

**MONSEÑOR,
THE LAST JOURNEY OF
ÓSCAR ROMERO**

**Study
Guide**

ave maria press



notre dame, indiana

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Founded in 1865, Ave Maria Press is a ministry of the Indiana Province of Holy Cross.

www.avemariapress.com

Product ID: web2011-001

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to the administration of the University of Notre Dame's Helen Kellogg Institute for International Studies for its scholarly support.

I am also appreciative to the leadership of Notre Dame's Department of Theology for its appreciation of the pastoral leadership of Archbishop Óscar Romero y Galdámez.

Lastly, Michael Amodei of Ave Maria Press has been an excellent project editor for this study guide.

Robert S. Pelton, C.S.C.

February, 2011

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1.

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study Guide

This short study guide has been prepared for Catholic high school teachers, parish youth ministers, and other catechists to accompany the viewing of the film *Monseñor, the Last Journey of Óscar Romero*. The highly acclaimed 2011 work produced by Latin American/North American Church Concerns (LANACC) recounts the short time between the installation of Óscar Romero as archbishop of San Salvador, El Salvador, in 1977 to his assassination on March 24, 1980. Romero had become a lightning rod between several warring factions in his country, and especially for speaking out for the campesinos, the poor and unjustly treated peasants of El Salvador.

This study guide provides an overview of the film, biographical information on Archbishop Romero, and background on the religious and political turmoil in El Salvador. It offers suggestions for a five-day lesson plan to accompany the viewing of the film with discussion prompts, assignments, and review.

The film is most appropriate for use with a course on Catholic social teaching that meets in sequential 45- to 60-minute periods. References to *Catholic Social Teaching: Learning and Living Justice* (Ave Maria Press, 2007) are included. The film also supports elective course *Option C: Living as a Disciple of Jesus Christ in Society* of the United States Catholic Conference *Doctrinal Elements of a Curriculum Framework*.

In a parish religious education or youth ministry setting, the material can be adapted to sessions that meet less regularly, but have the time to view longer segments of the film, or even the entire film.

The study guide can also be used with adult groups who are meeting to view the film.

Synopsis of the Film

Monseñor, the Last Journey of Óscar Romero (total running time: 87 minutes) tells the story of the growing repression in El Salvador near the end of the 1970s, and the interwoven story of Archbishop Óscar Romero, or *Monseñor*, as he was commonly known.

The film presents a tapestry of the Archbishop surrounded by the campesinos who loved him and whom he loved. The film focuses on the short time between Romero's installation as Archbishop of San Salvador and his death, utilizing several elements: actual footage of Romero's words and actions, footage of the repression of the campesinos, some news broadcasts, and contemporary reflections from people who were with Romero up to the time of his death. In many cases, the film interviews the same person, cutting between interviews that took place then and now. The film features many different people: campesinos, Church leaders who followed Romero, members of the government, priests, soldiers, personal associates of the Archbishop, and Salvadorans who fought with the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN)—the guerrilla army.

Ironically, when Romero was installed as Archbishop, many in the Church believed he was a safe choice to keep the status quo, whereby the rich and those in power felt at home in the Church while the

poor felt displaced and unwelcome. After Romero's close friend, Fr. Rutilio Grande, S.J., was assassinated, Romero was further moved to commit his life to the poor. While doing so, Romero remained faithful to the true call of the Gospel—to show preferential love for the poor, and to the Church's century-old body of Catholic social teaching. Romero always "thought with the Church." He consistently preached non-violence, the Beatitudes, and the Gospel message of love of neighbor. Because of his fidelity to Christ and Christ's Church, even as it cost him his life, he can be described as a "martyr for the Magisterium."

Monseñor, the Last Journey of Óscar Romero is not only a news and biographical documentary, but also an inspirational film intended to move others to use the Gospel to fight against injustice and to dissipate poverty. Romero is captured as a spiritual and ethical giant who never loses his easy way of being with people. For these reasons, it is appropriate as a resource in many catechetical settings.



needs or comforts, poverty can refer to other realities as well:

- *Poverty of the soul* is the type of poverty that is often present in people with a lack of purpose in life, a sense of hopelessness about any lasting meaning. This type of poverty usually involves people who are well-off in life and who ignore the love, forgiveness, and redemption offered by the all-holy God. The more affluent

citizens of El Salvador could more typically fall into this group.

- *Poverty of the spirit* is different from poverty of the soul. With this type of poverty, a person is likely to seek out God and to live life based on the first Beatitude: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:3). The film depicts the campesinos as experiencing this type of poverty.

