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Beatification Date Announced

Beatificación de los Siervos de Dios

P. Rutilio Grande S.J., Nelson Rutilio Lemus,
Manuel Solórzano y Fray Cosme Spessotto.



Fecha:
Sábado 22 de
enero de 2022

Lugar:
San Salvador

Preside:
Su Eminencia, Cardenal
Gregorio Rosa Chávez

OFICINA DE CANONIZACIÓN
ARZOBISPADO DE SAN SALVADOR

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Salvador Martyrs to be Beatified in January

Just before publication of this edition of Romero News we received the long-awaited confirmation of the beatification date of four Salvadorean Martyrs, Jesuit Father Rutilio Grande and his two companions, Manuel Solórzano and Nelson Lemus, and Franciscan friar Cosme Spessotto.

The news was announced by the Bishops' Conference of El Salvador on 27th August after confirmation from the Vatican Secretariat of State. The beatification ceremony will be held in San Salvador on Saturday 22nd January 2022 presided by El Salvador's Cardinal Gregorio Rosa Chávez. See page 29 for details and updates on our website.

A Date for your Diaries

**6pm Thursday 14th October 2021
3rd Anniversary of the Canonisation
of Saint Oscar Romero
Ecumenical Service of Thanksgiving
at
Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral**

41st Anniversary of Martyrdom

Archbishop John Wilson's homily at the Mass on 27 March 2021 in St George's Cathedral, Southwark, by the shrine to St Oscar Romero.

Back in February 2011, I was privileged to visit two priests from the Diocese of Leeds working in Peru. One served a parish in Carabayllo, on the far outskirts of Lima, just off the main highway. I stayed with him for a week and, out one day for an early morning walk, I saw a young woman stood beside the road with a sack of empty drinks cans. She was running back and forth, in between the traffic, putting the cans in the pathway of oncoming vehicles. Once flattened, she dashed to retrieve them so they could be sold for recycling. With each can, she risked her life, for pennies. I looked on, horrified. I then noticed a plinth in the central reservation, with a bust of Monseñor Romero. He too, as it were, looked on.

But here's a defining truth about St Óscar Romero, assassinated 41 years ago last Wednesday. He did not merely look on at poverty. He was not just a bystander in the face of injustice. His heart burned

with righteousness. He spoke and he acted. Before he was ever martyred or canonised, he lived as a saint and preached like a prophet.



Archbishop John Wilson at the Anniversary

It is impossible to remember St Óscar without thinking simultaneously of his impassioned stance for justice; of his courageous defence of human rights; of his relentless advocacy for the poor; of his damning critique of oppression and violence. He did all this because he belonged to Christ. He did this because he believed the Gospel. He knew that what was happening before his eyes, to the weakest and the poorest, was happening to Christ and to His body, the Church. As Christ crucified shared our sufferings, so St Óscar entered into the suffering of his people. He could not, and would not, simply look on. Here was a shepherd who not only smelled of his sheep, but who shed his blood with them

and for them, as he celebrated Holy Mass in the person of Christ.

Both during and after his lifetime, St Óscar's beloved homeland was scarred by brutal conflict. Around 75,000 civilians were killed in the civil war, and others in the years leading up to it. Death squads murdered priests, religious, and lay people. Among so many innocent victims, the names of Fr Rutilio Grande, Manuel Solórzano, Nelson Lemus, Sr Maura Clarke, Sr Ita Ford, Sr Dorothy Kazel, Jean Donovan, and those massacred at the Central American University, all shape the Salvadorean martyrology.



In terrible years of darkness and turmoil, faith remained an anchor. In fact, it remained **the** anchor. In St Oscar's words, '*Christianity's only true absolute [is] God and his Christ.*' In changing times he preached a changeless truth: God in Christ is with us, '*a pilgrim accompanying*

us throughout history.' This unchanging certainty came alive slowly for the two Emmaus-bound disciples. With their hope destroyed, and their confidence undermined, they fled, downcast, away from Jerusalem. But the risen Lord Jesus turned their getaway into a pilgrimage. First, He accompanied them in their sorrow, walking with them in solidarity. He then listened to their story, making sense of it through the Scriptures. Finally, He showed Himself to them in the Eucharistic breaking of bread. These previously downtrodden escapees were transformed into evangelists. Their hearts were lifted and set ablaze. Sent out as witnesses, their story is our story as, we too, encounter and announce Christ on the way. For St Óscar the parallels were real. Our greatest need is for hope that does not deceive us. This hope has a name. Of course, we should work for a better world; but human fulfilment will never come about through worldly liberation. '*There is no liberation,*' preached St Óscar, '*without the cross. There are no true liberators without hope in another life.*'

Hope in another life is hope in Christ and life in the Spirit. Victory over death,

forgiveness of sins, the commandment to love and live the Gospel of justice, all this, and more, gives purpose and meaning to our history. What the Lord Jesus did for the Emmaus disciples, St Óscar mirrored towards the marginalised and dispossessed. The call to Christian love has no expiry date or exclusions. We must be Christ to whomever we meet on the road. We must journey together as pilgrims.

Faced with a pandemic of injustice, a pandemic of poverty, a pandemic of violence, St Óscar Romero was not indifferent. Christ directed his response. The Gospel was his roadmap. He accompanied and he listened. He unpacked the Scriptures and gathered people around the altar. Faith in the risen Christ gave him strength to stand firm, to preach conversion here and now. Conversion to peace and reconciliation. Conversion to respect for human life and dignity. Conversion to sharing fairly the earth's resources. Conversion to genuine freedom as children of God. Minutes before he was shot, St Óscar declared: *'We know that every effort to improve society, especially when injustice and sin are so widespread, is an effort that God*

blesse, that God wants, that God requires of us.' In the service of God's kingdom, in the sometimes-daunting search for truth, holiness, grace, justice, love and peace, God commands that we speak and act, not just look on in passive silence.

I wondered what St Óscar might say to us as we plan recovery from our own experience of pandemic? Undoubtedly, he would call us more deeply into relationship with Christ through the Church. He would call us back to the sacraments and the life of faith. But, perhaps, he might also offer us three straightforward encouragements. The first, not to seek supposed progress at the expense of anyone else. The second, to walk forward in virtuous solidarity with as many people as possible, especially those on the margins. The third, that each of us ask ourselves what we can give, what we can do, and what we can say, to make a difference to those most in need.

What astonishes and inspires me about this incredible saint of the twentieth century Church is how totally open he was to Christ, to the Holy Spirit, to overcoming his personal insecurities, to

preaching the word of life so powerfully that it cost him not less than everything. Endurance in Christ, endurance through and with Christ, enabled St Óscar Romero to know and do God's will. May his example and heavenly intercession grant us something of the same.

Let Us Dream – Unmasking a post-COVID Future with St. Oscar Romero

This reflection at the March 2021 Romero Week Service at St Martin in the Fields was delivered by Gemma Simmonds, Congregation of Jesus

Back in 2019, in the alternative universe we lived in before Covid, I can remember sitting on a bus and looking at some of my fellow passengers. Their appearance and language suggested that they were not native British, and they were wearing masks. 'How very odd these foreigners are', I remember thinking to myself, 'whatever is it that they're so afraid of? You'd think we were all carrying some deadly disease...' Well, two years on, we all now know what kind of thing it was that they and we have become so afraid of. What seemed to me then a harmless, if somewhat neurotic foreign peculiarity

has now become the norm for everyone as we struggle to save our own and each other's lives in the face of a deadly pandemic. The wearing of masks has become a banal, everyday nuisance, or a fashion statement, or an issue of ideological conflict, but it has also become a metaphor for the moral and philosophical questions raised by the pandemic itself.

