

Romeronews

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St Óscar Romero 45th Anniversary of Martyrdom



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DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Romero Lecture 2025

**Fr Luis Orlando Pérez will speak on
“Excavating Hope”**

on

**Thursday 13th March – 7.00pm
City Centre Campus, Trevelyan Sq.
Leeds Trinity University**

and

**Thursday 20th March – 7.00pm
St Edmund of Canterbury Church
Waterloo, Liverpool L22 8QF**

**Saturday 22nd March - 11.00am
National Ecumenical Service
St Martin in the Fields, London
Preacher: Cardinal Michael Fitzgerald**

**Sunday 23rd March - 6.00pm
Evensong St Albans Cathedral
Speaker Sister Gemma Simmonds CJ**

**Thursday 27th March - 12.30pm
Mass and Romero School Awards
St George’s Cathedral Southwark**

**Saturday 13th September
CAFOD-Romero Trust Pilgrimage
Holy Island of Lindisfarne**

**Saturday 1st November – 11.00am
Romero Trust XX Anniversary Mass
St George’s Cathedral Southwark**

**10th to 20th November 2025
Pilgrimage to El Salvador**

MARCH – ROMERO EVENTS

We are really delighted to welcome three eminent guest speakers for the commemorative events on this 45th anniversary of Saint Óscar's martyrdom.



Cardinal Michael Fitzgerald is our guest preacher at the Ecumenical Service at Saint Martin in the

Fields, Trafalgar Square, in London on Saturday 22nd March.

Cardinal Michael, a member of the Missionary Society of Africa (White Fathers), is an expert on interfaith relations. After 10 years of teaching at the Pontifical Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies in Rome and Makerere University in Uganda he worked pastorally in Sudan. He later served as President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and in 2006, was appointed by Pope Benedict XVI as apostolic nuncio in Egypt and delegate to the League of Arab States. From 2012-18 he was based in Jerusalem and created Cardinal by Pope Francis in 2019.

Cardinal Michael's vast experience in the Middle East is particularly relevant at this current time of conflict in the Holy Land and he certainly will have many insights to share from his long service there.



Sr Dr Gemma Simmonds CJ is a theologian and a sister of the Congregation of Jesus. Gemma

began her ministry teaching in the UK and went on to missionary work among women and street children in Brazil. She trained in Christian spirituality and started to work as a retreat giver and spiritual director and as chaplain in the Universities of Cambridge and London. Alongside this she spent 26 years as a volunteer chaplain in Europe's largest women's prison. Until 2018 Gemma taught pastoral theology at Heythrop College in the University of London. She is now the director of the Religious Life Institute and senior lecturer in pastoral theology at the Margaret Beaufort Institute of Theology, in Cambridge. The author of several books, Sr Gemma has been our guest speaker at several Romero commemorative events over the

years. Sr Gemma will be speaking at evensong in St Albans Cathedral at 6pm on Sunday 23rd March.

Our third guest, Fr Luis Orlando Pérez SJ will be speaking at the **1.30pm Spanish language Mass** on Sunday 13th March at Saint George's Cathedral Southwark, as



well as events in Liverpool and Leeds (Details on page 2).

Fr Luis is a Mexican Jesuit

and lawyer who is currently pursuing Doctoral studies in the Institute of the Americas, at the University of London. He has wide experience of working on human rights: in conflict-hit Colombia on documenting human rights and political violence. In Mexico his work at the Miguel Agustín Pro Human Rights Centre is focussed on pastoral accompaniment to families seeking justice for their children who were victims of the 2014 Ayotzinapa mass kidnapping. In one of Mexico's most infamous human rights cases, 43 students were captured and abducted by the police. Their fate is unknown and the remains of only 3 were ever found.

WE SOW HOPE TO HARVEST FREEDOM



16th November 2024 marked 35 years since the murder of six Jesuits and two women by the army at the UCA Central American University in San Salvador.

At the vigil Mass of the anniversary, celebrated on the UCA campus before an enthusiastic congregation, Fr José María Tojeira, who was Jesuit Provincial at the time of the massacre gave an impassioned homily on how to keep hope alive in times of fear and distress.

The readings today speak of sowing and harvesting. In Christianity, the fruit of the sowing not only nourishes us, but also unites us to Jesus, the Saviour, and to our neighbours, when we share the bread that he left us as an effective sign of his presence. In Mayan culture, human beings were created from corn, and so

we cultivate it and feed from it, uniting ourselves to it and to the God who represents it. The sowing and the grain are always a reminder of something that transcends us and drives us to the multiplication of good.

But sowing is not easy. Jesus, the ultimate sower, was persecuted,



mistreated and unjustly nailed to a cross for announcing a universal harvest in which the love of God and love of our neighbour,

intimately united, would be the saving fruit of humanity.

The prophet Jeremiah, in the first reading, warned us against prophets and soothsayers who used the name of the Lord to prophesy lies. Today, when those who want to impose their interests through violence, those who presume to be a superior race whose blood should not be mixed with that of other peoples, those who insult migrants by calling them savages from prisons and asylums, triumph in elections, we Christians are in difficult sowing times. The pests of

ambition and the birds of arrogance want to destroy the clean grain of the Gospel of the poor. For many, this will be a time of cross and pain. A time of commitment to the poor. How can we not think, as we walk sowing amidst adverse winds and storms, of the humiliated and threatened migrants; of the poor, forgotten and treated with contempt; of the women harassed and mistreated by a cowardly machismo; of the hungry, abandoned or abused children; of the families of prisoners who cannot even visit their loved ones in prisons and sow in them the rehabilitating grain of their affection.

Monseñor Romero, that sower of hope and conversion in our country, warned us years ago, also in difficult times of sowing, that the idols of wealth, power or efficiency at all costs threatened peace, justice and fraternal coexistence. He insisted on perseverance and resistance, taking on the violence of the cross in the pain of sowing.

His words continue to make sense in the face of the false prophets of power and money. 'Know', he said, "that there is a violence far superior to that of the tanks and also to that of the guerrillas; it is the violence of Christ who says: "Father,

forgive them, for they know not what they do”. A forgiveness in Jesus that springs from the cross assumed as an act of love and which is also, in Romero's words, ‘the violence of love, the violence of fraternity, the violence that wants to turn weapons into ploughshares for work’.

Our martyrs, whom we remember today, liked to repeat that ‘with Monseñor Romero, God passed through El Salvador’. A sower of holiness and generous dedication, Romero's life and testimony made our martyrs more Christian, more courageous and also led them to unite their blood with the blood of all the victims of the cruel and inhuman war that ravaged our lands. 35 years after the martyrdom of our brothers and sisters, and of so many victims who were as generous as they were innocent, we too must evaluate whether their shed blood helps us to be more generous, more courageous and, in short, more Christian.

