
ROMERO, JESUIT MARTYRS IN EL SALVADOR, AND POPE FRANCIS IN THE MISSION OF PROMOTING PEACE AND RECONCILIATION

罗梅洛、萨尔瓦多耶稣会殉道者和教宗方济各 推动和平与和解的使命

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ABSTRACT

On March 24, 1980, Oscar Arnulfo Romero, the Archbishop of San Salvador in El Salvador, was killed while celebrating Mass. On Nov 16, 1989, a unit of soldiers machine-gunned six Jesuits at the Central American University in San Salvador. Romero and the six Jesuits were murdered because they spoke out against injustice towards the poor and promoted non-violent national peace negotiations. Carrying Christ's mission, they even offered their own lives.

In recent decades, the Chinese government has been stricter with churches in China. O'Connell (2018) reported that, in a historic breakthrough, on September 22, 2018 in Beijing, the Holy See signed a "provisional agreement" with China on the appointment of bishops, to foster peace and reconciliation for the Chinese Catholic church. As a human person, a moral leader and a Christian, one must ask oneself: What is God's mission and my role in it? Inspired by the martyrs and Pope Francis, how can one carry out the mission of promoting peace and reconciliation?



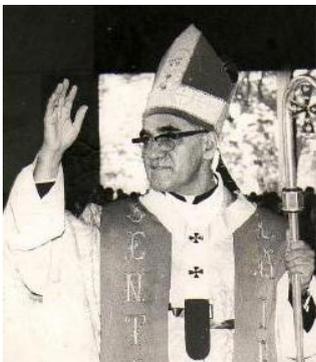
ARCHBISHOP OSCAR ARNULFO ROMERO

Following the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), the Latin American church, especially the church in El Salvador, was bitterly divided between those who favored a traditional ecclesial model and those who preferred a model centered on the church's "option for the poor". Oscar Arnulfo Romero, who had been a staunch defender of the former model, eventually evolved into a proponent of the latter (Brett, 2017, p. 52). The option for the poor is a trend, throughout the Bible, of preference being given to the poor and powerless of society, especially in Jesus's teachings. During the twelve-year civil war in El Salvador, the country was also seriously divided economically and politically.

HOW DID ROMERO BECOME AN ADVOCATE FOR THE POOR?

Romero's life was gradually transformed, and he eventually offered his life for people who were suffering, especially the oppressed and the poor. He was born into a poor family and suffered from hunger during his early years. He entered the seminary when he was thirteen years old and finished his studies in Rome. After he became the Bishop of Santiago de María, he had already begun to confront social oppression in his diocese (Brett, 2017, p.60). During the difficult and chaotic years of civil war, he showed deep compassion for the "campesinos killing themselves during the harvest" and "children dying because of water they were drinking" (Brett, 2017, p. 60). He often provided poor coffee growers shelter in two of his churches along with drinks of hot corn *atol* or milk (Brett, 2017, p. 60). Throughout his ministry to the poor, Romero tirelessly advocated for justice and for people's dignity, so they called him the "voice of the voiceless" (Brett, 2017, p. 63).

In 1977, as violence intensified in El Salvador, Romero was appointed Archbishop of San Salvador. During this time of turmoil many clergymen were kidnapped, tortured, beaten, or imprisoned and large numbers of foreign clergy were expelled from the country. Five diocesan priests and the Jesuit Rutilio Grande, were murdered by government-connected death squads, as were countless lay catechists and other lay church workers (Brett, 2017, p. 63). Grande, the first priest assassinated, was killed on March 12, 1977. After Grande's death, Romero changed his cautious attitude toward the government and urged the government to investigate the murder.



HOW AND WHY WAS ROMERO KILLED?

Romero also received many death threats. However, he continued to lead priests and

Catholics to fight for the poor and the oppressed in non-violent ways. Romero said:

The church would betray its own love for God and its fidelity to the gospel if it stopped being . . . a defender of the rights of the poor . . . a humanizer of every legitimate struggle to achieve a more just society . . . that prepares the way for the true reign of God in history (Creighton University Online Ministry, (n.d.).

On March 24, 1980, the Archbishop Romero was murdered while celebrating Mass. Before he was killed, he regularly spoke out against injustice towards the poor and politically oppressed amidst an intensifying war between leftist rebels and the government and right-wing forces in El Salvador. Huge crowds gathered to attend his funeral, and forty people at the funeral were killed by snipers (Zraick, 2018).