A year ago, as the pandemic raged across Rome and the rest of the world, Pope Francis stood alone in the dark and the driving rain in St Peter's Square and blessed the world in the name of Christ. He looked a lonely and vulnerable figure as he raised the body of Christ like a battle standard, yet there was strength hidden within his apparent weakness and a wisdom beyond the philosophies of this world as he spoke of his dream for a better future. His recent book, *Let Us Dream*, asks:

'Look at us now: we put on face masks to protect ourselves and others from a virus we can't see. But what about all those other unseen viruses we need to protect ourselves from? How will we deal with the hidden pandemics of this world, the pandemics of hunger and violence and

*climate change?... If we are to come out of this crisis less selfish than we went in, we have to let ourselves be touched by others' pain.'*¹

These words could just as easily have been preached in one of the famous homilies of St Oscar Romero, a man of virtue who, in his early days, liked to play it safe. He lived in circumstances of desperate threat and danger in the chaos of El Salvador. His clerical status and his conservative approach to unrest within church and society protected him from the worst of what was being suffered by the poor who surrounded him. He was certainly aware of their plight, he suffered an anguish of sympathy in the face of their suffering, but it was at a relatively safe distance. And then everything changed.

The suffering came close to him through the death of a friend and brother priest, Rutilio Grande. Five other priests were murdered within the following two years, along with hundreds of lay catechists and ordinary Christians. Through Grande's example, Romero did

what has become so mortally dangerous in our present crisis. In the words of Pope Francis, he '*touched the suffering flesh of Christ in others*'.² It was that close encounter with others' suffering that cured him of what Pope Francis describes as '*existential myopia*', our inability to see what is in front of our eyes.

Pope Francis' comment about unmasking and the example of Oscar Romero's life and preaching pose a considerable challenge. Most of us spend a great deal of effort precisely trying to avoid being touched by pain, whether our own or that of others. Isn't it a reasonable form of self-preservation to do so? Suffering weakens us, it renders us vulnerable, it exposes us to danger. Of late, not only we as individuals but our entire society has become acutely alert to this in the calamity of Covid. Yet we are reminded by Pope Francis that a calamity offers opportunity as well as threat. In our current situation danger lies on all sides, but Francis quotes Friedrich Hölderlin's *Hyperion*, whose lines have

¹ Pope Francis with Austen Ivereigh, *Let Us Dream: the Path to a Better Future*, (London, Simon and Schuster, 2020), p.5

² Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 24

been significant for him at different points in his life:

'Where the danger is, also grows the saving power', and later he sets the whole world a challenge:

'We must not let the current clarifying moment pass us by'.³



Gemma Simmonds at St Martin in the Fields

The current clarifying moment. Well, that's one way of describing it... But how clarifying is it, exactly? Early on in the pandemic a friend sent me a picture of

the globe wearing a Covid mask. The logo read, 'don't let's pray to go back to normal: normal was the problem in the first place'. The theme of unmasking is both implicitly and explicitly common to both these great prophets and pastors of Amerindia and it takes up the central message of today's reading,

'For nothing is hidden but it will be made clear, nothing secret but it will be known and brought to light. So, take care how you hear; for anyone who has will be given more; from anyone who has not, even what they think they have will be taken away.' (Luke 8:17-18)

But what will be given to us, and what is it that we stand to lose? Amid all the masks that we now wear for fear of contagion, Francis claims that 'Covid has unmasked the other pandemic, the virus of indifference, which is the result of constantly looking away, telling ourselves that because there is no immediate or magic solution, it is better not to feel anything [...] This crisis unmask our vulnerability, exposes the false securities on which we had based our lives.'⁴ We are rightly shocked

³ Pope Francis, *Let Us Dream*, pp.6; 99

⁴ Ibid, pp. 18-28

and grieved by the tens of millions who have suffered from Covid and the millions who have died, but he reminds us that in the first 4 months of 2020, 3.7 million people died of hunger. That is more than all the people who have died of Covid so far.

Danger shakes us when it comes to our front door but passes us by when poverty, suffering and exclusion become banal and unremarkable. If we have managed to avoid the relentlessness of suffering hidden but deeply embedded within our social and economic systems, then we also avoid the God who cries out for our attention in the cry of the poor. It was precisely when Romero stepped out of the protective clerical circle in which he lived and allowed his vulnerable and unprotected self to be exposed to the gaze, the touch and the lives of the poor that he became a true member of the revolution of tenderness preached by Pope Francis.⁵

The relative privilege in which we live as dwellers in the so-called developed world shields us from the most distressing

aspects of poverty. But this also prevents us seeing the light of Christ shining from the lives of those who are excluded from and on the margins of society. St Paul reminds us that 'The god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers' (2 Cor.4:5), but the minds of believers can be similarly blinded. We need to learn again to see, and Romero believed that for this reason the world needs the church. But a blind church is of no use to a blind world. The church, too, needs to learn to see again.⁶

It is common currency to refer to Romero as a prophet, but that is a word too easily used with little reflection. One of Romero's biographers remarks that 'prophets are not simply pious social critics; they are also dreamers who dare to imagine a world where God is King, and for this reason they are persecuted.'⁷ Part of the prophet's role is to throw light on the meaning of what is happening all around us.

When the University of Leuven awarded Romero an honorary doctorate in 1980 he made a speech in which he adapted

⁵ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 48

⁶ Edgardo Colón-Emeric, *Óscar Romero's Theological Vision: Liberation and the*

Transfiguration of the Poor, (University of Notre Dame, 2018), p. 1

⁷ Ibid, p.10

the famous saying of St Irenaeus, 'the early Christians', he said, 'used to say, *Gloria Dei, vivens homo* - the glory of God is the living human being. We can make this concrete by saying, *Gloria dei, vivens pauper* - the glory of God is the living poor'.

In his masterwork on Romero's theological vision Edgardo Colon-Emeric remarks that in his transformation of Irenaeus' words, Romero was offering an example of *ressourcement* from the margins. The *ressourcement* theologians of the Second Vatican Council led the church on a journey of renewal by returning to the sources of patristic wisdom. Romero leads us by a return to the sources of wisdom found in the Gospels themselves, the words and acts of Jesus who preached the good news of God's reign to the poor and those on every kind of margin.⁸

When a bomb blew up the radio station *Voz Panamericana*, technicians worked for a week to repair it so that Romero's Sunday homily could be heard. He preached at the risk of his life and spoke of Christ not only by preaching

sermons but being himself a sermon. He spoke of Christ being the best microphone of God and his hearers, as the church, being the best microphone of Christ. '*Each one of you*', he said, '*wherever you are, needs to live the life of faith fiercely because you are a true microphone of God our Lord in your context. Thus the church will always have preaching*'.