Because, in fact, today it is up to us to sow amidst the hatred in social media, in false and grandiose propaganda presented as truth. We must be honest, even if we are disliked, and seek truth in the midst of corruption, the rejection of

solidarity and the refusal of transparency. It is also up to us to defend human rights while the loud sirens of power claim that human rights are a mechanism to defend criminals.



José María Tojeira at the Vigil Mass

We want a social and democratic state governed by the rule of law that strives to overcome poverty and inequality, that provides quality health care for all, that prioritises education and that has a universal pension system. It is also incumbent upon us to uphold what the early Church called parrhesia – speaking the truth for the common good - which Paul beautifully described when he said that ‘Christ has set us free to be free’. In the face of the powerful who seek freedom to dominate and to justify the

law of the strongest, we are called to be free to love, to serve and to sow values and virtues that bear universal fruits of love, truth and life for all.

It cannot be that in the midst of crises, or even the whims of the powerful, workers are laid off and those who impose staff cuts are rewarded. It is not right to forget the peasants, to grab land for export crops, to support environmentally predatory companies, to privatise water or to threaten to change laws and return to open-pit mining projects. This is not freedom, it is oppression. We face global warming, which will undoubtedly bring more problems to countries in the tropics, and we have no plans to face the future in solidarity.

We want to be governed by laws, not individual people. And we want those laws to be inspired by the courage and dignity of our people, by generosity and solidarity, by social justice, not by speculation or by the perverse idea that capital is more important than work. Our martyrs, those of the UCA, the forty who with them aspire to beatification, and so many others who died in the effort to build peace and reconciliation, sowed hope. All of them now impel us to work

for freedom and justice. Freedom to demand that the justice system tells the truth about the massacres and injustices of the past. And to force institutions, whether military or civilian, to review their past in the war, to recognise their crimes, to apologise for the evil done, to abandon arrogance and abuse, and to give guarantees of respect for human dignity. Our Lord Jesus in the Gospel gives us a word of hope. The time of harvest is coming. Even the smallest seed can give birth to a tree where those who have no nest can find shelter. If Jesus had lived in our land, perhaps he would have chosen the small seed of the ceiba tree to show us the splendid possibilities of the Kingdom of God. What is sown with love and for love always multiplies solidarity. Even in times of greatest difficulty, Jesus invites us to raise our heads because the day of our liberation is at hand. In recent history we have seen many sowers of love and hope. Courageous people convinced that peace and justice must walk together, women and men who take up arms to demand freedom for the innocent, to search for the disappeared, to defend the abused. All of them authentic followers of the Lord Jesus.

While they continue to grow in our memory and call us to generosity, their persecutors remain like cobwebs, abandoned amidst ruins and smelling of oblivion. The martyrs we remember today, those six Jesuits and two courageous women, and many others are part of the true history of El Salvador and of the world in which we live.

Together they invite us, to take up the task of transforming reality through our faith as sowers of the Kingdom. A permanent task formulated by Ignacio Ellacuría, which demands a creative and supportive response, love for the poor and the struggle for social justice. A permanent task that will reach its culmination when the Lord Jesus, on the day of the final triumph of love, gives all creation to the Father so that He may be all in all.

My brothers and sisters, when the Fathers of the Church said that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church, they were speaking the truth. They sow in us strength and hope, endurance in evil times and festive joy in the memory of those who sealed their witness with their blood. The psalm reminds us; “those who sowed in tears reap in song”.

What remains for us is to take comfort in faith, to support each other in mutual witness and to be witnesses of the Living Word. Evil can overcome good, but it cannot replace good with evil for long. Our faith, as the martyrs show us, is like a powerful spring which, no matter how much we are crushed, brings us back to the level of peaceful struggle for the Kingdom of goodness, justice and love. To celebrate the martyrs, who gave their lives for Jesus and for the face of Jesus reflected in the poor and persecuted, is to begin, in advance, to celebrate the resurrection and the final triumph of the fraternity of the Kingdom of God. That is why we affirm with full conviction that we sow hope in order to achieve freedom. That is why, as we approach the altar where the Lord gives himself to us as bread broken and shared, we can say and repeat together,

**Long live the martyrs of
El Salvador!**



ADIÓS DON PABLO 18th March 1988

An extract from Fr Tommy Greenan's book "Song of the Poor", reviewed in the Autumn 2024 edition of the Romero News, which recounts his experiences of working among the rural communities in the 1980s war zone of Chalatenango.

La Niña Laura, Pablo's old, barefooted sister came to see me yesterday. Restraining tears, she said, 'Pablo called for you four times, *Padrecito*. He wanted to say "Goodbye". But you weren't here, and he wouldn't believe me. He told me he had seen you going to the shop the day before, but how could he? He was nearly blind as well as deaf and mentally wandering.'

I felt sad at not having been present to bid him farewell. The surly Pablo reminded me of the old Scotsman who, on his death-bed, was asked if he wanted more prayers and scripture readings. He was tired and answered, 'Ah theekit ma hoose when the weather wiz warm'. Pablo had made sure no tiles had become loosened from his house long before the rains fell. His salvation did not depend on the oils of a church sacrament. However, I would have liked

to have been present, just to say goodbye.

Niña Laura told how, before Pablo died, he had got her to dress him with the clothes he had been gifted. He named each item of clothing and the person who had given him it. He put on the white shirt his niece's son had gifted him, the trousers given him by Blanca, his niece. And so on. Then, knowing he was going on his last journey, he sent for flowers, and an old woman at the top of the street gifted him flowers.

Pablo always kept a peso-note in his shirt pocket to pay for the nails of his coffin. He never had the

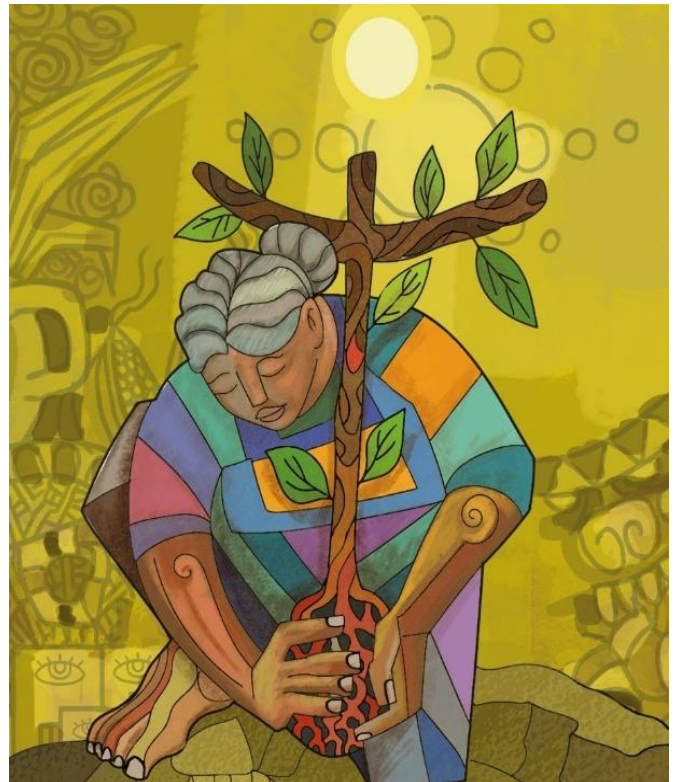


money with which to buy the whole coffin. But Jesus, too, occupied a borrowed tomb after his crucifixion. The disgrace of this is not in the poor person, but in the social situation which permits and fosters such poverty. As it happened, after his death, a couple of men in the village bought Pablo his coffin.

