in Romero's ministry, homiletic, liturgical, didactic, iconic-symbolic, poetic, contextual, and weaves them subtly and perceptively into a narrative that is rich and provocative of further thought and reflection.

The figure of the Martyr Bishop that emerges on these pages is one of deep humanity with a remarkable and rare

ability for empathy and analysis. It shows a man of profound faith formed by the rhythms of the liturgy; a pastor able to interpret the facts of the moment and the increasing brutalisation of the poor masses in El Salvador within the vision of the practice of Jesus and his death and resurrection; a priest able to enact all of this in the fragmented reality of Salvadorian society and yet also able to promise a future in the wounded yet risen Christ. That Romero should die as his life blood poured out on the ground while offering the body and blood of his Lord receives one of the finest Eucharistic reflections I've read in a long time. This is an exceptional work by the best speculative theologian I have read in many years. The book also includes 91 pages of fascinating end-notes and a very useful 21 page bibliography.

This review first appeared in The Tablet

The book is available from the Romero Trust at the special price of £30 including postage and packing, instead of the list price of £42.50. Contact:

romerotrust@gmail.com

Or by post:

Archbishop Romero Trust

PO Box 70227

London E9 9BR

HOPE AND TRAGEDY IN EL SALVADOR

Clare Dixon reports on news from El Salvador

Two news items from El Salvador briefly featured in the international media in June. The first was the inauguration of new President Nayib Bukele, a 37-year-old social enterprise businessman turned politician and the second was the haunting image of the bodies of Salvadorean father, Oscar Martinez and his tiny daughter, Valeria, who were washed ashore at a riverbank on the Mexico-US border.



Oscar Martinez and daughter Valeria

The tragedy cannot be understood separately from El Salvador's painful past. Valeria's arms were still wrapped around her father's neck, even as both lay, face down, dead on the Mexican

side of the river, ushering the end of their desperate and, ultimately, failed attempt at reaching the US.

The political career of the new President spans only three years as mayor of a small town followed by three years as mayor of San Salvador. His campaign for the presidency was launched in 2017 when the governing party, the left-wing FMLN, expelled him. His social media-fuelled campaign against "the corrupt ones of the past" struck a chord with the public who gave him a decisive first round victory in February's presidential elections. Meanwhile a proposal for a law of "national reconciliation" in El Salvador, which is opposed by human rights organisations representing the victims and many others, has stalled for the time-being in El Salvador's National Assembly.

At the end of June, Amnesty International, met Bukele to deliver a set of recommendations about the human rights situation in the country, putting emphasis on the need to assess responsibility for historic human rights abuses in the civil war, the rights of women and girls, the need to protect

human rights defenders, the needs of migrants, human rights in public security and policing, and adherence to international human rights commitments.



New President Nayib Bukele

Bukele frequently voices his commitment to human rights, but questions arise at his iron fist approach to combat gang violence in the country. Adding to the military presence on the streets, he is recruiting 3000 more soldiers to fight crime. Nor has he shown much interest in the need for protection of human rights defenders, instead asserting that anyone who criticises his approach must be siding with the gangs against the Salvadorean people.

As for the rights of migrants who have fled El Salvador, Bukele acknowledges that the country has to address the conditions of poverty and violence which compel migrants like Oscar Martinez to

leave. He has largely refused, however, to criticise the Trump administration for its treatment of immigrants in detention.

