

Romeronews

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Martyrs for Our Time



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Romero Week Events

We are delighted to announce the March celebrations for the 42nd anniversary of St Oscar's martyrdom. Our special guest, eminent Romero scholar and theologian Edgardo Colon-Emeric, will speak at the following venues:

Saturday March 19th at 11am

National Ecumenical Service
St Martin in the Fields, London

Sunday March 20th at 6pm

Evensong at St Alban's Cathedral

Tuesday March 22nd at 5.30pm

Newman University, Birmingham

Thursday March 24th at 7pm

Prior's Hall at Durham Cathedral

Saturday March 26th 11am

Memorial Lecture, Cornerstone, Cardiff

Sunday March 27th at 11am

Wesley's Chapel, City Road, London

Other Events

Southwark: Thursday 24th at 12.30pm
Feast Day Mass, St George's Cathedral

Bradford Friday 25th at 7pm
Romero Film: "Righting the Wrong"
St Winefride's Church Hall

For further details please see page 31

Celebrations in San Salvador

Julian Filochowski brings us an eye-witness report of the beatification ceremony in January for the four martyrs



Aerial view of the ceremony in the Saviour of the World Plaza in San Salvador 22 January

It had been a long wait since early in 2020 when Pope Francis proclaimed as martyrs the Jesuit, Rutilio Grande, his two lay companions, Nelson Lemus and Manuel Solórzano, and the Italian Franciscan missionary priest Cosme Spessotto - all killed out of hatred of the faith. More than 40 years after their assassinations, on Saturday January 22nd at 5.00pm local time (11.00pm GMT), the beatification of this quartet took place in the Plaza Salvador del Mundo in San Salvador.

We witnessed a beautiful ceremony as nightfall descended, with a huge socially-distanced crowd of lay folk in attendance – and an impressive assemblage of concelebrating clergy, bedecked in martyrial red vestments custom-made for the occasion. COVID measures prevented a significant international presence in the Square. But thousands more from the U.S. and across the globe attended virtually and became part of the live-streamed celebration. Happily, I found myself seated amongst the family members of Rutilio Grande and Manuel Solórzano - nieces, grandchildren, and distant cousins, one of whom I had last met in Los Angeles twenty years ago – at a time when this beatification was simply unthinkable!

The local Salvadoran Cardinal, Gregorio Rosa Chávez, was delegated by Pope Francis to preside. He delivered a highly appreciated homily, placing the four martyrs in the context of the country's conflict and civil war in the 1970s and 1980s, which ended with the peace accords in 1992. To widespread disbelief and dismay, El Salvador's current president, Nayib Bukele, has recently attacked the accords and

rejected them as worthless. For the Salvadoran Church, therefore, to place the peace accords centrally in the new martyrs' story on this extraordinary national occasion provided a great boost to the adrenalin of all those striving for social peace in El Salvador. President Bukele was not present at the ceremonies, having arranged a visit to Istanbul to his Turkish homologue, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, to coincide with the beatification date.



The evening celebration

In the days that followed, there were Masses of Thanksgiving in San Juan Nonualco, the town where Fr Cosme had served as parish priest for 27 years until his killing; in San Salvador's cathedral; and in the parish church in El Paisnal, where Rutilio Grande the Jesuit martyr is buried, alongside his companions Manuel, the sacristan-catechist martyr

and Nelson, the teenage martyr. This was a simpler and more intimate liturgy for the people from the surrounding area where Rutilio had served and for the Jesuit communities and their friends.

Everyone's attention was immediately drawn there to a new picture¹ of the three martyrs painted by a young local artist, Cristian Lopez, and unveiled that weekend. It is full of symbolism with Rutilio's bible and catechism highly visible, with spent bullet shells on the ground, their overturned vehicle in the background and various signs of their martyrdom.

This depiction of the three presents their faces and their *campesino* dress faithfully - taking advantage of a previously unseen family photograph. Hopefully the painting will now bring closure to the nagging unhappiness in the diocese at the loss of Rutilio's famous 'Table for All' mural which was peremptorily removed from this same church some years ago.

These four new martyrs are undoubtedly symbols of the Vatican II Church – lay and clerical missionary disciples. At the

¹ See front cover

Angelus in St Peter's Square on the day after the beatifications Pope Francis declared:

"They stood by the poor, bearing witness to the Gospel, truth and justice, even to the shedding of their blood." He continued "May their heroic example arouse in everyone the desire to be courageous agents of fraternity and peace. Let us applaud the new blessed!"

It was a reminder that without Pope Francis's commitment to Archbishop Romero and Rutilio Grande, and his intervention on their behalf, El Salvador's cloud of martyrs would still be waiting in the cold at the back of the Vatican's sainthood queue.

And yet, there was still more good news to emerge in El Salvador. The Bishops' Conference of El Salvador, meeting just before the beatification ceremonies, decided that they would launch a collective cause for the canonisation of 'The Martyrs of El Salvador' as a process of the whole Salvadoran Church. It will likely be led by Monsignor

Rafael Urrutia, the diocesan postulator for both Archbishop Romero and Rutilio Grande.

This initiative would be akin to the '40 Martyrs of England and Wales' or 'The Martyrs of the Spanish Civil War'. It has not yet been decided exactly who will be included in this bumper cause. Nevertheless, it is certain that it will include the four U.S. women missionaries assassinated in December 1980, Fr Octavio Ortiz and the four young men killed with him in El Despertar, and the other priests and religious murdered during the civil war. The names of some 500 potential lay martyrs - catechists and Delegates of the Word - have been brought together, region by region of the country, by a team coordinated by the Irish Franciscan missionary, Ciaran O' Nuanain. It is hoped and expected that a selection of these will be included in the final list.

Finally, the search has already begun for a miracle to secure the canonisation of Blessed Rutilio Grande and companions, and another for Blessed Cosme Spessotto.

[Alleluia, Amen!](#)

A Prayer for Rutilio Grande Sr Dianna Ortiz OSU²

God of Justice, with the people of El Salvador, we remember Blessed Rutilio Grande's compassion and love for the poor and disenfranchised. May we learn from his example to be shoulders of comfort and rest for those walking through storms of persecution and injustice.

May we learn from his example to be prophetic and pastoral witnesses where we are led by the voices of the poor and the everyday leaders in our communities.

May we learn from his example to be credible signs of hope in a world divided by conflict and the carnage of violence, and may we learn from Blessed Grande and other martyrs that the sins of El Salvador's violent past can serve as a vehicle of change for the common good, shape our actions as servant leaders, and build a culture of love, respect, and nonviolence.