Death was a release. A few months before he died, I went to visit him. His niece, Blanca, met me at the door. She looked and sounded at the end of her tether. 'I don't know what to do with him, *Padrecito*. He went off to see you this morning. His mind has gone a bit *loco* and now he's down the embankment.' In his last months, owing to a fall, Pablo could not walk. He used to pull himself from place to place in a seated position.

I looked down the embankment and there he was, sitting on the rubbish dump, a modern-day suffering Job, planted on his dung-heap. I got help; a young lad and me lifted him to the street. It was difficult to suppress the humorous side of the situation. The image of Steptoe, the rag-and-bone merchant of television, with his toothless grin, crossed my mind's eye. Later in the day I asked myself when Pablo was going to make that longer journey beyond this life's rubbish dump. On Saturday, 5th of March 1988, old Pablo passed on to the Judgement Seat of God, but not to stand before it and be judged. Not he. Pablo and all the poor will be seated as our judges on the Last Day.

Jesus promises that it will be so: 'I was hungry and you gave me no food; I was thirsty and you never quenched my thirst; I was an outcast and you didn't receive me into your house; I had no clothing and you didn't clothe me; I was sick and imprisoned and you didn't come to visit me' (Mt. 25, 42-43). And on that day we will not be able to avoid the consequences of having lived in the presence of God's Poor.



**Pilgrimage of Hope to El Salvador
10th to 20th November 2025
Sign up now for a once in a lifetime
opportunity to meet those who keep
the memory of Saint Óscar alive.
SEE PAGE 21**

UNDERSTANDING HUMAN DIGNITY THROUGH THE EYES OF ROMERO



Matthew Philipp Whelan, Assistant Professor of Moral Theology & Social Ethics at Baylor University, Waco, Texas, sees dignity as a central pillar of Romero's pastoral practice.

Dignity is a fundamental concept in Catholic social teaching, deeply rooted in the belief that every person is created in God's image. This idea, prominently highlighted in Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* (1891), has evolved over time within the Church's teachings. But what does dignity mean, and how do we uphold it in a world often marred by injustice and inequality?

Imagine living in the late 19th century when Pope Leo XIII wrote *Rerum Novarum*. You might believe that workers were less than human based on how society was organised and how workers in cities throughout Europe were treated. Fast forward to Óscar Romero's El Salvador, where, during the 20th century, peasant farmers (*campesinos*) were

systematically excluded from land access and repressed when they tried to organise for just wages and better working conditions. Many of the wealthy and powerful who controlled the land regarded such people as beneath them as unworthy to have access to land, much less competent to cultivate it. Civil wars in El Salvador and elsewhere resulting from conflicts over land began new patterns of migration to the United States that continue to this day, and the current President of the United States consistently refers to present-day migrants as less than human – and presumably so do many of the people that voted for him.

We can see that human dignity is not just a "self-evident" truth. Often, the world we live in blatantly and systematically denies the dignity of whole groups of people. This makes human dignity not only something we must have faith in – in the sense of believing in something not yet fully seen – but also something we must struggle to make more ordinary.

That is what Estela Hernández, a Hñáhñú woman from Mexico, thought. In 2017, she gained national attention by speaking of the need to fight *hasta que la*

dignidad se haga costumbre (until dignity becomes ordinary). This phrase spread through Latin America, igniting social movements seeking to redress economic inequality and advocate for basic social services.

Hernández's words are a good entry point for returning to Romero and thinking more deeply about how he – and the Catholic social teaching tradition more broadly – understand human dignity. Romero's belief in human dignity wasn't just theoretical; it was a call to action. He thought that learning to recognise the dignity of every person and affirm the equal status of all humans required faith, along with a relentless effort to make this recognition and affirmation a reality in everyday life. "That is why the Church values human beings and fights for their rights, for their freedom, for their dignity. That is an authentic struggle of the Church," Romero explained in a 1997 homily: "As long as human rights are violated, as long as there are arbitrary arrests, as long as there are tortures, then the Church considers herself persecuted as well. She feels distressed because she values human beings and cannot bear to

see the image of God trampled upon by those who become brutish themselves by brutalising others."

In this passage, Romero is referring to the arbitrary arrests, disappearances, torture, and murders that were commonplace in El Salvador by the late 1970s. His words show that respect for human dignity was anything but guaranteed at that time. He also points to the important relationship in Catholic social teaching between human dignity and the belief that all human creatures are made in God's image (*imago Dei*). Trampling upon an image of the divine is no way to treat it.

Romero worries not just about the dignity of the trampled upon but also about the dignity of the trampers. Those who are doing the arresting, disappearing, torturing, and murdering their fellow Salvadorans compromise their own dignity by what they are doing. As Romero puts it in the same homily, the Church wants to "beautify" (*hermosear*) the image of God in both victims and victimisers alike.

Because all humans are made in the *imago Dei*, there is an equality between them. There is also a common belonging

to the community of humankind. But this equality and common belonging, though essential to our humanity, has been rejected and made difficult to perceive because of all the sin and violence in the world. That is why, for Romero, the Church beautifies the image of God by standing alongside the victims in solidarity and helping them advocate for their dignity, by advocating on their behalf and keeping records of the injustices, by confronting victimisers in love and telling them the truth about their actions, and by continually reminding his people – victims and victimisers alike – of their common origin and destiny in God.



Thus, Romero's way of thinking about dignity leads to questions like, how do we realise human dignity in our world, that is, engage in in the work of dignification? What practical conditions lead to its

reaffirmation and restoration? How do these conditions come about?

In Catholic social teaching, the tradition on which Romero draws, dignification crucially involves concrete measures like justice in wages, access of the landless to productive property like land, co-ownership and co-determination (involving workers in the ownership, management, and decision-making in businesses) in every aspect of economic life, and the right of workers to organise in unions and other organisations.

Advocacy for these and other measures represents dignification "from above." Its agents include prominent figures like Romero, government leaders, and others who enact laws and policies that seek to reaffirm and restore human dignity. When dignity is systematically degraded – when, as it was in El Salvador, poor farmers were excluded from access to land, wages were insufficient to live a dignified life, and organising of rural workers was declared illegal – a systematic legal and political response is required from public authorities.