Thanks to Tim Muth of El Salvador Perspectives

IN MEMORIAM - SALLY O'NEILL

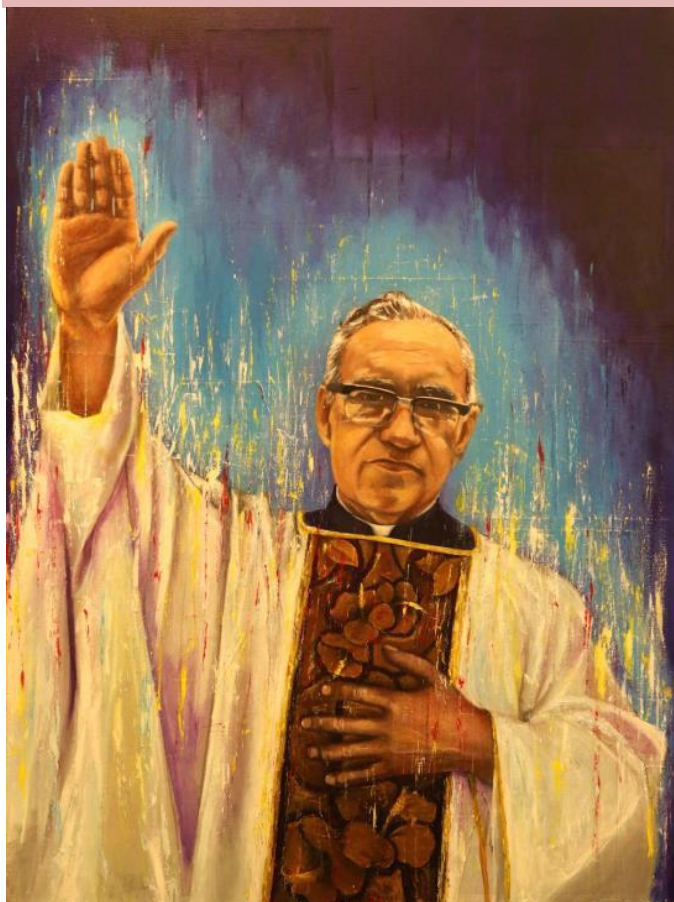
Sally O'Neill, a great friend of the Romero Trust, who worked for CIIR and Trocaire in Central America for more than 40 years, died in a tragic accident in Guatemala in April. Sally was one of the first people to bring the 1981 El Mozote massacre to international attention after receiving reports from Irish missionaries based in El Salvador.



At her memorial service in May in the chapel at Maynooth, President Michael D Higgins called Sally “contemporary Ireland’s greatest gift to the Latin world”.

Rest in Peace

**LAST CALL FOR THE
ROMERO PILGRIMAGE
6-18 NOVEMBER 2019**



Now that Saint Oscar Romero has been recognised by the universal church, many friends of Romero have asked if we could organise a fourth pilgrimage to El Salvador after the highly successful visits in 2010, 2013 and 2017. “Romero Pilgrims” who have already made that journey with us have been inspired by the warmth and resilience of its people, the beauty of the countryside and the chance to visit the holy places and meet with close friends and colleagues of Romero.

The November 2019 visit will be led and accompanied by Trustees of the Romero Trust, Julian Filochowski, Clare Dixon, Bishop John Rawsthorne and our pilgrimage organiser Anthony Coles.

Are you inspired by Romero? Interested in becoming a Romero pilgrim? Our twelve-day trip will coincide with a special time in the country: the celebration of the 30th anniversary of the Martyrs of the UCA, the six Jesuit priests and their two women colleagues killed in 1989.

The all-inclusive cost of the visit is £1,895 covering flights, accommodation, all meals and local transport. For the last remaining places contact Anthony Coles. For full details please visit the Romero Trust website:

<http://www.romerotrusted.org.uk/news/romero-pilgrimage-2019>

or contact Anthony Coles on:

arctc@btinternet.com

Tel: 020 7431 3414

**BUT HURRY AS BOOKINGS
MUST CLOSE IN AUGUST!!**



ROMERO RESOURCES

Did you know that a range of inspiring documentaries and feature films are available, free to view, on the Romero Trust website? We particularly recommend:

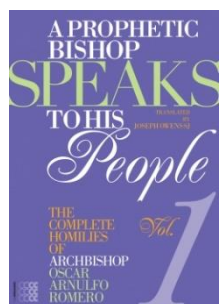
Righting the Wrong:

This documentary provides an excellent overview of Romero's life and martyrdom. It goes on to describe the long drawn out process after his death leading finally to his canonisation by Pope Francis last October. 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>

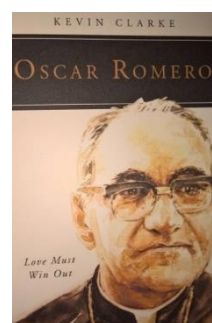
BOOK OFFERS



A Prophetic Bishop Speaks to His People: The Complete Homilies of Oscar Arnulfo Romero, Volumes 1 to 6

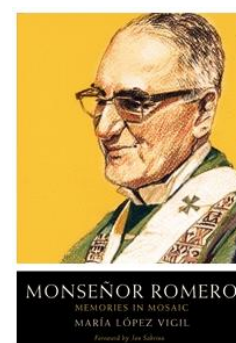
Readers encounter Romero the way ordinary Salvadoreans did—through his sermons, which are brought to a startling new level of clarity and precision. This

new set of translations, elegant and mellifluous, is a reference set that no Romero student can do without. All six Volumes are now available from the Trust at **£20 each (incl. p&p)** but we have **An Extraordinary Special Offer for 2019** to individuals and religious communities who are Romero News readers: **all six volumes for £60 (incl. p&p)**. In bookshops the cost would be £34 per volume!