² While serving as a missionary in Guatemala in 1989, Ursuline Sister Dianna Ortiz was abducted,

Romero and Rutilio

Homily originally delivered by Julian Filochowski at St Martin-in-the-Fields Church London Wednesday 14th April 2021

Martyrdom is the supremely Christian death. Rutilio Grande and Archbishop Romero are two inspiring 20th century martyrs. They were both executed like Jesus - on the orders of the military rulers of El Salvador. Why? For "stirring up the people" - as Luke chapter 23 puts it... It was Tertullian in the 2nd Century who gave us the enduring message: - "The Blood of the Martyrs is the seed of the Church." Whilst bishop Pedro Casaldáliga from Brazil, warned us: - "Woe to that people that forgets its martyrs".

In an era of junk media and bad news we can easily forget the good news of even recent martyrs. Every year on March 24th, the anniversary of his assassination, the Anglican Communion celebrates the Feast of Oscar Romero and all the Martyrs of El Salvador too. And there have been many in the

raped, and tortured by Guatemalan military. She died of cancer in February 2021.

repression and killings both preceding and during El Salvador's civil war. Some 800 names have been collected as 'anonymous witnesses to the gospel' and over 500 identified as 'credible martyrs'. St Oscar Romero is pre-eminent amongst them, and we honour his ministry and martyrdom in this church every year in a special ecumenical liturgy. Killed prior to Oscar Romero, but yet bound up with him, is the Jesuit priest Rutilio Grande. He is soon to be beatified, as Blessed Rutilio Grande, along with two lay companions.



The three crosses shrine at the spot where Rutilio, Manuel and Nelson were killed

Rutilio is an attractive and energising figure for us Christians, struggling to follow Jesus, in a world, dare I suggest it, of unresponsive structural injustice that is breeding inequality and destitution.

I never met Rutilio Grande but within weeks of his killing in March 1977 I visited the roadside shrine marking the place where together with his 72-year-old friend Manuel Solorzano, and 16-year-old Nelson Lemus, he was shot dead. It's widely accepted that it's impossible to understand Archbishop Romero without Rutilio Grande.

Rutilio has been aptly described as Romero's precursor, or John the Baptist to Romero's Christ. He prepared the way for Romero; and his killing was a pivotal moment in Romero's development. The scales finally fell from Romero's eyes. It crystallised in Romero his fundamental option for the poor. A grain of wheat had fallen into the earth and died...and was quickly bearing fruit! Romero and Rutilio were both from relatively poor backgrounds, born in small rural villages, both were constantly aware and proud of their humble roots; both loved the Salvadoran people and remained close to them. Both were ordained priests and

had deep faith in Jesus Christ; and they both loved the Church. Yet both had fragile personalities with nervous frailties; and both had the great gift of prophetic preaching; the 2nd Vatican Council guided their pastoral activities; both are martyrs killed by agents of the Salvadoran security forces – both assassinations were covered up without anyone brought to justice in El Salvador. Rutilio was born in 1928 into a large dysfunctional Catholic family; there's obscurity around his parents' separation which greatly affected young Rutilio who was brought up by his grandmother. The family fell into serious poverty.

His health was always problematic – physically he was not strong; and there was intermittent nervous illness with two serious crises. But in 1966, during his retreat, he reflected on the weakness of his nervous system. He accepted himself and promised himself not to be an obsessive perfectionist. He wrote that he would 'learn to swim by swimming'. "This is My Cross. But I am confident with the help of God I will triumph." And he did! His health weakness was compensated by his undoubted pastoral charism and his gift as a preacher. He spoke the

colloquial language of the people with popular idiom and all the simplicity of the peasant culture. He tried to make biblical characters and gospel teachings accessible to everyone – as such he resembled the greatest spiritual teacher of them all – Jesus of Nazareth. In 1968, the Latin American bishops meeting in Medellín took the conclusions of the 2nd Vatican Council and sought to interpret them for their continent, with a dramatic change of direction - advocating the preferential option for the poor. This had profound implications for El Salvador, for Rutilio and for Romero.



Rutilio began to question various Jesuit educational institutions, their exclusive schools and the top-class University, very close to the country's wealthy social

elites. He argued that his Jesuit brothers needed to engage in direct experience, and identify more closely with the rural poor.

So, at the end of 1972, Rutilio was appointed to head a pastoral programme in the parish of Aguilares, which included his birthplace, El Paisnal. It was a conflictive zone, the epicentre of a cauldron of injustice. Huge sugar cane plantations and 3 enormous sugar mills in the area. Big issues of exploitation on the sugar estates of Christian landowners, and with a landless and impoverished rural peasantry all around. Army-backed militias were in action to suppress protest. Rutilio embarked on a team-based evangelisation "Mission".



The pastoral team created living base Christian communities and trained pastoral agents who became real movers and shakers. They, and in particular the women, quickly began to set the direction

of parish activity. It was a new way of being Church – a non-elitist, non-clericalist approach - aspiring to be a servant Church with servant leaders. Rutilio led with the Gospel but he didn't shy away from speaking on social and political questions. He was prophetic on issues of land reform, the relationship of rich and poor, and workers' rights. He was fond of saying "the Gospel must grow little feet" if Christ isn't to remain in the clouds. It was a "pastoral" liberation ministry that began in scripture and allowed lay people to work for social transformation without resorting to Marxist analysis.

Over the next 4 years, peasant political organisations developed rapidly in the area. The pastoral team had no political agenda, and as Rutilio himself put it, "We come to put leaven in the dough, not to give them a plan!" (In parenthesis it reminds me of Pope Francis's recent warning to Catholic clergy that "the Church is called to form consciences - not replace them.") But there was voluble opposition to Rutilio's work from many quarters – the pastoral team were described as "little angels with red wings and machine-guns under their

cassocks." They were labelled as 'Communists, agitators, preachers of the bloody revolution of hate and violence'. And there were death threats. When, in February 1977, Fr Mario Bernal, pastor of nearby Apopa, was deported to his native Colombia, Rutilio preached at a great open-air Mass to lament his expulsion. His words were an audacious challenge to the government:

" I'm afraid that very soon the Bible and the Gospel will not be allowed to cross our borders. All that will reach us will be the covers, since all the pages are subversive.... So if Jesus of Nazareth returned, at this time...with his preaching and actions. They would accuse him,.. of being an agitator, arrest him and put him in jail,and they would undoubtedly crucify him again. Because many prefer a Christ of undertakers and morticians. They want a mute Christ without a mouth. They want a God who will not challenge them – one who will not say those tremendous words 'Cain, what have you done to your brother Abel?' "

It likely sealed his fate. And on Saturday March 12th, 1977, with Manuel Solorzano and Nelson Lemus sitting beside him, and three young children in the rear, he set out again in his VW Safari along the dusty road from Aguilares to El Paisnal to celebrate Mass. As they drove by the hamlet of Los Mangos, a hail of bullets killed all three. The panic-stricken children were allowed to escape; but they recognised one of the killers. The perpetrators were a death squad under army command.