An important thread tying all these measures together is the belief that God has given creation as a gift for the use

and enjoyment of all peoples. Usually, wages are how workers and their families enjoy the gift of creation, hence the importance of ensuring that their wages are sufficient to do just that. In rural areas, where land is especially important for people's livelihoods, dignification might happen through advocating a better distribution of land for peasant farmers, as Romero did. In urban areas, it might happen through advocating for co-ownership and co-determination. In all these cases, ensuring that all people are able to use and enjoy the gift of creation necessitates protecting and supporting their ability to organise into unions and other kinds of associations, and to advocate on their own behalf. There was plenty of this kind of organising and advocacy in El Salvador at the time, and Romero consistently lifted it up and tried to help other people to see it. Even when pursuing dignification from above – urging the Salvadoran regime to implement land reform – Romero argued that land reform is rightly seen as a response to a movement for dignification welling up “from below,” from the very ones whose dignity has been trampled upon. In 1979,

Romero insisted that “the government ... should not make the people feel that they're being offered a gift [with land reform] so they remain passive. No, the reform is a fruit that [the people themselves] have achieved because they began to take action themselves and participate in the economic and political processes of the country.” Here Romero follows Catholic social teaching in accompanying those whose dignity has been degraded in advocating for themselves.

Of course, it is sometimes the case that those whose dignity has been degraded are not even aware of it, failing to realise that that the work of dignification requires their own involvement. This was also the case in Romero's El Salvador. The peasant farmer Antonio Rivas describes the ministry of the Jesuit Rutilio Grande, Romero's friend and fellow martyr, this way:

Father Grande told us that ... as Christians, we were accustomed only to looking down at the soil. But from time to time, we should also look up to see whose shoe is pressing on the back of our necks. As workers, we also had a right to organise ourselves, to defend our

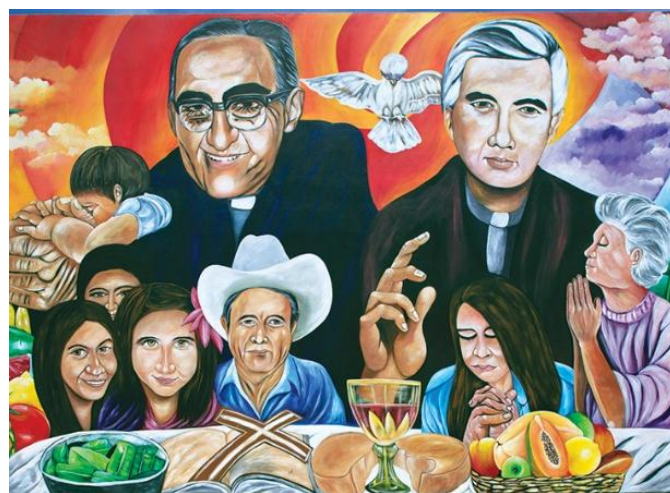
rights. That's not a sin. The way we were being treated was unjust, because the salaries were small, and the work was big. ... In fact, I knew nothing about rights ... [but] with the rights language, we went to speak with the landowners, to help them see their mistake and acknowledge our rights. This is how it all began.

Here Rivas eloquently describes how he was once unaware of violence being done to his dignity, as well as Grande's role in helping him see that violence and learn to participate himself in the process of defending against it. Rivas also speaks of the dignification of himself and others as a process of "looking up" in order to regard others as equals, as well as to figure out what prevented equality from being achieved. As Rivas puts it, only by looking up could he see the shoe pressing on his neck.

Throughout his homilies, Romero insists, like Grande, that the Church must awaken the consciences of those who are presently asleep but whose dignity is under attack. Drawing on the Second Vatican Council and the speeches of Pope Paul VI, Romero calls this "Christian Humanism" The fact that "workers, *campesinos*, and other poor

people are becoming more aware of their dignity," Romero says, exemplifies such humanism.

The theme of awareness-raising or *conscientización*, pervades Grande's and Romero's writing. Here, Grande and Romero are indebted to Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educator who stresses how the poor and oppressed often internalise and accept oppression, rather than participate in the struggle against it.



Similarly, Grande and Romero sought to involve people in the struggle against dehumanisation, because to succumb to oppression without struggle is to surrender their dignity.

In a further homily Romero draws the following conclusion from this process of *conscientización*: "If I am also a child of God, ... then I must also participate in the politics of the common good of my country. Then I also have a right to the

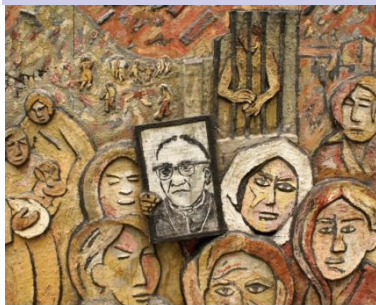
goods God has created for everyone.” Here Romero shows how the politics of the common good involves the coming together of those whose dignity has been assaulted and claiming for themselves what belongs to them in justice but has been denied them. Romero’s point is that when people discover for themselves that they are creatures made in the divine image, they realise there is no justification for their oppression, and that they have a right to be treated with dignity and to use and enjoy the gift of creation. For Romero, this politics of the common good isn’t just about people’s access to material goods like land or better wages and working conditions, though these are of course also essential. Above all, the politics of the common good encourages its participants, to return to Antonio Rivas’s words, to “look up” even higher. As Romero puts it, the common good is a good to which “every person can contribute something worthwhile.” “It is the moral force of good that attracts all people, ... so that all contribute according to their own inner being, their own responsibility, their own way of acting.” This is how we “all join together to build the public realm, which belongs

to everyone, and we all have an obligation to build.”

We are our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers, Romero is suggesting. There are goods that are essential to our sense of self-worth and purpose and that can only be enjoyed together with others or not at all. These “common goods” are at the heart of Romero’s understanding of human dignity. We discover them when we work alongside others to ensure that dignity becomes ordinary, and the gift of creation is truly shared by all. The politics of the common good shows us that dignification isn’t simply about restoring the dignity of particular victims. Most fundamentally, it means repairing the damage done to the community of humankind. These bonds might be difficult to see in the world in which we live, but they unite us as members of a single family.



SAINT ÓSCAR ROMERO AND CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING



Frank Turner SJ reviews a new volume of essays on how Saint Óscar Romero put Catholic Social Teaching into practice.

Romero, not himself an academic, is admirably served here by academics, the editor and fourteen contributors (too many for a reviewer to discuss comprehensively), who rightly honour someone who practises their discipline: Living it out 'to the end'.