Through his pastoral experience, Archbishop Romero learned that a Christian's response to Jesus is what we do for the poor. The Church is called to display a **preferential option for the poor**. This choice allows us to see things from the perspective of the poor and powerless, and to assess lifestyle, policies, and social institutions in terms of their impact on the poor. In 1986, during the height of the civil war in El Salvador, the United States Catholic Bishops authored a pastoral letter, *Economic Justice for All*, which spells out challenges that the Church must meet if it is to live out the preferential option for the poor:

1. We must speak for those who have no one to speak for them. We must defend the defenseless, those whom the Bible calls "poor."
2. We must look at things from the side of the poor and powerless.
3. We must evaluate lifestyle, policies, and social institutions in terms of how they affect the poor.

Major Catholic Social Teaching Themes in the Film

Several themes and terms from Catholic social teaching can be introduced through a viewing of the film.

Throughout the film a sense of the **poverty** in which the Salvadoran people lived is witnessed on screen and in the testimony of the people.

While poverty is most commonly associated with the lack of means to provide for material

4. We must help people experience God's saving love and liberating power so they may respond to the Gospel in freedom and dignity.
5. As individual Christians and as a Church community, we must empty ourselves so God's power can touch us in the midst of poverty and powerlessness.

The United States Bishops also emphasized that the **economy** exists for *all of the people*. Moral principles should shape the economy. Some points to consider in relation to the situation in the film: (1) Every person has the right to life and the basic necessities of life; (2) Every person has the right to just wages and decent working conditions; (3) Every person has the right to positively contribute to the common good (see below); (4) Free market economies must have just policies; (5) Government aid should be based on issues such as human rights.

Spiritual Works of Mercy	Corporal (Bodily) Works of Mercy
Counsel the doubtful.	Feed the hungry.
Instruct the ignorant.	Give drink to the thirsty.
Admonish sinners.	Clothe the naked.
Comfort the afflicted.	Visit the imprisoned.
Forgive offenses.	Shelter the homeless.
Bear wrongs patiently.	Visit the sick.
Pray for the living and the dead.	Bury the dead.

On a personal level, the preferential option for the poor means that we cannot live immoderately by selfishly using riches and wealth. It also means we must put into practice the **spiritual and corporal works of mercy**.

Archbishop Romero practiced the works of mercy so as to stand in **solidarity** with the poor, which is to take an equal position with them.

Solidarity is the virtue of social charity, friendship, and responsible sharing whereby we recognize our interdependence on others and that we are all brothers and sisters of one family under a loving Father. For example, Romero made it a point to console and comfort those who mourned for their dead, while at the same time working to overcome the political, social, and economic situations that led to their murders.

In viewing the film, questions may arise about why the campesinos were so poor. The lack of commitment to the **common good** of its citizenry by the government and the oligarchy which controlled it was a primary reason. The common good concerns our life together. Achieving the common good requires each individual to protect the welfare of every other individual. Practically, this entails three essential elements: respect for the person, social well-being and development, and peace.

The origins of the injustice depicted in the film have roots in the Spanish colonization and domination of Latin America, which began in the 1500s. This domination extended to the rule of the so-called "Fourteen Families" of aristocracy in El Salvador after independence from Spain was achieved. Members of these families held important positions in the army and government or influenced those who did. They also controlled most of the land. Meanwhile, the campesinos did not, for the most part, own land. As a rule, they were unfairly compensated for their work. Mutual respect, social well-being, and the right to a peaceful existence were elements of the common good that the campesinos were denied.

There are explicit scenes of **violence** in the film. Violence is defined as the use of some form of physical force to injure, damage, or destroy other

people and their property. There are three levels of violence:

- **The first level** denies basic human rights, resulting in unemployment, poverty, hunger, loss of participation in society, and early death. The suffering and murder of the campesinos illustrates that the Salvadoran government and military, influenced by the wealthy families, were violent in their treatment of the people.
- **The second level (counter-violence)** is when an oppressed group tries to correct the denial of human rights through violence, whether through individual acts or through organized armed resistance. Although many Salvadorans listened to Romero and did not use violence, some people in El Salvador believed that they could not end the oppression without being violent themselves. The FMLN was the coalition of guerilla groups that fought against the government. (The most complete listing of these and other important groups involved in the Salvadoran conflict is found in *Monseñor Romero*, by Roberto Morozzo Della Rocca [Salamanca, Spain: Ediciones Sígueme, 2010], 9–10.)
- **The third level (repressive violence)** is when those in power repeat the cycle of violence. To solidify their power over others, those in power (like governmental authorities or military regimes) further solidify the injustices committed against those oppressed, and the whole cycle starts over again. When the Salvadoran people began protesting, they were met with violence as the government and military tried to root out leaders and frighten the campesinos. The killing of many priests—and ultimately Romero himself—were examples of the third type of



violence, which was used against guerillas and non-violent protestors alike.