In the country named after Christ the Saviour, a priest assassinated had until then been unthinkable. Open persecution of the Church had now begun. This 'notorious' assassination was the opening shot of barbaric incidences of torture and martyrdom. The early stages of what would become a brutal 12-year civil war.

Rutilio's life could be described as dramatic. Serious health limitations; an obsession with fidelity to his vocation as a priest, left him in strange places, walking in the dark; the cruel doubts and disquieting uncertainties tested his faith and trust in God. And in those moments,

he put himself in God's hands. In his weakness, he found his greatness.

Oscar Romero too had suffered from scrupulosity and also from an obsessive-compulsive cycle of behaviour. It's my belief that he and Rutilio recognised one another as two peas out of the same pod who had a certain psychological fragility and that this became a bond, perhaps an unspoken bond, between the two of them. As the late Dean Brackley commented in a throwaway line "For all of us neurotics, Romero and Rutilio are a genuine inspiration!"

Romero's installation as archbishop, in February 1977, coincided with a massive presidential electoral fraud, followed by killings and unprecedented national tension. Romero had scarcely moved in when his friend Rutilio, was murdered. Romero drove out to Aguilares and spent most of the night praying beside Rutilio's body. He was tearful and filled with compassion. He saw in his mind's eye where it would inevitably lead him if he followed this through - and he assented. He said yes! His initial disbelief at what had happened became prophetic determination. Bishop Rivera Damas, Romero's successor, said of that night of

prayer and discernment: "One martyr gave life to another martyr. Kneeling before the body of Rutilio Grande, Monsignor Romero, on his 20th day as archbishop, felt the call from Christ to overcome his natural human timidity and to be filled with apostolic courage. From that moment on Archbishop Romero left behind the pagan lands of Tyre and Sidon and marched boldly towards Jerusalem." Towards his death. Three years later, on that fateful evening of March 24th Romero's final homily was a poignant reflection on John 12 – "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies it remains just a single grain; but if it dies it yields a rich harvest". Minutes later he was shot dead at the altar. As they say, Romero, like his friend Rutilio, 'talked the talk and walked the walk'. And both of them would surely endorse the words of another Latin American martyr, the Jesuit Luis Espinal, "[Whoever does not have the courage to speak on behalf of human beings has no right to speak of God.](#)" In the words of Rutilio's biographer, Thomas Kelly, which I heartily endorse: - "In promoting Rutilio for sainthood, Pope Francis is lifting up a model of the servant-leader priest who

freed himself from the trappings of the elite clergy and served among the marginalised in their struggle against systemic evil. Not only martyrdom, but a life lived in solidarity with the poor and challenging the forces of oppression that damage their humanity – a message to the whole church that the gospel’s preferential option for the poor, and those who live it, will be glorified.”

With Rutilio, God passed through Aguilares. God left martyrs like him as signs of credible love - and therefore signs of hope amidst cynicism and despair. And credible love inspires us to carry on the cause that was expressed in that love. Lord God, please continue to grant us serenity; the serenity to accept the things we cannot change. But also, Lord, please grant us the grace to change the things we cannot and should not accept. **AMEN**

JF writes: With acknowledgements and my profound gratitude to the biographers of Rutilio Grande: Rodolfo Cardenal SJ, Thomas Kelly, Rhina Guidos and Ana Maria Pineda whose studies of Blessed Rutilio have been a key source of ideas and words for this sermon.

Remembering Rutilio and Aguilares José Aníbal Meza Tejada

Childhood memories from one of Fr Rutilio’s young parishioners, now himself a Jesuit priest

On the occasion of the beatification of Fr Rutilio Grande, Nelson Lemus and Manuel Solórzano, I would like to share some memories, not so much of Rutilio himself but of everyday pastoral activities he was involved in.

I got to know Fr Grande and the original team, which became responsible for the parish of Aguilares (the place I was born) in 1972. As well as Rutilio there were Bengochea and Salvador. Later others joined the parish team (Benigno, Marcelino and Gustavo – ‘Tavo’). For the people of Aguilares this was something new, since they had had a series of parish priests who had shown little interest in pastoral work.

The first novel aspect was their presence and direct contact with the parishioners, both in the urban area and in the countryside. This was significant in that it meant an important shift from sacramental practice to a process of evangelisation. The people acquired new

energy from the formation of communities that held reflections on the gospel. A variety of people who hadn't had much to do with the Church began to be actively involved in parish life.

Religious celebrations acquired a different perspective and new energy. On one occasion during Holy Week, during the procession to the Holy Tomb, for the different points at which the coffin stopped places were chosen that were key to the political, social and economic life of Aguilares. For example, one of the stations was at the headquarters of the old Treasury Police (which was disbanded under the 1992 peace accords). Here the sermon was a condemnation of the repression and intimidation this police force practised in the rural areas.

Another novel aspect was the active role of the different pastoral workers from the rural areas (the 'cantons') through the structure of the Delegates of the Word (of God). The ordinary people, poor and exploited, had the Word of God in their hands, and this meant transformation, vindication, feeling that God cared for them, that they were sons and daughters of God. An example of this active role

was the Maize Festival. The basic principle of this festival was that everything was free. Maize cobs (fresh, not dried) were free, donated by all the communities, and cooked maize and maize porridge were free too.

A striking more personal feature that stuck in my mind was how important the music of the Brazilian singer Roberto Carlos was for Fr Grande. For a while on



Saturday afternoons some of his songs could be heard from the church's outside loudspeakers. They included *Un Millón de amigos* ('A Million Friends'), which is an invitation to build universal friendship, *Jesus Cristo*, a song that urges following the mission of Jesus Christ because 'I am

here now', *La Montaña* ('The Mountain'), which encourages regular prayer and reflection, and *El Progreso* ('Progress'), a song in advance of its time that expresses upset at damage to the environment. Rutilio was tall, slim, shy

but firm and prophetic in his speech. I can see him in his black or grey clerical shirt, his hair always well cut, in which there were more grey hairs than black. That's my memory of his physical appearance. It is a pleasure to share – after fifty years – these memories of a person who devoted part of his life to practising the first Beatitude: 'Blessed are the poor because the kingdom of heaven is theirs,' and was martyred along with two others now declared blessed, Manuel and Nelson.