Romero's sermons had an outreach of which few preachers can dream. It's estimated that 73% of the rural population and 47% of the urban population heard his sermons. When a further bomb destroyed the radio station again many came to the Basilica the following Sunday carrying tape recorders so that they could rebroadcast Romero's sermon. Those who were politically and socially as good as dead found a voice through that of their pastor. The crucified Christ speaks through his crucified people both to the world at large and to the church through and to whom he speaks. Romero was accused by his enemies of preaching violence, but he claimed that the only violence he

⁸ Ibid, p.20

preached was that of love; *'the violence that left Christ nailed to a cross, the violence that one does to oneself to overcome one's selfishness so that there may not be such cruel inequalities among us... 'The violation of human rights', he went on, 'the marginalisation and destruction of God's image bearers, constitutes a denial of the incarnation that must be repudiated'*.⁹

Romero discovered for himself that the faces of the poor unmask the paternalism implicit in many of the church's ministries. Charity from a safe distance is not enough. What we need to be praying for this Lent and every Lent is conversion as he was converted. Many of his biographers speak of Romero's conversion from religion at a safe distance to a radical discipleship. It is not that he was previously indifferent to the plight of the poor, but he saw it as something effectively separate from himself. Michael Lee, one of the most eloquent commentators on Romero's life and legacy, tells us that for him conversion was both a turning from and

a seeing anew. Romero himself described as a 'coming home' his growing commitment to immerse himself in the reality of the poor and his participation in efforts to make the world more resemble the reign of God and God's will for human flourishing. This conversion was not so much a radical change as an evolutionary process.¹⁰

Covid has unmasked for all the world to see the blight of poverty, sexism, racism, slavery and forced migration that have lain hidden from our gaze in plain sight. Romero's evolutionary conversion calls to us more powerfully than ever to a new vision and an ongoing call to deepen our faith in a fundamental option which involves our life in its entirety and lasts until our dying day. Like the blind man in Mark's gospel, we have already been touched by Jesus, but we don't recognise what we see. Our prayer must be in to be touched again so that we can see reality more clearly and respond to it wholeheartedly. Such a touch will above all breach the dualistic separation between the spiritual and the temporal

⁹ Ibid, pp.38-58; 108

¹⁰ Michael E. Lee, *Revolutionary Saint: the Theological Legacy of Óscar Romero*, (Orbis, Maryknoll, 2018), pp. 63ff.

which continues to exist in the hinterland of most of our minds, despite our denials. With the eyes of our faith renewed we will no longer be able to spiritualise our faith in a way that escapes or ignores the pressing issues of our day. We will move beyond personal acts of charity to an inescapable realisation of how sin is active structurally in our world and to full participation in the changing of the structures.



In one of his homilies Romero prayed for the conversion ‘of those who do not collaborate in the construction of a more just temporal order’, who ‘are able to transform society because they have

power in their hands’. We all have power as people with voices and choices, as consumers, as voters. Every Christian is called by nature of their baptism into Christ to be prophet, priest and king. This is our prophetic voice, it is the meaning of our participation in the priesthood of all the baptised and the establishment of the reign of God. I quote again Romero’s homily,

*‘let me remind you what the church teaches: that the social structures, the institutionalised sin in which we live, have to be changed. All of this has to change... The names of the victims change, but the cause is the same. We live in a situation of inequality, of injustice, of sin; and using the force of arms, paying to kill the voice that speaks out, is no solution... What will work is if each person in their own position: from government, capital, labourers, landowners, strives to change things: more justice, more love’.*¹¹

In a conversation with a Jesuit friend Romero remembered the poverty of his roots but also the way in which joining the clerical caste removed him from those routes to a safe and comfortable

¹¹ Ibid, pp. 73-4

distance. When he was made a residential bishop he was confronted once again with extreme poverty and, in his own words, came back home. He said, *'You know, Father, when a piece of charcoal has already been lit once, you don't have to blow on it much to get it to flame up again'*.¹²

We can easily rest in the self-satisfaction of believing that our individual acts of personal asceticism and charity are enough. They are not. True conversion happens at the intellectual, the moral and the affective levels of our lives. Once the world has been unmasked, once our eyes have been opened, we can never see the world in the same way again.

Pope Francis believes that our current crisis may reveal or unmask the God who has been hidden to so many by the false securities of the political and economic systems which have flourished to the advantage of the tiny minority and the massive disadvantage of the majority and by the superficiality and individualism of contemporary culture.

'Walking together', he says,

'listening to what the Spirit has to say to the Church, means allowing for the apparent purity of our positions to be unmasked, and to detect the tares growing among the wheat'.¹³

A sacrament is a sign which makes real what it signifies. If the church is to be a 'sacrament of salvation' then its mission is to be the living presence of Christ in the world, enabling all within and beyond it to taste in a partial way the fruits of salvation in justice, peace and radical love. *'The tradition that Christ entrusted to his church'*, Romero taught, *'is not a museum of souvenirs to be protected [...] It has always a view to the future [...] Here and now, we are still the authentic body of Christ in history [...] While Paradise will never be found here on earth, yet I want this earth to reflect the paradise toward which we journey. This is the reign of God that must be established on earth, A reign that many people do not want and yet a reign that is most necessary. Even if one must die as a martyr, this reign must be preached and announced'*.¹⁴

You and I may not be called upon

¹² Ibid, p.77

¹³ Pope Francis, *Let Us Dream*, p.90

¹⁴ Lee, *Revolutionary Saint*, pp. 95-98

to die as martyrs, but we are most certainly called upon to live as martyrs, that is, as witnesses to the call of Christ in the poor and the marginalised to this daily, evolutionary conversion. If we can commit to this, then we will at last know what it truly means to be Christian. The name Romero means 'pilgrim'. If we need a companion to help us on our way, then, in the Saint of El Salvador, we could not find a better one.

St Óscar Romero, pray for us.

The Glory of God is the Living Poor



We thank celebrated Methodist theologian, & Romero scholar, Edgardo Colón - Emeric, Dean of the School of Divinity at Duke University, North Carolina, for this moving reflection.

On 2nd February 1980, +Óscar Romero, Archbishop of San Salvador, spoke at the University of Louvain on the occasion of being awarded an honorary doctorate. The decision to attend did not come easily. The violence ripping El Salvador

apart rendered foreign academic honours superfluous. The place of the shepherd is with the sheep, especially when these are being rounded up and slaughtered. Nevertheless, in the end, Romero decided to accept and speak on behalf of his people. The topic for his acceptance address was "The political dimension of the faith from the perspective of the poor." For forty minutes, he spoke of how the church's engagement with the politics of El Salvador from the perspective of a preferential option for the poor had deepened the church's understanding of the central mysteries of the faith. Romero ends his address with a reference to the church fathers:

Early Christians used to say, "*Gloria Dei, vivens homo*" the glory of God is the living human. We can make this concrete by saying, "*Gloria Dei, pauper vivens*" the glory of God is the living poor.

The phrase "*gloria Dei, vivens homo*" comes from Irenaeus of Lyons. This is the only time in Romero's writings that the phrase appears in its original form or in its Latin American

transposition. This fact might make us treat Romero's statement of "*gloria Dei, pauper vivens*" as a casual remark, a gesture of erudition at the end of a speech—and a clumsy one at that, since Romero does not mention the name of its author. On the contrary, the phrase *gloria Dei, vivens pauper* is the capstone of Óscar Romero's theological vision. The formula synthesises his understanding of Christ, the Church, the human, and salvation.