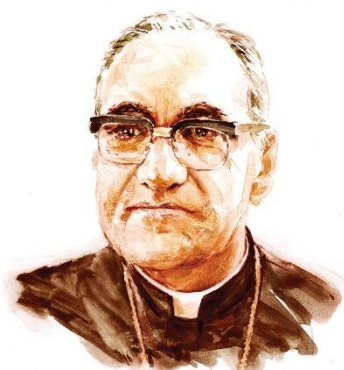
The book has two main sections: Part I, 'Romero in Context' comprises a biographical account by Ana María Pineda of his earlier life, followed by three discussions of his relationship with Catholic Social Teaching [henceforth CST], such as Michael Lee's account of the relationship between CST and liberation theology. Part II further explores Romero's relationship to CST,

with contributions arranged thematically. Edgardo Colón-Emeric writes on the option for the poor, Stephen J Pope on the common good and economic justice; Matthew Whelan on land conflicts as a specific case of such injustice; Elizabeth O'Donnell Gandolfo on the principle of solidarity; Kevin Burke on Romero's peace ministry; and so on.

Conservatism, no less than 'conversion to radicalism' needs an explanation. Pineda's biographical chapter will be revelatory for many. After a serious illness at the age of five which left him almost paralysed, Romero eventually had to relearn how to walk, speak and feed himself, naturally becoming isolated from other children and sometimes from his family. He was an inward-turned personality and in mid-life consulted a psychologist about his compulsive and perfectionist tendencies. Much of his earlier ministry was spent as an ecclesiastical administrator, distanced from those involved in social struggle.

As Lee shows vividly, the criticisms later levelled at Romero from outside are anticipated amply in **his own** early writings, shaped by that distance. Then, Romero alleged that liberation theology

was compromised by its reliance on Marxism so as to become reductionist; that it lacked a **supernatural** hope and was falsely 'prophetic' in promoting political change rather than transcendent conversion.



He called Christians to spiritual renewal, pastoral charity and a deeper social sensibility — calls which in

no way threatened the government or military.

But when in 1974, he became bishop of the poor rural diocese of Santiago de María, immersed in the misery of the poor and the oppression which caused it, his perspective soon changed. He **allowed** himself to change, in his first meeting with the clergy of his diocese, appealing 'Help me to see clearly'. It seems, therefore, that the 1977 murder of Rutilio Grande was not for him an atrocity out of the blue, which suddenly impelled him to condemn the violence, but a determining confirmation of what he had come to know. And by then, newly appointed Archbishop of the capital, he

had to confront not just local violence but the governmental-military axis. Other chapters are no less revelatory than Pineda's. Burke shows how Romero's pastoral letters and homilies were complemented by symbolic prophetic actions. One example is the cathedral '*misa única*' of 1977, the extraordinary, surely unprecedented, decision of the new Archbishop of San Salvador to cancel all Masses in the diocese except that in the Cathedral, celebrated in the presence of the bodies of Grande and his two companions. He also refused, among other gestures, to attend the presidential inauguration of his fraudulently elected namesake, General Carlos Humberto Romero, until the government had properly investigated Grande's murder, and he defiantly created a legal aid office.

These symbolic actions countered the grotesque 'aesthetic of terror' discussed in horrifying detail by Kevin Burke and originally documented by the priest-social scientist Daniel Santiago. Sadistic violence sought not merely to quell the resistance but to terrorise the population. Romero became convinced that the opposite of peace is not war but

violence, and that work for justice was an essential step in the search for peace. Stephen Pope shows how, in his fourth pastoral letter of 1979, Romero also condemned — while never equating — the guerrilla violence. But he found the primary cause to be the structural violence of dispossession and deprivation, from which arose the ‘repressive violence’ of the Right (state, military, landowners) to protect the injustice against even moderate opposition. Inevitably there arose ‘reactive violence’ originating in self-defence.

Whelan focuses on the struggle of the rural proletariat (‘those who must sell their labour to survive’) amidst land conflicts caused by the advance of ‘export agriculture’ and the concentrated, sprawling landholdings known as *latifundia*.

And, in an intriguing contribution Gandolfo shows how Romero’s prophetic advocacy was inspired by the popular movements which were **his** prophetic voice. He saw the suffering ‘people’ as subjects, not only recipients and beneficiaries, of solidarity. He saw the Church itself as ‘a prophetic and

sacramental community of love’: and saw this model of church embodied in the base communities he sponsored in San Salvador. Thus, there were many thousands of witnesses to faith in El Salvador who — along with Saint Óscar Romero — paid with their lives.

Óscar Romero and Catholic Social Teaching, Todd Walatka (editor),

University of Notre Dame Press, 2024

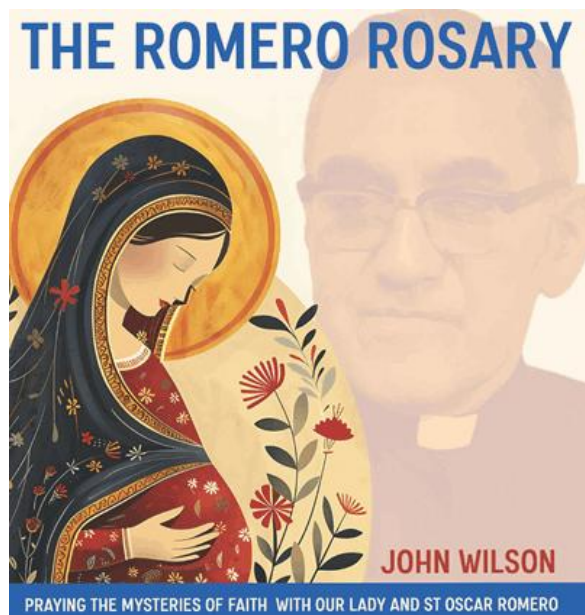
Now available from the Romero Trust at £36 (recommended price £57.40)

THE ROMERO ROSARY



Archbishop John Wilson kneels at the foot of the Romero Cross at the national shrine to Saint Óscar in St George’s Cathedral, Southwark

A lesser-known aspect of Saint Óscar Romero was his deep devotion to the Rosary, which is the subject of a new book by Archbishop John Wilson. In a homily in 1978, St Óscar preached that “the world will always be in need of prayer and of Mary”, adding that there is “no chain more beautiful for joining the world with God than the chain of the Holy Rosary”.



In recognition of the love of the rosary by St Oscar, Archbishop John has created the **Romero Mysteries** which focus on the subjects of **charity, compassion and mercy**, and **Justice and Peace**.

The beautiful book contains reflections on the traditional Mysteries, as well as the new Romero Mysteries. All are illuminated for reflection and prayer by the words of St Óscar Romero who said

the “mysteries of the rosary are a precious summary of the Gospel” and it was the rosary which the saint from El Salvador prayed when he and his people faced hostility and threat. In the words of Archbishop John:

"I wonder if you picked up and opened this little book because you love the holy rosary or because you love St Oscar Romero. Perhaps, like me, you love both. I hope what you read inspires you to pray the rosary and to learn more about St Oscar Romero. I keep everyone who reads this book in my prayers."