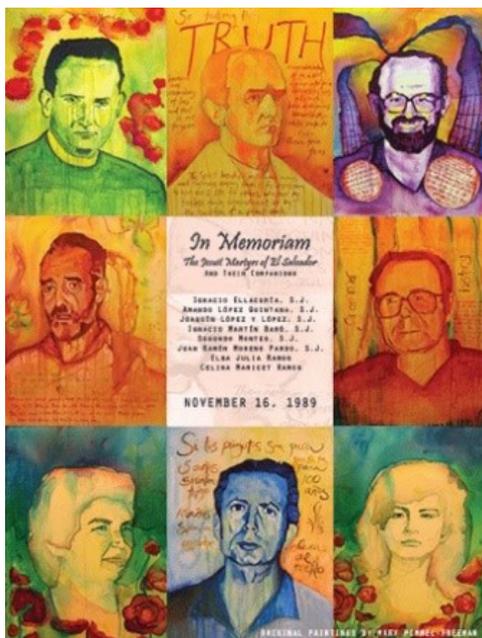
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JESUIT MARTYRS IN EL SALVADOR

On Nov 16, 1989, the world was shocked to learn that eight people were murdered on the grounds of the Jose Simeon Canas University of Central America (UCA) in El Salvador (Sobrino, 1990, p. xi). According to the United Nations Security Council report, Colonel Guillermo

Alfredo Benavides, with possible approval by the president of the country (p. 47), gave the order to a unit of an elite “antiterrorist” force to eliminate all suspected of sympathizing with the leftist rebels and intellectual authors of the uprising. After finding Father Ignacio Ellacuría, and five other Jesuits asleep in their community residence, the troops forced them outside, had them lie on the lawn, and then scattered their brains with machine-gun fire (Ellsberg, 2001, p. 499).

In addition to Ellacuría, the other murdered Jesuit priests were Ignacio Martín-Baró, Segundo Montes, Juan Ramón Moreno, Amando López, and Joaquín López y López, who was the National Director of the “Faith and Joy” catechetical movement. All of them taught at the university, fought for the faith and for justice for the poor, and were leaders for a nonviolent, negotiated settlement to the civil war in El Salvador. Two additional victims were Elba Ramos, their cook and housekeeper, and Celina Ramos, Elba’s sixteen-year-old daughter. Ironically, both Elba and Celina, frightened by the street fighting outside, had chosen to stay at the university because they believed that they would be safe (Ellsberg, 2001, p. 499). After the brutal killings, an international cry arose from diplomats, heads of state, religious groups, and the



human rights community to find the perpetrators of the crime.

WHO WERE THESE JESUITS?

Ellacuría and the other five Jesuits were neither communists nor the intellectual “brains” of the “Communist” movement, as wrongly identified by right-wing propaganda. Jon Sobrino (1989) lived with and knew the Jesuit martyrs best, and he shared information about them during this tragic time. Sobrino said: They were “human beings, Salvadorans, who tried to live honourably and responsibly amid the tragedy and hope of El Salvador” (p. 3). They were men of spirit, of service, and of love. They lived and served the poor and oppressed during the chaotic and dehumanising war in El Salvador. They served with humility and generosity, and offered their lives for the poor, the oppressed and for God. They walked with God with compassion, kindness, and love.

WHAT WAS THEIR MISSION?

The Jesuit martyrs cried out for life and fought for justice, reconciliation and peace through teaching, writing, directing retreats, and other daily activities. Ellacuría and the other Jesuits consistently denounced the injustice and repression that fed the bitter civil war and sought to promote a negotiated settlement to the conflict in non-violent ways (Ellsberg, 2001, p. 499). They did pastoral work in poor parishes and communities on Sundays after spending exhausting weeks at their regular jobs. They seldom had holidays or sabbatical years but dedicated themselves to the poor (Sobrino, 1989, p. 28). Indeed, they tried very hard to live out the teaching of Jesus and the church’s “option for the poor” (Ellsberg, 2001, p. 500).

Pedro Arrupe, Superior General of the Society of Jesus had emphasized this “option for the poor” in a letter to the Jesuits of Latin America in 1968. Later, the 32nd General Congregation defined the Jesuits’ spirit and mission as “serving faith and promoting justice.” As a result, throughout the so-called Third World, from 1975 to 1990, thirty-two Jesuits, including Rutilio Grande (Mawhinney, 2002) and the six other

Jesuit martyrs in El Salvador, were murdered and paid the ultimate price for their mission (Sobrin, 1990, pp. viii-ix).

HOW COULD THEY CARRY OUT THEIR MISSION IN A CRITICAL SITUATION?