This essay examines the theological vision of salvation as transfiguration that renders Romero's saying intelligible. First, it places this vision next to those offered by other Latin American theologians. Second, it considers how Romero made this vision concrete by adapting the Irenaeian dictum. Third, it offers some thoughts on how Romero's vision of salvation as transfiguration is scandalous.

I. Salvation in Latin America

The history of Latin America has been written in blood. In the words of a hymn by Justo González, "from all four of earth's faraway corners flows together the blood of all races...hardy blood that

was brought by the Spanish, noble blood of the suffering Indian, blood of slaves that stood heavy oppression, all the blood that was bought on the cross." How all the blood spilt in the Americas relates to the blood of Calvary poses the question of salvation. Latin American theologians and pastors have offered different answers to this question.

Salvation can be understood as liberation. The Peruvian Gustavo Gutiérrez observes that, in Latin America, "economic development" and "social progress" have been touted as quasi-mystical words. If the problem of Latin America is underdevelopment, then the solution is development. However, if the real problem is oppression, then the remedy is liberation. Gutiérrez's theological vision affirms the unity of creation and salvation: the creator is the redeemer. Christ is the liberator and human beings are called to participate with Christ in their own liberation.

Salvation can be understood as justification. According to Methodist theologian Elsa Támez, the historical experience of Latin America raises new questions for the article on which the Church stands or falls. The new

reformers do not only ask, like Martin Luther, “Where do we find a merciful God?” But they also ask, “How can we bring about a just world? How do you uphold the reformation slogans of *sola gratia*, *sola fide* without devaluing the importance of human action in society?” The Latin American experience sheds light on the human predicament—lack of knowledge of God and lack of justice are correlated. This experience leads Támez to a new reading of justification by faith in Paul. Justification names the salvation of those who were once socially dead but are now counted among the people of God.

Salvation can be understood as solidarity. Cyprian of Carthage, in the context of the Novatian schism, stated that *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*: outside the church there is no salvation. The Jesuit Jon Sobrino, in the context of economic class schisms, reformulates the saying as *extra pauperes nulla salus*: outside the poor, there is no salvation. The doctrine of salvation starts from the fact that Christ became poor. The transcendent God became trans-descendent and con-descendent. The poor are God’s chosen bearers of

salvation not because they are strong but because they are weak and rejected. By virtue of who they are, they denounce a world of selfish abundance and call it to repent, turn, and be saved by siding with them in transforming society.

Salvation can also be understood as transfiguration. Archbishop Óscar Romero was not a theologian, but as a pastor he had to respond to the blood that was crying from the ground of El Salvador. Romero found an interpretive framework in the feast of the Transfiguration. This may seem odd. The Transfiguration is not a major feast in Western Christianity nor a significant locus in Latin American theology. However, for El Salvador—whose name is dedicated to the transfigured Christ, the saviour of the world—the transfiguration is more than a liturgical feast; it is a national celebration. Romero issued a pastoral letter on each feast of the Transfiguration during his years as archbishop, and he preached several sermons that used the transfiguration as the liturgical lens through which to interpret Christ, the Church, humanity, and salvation. From the pulpit of San Salvador, Romero preaches, “The

theology of the transfiguration is saying that the road of redemption passes through the cross and Calvary, but that the goal of Christians lies beyond history. This does not alienate redemption from history but gives history more sense, its definitive sense.”

In their own way, each of the theological visions sketched above is a work of translation and adaptation of a previously received tradition. Each is looking for language to interpret the scandal of the blood shed in the Americas in light of the scandal of the cross. Gutiérrez translates the *nouvelle théologie*. Támez translates Protestant perspectives on Paul. Sobrino translates the prophetic (if problematic) ecclesiology of Cyprian. Romero translates Irenaeus. They are translators, not parrots. Their work is original. Their translation is a transplantation of the living tradition of Christianity into new soil. In the case of Romero, the transplantation takes hold more fruitfully because it is rooted in the liturgy of the Church and the history of his country. From these roots, Romero harvests an understanding of the transfigured human that is both Irenaeian

and Salvadorean. ***The glory of God is the living poor.***

2. The Irenaeian dictum



Irenaeus was among the first theologians to reflect on the mystery of the transfiguration.

On Mount Tabor, Jesus

reveals the glory of God and the glory of the human. Both the identity of Christ and the destiny of humanity are revealed by the light of the transfiguration. As Romero puts it when abridging the famous saying, “The glory of God is the living human, but the life of the human is the vision of God.”

The Irenaeian phrase is profound and easily misinterpreted. Often Irenaeus is read as saying, “God is glorified when I am fully alive.” This may well be true, but it is not really what Irenaeus is after. Glory here does not refer to the honour humanity renders to God but rather the light which God shines on his creatures. Humans live as they see the light of life, which is the glory of

God. The clearer the vision of God, the more alive the human becomes, the more the glory of God is manifest. The fact that the phrase appears only at the end of Romero's speech at Louvain may lead us to dismiss it as a rhetorical flourish or a nod at erudition. However, several things militate against this interpretation.

First, there is good evidence that Irenaeus was one of Romero's most read authors before and during his time as archbishop. Second, the Irenaean saying played a pivotal role in how Romero led his Archdiocese in responding to the murder of his friend, Father Rutilio Grande. Romero wanted to cancel the Masses across his archdiocese to celebrate one Mass at the cathedral, but worried that God would be less glorified with fewer Masses. But one of his priests argued that speaking out against the death of innocent people would glorify God because "the glory of God is the living person." Whether this was a good interpretation of Irenaeus is besides the point. The argument won Romero over. Third, in the Louvain address, Romero understands human life that is dynamic and progressive. Like

Irenaeus, he professes that human life manifests the God of life but in different ways at different stages. Fullness of life, like fullness of vision, is not possible except in the kingdom of the Father. Even so, for Romero, the Church is concerned with life in all its saving economies because wherever there is life, God manifests himself. In this context, Romero's appeal to Irenaeus serves as the capstone for the entire address. Indeed, we could go so far as to say his adaptation of the saying was a faithful translation of the Irenaean logic to a Salvadorean context. Far from being an offhand remark, the saying *gloria Dei, pauper vivens* expresses the heart of Romero's theology.

3. The Scandal of the Transfiguration

Hans Urs von Balthasar titled his book on Irenaeus *The Scandal of the Incarnation*. The teaching of that early Church Father was a stumbling block for those who condemned the flesh as not worth saving. The theological vision of Óscar Romero, a more recent Church Father, focuses attention on the scandal of the transfiguration. In El Salvador, the celebration of the transfiguration was not

always seen as subversive. For a long time it was patriotic. It only became a scandal when Romero translated it from the world of the poor. It became a stumbling block for the oligarchs who condemned the life of the poor as not worth living and for all who have stocks in the dull, untransfigured status quo. For Romero, the transfiguration—like the incarnation—is partial and preferential.