The book is published by Pauline Books and is available to purchase online at PaulineUK.org.

**CAFOD & Romero Trust
Holy Island Pilgrimage
13th September 2025
JOIN US !!**



Statue of St Aidan on Holy Island

**ROMERO TRUST PILGRIMAGE
TO EL SALVADOR
10-20 NOVEMBER 2025**



The view of the San Salvador volcano from the Loyola Centre pilgrimage accommodation.

**SIGN UP NOW FOR THE 2025
PILGRIMAGE TO EL SALVADOR**

The Romero Trust has previously organised four pilgrimage tours to El Salvador, each with more than thirty participants: admirers of Romero from UK, Ireland, USA, Australia, Kenya, DRC and New Zealand. Each visit has been a unique and unforgettable experience for all the pilgrims. We travel in the steps of Saint Oscar Romero, learning about the hopes, the sufferings and the joys of the people of El Salvador who inspired Saint Oscar to say, **“With these people it is easy to be a good pastor”**.



The Chapel of Divine Providence, site of the martyrdom of Saint Oscar Romero

In November 2025, to coincide with the 36th anniversary of the UCA martyrs, we hope to organise a further 11-day visit to this beautiful and inspiring, yet troubled land to meet the people for whom Saint Óscar Romero and so many martyrs offered their lives. This will be a unique and life-changing opportunity to get close to the lives of the Salvadorean people and their martyrs, accompanied by the Romero Trust’s co-chairs, Julian Filochowski, a friend of Saint Romero, and Clare Dixon, who worked closely with the Jesuits of the UCA. The tour will be arranged by expert pilgrimage organiser Anthony Coles.

**PLEASE LET US KNOW AS SOON AS
YOU CAN TO MAKE SURE THE
PILGRIMAGE CAN GO AHEAD**

The cost, covering accommodation, local travel and all meals will be around £1,150 excluding flights (approx. £800).

If you are interested in joining the pilgrimage please contact: romerotrust@gmail.com or Anthony Coles: 020 7431 3414
Email: arctc@btinternet.com



Saint Romero's tomb in the Cathedral

Scenes from the Romero Pilgrimage



Centro Loyola – Our home from home



Ciudad Barrios - Romero's birthplace



Divine Providence Chapel



El Mozote – Martyrs' Monument

El Salvador Update

Human Rights Suspended

Since embarking upon his second – illegal - term as President in June 2024, Nayib Bukele has wasted no time in consolidating his hold on power, despite the fact that in El Salvador there is a constitutional ban on re-election. On being returned to power with more than 80% of the vote the President now has total control of the three branches of power, the executive, the judiciary and the legislature with 57 of the 60 seats in the national assembly.

His popularity is based almost exclusively upon having dramatically reduced the gang-related crime and killings which had plagued the country for years. This has been achieved through draconian measures whereby constitutional guarantees have been suspended a State of Emergency known as the state of exception. Since it was first introduced as a 30-day measure in March 2022, the emergency decree has been renewed 35 times and human rights groups doubt if it will ever be lifted. In less than two years, more than 84,000

people have been arrested and held without trial or specific charges against them. This is a greater number than the total prison population of England and Wales, with a total population more than ten times that of El Salvador.

Amnesty International has kept track of events, deploying five missions to the country to document the patterns of grave human rights violations. After each trip, the organisation has testified to the gradually deteriorating circumstances of the victims and their families, throwing human rights in the country into ever deeper crisis.



Protests by Salvadoreans in the USA

Allegations by human rights organisations, protests by victims and concerns expressed by regional and international bodies have all been met by the Salvadorean government with silence, indifference, and a lack of transparency, further cementing a model of repression and impunity.

According to Amnesty, increased militarisation, above all in marginalised, impoverished communities, has brought back memories of past horrors, when the armed forces were used to repress the population. This approach, combined with efforts by state agents to stigmatise human rights organisations and the free press and to thwart their efforts, has fostered a climate of fear and intimidation that stifles civil society and spurs self-censorship.

Bishops Protest at Mining Reversal

El Salvador made history in 2017 when it voted to become the first country in the world to ban metal mining within its borders. The successful campaign to bring in the mining ban had been led by Archbishop José Luis Escobar Alas with overwhelming support of the bishops' conference and civil society organisations. Yet, in December 2024, President Bukele took to social media to proclaim that El Salvador needed to exploit gold deposits in the country. Claiming "God placed a gigantic treasure under our feet: El Salvador potentially has the highest density gold deposits per km² in the world. This wealth, given by

God, can be used responsibly to bring unprecedented economic and social development to our people."



2017 demonstration convened by the Church in favour of mining ban

Speaking at Mass two days before Christmas, the archbishop did not mention any politicians by name, but he voiced deep opposition to a proposal being pushed through the National Assembly that day to roll back a ban on mining in the Central American country. "We are not interested in politics," he said "We are interested in people's lives, people's health. That is why we ask the honourable deputies not to repeal the law that prohibits mining."

The archbishop had put the issue in more stark terms the day before, saying in a social media video, "We're facing a life and death situation. "This is not a partisan political discussion; it is about protecting people's lives, people's

health,” the archbishop said, noting that mining activities leave behind “a large amount of poison, which would cause so much harm to the population.”



Protest outside the Legislative Assembly against the repeal of the mining ban

El Salvador’s assembly ultimately ignored the archbishop—along with pleas from El Salvador’s bishops’ conference, environmental groups and populations in areas previously impacted by mining activities—by reversing its ban on extractive activities.

Water defenders’ retrial

Five Salvadorean environmental defenders who were exonerated of bogus civil war charges are to face retrial amid growing evidence of political interference. The five were acquitted in October 2024 over the alleged killing of an army informant in 1989. In a

court ruling that the state had failed to prove a crime had taken place, or that the defendants were linked to any wrongdoing.

The environmental leaders, who are all over 60 and suffer from a range of chronic medical issues, spent nearly two gruelling years fighting the charges, including nine months in which they were held in overcrowded prisons. But their celebrations were short-lived. The attorney general, a close political ally of Bukele, successfully appealed the verdict in early December and the men face a retrial on the same charges of murder and illicit association.

The move came as a new opinion poll by the Jesuit Central American University found that almost two-thirds (61%) of Salvadoreans oppose a return to mining because of the threat it poses to the country’s stressed and depleted water resources.

Bukele and Trump - Soulmates?

Despite his protestations of admiration for President Trump, and claims that they were close friends, Bukele was not one of the foreign leaders to be invited to the US presidential inauguration on 20th

January. Since the election of President Trump there had been much speculation about the potential impact of his presidency upon El Salvador, given Trump's declared intention to deport any undocumented migrants and even foreign-born US residents with legal status.