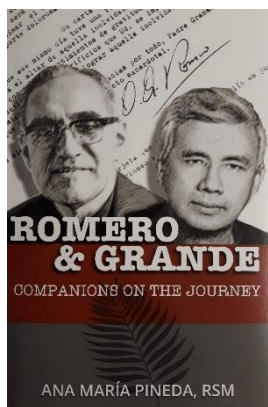
Oscar Romero – Love Must Win Out by Kevin Clarke. An excellent and very readable short introduction to the life and times of Archbishop Romero.

£8 (incl. p&p).



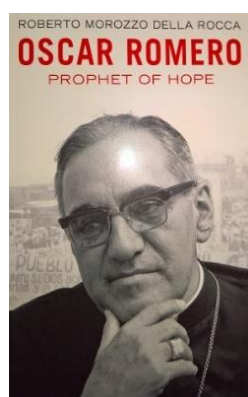
Oscar Romero: Memories in Mosaic Romero remembered by the people who worked with him, lived with him and prayed with him.

Arguably the best book on Romero. Unput-downable. Highly recommended.
£16 (incl. p&p)



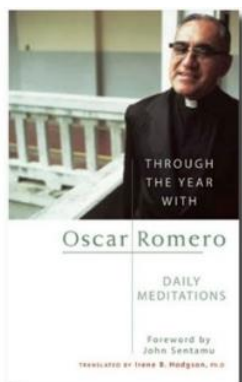
Romero and Grande – Companions on the Journey by Ana Maria Pineda. According to Pope Francis one can't understand Romero without Rutilio. This

book, imported from the US, brings together the interconnected stories of the two martyrs in a special and sympathetic manner. **£12 (incl. p&p)**

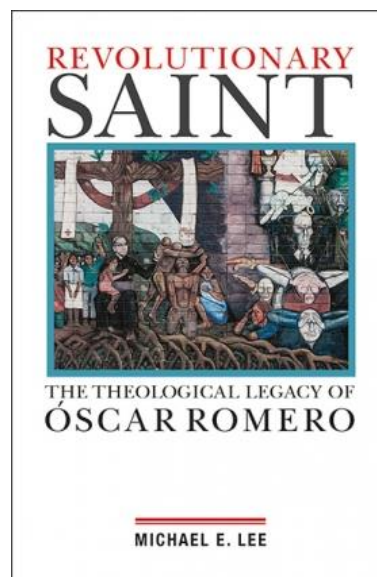


Oscar Romero - Prophet of Hope by Roberto Morozzo della Rocca

This is a comprehensive biography written by one of the authors of the documentation that secured Archbishop Romero's beatification. Well worth reading. **£9 (incl. p&p)**



Through the Year with Oscar Romero: Daily Meditations
Powerful and moving selections from Blessed Romero's broadcast homilies. **£9 (incl. p&p)**

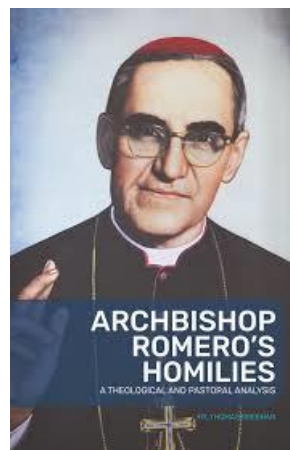


Revolutionary Saint – The theological Legacy of Oscar Romero
Michael E. Lee.
Orbis Books.
Reviewed in last Romero News:

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

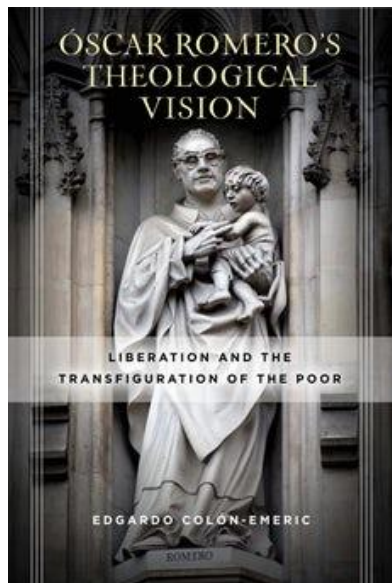


Archbishop Romero's Homilies; A Theological and Pastoral Analysis.