Rutilio Grande's Miracle³ **Martin Maier SJ**

Martin Maier SJ is currently Director of Adveniat, the German Catholic humanitarian aid organisation for Latin America. He has taught theology for many years at the Romero Centre at the UCA Jesuit University in San Salvador



Beatifications and canonisations can be pointers to the way the Church is moving. On 22 January 2022 in El Salvador, the Jesuit Rutilio Grande was beatified,

along with his lay companions, Nelson Rutilio Lemus and Manuel Solórzano and the Franciscan Cosme Spessoto: they were declared martyrs. They represent the new start the Church made after the Second Vatican Council. They represent a missionary Church that has gone to the peripheries, the social and existential edges. They represent a persecuted Church, which has produced numerous martyrs for faith and justice.

At the Second General Conference of Latin American bishops in Medellín, Colombia, in 1968, Vatican II was creatively transposed into the Latin American context. In this process the bishops recognised as the most important sign of the times the poverty on the subcontinent that cried out to heaven. Inspired by the Gospel and the emerging theology of liberation, they made the preferential option for the poor the Church's programme. Rutilio Grande put the option for the poor at the centre of his new concept of a missionary rural ministry.

Rutilio was born in 1928 into a poor family in the little village of El Paisnal in

³ Translated from German by Francis McDonagh

El Salvador. In 1945 he joined the Jesuits. He followed the order's normal training in philosophy and theology in Venezuela, Ecuador, Spain, France and Belgium. Subsequently, until 1972 he worked in priestly formation in El Salvador's national seminary in the capital, San Salvador. There he tried to include in formation the spirit of the Second Vatican Council and the Medellín conference. His biographer, Rodolfo Cardenal, writes: 'Rutilio's aim was to train priests that would be at the service of the people and not clerical bosses.' This was one reason why he was not appointed rector of the seminary. Consequently, in autumn 1972 he decided to engage in direct parish work in the community of Aguilares, which included his birthplace.



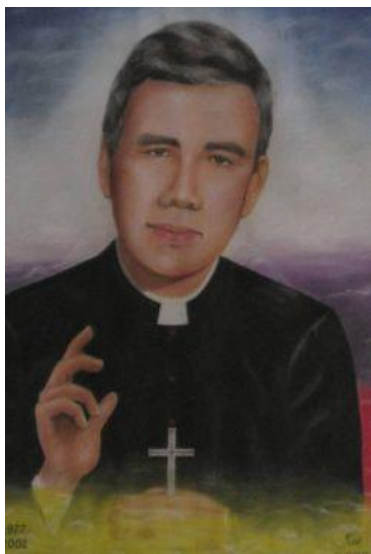
In Aguilares Rutilio, with a team of Jesuits and women religious, began to

implement a ministry of awareness-raising and liberation. In so doing he was bringing about the Church's shift of position to the side of the poor, which had been decided at the bishops' assembly in Medellín but was far from being accepted by the whole Church in Latin America. In the same spirit, the Jesuit order had in 1975 redefined its mission in the world of its time in terms of the need to combine the preaching of the faith and the fight for justice.

In Aguilares the overwhelming majority of the population lived in the harshest poverty. The land was in the possession of a few large landowners. It was clear to Grande that God was not indifferent to this situation. He often said in his sermons: 'God is not far away in heaven lying in a hammock, but he is in our midst. For God it matters whether the poor down here are in distress or not.'

Rutilio Grande based his pastoral approach on popular piety. This reflected the 'popular theology' developed in Argentina by Lucio Gera, a distinct position within liberation theology that also strongly influenced Pope Francis. But Grande realised that popular piety needed to be freed from magical

elements and evangelised. He described his approach by saying that he 'removed the rosary from the faithful and replaced it with readings from biblical passages with a commentary'. By reviving the November maize festivities, Rutilio Grande showed respect to the ancestral indigenous traditions while inculturating Christian faith.



An essential element of Rutilio's pastoral approach was the active involvement of the laity. The secret, the heart, of the new

departure was the base communities, which read the bible in their groups. The point of this was to connect the word of God with people's lives.

The groups did this by following the three-step 'See – Judge – Act' process associated with the Young Christian Workers, which was also the central approach of liberation theology. Out of his pastoral team Rutilio trained men and women to be 'delegates of the Word', messengers of the Word who went

around to create new groups. Aguilares began to move. When the peasants of Aguilares judged the lives they lived in the light of the Word of God, it was really illuminating. They discovered that poverty and oppression are a recurring theme in the bible, and that, through the prophets and through Jesus, God took the side of the victims.

In this way faith developed a social and political impact. Grande encouraged the peasants to organise in unions and to demand their rights to a decent life and just wages. Other priests followed this example. But the large landowners saw this as a threat to their interests, and so began the persecution of the Church in El Salvador. Foreign priests, and Jesuits in particular, were accused of stirring up unrest and promoting communism. At the beginning of 1977 the first priests were tortured and expelled, among them the Colombian Mario Bernal, parish priest of Apopa, near Aguilares.

On 13 February 1977 there was a protest demonstration in Apopa against the expulsion of Mario Bernal with over 6000 people taking part. In the mass at the end Rutilio delivered a sermon that contained fiery language. Fearlessly he asserted:

'It is dangerous to be a Christian round here! It is dangerous to be a real Catholic! It is practically illegal to be a genuine Christian in our country.' He quotes statistics about the injustice and extreme poverty in El Salvador. Then he went on: 'But we dress all this up with false hypocrisy and lavish constructions. Woe to you hypocrites! You go around outwardly getting a reputation as Catholics, but within you are filthy evil! You are Cains and crucify the Lord when he goes around under the name of Manuel, under the name of Luis, under the name of Chabela, under the name of an ordinary rural worker!'

The sermon culminated with the image of Jesus returning to El Salvador: 'I am very much afraid, dear brothers and sisters and friends, that very soon the bible and the Gospel will not be able to cross our borders. We'd get the covers, nothing else, because all the pages inside are subversive – subversive of sin, naturally! ... I am very much afraid, brothers and sisters, that if Jesus of Nazareth were to come back as in that time, coming down from Galilee to Judea, that is, from Chalatenango to San Salvador, he would not in our time get as far as Apopa with

his preaching and actions. I think they would stop him up there, on Guazapa Hill. There they would arrest him and throw him into prison.... They would bring him before many Supreme Courts for violating the Constitution and being a subversive. They would accuse him, God made man, the model of humanity, of being a revolutionary, a foreign Jew, of confusing people with outlandish foreign ideas, opposed to "democracy", that is opposed to the minority. Anti-God ideas, because they belong to the clan of the Cains. There can be no doubt, brothers and sisters, that they would crucify him once more.'