The Presidents during Trump's first term

Many families in El Salvador depend upon remittances from their relatives in the US and the impact of the enforced return of hundreds of thousands of Salvadoreans would be devastating for the country's economy. Despite Bukele's claims that El Salvador is a sovereign and independent country, it was not long before his debt to the US was called in.

Just two weeks into Trump's presidency US Secretary of State Marco Rubio travelled to El Salvador where he met President Bukele and announced on 3 February: "In an act of extraordinary friendship to our country..El Salvador has

agreed to the **most unprecedented and extraordinary migratory agreement** anywhere in the world".

The country will continue accepting Salvadorean deportees who illegally entered the US, it will also "accept deportation of any illegal alien in the United States who is a criminal from any nationality, and house them in his jails". In addition, Bukele "has offered to house in his jails dangerous American criminals in custody including those of US citizenship and legal residents."

Bukele later confirmed the agreement saying "We are willing to take in only convicted criminals (including convicted US citizens) into our mega-prison in exchange for a fee." El Salvador's Terrorism Confinement Centre (know an CECOT) is the country's largest and newest prison, with a maximum capacity of 40,000 inmates. "The fee would be relatively low for the US but significant for us, making our entire prison system sustainable," he added. Those within the Trump administration and the president's allies have been quick to praise the announcement, with Elon Musk calling it "a great idea".

Economy declines

In an opinion piece from the UCA, Jesuit Rodolfo Cardenal, Director of the Archbishop Romero Centre at the University, spoke of the harsh reality of life for the majority of the population despite President Bukele's claims of a dynamic economy.

'The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) has placed Bukele's El Salvador on the world list of countries with hunger. The year 2025 finds half of the Salvadorean population struggling to eat every day. Hunger is accompanied by a further degradation of the state's social services.

El Salvador's economy has grown the least of any country in the region in the last five years, the same years he has been in power. The country imports far more than it exports or produces. The astronomical trade deficit is largely covered by remittances from the diaspora. Government lack of liquidity is proverbial, as is the neglect of education and health. Bukele's economic gambles have failed to boost economic growth. First came bitcoin. Then it was surf tourism and entertainment. The last

resort is the massive dismissal of public employees and the reduction of social spending, a 'bitter medicine' for the majority of the population.

The gold mine that Bukele claims to have found underground seems to him to be a godsend for his 'economic miracle'. Apart from the intrinsic perversity of metallic mining, the treasure trove story is not backed up by any studies. And even if it were confirmed, its exploitation and the wealth it may generate will not be immediate. Moreover, no one in their right mind can guarantee that it will result in general prosperity or that it will be distributed equitably.

As with previous gambles, the wealth is reserved for the Bukele family clan and their associates. In the meantime, the living standards of the majority will languish even further.'

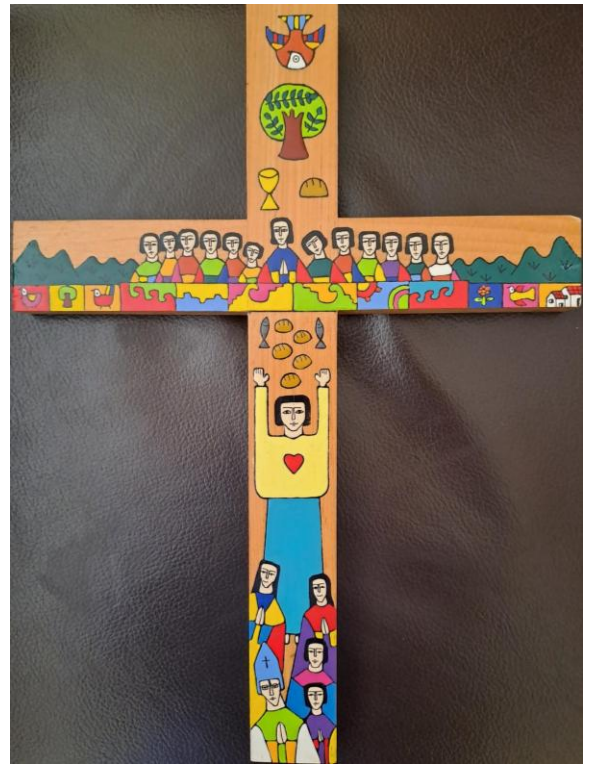


The Southwark Romero Cross

The beautiful Romero Cross in St. George's Cathedral is the work of the celebrated Salvadorean artist, Fernando Llorc. The Llorc family workshop has produced large copies of the double-sided cross and the Romero Trust has them available for purchase.

The small single-sided cross measures 4 inches and costs **£5 or 3 for £12 (+ p&p)**

The large double-sided cross with a stand measures 12 inches and costs **£15 (+ p&p)**



Reverse of cross represents the People of God

MARTYRS OF EL SALVADOR PRAYER CARDS



Front of Cross represents Christ and Romero



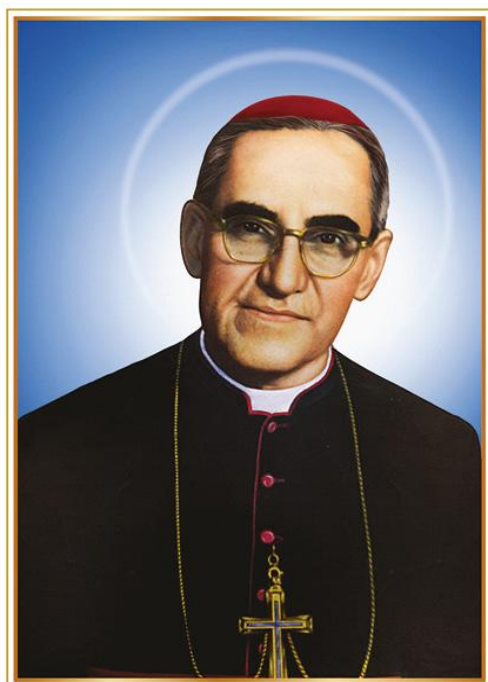
The Romero Trust has produced prayer cards of this beautiful portrait of Rutilio Grande and his companions, Manuel

Solórzano and Nelson Lemus, by Salvadorean artist Cristián Lopez.

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



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



ST OSCAR ROMERO
BISHOP AND MARTYR

Individual prayer cards are free of charge, just send us a self-addressed

envelope. For bulk orders the charge is £10 for 250 cards.