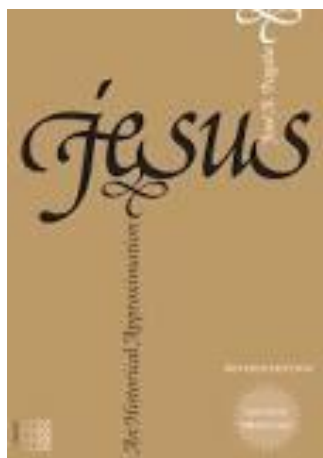
by Tommy Greenan
a priest of the Diocese of St Andrews and Edinburgh who worked many years in rural El Salvador.
£11 (incl. p&p)

Oscar Romero's Theological Vision



The latest scholarly work published on Archbishop Romero which is reviewed in this edition of Romero News by Dr David McLoughlin

Special price of **£30 (incl. p& p)**
instead of full price of £42.50.



Jesus: An Historical Approximation

Author Mgr. José Antonio Pagola presents a lively and passionate narrative of Jesus,

addressing basic questions about who he was, the originality of his message and how the vision of the Kingdom of God centred his life. A profound theological reflection about Jesus.

Extra special offer at **half** the bookshop price. **£20 (incl. p&p)**

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ROMERO IN THE CARIBBEAN

Romero Trust Chair, Julian Filochowski was invited to lead a Retreat and Study Days focussed on Archbishop Romero for all the members of the Bishops' Conference of the Antilles – 19 Bishops and Archbishops in all. The retreat, which took place in Cayenne, French Guiana in May was such a success that a further session is now planned for the clergy of St. Lucia. Can you spot the odd man out in the picture below??



FRIENDS OF ROMERO

Thank you so much for your continued support. There are around 800 *Friends of Romero* who belong to our solidarity network. Your donations help produce the Romero News newsletter and put on events such as Romero Week, the Romero lecture and events to mark Romero's canonisation.

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.romerotrust.org.uk

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

Trustees: Julian Filochowski, Clare Dixon, Bishop John Rawsthorne, Rev Richard Carter, Frank Turner SJ, David Skidmore, Jan Graffius, Sr. Eileen McLoughlin, Stephen Davies, Rev Jim O'Keefe. Treasurer: Stephen Lloyd. Membership: Madge Rondo. Romero News Editor: Clare Dixon

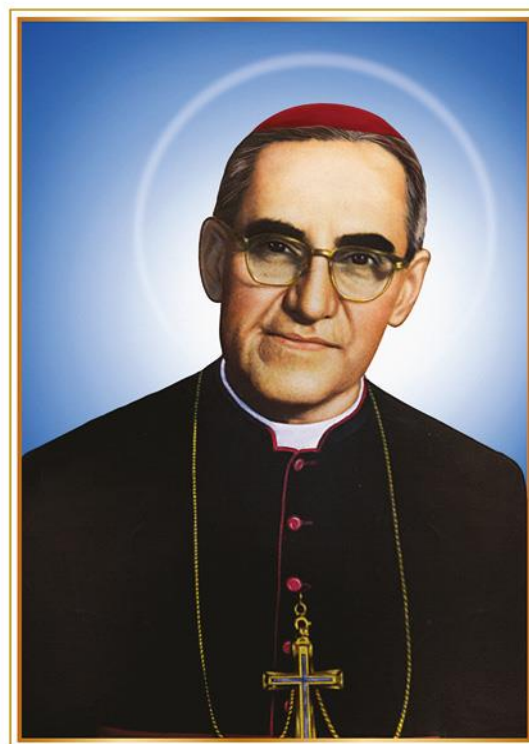
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Archdiocese of San Salvador
UCA media centre
Salvador Perspectives
Trocaire
Equipo Maíz
Fundacion Fernando Llort

ST OSCAR ROMERO PRAYER CARDS AND PORTRAIT

The beautiful, official portrait of Saint Oscar Romero is now 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.

The A3 size portrait, printed on high quality parchment style paper, perfect for framing, costs just £1 each + £3 postage and tube packaging.

For more than 1 copy the p&p is £5.

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

Liverpool Romero Lecture



Wednesday 25 September 2019
(first anniversary of Fr Kevin Kelly)

6.30 for 6.45pm

001 Theatre in the Cornerstone
Hope University (Everton Campus)
Liverpool L3 8DR

Prophetic Trajectories of Hope from San Salvador to Liverpool

A celebration of the ministries of Óscar Romero, Austin Smith, Kevin Kelly & Tom Cullinan

The Archbishop
Romero Trust



Archdiocese of Liverpool
Justice & Peace Commission

given by

David McLoughlin
Newman University, Birmingham
(chaired by Pat Jones)

preceded by

SFX LIVERPOOL



**Memorial Mass in nearby SFX Church
at 5.45pm** celebrated by Bishop John Rawsthorne



**LIVERPOOL HOPE
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175 YEARS OF EXCELLENCE

and afterwards...
drinks to toast the Merseyside Prophets!