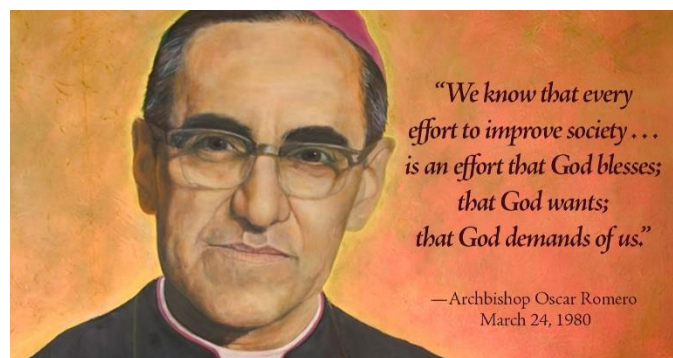


The glory of God first illumines the faces of the landless *campesino*, the market woman, the unemployed labourer. As these faces behold their God, they

become transparent to his glory and shine from the church to the world. Romero's theological vision may be called a doxology of the cross. The voice of the Father glorifies the Son and all human flesh, beginning with weak, malnourished flesh, because all are called to become children of God. If all are called, Romero asks, then "by what right have we catalogued people into first class humans and second-class humans, when in the theology of the human, there is only one class—that of children of God?" He further argues, "Every human being is a child of God and each human being who is killed is a sacrificed Christ, which the Church also venerates." God makes himself known through the flesh of Jesus—the long-expected suffering servant and his cross-bound friends. These are not the poor generically but those who have embraced Christ from their poverty. *Gloria Dei, pauper vivens*, but the life of the poor is the vision of the God who became poor—this is the scandal of the transfiguration.

In his final Sunday homily, Romero offers his listeners a sneak preview of a new hymn composed by Guillermo

Cuéllar in honour of the Divine Saviour of the World. It is meant to be sung as the *gloria* for the Salvadorean mass. The chorus has some wonderful plays on language that are hard to translate. *Gloria al Señor, Gloria al patrón de nuestra tierra el Salvador.* Glory to the Lord, Gloria to the patron of our land, El Salvador. *No hay otro Dios, solo el Señor, solo un patrón, nuestro divino Salvador.* There is no God, only the Lord, only one patron, our divine saviour. Romero says he particularly likes the final stanza: *Pero los dioses del poder y del dinero*—But the gods of power and of money—*se oponen a que haya transfiguración*—are opposed to there being transfiguration. *Por eso ahora vos, Señor, sos el primero*—This is why you, oh Lord, are the first one—*en levantar tu brazo contra la opresión*—in raising your arm against oppression. The following day, March 24, as he finished preaching on John 12:23-26, the hour of glorification, these gods shot Romero through the heart. But they could not kill him. Romero received life from seeing God in his adopted poor relations, and he now lives from seeing God in the light of glory.



TRANSFIGURED BY JUSTICE

Wonderful thought-provoking homily by Bishop Nicholas Hudson from the Mass at St George's Cathedral, Southwark on 15th August 2021, to celebrate St Oscar's 104th birthday.

[Read it on our website!](#)

Dean Brackley SJ

The 16th October 2021 will see the tenth anniversary of the untimely death of Fr Dean Brackley, professor of theology in the UCA, the Jesuit University of El Salvador. Dean was guest speaker for the Romero Trust in 2009, traveling through England and Scotland and inspiring all who met and heard him. Here we present a short tribute to Dean from a young Salvadorean woman along with some of his own writings as well as the following invitation from Dean:

"I invite you to discover your vocation in downward mobility. It's a scary request... The world is obsessed with wealth and security and upward mobility and prestige. But let us teach solidarity, walking with the victims, serving and loving. I offer this for you to consider – downward mobility. And I would say in this enterprise there is a great deal of hope. Have the courage to lose control. Have the courage to feel useless. Have the courage to listen. Have the courage to receive. Have the courage to let your heart be broken. Have the courage to feel. Have the courage to fall in love. Have the courage to get ruined for life. Have the courage to make a friend."

Dean Brackley

Tribute from Paty Montalvo

"I still ask myself: How did God manage to have our paths cross – Padre Dean's and mine? But God works miracles like that. I'm one of the seeds that he

planted. He seemed to believe in even his most stubborn students. It was the only way to teach us to use a tool we *campesinos* tend to ignore: books.

He nourished us with love, he rained wisdom on us, and he wouldn't let go till he saw that our roots were strong and firmly anchored in the earth. Believing in us, he has changed us and shown our families new horizons. The harvest is one of doctors, lawyers, journalists.

Imagine Jesus embracing Dean after seeing what he had done, how he helped his people to multiply their talents, even the most humble, those who – because they were poor *campesinos* -- were despised. We continue to be poor, but not in our hearts; we continue to be *campesinos*, but we are serving our brothers and sisters with love and pride, as he did and as he taught us to do.

Thank you, Padre Dean.

(Translation by Gene Palumbo)

Patricia Montalvo was an early participant in the scholarship programme that Dean set up for Salvadorean students from humble, often rural, "campesino" backgrounds. Paty completed her medical school training two months after Dean's death. She is now working with COVID patients at a public hospital in San Salvador.

Meeting the Victims

"Meeting the victims, falling in love"
by Dean Brackley, S.J.



Waves of foreign delegations have come to El Salvador during recent years. The pilgrims disembark a little anxious, vaguely dreading what awaits them. They know that the people are very poor. They have heard of massacres and bombings of the past and the hunger and sickness of the present. They fear, half-consciously, that these poor people will lunge for their wallets, or that when they, the visitors, arrive at their first poor community, they will suffer a massive Irish-Catholic -- or Jewish or Methodist -- guilt-attack and at the very least they will have to sell their VCR when they get back home. As happens with most of our fears, it doesn't turn out that way. On the

one hand, the visitors spend much of their time in El Salvador wondering why these poor people are smiling. The people are glad they came and receive them with open arms. On the other hand, if the pilgrims listen to the stories of flight from the army, torture and death squads, and since the war, of unspeakable hardship and premature death, the victims will break their hearts.

And that, after all, is the main reason the pilgrims have come. It is an experience of extraordinary richness, if the visitors muster the courage to take it in. The encounter stops the visitors short and focuses their attention. "My God!" they cry, "half their children die from preventable disease. The powerful steal from them at will. There is no justice. And what has my government been doing here in my name?" The poor bring the visitors face-to-face with evil; and the visitors respond with horror. Not that the poor are all saints. Hardship brings out both the best and the worst in people. They just obviously do not deserve what they have to suffer.

The injustice clashes strikingly with their humanity. This presses in upon the visitors, and it can shake them to their

roots. As the poor draw deeper into their own reality, the newcomers pass from observers to participants. The more they allow the poor to crash through their defences, the more unsettled they feel. They begin to see their own reflection in the eyes of their hosts, and they say to themselves, "Hey, these people are just like us!" They sense a gentle invitation to lay down the burden of their own superiority (of which they are mostly unaware) and identify with these humble people, despite the differences between them. They begin to feel smaller and more "ordinary." A sweet shame comes over them, not bitter remorse but more like the shame one feels when falling in love. The visitors feel themselves losing their grip; or better, they feel the world losing its grip on them. What world? The world made up of important people like them and unimportant poor people like their hosts. As the poet Yeats says, "things fall apart;" the visitors' world is coming unhinged. They feel resistance, naturally, to a current that threatens to sweep them out of control. They feel a little confused -- again -- like the disorientation of falling in love. In fact, that is what is happening, a kind of falling

in love. The earth trembles. My horizon is opening up. I'm on unfamiliar ground, entering a richer, more real world.