It must have been this sermon that was Rutilio Grande's death sentence. On 12 March 1977 – with two companions, 70-year old Manuel Solórzano and 15-year old Nelson Rutilio Lemus – as they were travelling to a liturgy, he was murdered in an ambush by members of the National Guard.

The murder was ordered by the large landowners. The three bodies were wrapped in cloth and laid in front of the altar in the church of Aguilares. Late that night the newly appointed archbishop of San Salvador, Oscar Romero, arrived.

Even though Rutilio Grande was a friend of Romero's, Romero was somewhat critical of his pastoral approach in Aguilares: there is a remark to this effect in one of his reports to the Pontifical Council for Latin America in Rome. But as he stood before Rutilio Grande's corpse, Oscar Romero was shaken to the core. He asked to see the priest's simple room and muttered to himself: 'He really lived in poverty.' He decided to celebrate a mass in the middle of the night. As the text for his sermon he chose this verse from John's gospel: 'No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends' (Jn 15.13).



Cristián Lopez paints the martyrs of El Paisnal

The three bodies were taken to San Salvador, where on 14 March Romero celebrated the requiem mass in the cathedral. The mass was broadcast on radio. Romero thought that the murderers might be listening to the broadcast in their hiding-place and addressed them in these forceful words: 'Criminal brothers, we love you, and we ask God to move your hearts to repentance, because the church is incapable of hatred; the church has no enemies.'

The murder of Rutilio Grande and his companions brought about a profound change in Romero, which some people have even described as a 'conversion'. A timid, conservative bishop became a prophetic defender of the poor. In popular tradition this change was described as 'Rutilio's miracle'. Looking back later Romero himself described his intuitive insight in front of Rutilio Grande's body in these terms: 'If they killed him for what he did, then I have to follow the same path. Rutilio opened my eyes.'

The Jesuit Salvador Carranza, who belonged to the Aguilares pastoral team, compared the significance of Rutilio

Grande for Romero with that of John the Baptist for Jesus. John regarded himself as the forerunner who was to prepare the way for someone greater who would come after him. It was after John's imprisonment and murder that Jesus began his public activity.

Romero reacted to the murder of Rutilio Grande with an announcement that he would not take part in any other official government event until the crime was solved. He gave another sign on 20 March: across the whole of the archdiocese of San Salvador only one mass would be celebrated, in San Salvador's cathedral. In the tense situation the military government was afraid that masses of people would attend and did all it could to prevent the mass.



St Romero of the Poor and Peasant Farmer

The nuncio too was against the idea, but Romero was not be swayed. Over 100,000 people gathered for the mass. In his sermon Romero was clear: 'Anyone who touches one of my priests touches me.' In Catholic schools instead of the normal classes, passages from the bible, Vatican II and Medellín were read and discussed with the students.

For Pope Francis the beatification of Rutilio Grande was particularly important, as had been the canonisation of Oscar Romero in 2018. As provincial of the Argentine Jesuits he had followed their story carefully. In an address to the Central American bishops at World Youth Day in Panama in 2019, he proposed Oscar Romero as the model of a bishop, who gave his life for his flock. He knew the life of Rutilio Grande from a book by Rodolfo Cardenal, of the Jesuit Central American University in San Salvador, which appeared shortly after his murder. In 2015, when he met Cardenal in Rome, he said: 'Rutilio Grande's greatest miracle is Archbishop Romero.'

Rutilio Grande's beatification comes at a time of new movements and changes in the Church of Latin America and the

Caribbean, comparable with the transformation of the Church following the Medellín bishops' conference in 1968. An important reference point is the Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops in Aparecida, Brazil, in 2007 with the motto 'Disciples and Missionaries of Jesus Christ – so that our peoples may have life in him', which called for a new missionary impetus. The drafting of the final document was coordinated by the then Archbishop of Buenos Aires, Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio.

It was at Aparecida that Bergoglio first became aware of the significance of the Amazon region and its indigenous population, and the threats they faced. With Pope Francis' encouragement, in 2014 the Church Amazonian Network, REPAM, was set up, with a particular concern for the preservation of the rainforest. In 2019 the Amazon synod was held in Rome; this, with its vision of a Church with an Amazonian face, suggested 'new paths for the Church and an integral ecology'. An important further step was the creation of the new ecclesial conference for the Amazon region, CEAMA, with the task of carrying out the

synod's decisions. The new conference is made up of bishops, priests, deacons and members of indigenous peoples from all nine Amazon countries.

An important event of a new kind took place in Mexico from 21 to 28 November 2021, the First Ecclesial Assembly for Latin America and the Caribbean.



Strictly, following the five major previous General Conferences of Latin American and Caribbean

Bishops, it was time for the Sixth Episcopal Conference. Pope Francis, however, expressed a wish, not for a bishops' conference to be held, but an ecclesial assembly including priests, religious and lay people. The assembly took place in hybrid form, with around 80 participants physically present in Mexico and virtually, with around 1000 further participants across the whole continent. They included 200 bishops, 200 priests, 200 religious and 400 laypeople.

The assembly was preceded by a wide-ranging consultation process based on a preparatory document with the programmatic title: 'We are outgoing

missionary disciples.’ From 70,000 contributions by individuals and groups emerged a ‘narrative synthesis’ that in its turn became the basis for the deliberations in Mexico and across the continent. The Ecclesial Assembly approved a final declaration and identified twelve challenges for the Church in Latin America and the Caribbean. The Ecclesial Assembly showed clearly that the old hierarchical structures in the Church have outlived their usefulness.



For the Church to survive into the future laity and especially women must have responsibility in the Church’s mission.

This requires the ending of clericalism and the participation of the whole people of God in discussion and decision-making processes and brings up again the issue of the access of married men and women to ministries in the Church. Christians of African heritage and young people, who are relatively badly represented, have been winning a greater hearing. A further important topic was the preservation of the Amazon rainforest. Nevertheless the Ecclesial Assembly also showed that these processes of change are difficult and will take time.

Much of what is today on the renewal agenda of the Church in Latin America and the Caribbean was anticipated by Rutilio Grande in his ideas for a missionary rural ministry in Aguilares: the new emphasis on mission, the new involvement of the laity, respect for indigenous traditions, the Church’s prophetic contribution to political and structural change. This makes the beatifications on 22 January 2022 an encouraging sign for the Church on its road to social, cultural, ecological and synodal conversion.

Obituary Sister Pamela Hussey

Clare Dixon remembers a colleague, friend and inspirational role model



Founding member of the Archbishop Romero Trust, Sister Pamela Hussey, died peacefully on 13th December 2021, at the nursing home of the Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus in Harrogate, just three weeks short of celebrating her 100th birthday.