RESOURCES

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

We particularly recommend:

Roses in December: *A moving account of the life and the death of lay missionary 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.*

What Lucia Saw: *A dramatic retelling of the true story of Lucía, the only witness to the killing of the UCA martyrs. A gripping and chilling tale of an attempted cover-up of the UCA massacre. **Highly recommended!***

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

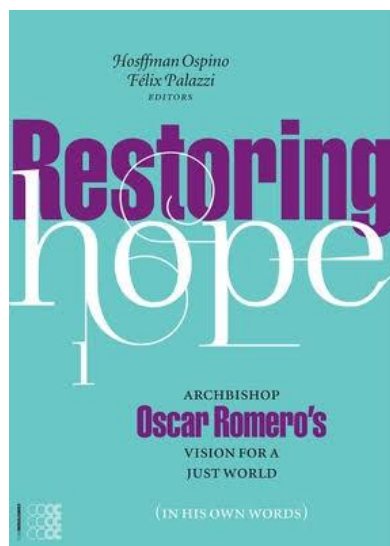
PO Box 70227

London E9 9BR

BOOK OFFERS

Restoring Hope – Oscar Romero’s Vision for a Just World. 83 pages

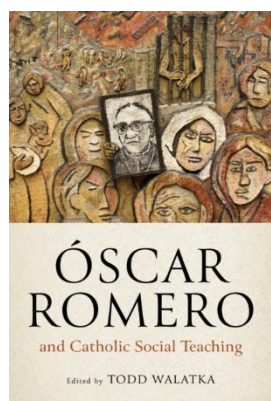
Ed. Hosffman Espino



An exquisite selection of Saint Óscar Romero's own words about hope from the homilies he preached when Archbishop of

San Salvador **£12 (incl. p&p)**

Óscar Romero and Catholic Social Teaching Edited by Todd Walatka

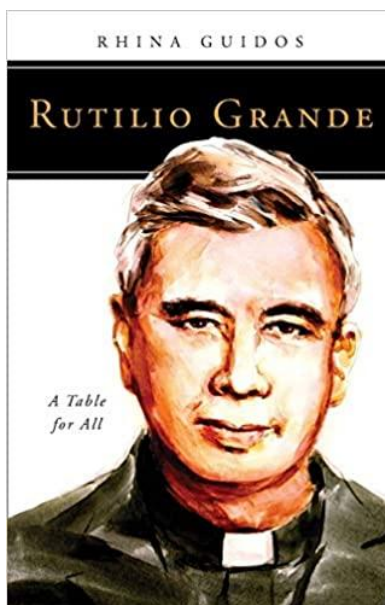


Selected essays by 14 Romero scholars. This book explores the life, mission, and writings of St. Óscar Romero in the light of contemporary work for

justice and human development, and the challenges facing Christian communities today. **402 pp**

Special price of £38 (incl. p&p)

'Rutilio Grande - A Table for All' by Rhina Guidos.



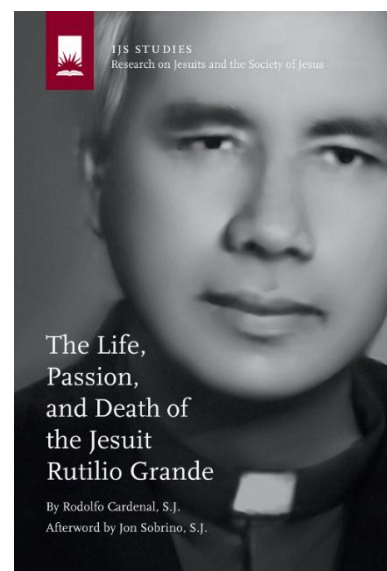
A short and well-written biography which beautifully captures the life and ministry of Blessed Rutilio Grande”.

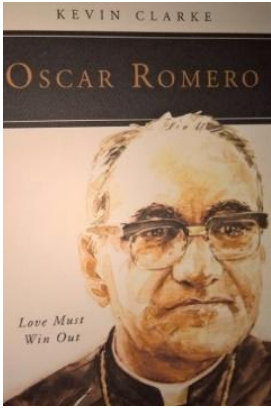
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The Life, Passion and Death of the Jesuit Rutilio Grande 482 pages

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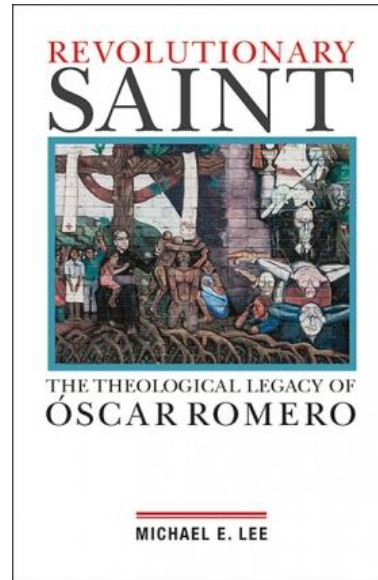




Oscar Romero – Love Must Win Out by Kevin Clarke. An excellent and very readable short introduction to the life and times of

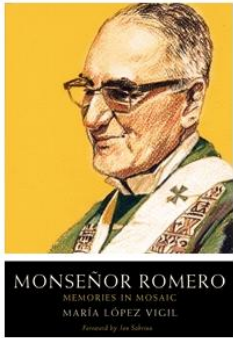
Archbishop Romero.

£10 (incl. p&p).



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

Available in bookshops at £20: from the Romero Trust at the special price: **£16 (incl. p&p)**



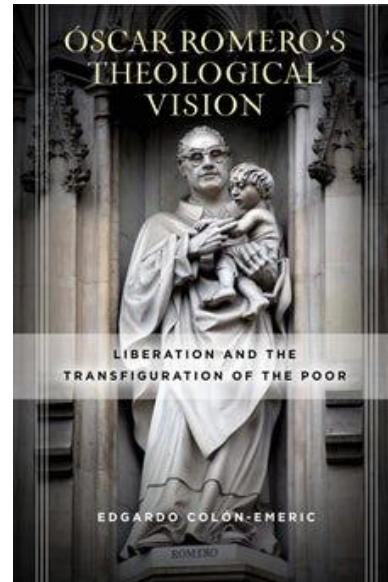
Oscar Romero: Memories in Mosaic Romero remembered by the people who worked with him, lived with him and prayed with him

compiled by María López Vigil.

Arguably the best book on Romero. Unput-downable. Highly recommended.

£17 (incl. p&p)

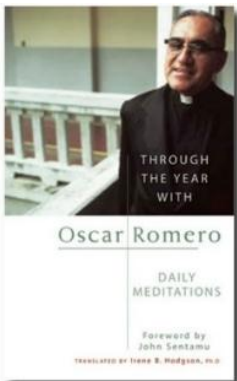
Oscar Romero's Theological Vision by Edgardo Colón-Emeric:



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

Oscar Romero.

Special price of **£25 (incl p&p)**



Through the Year with Oscar Romero: Daily Meditations Powerful and moving selections from Saint Oscar Romero's homilies. **£10 (incl p&p)**

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Your donations help us to produce this newsletter and put on events like Romero Week and the Romero Lecture.

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

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

or visit our website:

www.romerotrusted.org.uk/support

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Please do inform us of any changes of your address and please send any feedback

Remember, you can also view the newsletter on the Trust's website, and can contact us by email on:

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