Dean in the rural church in Jayaque

We all live a bit on the periphery of the deep drama of life, more so, on average, in affluent societies. The reality of the periphery is thin, one-dimensional, "lite," compared to the multi-layered richness of this new world the visitors are entering. In this interchange with a few of their representatives, the anonymous masses of the world's poor emerge from their cardboard cut-out reality and take on the three-dimensional status of full-fledged human beings. Actually, there are more than three dimensions here. The eyes of the victim beckon. They are like a

bottomless well in which something infinite draws me on. In their welcome, peace sweeps over me. I feel almost at home in this strange place. Although an accomplice to the world of important people like me and unimportant people like them, I feel accepted, forgiven -- even before I have cleaned up my act with them or billions like them.

After reflecting on these issues for some years, it only gradually dawned on me that I belong to a peculiar tribe. The middle-class cultures of the North are newcomers to world history and have only existed for about 200 years. We're not all bad people, we're just a tiny minority under the common illusion that we are the centre of gravity of the universe. The poor can free us from this strange idea. Don't get me wrong. The middle-class cultures have made extraordinary advances in civilisation. True; many came at great cost to the despoiled nations and races. Still, these are historic achievements. And I'm not even talking about ambiguous technological progress. I mean the spiritual, cultural and political breakthroughs: the unheard-of opportunities, political liberties,

democracy, the critical consciousness of the Enlightenment, and all that. No need to demean these gains. The problem for us is that the new freedoms and economic security have distanced the non-poor from the kind of daily life-and-death struggle that has been the daily fare of the poor of all times right up to today. Maybe 90 percent of all the people who ever lived have struggled every day to keep the household alive against the threat of death through hunger, disease, accidents and violence. By distancing the non-poor from the daily threat of death, the benefits of modernity have induced in us a kind of chronic low-grade confusion about what is really important in life, namely life itself and love. Besides, superior technology and the communications media induce us to think of our culture and perspective on life as the norm, and basically on track. The encounter with the poor stops us short; it recollects us. When we come out on the other side, we realise that the marginalised are actually at the centre of things. It is we, in Washington and Paris, who are on the fringe. These people shake us up because they bring home to us that things are much worse in the

world than we dared to imagine. But that is only one side of the story: If we allow them to share their suffering with us, they communicate some of their hope to us as well.

The smile that seems to have no foundation in the facts is not phony; the spirit of fiesta is not an escape but a recognition that something else is going on in the world besides injustice and destruction. The poor smile because they suspect that this something is more powerful than the injustice. When they insist on sharing their tortilla with a visiting gringo, we recognise there is something going on in the world that is more wonderful than we dared to imagine.



It seems that the victim offers us the privileged place (although not the only place) to encounter the truth which sets us free. The poor usher us into the heart of reality. They bring us up against the world and ourselves all at once. To some extent, we all hold reality at arm's length -- fending off intolerable parts of the world with one hand and intolerable parts of ourselves with the other. The two go together.

As a rule, our encounters with the world place us in touch with internal reality, as well. In particular, when the world's pain crashes in upon us in the person of the victim, the encounter dredges up from within us the parts of ourselves that we had banished. The outcast outside us calls forth the outcast within us. This is why people avoid the poor. But meeting them can heal us. We will only heal our inner divisions if we are also working to heal our social divisions. The victims of history -- the destitute, abused women, oppressed minorities, all those the Bible calls "the poor" -- not only put us in touch with the world and with ourselves, but also with the mercy of God. There is something fathomless about the encounter with the poor, as we have said

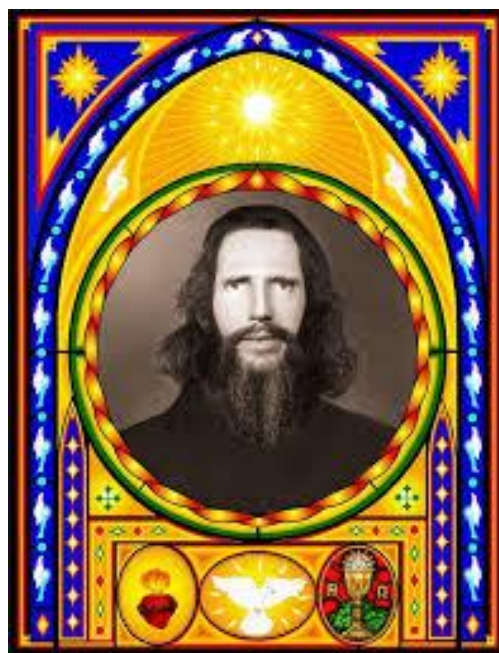
-- like the opening of a chess game with its infinite possibilities. If we let them, the poor will place us before the abyss of the holy Mystery we call God. They are a kind of door that opens before that Mystery and through which God passes to get at us. Clearly we need them more than they need us. Small wonder that people keep returning. Something has happened, a kind of falling in love, I think.

John Bradburne: Martyr for Justice

Roger Riddell celebrates the life of a modern English martyr in the mould of Oscar Romero.

This year is the centenary of the birth of John Randal Bradburne in Skirwith in England's Cumbrian Fells, and this September marks the forty-second year since his gruesome murder in Zimbabwe's rural Mashonaland. For many years after his death few outside Zimbabwe's Catholic community knew or had heard of John Bradburne, but his name is becoming more widely known for two main reasons. Firstly, more people have discovered his poems and like

them. John began to write poetry from an early age and never stopped. Indeed, he comfortably holds the record as Britain's most prolific poet, writing three times as many lines as Wordsworth and almost twice as many as Shakespeare. The second reason more people have been hearing the name John Bradburne is that in 2019 Rome issued a formal *nihil obstat* for the cause of John's beatification to proceed. But who was John Bradburne?



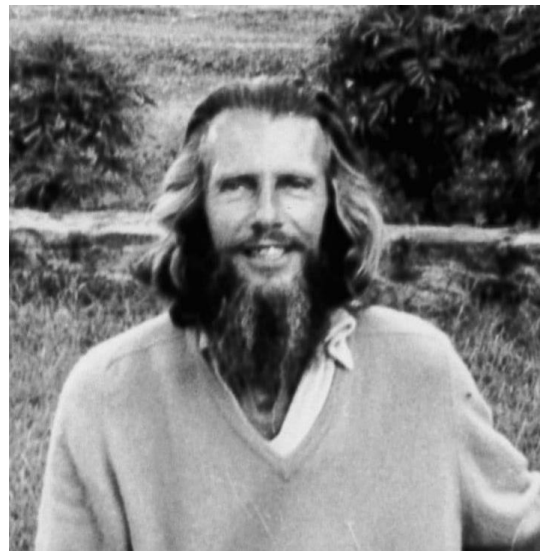
The son of a high church Anglican clergyman, three days after his nineteenth birthday he joined the Indian army where he first met the man who became his lifelong friend, the future Jesuit priest John Dove.

Dove summed up Bradburne's war years thus "He was both a hero and a misfit. War demands courage and expertise in killing. The latter was quite foreign to John."