Born of English parents in Argentina, Pamela always said that she felt that hers might be described as a life of two halves or, more accurately, of two continents, Latin America and Europe. In 1942, at the age of twenty, Pamela quit her job at the British Embassy in Buenos Aires. She demonstrated the fearlessness which was to become her hallmark when she decided – at the height of the Second

World War - to undertake the perilous journey across the Atlantic. She set sail for Britain to join the WRNs and ‘do her bit’ for the war effort, jokingly downplaying her decision years later by saying, “I only joined for the hat!” But it was a hazardous voyage from South America to Britain and the vessels immediately ahead of and behind Pamela's ship were sunk by U-Boats. On arrival in Britain Pamela enrolled in the Royal Navy and was sent to the Irtton Moor listening post, now GCHQ Scarborough, as a WRNS Wireless Telegraphist special operator in Signals Intelligence.

Pamela and her colleagues would transcribe German communications sent in Enigma-encrypted code, which was then passed to a mysterious 'Station X', now known as Bletchley Park. Pamela's role in the war effort was recognised by the French Government in 2018 when she was awarded the French President's highest order of merit, the Légion d'Honneur. At the end of the war Pamela returned to Argentina but in 1950, in search of what she called a “deeper commitment”, she moved to Britain and joined the Society of the Holy Child

Jesus. She studied at Oxford and spent years as a teacher of modern languages whilst also acting as secretary to the leader of the SHCJ province.

Just as she was about to reach the age of 60 Pamela said, “the two continents of my life came together again”. Pamela had long supported Justice and Peace and she was eager, once again, to “do her bit”. This time it was another war which compelled her into action: in El Salvador Archbishop Oscar Romero had been murdered the previous year for denouncing the repression of the poor and espousing their cause. Throughout Central America vicious military regimes, backed by the US, were violently suppressing peaceful protest and the region was heading towards all-out civil war.

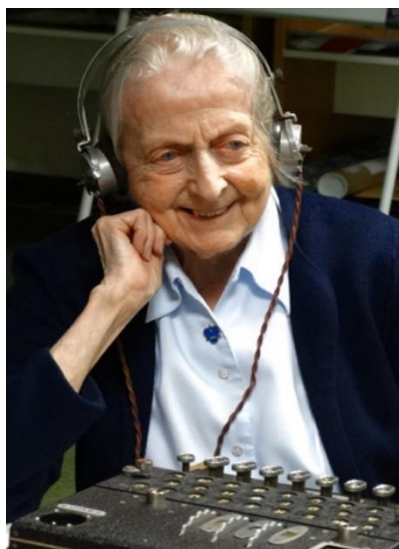
Pamela found an outlet for her moral and spiritual indignation when she was approached by Julian Filochowski of CIIR, the Catholic Institute for International Relations, who asked whether she might lend a hand in managing their overwhelming workload at such a critical time for Central America. Pamela, whose perfect fluency in Spanish could be a huge asset to CIIR,

hardly dared to hope that she might be permitted to offer her services. Much to the surprise and delight of both Pamela and CIIR, her Provincial agreed to release her to work full-time as a volunteer.

For the next 25 years at CIIR Pamela devoted her energies to the cause of the poor throughout Central America but especially found her calling in El Salvador, traveling frequently to the country to learn how best to provide support and encouragement to CIIR’s key friends and allies there.

She became an eloquent advocate and ambassador for the Church in El Salvador, fostering particularly close relationships with the religious and missionary congregations, the Jesuits, Franciscans and Poor Clares, who, in turn, doted upon her. Pamela discovered a whole new vocation and what she described as “a new ministry of writing”, becoming particularly inspired by the role and leadership of women she encountered through her work. Her first book, *Free from Fear: Women in El Salvador’s Church*, was published by CIIR in 1989, followed by four more volumes which she co-wrote with her

Quaker close friend and colleague, Marigold Best.



Pamela in 2014 visiting the GCHQ museum in Scarborough, and the underground bunker where she used to work during World War 2, listening to German coded radio messages.

Pamela was perhaps CIIR's most powerful secret weapon in challenging the apologists for US (and British) foreign policy in Central America. If any one individual embodied the value of "speaking truth to power" without fear or favour, that was Pamela. Her diminutive stature and rather prim and genteel demeanour belied a spirit of steely resolve and courage. Nobody could patronise Pamela, or if they tried, they certainly wouldn't attempt it a second time. Woe betide anyone who underestimated Pamela, and numerous politicians, government officials and journalists learned this the hard way when she refused to leave unchallenged any empty platitude or condescending remark. No wonder that, upon her

retirement (at 85!) from CIIR/Progressio, so many women present at her farewell party agreed wholeheartedly that Pamela was a role model – "you are who we all want to be when we grow up!"

In 2000, Pamela was awarded an MBE for her work for human rights and in 2004, whilst still working full-time at CIIR, she became one of the five founding trustees and the first treasurer of the Archbishop Romero Trust. She was delighted and proud that the official address of the Trust was Dean's Mews, Cavendish Square, the home of the SHCJ community where she lived.

At the age of 91 she stepped down as a Trustee and took on the senior role of Patron of the Trust when she moved to the SHCJ retirement home in Harrogate. There she maintained her lively interest in world affairs, enjoying conversation with visitors, reading *Le Monde Diplomatique*, daily walks to a local café and sending friends amusing notes and the watercolours which were her lifelong pastime.

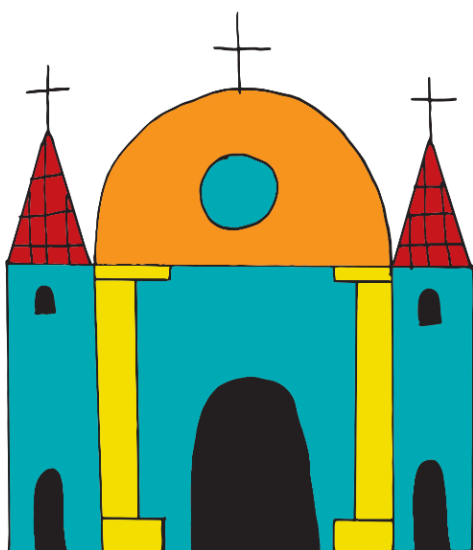
Pamela was close to her family, and into her eighties she was very assiduous and attentive to her mother, who lived to the great age of 104. Many of us were

convinced that Pamela was determined to reach her own centenary. Sadly that was not to be, but Pamela will be loved and remembered by her family and many friends across the world. As her brother Peter said, “she was a good Sister, and a good sister”. Perhaps the words of the envoy of the French government in 2018 when awarding Pamela the Légion d’Honneur best sum her up:

“The Légion d’Honneur expresses righteousness, honour, heroism and excellence. Sister Pamela, you are a perfect example of someone who deserves our gratitude and thanks.”