Inspired by the spirit of the “preference for the poor” (Locatelli, 2009, p. 14), and impelled by the love for God and the poor, Ellacuria often articulated the meaning of faith and the gospel from the perspective of the poor and of Yahweh’s suffering servant—Jesus, who suffered so much and even offered his life for the people. Hence, for Ellacuria, the task of the Christian was not simply to contemplate the mystery of suffering, but to “take the crucified down from the cross,” to join the poor and the oppressed in mutual compassion and effective solidarity (Ellsberg, 2001, p. 500). Thus, to be a Jesuit, for him, was to be a contemplative in action, to do what Jesus did and to love as Jesus loved. To be a companion of Jesus is to “engage, under the standard of the Cross, in the crucial struggle of our time: the struggle for faith and the struggle for justice which it includes” (Society of Jesus, 1977, p. 401). Aware of the dangers all of them faced, Spanish-born Jesuit Segundo Montes, the rector of the community spoke to the Jesuit community about their decisions to remain with the people. He said:

This is my country and these people are my people...The people need to have the church stay with them in these terrible times—the rich as well as the poor. The rich need to hear from us, just as do the poor. God’s grace does not leave, so neither can we (Ellsberg, 2001, p. 500).

Romero and the Jesuit martyrs in El Salvador died for social justice, peace, and reconciliation, and caring for the poor and marginalised. Afterwards more and more Jesuits volunteered to continue the mission there, as well as in China, and in other countries. Their spirit and mission continue to inspire more and more people to follow their examples.

POPE FRANCIS AND THE “PROVISIONAL AGREEMENT”

China first broke off diplomatic ties with the Holy See in 1951, and Catholics were forced to go underground until the 1980s when religious practices were allowed again (*BBC News*, 2018). In 2014, hundreds of towering red church crosses in the Zhejiang Province (known internationally as “China’s Jerusalem”) were removed, according to government officials, for violating building codes (Cao, 2017, p. 30). Since the 1980s, some Catholic bishops in China have been appointed by the Chinese government without authorisation from the Pope. Therefore, much confusion and division arose between the Chinese government and the Holy See. Pope Francis has continued the former popes’ efforts to dialogue with the Chinese government, to promote peace, reconciliation and unity within the Chinese church. These efforts culminating in a historic breakthrough, the Holy See signed a “provisional agreement” with China on the appointment of bishops on September 22, 2018 in Beijing (O’Connell, 2018).

As a world leader, Pope Francis has been well-known for his humility and extraordinary love for the poor (Padden, 2013). He has inspired countless people with his edifying life example. But he humbly portrays himself: “I am a sinner whom the Lord looks upon with mercy” (NCR staff, 2016). In *the Spiritual Exercises* (No. 95), Ignatius encouraged Jesuits and Ignatian leaders to be followers and companions of Christ, to labour and to fight for the kingdom of God, and for helping souls (Puhl, 1951, p. 44). Romero, the Jesuit martyrs and Pope Francis are truly servant leaders, listening to others and fighting for justice, peace and reconciliation. They are servants of Christ’s mission (Society of Jesus, 1995, p. 18) living out Jesus’ teaching and the church’s “option for the poor” (Ellsberg, 2001, p. 500).

Pope Francis’ leadership is inspired by this Ignatian ideal, in both small ways and great things. He not only washed twelve prisoners’ feet including women and a Muslim man (Pullella, 2017), but also urged people to fast and pray for peace in Syria and in the world (Gomes, 2018). In the same spirit, after the “provisional agreement,”

Pope Francis accepted seven illegitimate Chinese bishops' pleas for pardon and reconciliation with him and the universal church. After reviewing their files, the Pope legitimized them all. This was the main public fruit of the provisional accord (Mariani, 2018).

What is our role in the mission to promote peace and reconciliation? Bishop Guo once said, "The main purpose of our work is to try to

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preserve the integrity of our faith, not the pursuit of our rights or personal honor when obedience and humility are at stake" (Worthley, 2019). God's mission for us is also to listen attentively to the voices of local churches, of the Pope, and especially of God deep within our hearts. We are called to respect and understand the differences between us, forgive and reconcile with one another individually and communally. By doing so, healing, reconciliation, peace, joy and hope will come to the Chinese church. This will help souls in China who are filled with consumerism, hedonism, and atheism. It is a very meaningful yet challenging mission.

Some people regard the "provisional agreement" as an imperfect agreement. Indeed, there are still many challenging issues before us, such as the nomination of bishops, the legality of the Chinese bishops' conferences, church leaders freely visiting the Vatican and Beijing, diocesan boundaries for 144 dioceses for the Vatican or 98 dioceses for the Chinese government, and so

on. However, the direct link between the Catholic Church and China, and the policy of engaging in encounter and not in confrontation, should benefit both the Chinese church and the Chinese government. With the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the efforts of every individual with a good heart, the agreement may favor a fruitful and forward-looking process of institutional dialogue and may contribute positively to the life of the Catholic church in China (O'Connell, 2018).

To sum up, Romero and the Jesuit martyrs laid down their lives for justice, faith, peace, reconciliation, and service to the poor. Pope Francis not only makes peace and reconciliation with Muslims and other religions and for countries at war such as in Syria, but also in dialogue with the Chinese government and bishops for the sake of the church in China. They have truly lived out their identity as companions and servants of Christ's mission in action. Can we do no other?



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