Returning to the England he sorely missed, John spent the next seventeen years as a searcher, taking odd jobs and trying his vocation, but he never settled. In the early 1960s, Dove, by then working in Rhodesia, arranged for him to come out to the country and work as a mission helper. Though Bradburne fell in love with and soon started writing poetry about the country, he didn't settle and pined for the solitude he thought he could not live without.

It is in March 1969 that Bradburne made his first visit to Mutemwa, a settlement 90 miles east of Harare where people with leprosy were sent to live out the rest of their days, living pretty much as outcasts. After meeting a few of its more mobile residents and seeing the inhumane conditions they were forced to live in, John promptly announced he was staying. With great difficulty he was persuaded to leave, but within a month he was back, and, except for the odd break, John never left.

Though officially the warden, John saw his role more as a companion of the residents than a distant grand administrator: he sought not only to improve their quality of life, but to live alongside them and build a vibrant community – and he succeeded. More and better food was provided, as were warmer clothes and extra blankets needed for Africa's bitter winters.



Soon John not only knew each person by name, but he wrote a poem about every one of Mutemwa's residents, sat with those who were sick and prayed with those close to death. But John also brought joy and laughter: from a colony of stigmatised and forgotten lepers, Mutemwa became a vibrant community of living people.

But then, just short of four years after he arrived, judged to be incompetent (and,

perversely, too kind), John was sacked. But he refused to leave, and for some weeks, lived precariously in a tent on a hill before a hut was built for him just outside the settlement so he could continue as the keeper of the keys of the church, and he visited the residents when allowed. It was an uneasy time: rations were cut to save money – and John's heart and his sense of justice drove him to try to intervene. Perhaps inevitably, over time splits within the community started to surface with some residents allying themselves more closely to John and others to the new regime.

From the mid-1970s, Zimbabwe's liberation war had been hotting up and John had been warned it had become far too dangerous and he should leave, but he stayed. Perhaps inevitably, in September 1979 he was abducted. Three days later his body was discovered by the roadside with bullets in its back some distance from where he had been living. The story commonly told about his death is that John Bradburne – a (saintly) white man who cared for black lepers - was (viciously) killed by Mr Mugabe's black guerrilla

fighters. Even if true, this tells only part of the story.

From what has been pieced together of what happened before John was shot, fierce arguments took place as to whether he should be killed or not, with some arguing that John was devoted to the people and others that he was, indeed, an enemy of the people and so should be killed. In other words, his death was far from uncontested, and if Mr Mugabe's guerrillas who were based in far-off Mozambique did shoot John, they would have been guided, as they always were, by what they were being told by influential vocal locals.

What this suggests is that John's death is likely to have had less to do with race and more to do with power. Not only did John take sides with the marginalised, and the struggle to help those with leprosy lead more human and fulfilling lives, but he (doggedly) defended the gains made to their quality of life as best he could in the face of growing, sometimes fierce opposition. John's way of acting may not always have been the most tactful, but his commitment to the people he had grown to love was both deep and unswerving. So, if John were to

be heralded as a martyr, I believe he is best seen as a martyr for justice, seeing past the fog of politics to the clarity of the human dignity of the people he had grown to love and whose basic rights he strove to uphold and defend.

*This is an edited version of an article original published in the Tablet entitled “**God’s outcast and martyr for justice**”. Roger Riddell is a former Jesuit who returned to independent Zimbabwe after being declared a prohibited immigrant by Ian Smith’s government. He was formerly International Director of Christian Aid.*

El Salvador News in Brief

Beatification date announced

Church bells rang out in celebration in every church across the land on 27th August on news of the confirmation from the Vatican’s Secretariat of State that four martyrs will be beatified on 22nd January 2022. On Sunday 30th August thanksgiving Masses were celebrated throughout El Salvador. Three of the martyrs, Rutilio Grande SJ, Manuel Solorzano and teenager Nelson Lemus were born and raised in El Salvador,

whilst the fourth, the Franciscan missionary, Fray Cosme Spessotto OFM, left his native Italy in 1950 to spend the next 30 years as pastor in a rural parish until his death from an assassin’s bullet. (See issue 26 of the Romero News for short profiles of both priests).

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic which is still at its height in El Salvador, the beatification ceremony cannot be held on the same massive scale as the 2015 ceremony for Saint Oscar Romero.



Given the current COVID precautions, which are expected to be still in place in January, and the continued restrictions on international travel, Cardinal Gregorio Rosa Chávez – the auxiliary bishop of San Salvador - will preside over the ceremony, representing Pope Francis.

The open-air ceremony will take place on the atrium and steps of San Salvador's Metropolitan Cathedral, facing onto the main square – the Plaza Cívica – where the National Palace and other historic buildings are located. An organising commission has been set up comprising priests from both the Jesuits and the Franciscans as well as representatives of the Dioceses of San Salvador and Zacatecoluca, the home dioceses of Fr Grande and Fray Cosme.



An admirer of Fr Rutilio Grande at the canonisation of St. Oscar. Her hat reads: "Fr Rutilio We will always remember you"

It is well known that Pope Francis has, for decades, been an admirer of his fellow Jesuit, Rutilio Grande, and the news of his beatification is a huge boost for his many supporters.

COVID-19

There are more signs of concern over El Salvador's third wave of COVID cases and many Delta variant cases. July saw double digit numbers of confirmed deaths for the first time in 2021. The number of people listed as having "moderate" cases of the disease has reached numbers not seen since last September. El Salvador received another 1.5 million doses of the Moderna vaccine from the USA via the COVAX mechanism. By August, approximately 1.4 million people are fully vaccinated and 2.4 million or more than half of adults have received at least one dose.

Armed Forces to double in size

President Nayib Bukele announced in July a doubling in size of El Salvador's military from 20,000 to 40,000 soldiers

over the next 5 years. At a time when the murder rate has hit post war lows, the president professes to need a massive increase in his military forces to fight gangs.



A massive recruitment campaign is under way via the President's twitter account, stating "we are looking for 20,000 young people who want to defend our motherland from its internal and external enemies:

May God bless El Salvador"

Under Bukele, the army has been used more broadly in the internal affairs of the country than at any time since the civil war and military patrols are ever-present on the streets. The defence budget has grown significantly since he came to office with human right advocates expressing concern in light of the country's decades of military repression

and human rights abuses which continued up to and through the civil war.

Corruption hearings

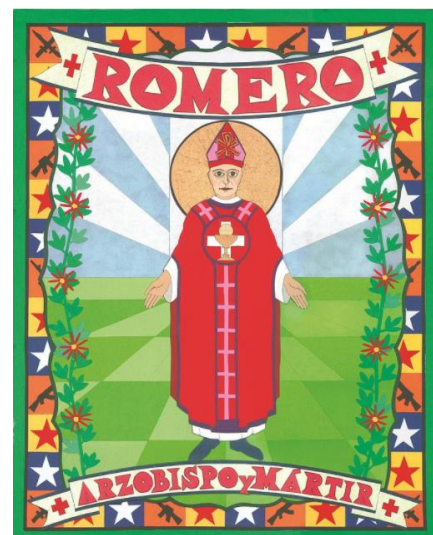
President Bukele promised to fight corruption in his successful presidential electoral campaign, but he has recently abolished the key independent anti-corruption commission just as it turned its sights towards his own administration. The ruling party "Nuevas Ideas" and its allies have shown little interest in investigating the possibility of current corruption in the country with the Attorney General saying he has no basis to investigate officials described as corrupt by the United States. None of those officials has been removed from office. The Legislative Assembly has not set up any investigation into the corruption which has been rife throughout the COVID pandemic contracting nor made any proposals to prevent the corruption of the past from recurring today or tomorrow. Former President Antonio Saca is serving a 10-year sentence for corruption.