Sister Pamela Hussey SHCJ

7 January 1922 – 13 December 2021



El Salvador News in Brief

Bukele’s Bitcoin Gamble

The adoption of Bitcoin as legal tender in El Salvador in September 2021 has not created a financial bonanza for the country or its people. Instead, El Salvador's Bitcoin trading, led by its Bitcoin-cyber president, has accumulated \$18 million USD in unrealised losses, and the country's credit rating on world financial markets has fallen through the floor.

The International Monetary Fund has been urging Bukele to reverse course, and the likelihood of needed loan funding from the IMF seems ever more remote. All of this has produced an abundance of negative commentary in the world’s press. Today, only the Bitcoin enthusiasts seem to be unreserved fans of Bukele's Bitcoin gamble. Meanwhile the President is seeking investment to build a Bitcoin city at the base of a volcano.

The city will be circular to represent the shape of a large coin and will be built in the south-eastern region of La Unión, The site would take advantage of the Conchagua volcano's geothermal energy to power Bitcoin mining.

Foreign Agents' Law

In December the global civil society alliance CIVICUS expressed its grave concern about the "Foreign Agents" bill proposed by the government of El Salvador, which would give the executive broad powers to repress civil society and independent media.

International pressure has put the brakes on the introduction of the law which would have limited the legitimate activities of organisations, charities and individuals that receive funding or support from abroad. It would require them to register as a "foreign agent" with the Ministry of Interior and impose a 40 per cent tax. The bill would have allowed the cancellation of the legal registration of organisations that fail to comply with its provisions and can carry prison sentences for "foreign agents" who

"disturb public order", terms often used to refer to the participation in and organisation of protests.

The approval of this legislation would be a serious blow to the fundamental freedoms of the people of El Salvador by curtailing the space for organisations of civil society to operate freely.

UCA Jesuits' Case Reopened

El Salvador's Supreme Court has reopened a criminal investigation into the 1989 massacre of six Jesuit priests their housekeeper and her daughter carried out by a U.S.-trained death squad during the Salvadoran civil war.

There have been ongoing attempts by the Jesuits to prosecute all of those involved in the massacre, since a 1993 amnesty law was declared unconstitutional in 2016.

In January of this year President Bukele declared his willingness to reopen the Jesuit case. His move was seen as a rather cynical attempt to present the Government in a favourable light by taking a lead role in pushing for trials against wartime crimes.

Previously Bukele had been discredited because of the obstacles placed in the way of the investigation of the notorious Mozote massacre of some 1,000 civilians and the dismissal of the judge in charge of that case.

The Jesuits, who have pursued the case of their murdered colleagues for more than three decades, believe that the government is trying to present its initiative in this case as an attempt to undermine the longstanding efforts of the Jesuits to ensure a process of transitional justice to benefit victims of human rights abuses.

At the end of February prosecutors in El Salvador charged the former president Alfredo Cristiani over the 1989 massacre that sparked international outrage. The former president, who served from 1989 to 1994, has denied any involvement or knowledge of the plan to kill the priests. Prosecutors also announced charges against a dozen other people, including former military officers, over the massacre. The list of charges will apparently include murder, terrorism and conspiracy. The attorney general, Rodolfo Delgado, wrote that his office “is determined to go after those accused of

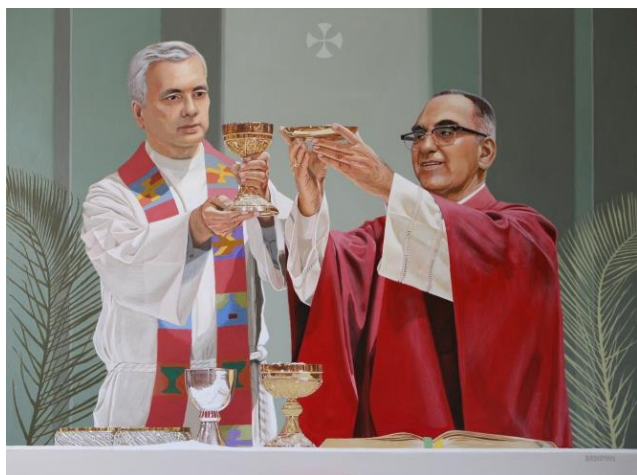
ordering this regrettable and tragic event”. After more than thirty years of efforts, the reopening of the case is raising hopes that justice may finally prevail, setting an important precedent in establishing the rule of law to allow the prosecution of war crimes and transitional justice for victims.

MARTYRS OF EL SALVADOR NEW PRAYER CARDS

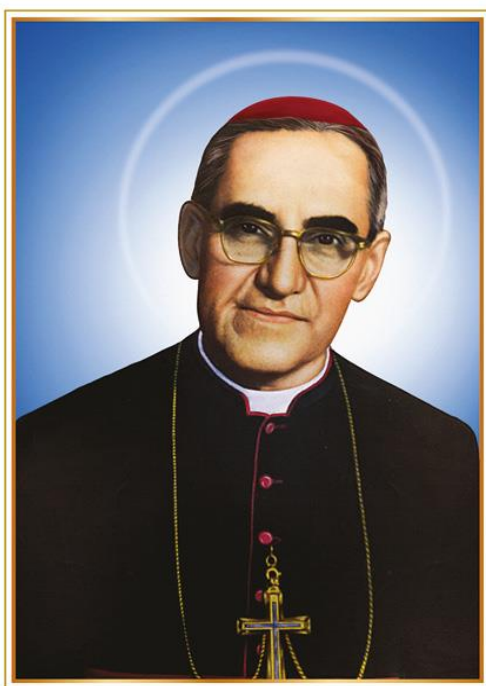


To celebrate the beatification of Rutilio Grande and his companions, Manuel Solórzano and Nelson Lemus, the Romero Trust has produced prayer cards of this beautiful portrait by Salvadorean artist Cristián Lopez.