The Bitcoin Gamble

In June, President Nayib Bukele made a surprise declaration that the cryptocurrency Bitcoin will become legal tender in El Salvador, alongside the US dollar which replaced the local currency – the *colón* - almost 20 years ago. After a rushed passage of only a few hours' debate through the Legislative Assembly the Bitcoin Law comes into effect on 7 September. Accepting Bitcoin will be *mandatory throughout the country even for street-vendors* although few people understand how the cryptocurrency works or what it is worth. Serious doubts from home and the international financial community continue to be raised about the feasibility of Bukele's Bitcoin plans which he proclaims will be the driver of economic progress and growth. Recent public opinion polling showed that despite the President's current popularity, 82% of Salvadoreans are not in agreement with the new Bitcoin law. Only time will tell whether this unprecedented gamble will pay off or will further impoverish the country.

Ongoing impunity for war crimes

Five years have now passed since the Constitutional Chamber declared the 1993 Amnesty Law null and void. That law had prevented the prosecution of those responsible for massacres, disappearances and other crimes against humanity during El Salvador's bloody civil war. Despite that ruling, there remains practical immunity from prosecution in El Salvador for former military leaders as no part of the judicial system is advancing cases of massacres and other human rights abuses. The sole exception is the El Mozote massacre trial which, thanks to the diligent work of the Church's human rights bodies, has eventually seen some progress after almost 40 years.

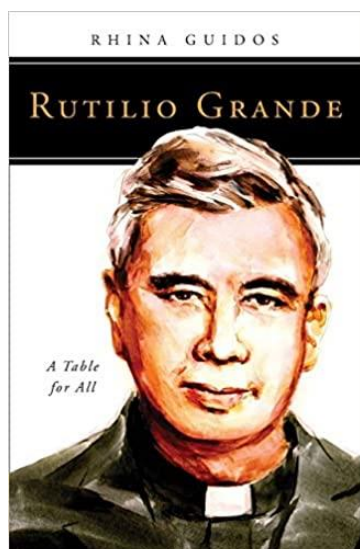


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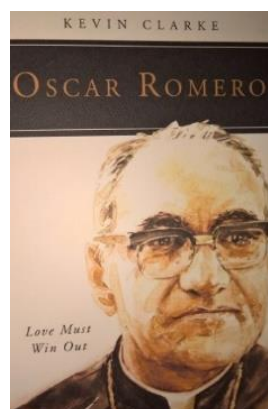
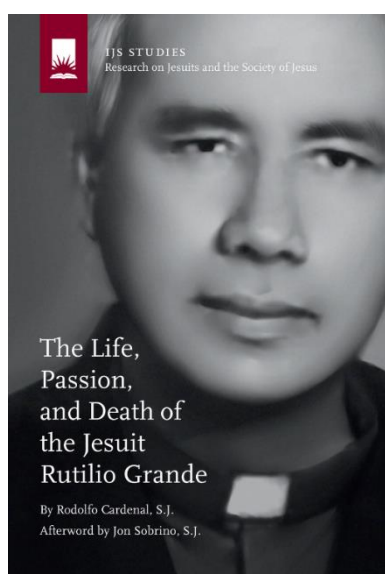
Cardenal SJ.

With an after -

word essay by

Jon Sobrino SJ.

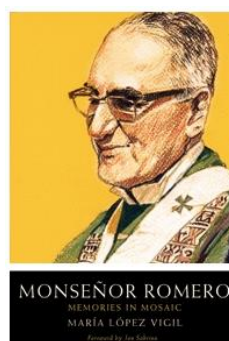
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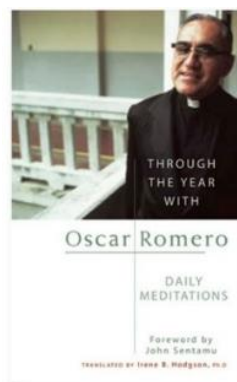
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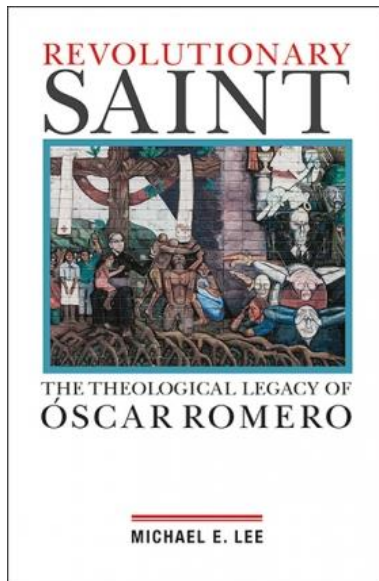
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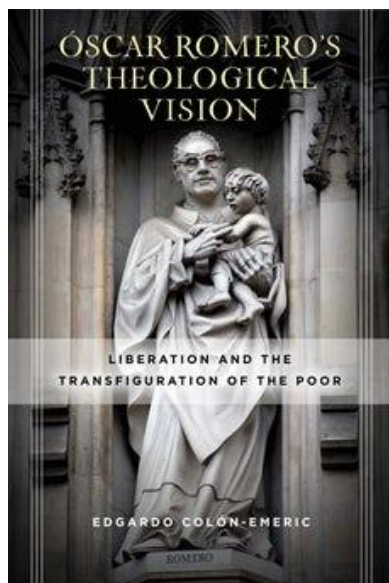


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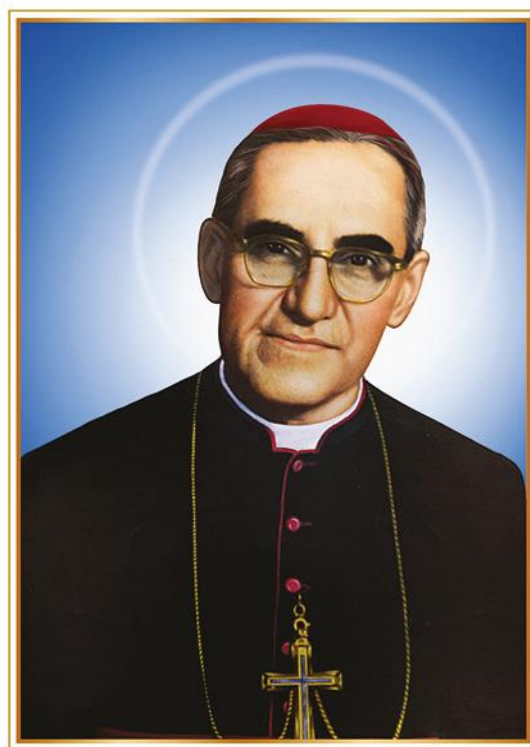
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