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

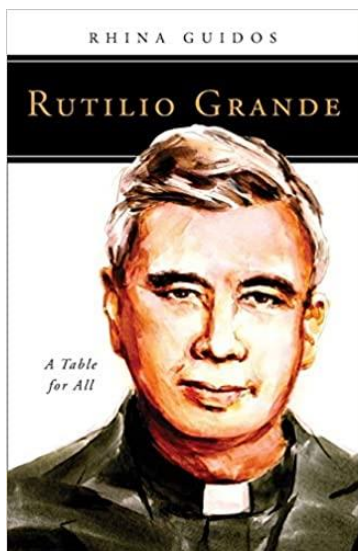
captures the

life and

ministry of the soon-to-be-Blessed

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£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

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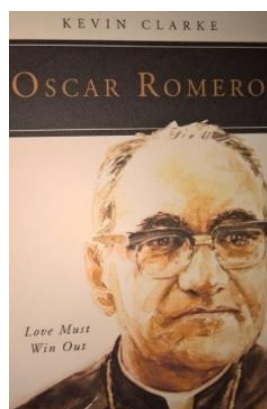
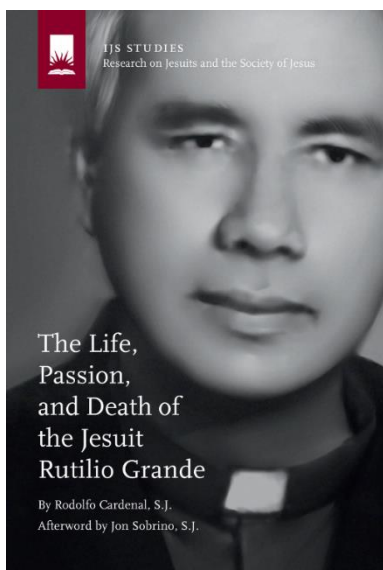
Cardenal SJ.

With an after -

word essay by

Jon Sobrino SJ.

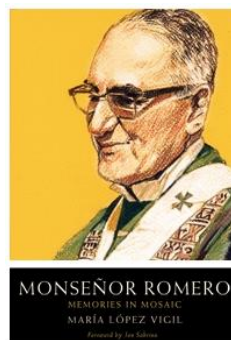
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Oscar Romero – Love Must Win Out by Kevin Clarke. An excellent and very readable short introduction to the life and times of

Archbishop Romero.

£8 (incl. p&p).



Oscar Romero: Memories in Mosaic

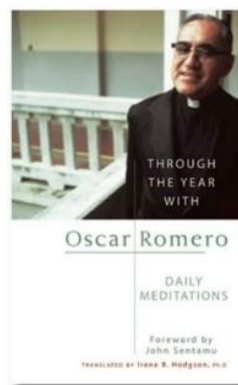
Romero remembered by the people who worked with him, lived with him and prayed with him

compiled by María López Vigil.

Arguably the best book on Romero.

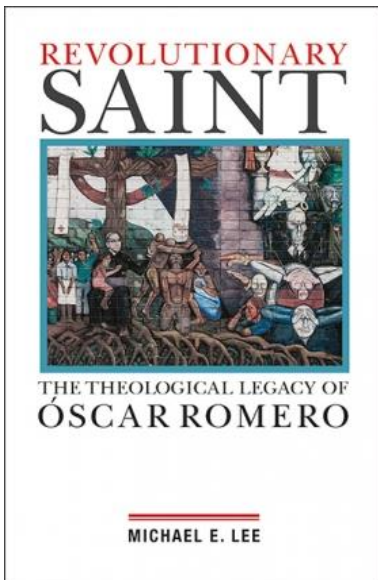
Unput-downable. Highly recommended.

£16 (incl. p&p)



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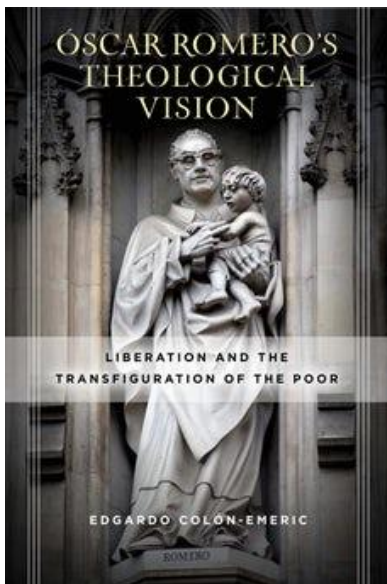
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Thank you so much for your continued support. Your donations help produce this newsletter and put on events such as Romero Week, the Romero Lecture, and to work for the canonisation of the Martyrs of El Salvador.

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.romerotrust.org.uk

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

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Update: El Salvador Perspectives

Artwork: Fernando Llort

Translation: Francis McDonagh

Romero Week Events 2022



Dr. Edgardo Colón-Emeric is our guest speaker for events to mark the 42nd anniversary of the martyrdom of St Oscar Romero. Edgardo is Dean of the Divinity School at Duke University, in North Carolina, a Methodist pastor and author of the highly acclaimed '**Oscar Romero's Theological Vision: Liberation and Transfiguration of the Poor**'.

Saturday March 19th 11.00am St Martin-in-the-Fields, London

National Ecumenical Service. Edgardo Colón-Emeric to give the Address. 'Microphones of God – Romero's message for the present time'

Sunday March 20th 6.00pm St Alban's Cathedral

Evensong. Edgardo Colón-Emeric to preach.

Tuesday March 22nd 5.30pm Newman University, Birmingham

Evening Lecture. Speaker: Edgardo Colón-Emeric. 'Joy and Hope for the 2020s – the relevance of Romero for the times we are in'

Thursday March 24th 12.30pm St George's Cathedral, Southwark

Mass for the Feast Day of St Oscar Romero. Archbishop John Wilson will preside and present Romero Award certificates.

Thursday March 24th 7.00pm Prior's Hall, Durham Cathedral

Public Lecture preceded by Evensong at 5.15pm. Speaker: Edgardo Colón-Emeric. Book with Eventbrite.

'Joy and Hope for the 2020s – the relevance of Romero for the times we are in'

Friday March 25th 7.00pm St Winefride's Church Hall, Bradford

Film show 'Righting the Wrong' with Clare Dixon to introduce and respond.

Saturday March 26th 11.00am Cornerstone in Cardiff with CYTUN

Gethin Abraham-Williams Memorial Lecture. Speaker: Edgardo Colón-Emeric. 'Romero – an ecumenical inspiration for the 2020s'

Sunday March 27th 11.00am Wesley's Chapel, City Road, London

Morning Service. Preacher: Edgardo Colón-Emeric.

ARCHBISHOP ROMERO TRUST

Microphones of God

Romero's message for the present time

An ecumenical service to mark the
42nd anniversary of the martyrdom
of Archbishop Romero



Speaker:

Edgardo Colón-Emeric

Dean of Duke Divinity School, NC

Saturday March 19th at 11.00am

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

All are welcome



contact: romerotrust@gmail.com website: www.romerotrust.org.uk

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