The film also depicts the cruel injustices leading to a civil war in El Salvador. The war, which lasted for twelve years, would not have met many of the criteria for a **just war**. The Church's just-war definition is a set of principles developed through the

centuries that clearly outlines when a nation may ethically participate in a war. It also sets clear limits on armed force once a war is engaged. The Church holds that the following criteria must be present before a government can declare war and subsequently use lethal force:

- **Just cause.** There must be real, lasting, grave, and certain damage inflicted by an aggressor on a nation or a community of nations.
- **Legitimate authority.** The right to declare a way of defense belongs to those who have the legitimate responsibility to represent the people and are entrusted with the common good.
- **Comparative justice.** The rights and values in conflict must be so important that they justify killing.
- **Right intention.** To be just, a war must be waged for the best of reasons and with a commitment to postwar reconciliation with the enemy.
- **Probability of success.** The odds of success should be weighed against the likely human cost of the war.
- **Proportionality.** The damage to be inflicted and the costs incurred by the war must be proportionate to the good expected.
- **Last resort.** War must be a last resort, justifiable only if all peaceful efforts have been tried and exhausted and there are no alternatives.
- **Immunity of noncombatants.** Civilians must not be the object of direct attack.

Archbishop Romero was a **pacifist**, an advocate of **non-violence**. A pacifist is someone who opposes all war as a means of settling disputes. To be non-violent is to combat evil by using peaceful means like dialogue, negotiations, protests, boycotts, civil disobedience, strikes, citizen resistance, and so on. Romero met with the guerilla leaders and asked them to stop fighting. He asked the government to stop the oppression. Ultimately, he told soldiers that they were not obliged to take orders that were against God's law. This statement, however, was the last straw for the government and the military. They determined that Romero had to be eliminated. He was killed by the government while celebrating Mass.



2.

THE FILM IN CONTEXT

Who Was Óscar Romero?

Óscar Arnulfo Romero y Galdámez was born on August 15, 1917, in an El Salvadoran mountain town. Romero's parents apprenticed him to a carpenter after he finished schooling at age twelve,



but he wanted to become a priest and entered the junior seminary the following year. After many years of study, first in San Salvador, and later at the Gregorian University in Rome, he was ordained a priest at the age of twenty-five.

Romero's first assignment was as a rural parish priest, but he was soon appointed the rector of an inter-diocesan seminary, a position he held for twenty-three years. During this time, Romero discovered the power of radio and used it for his ministry. The campesinos were not attending church in large numbers. For the most part, they felt that the Church was only for the wealthy landowners. The campesinos called these people the "betters" and felt excluded from participating in the Church with

them. Romero began to broadcast sermons and other news over the radio in an attempt to reach out to the poor.

In 1970, Romero was named auxiliary bishop to Archbishop Luis Chavez y Gonzalez of San Salvador who was bringing the changes of the Second Vatican Council to the archdiocese. At the time, Romero found Archbishop Chavez y Gonzalez too progressive for his own comfort. Chavez y Gonzalez had been deeply influenced by the Second Vatican Council and had implemented many liturgical and social reforms. Lay people were given greater roles than before, including as catechists. During the years Romero was rising through the ranks of the Church's hierarchy, he would have considered himself a social and doctrinal conservative.

In 1974, Romero became the bishop of the nearby Diocese of Santiago de Maria, a diocese that included his hometown. Romero was soon called to take a stand on social issues. Crisscrossing the diocese by horseback, the bishop was faced with the brutal reality of the campesinos. Many children were dying because of lack of basic medical care. Workers were being paid less than half the minimum wage. Romero began to use his own personal resources to try and help the poor, but he knew that it wasn't enough.

Many farmers and laborers saw violent protest as a way to bring change. But others chose peaceful protest rooted in the Gospel. In the 1970s, thousands of campesinos joined base ecclesial communities, also known as small Christian communities.

These communities were composed primarily of lay people who talked about the significance of biblical stories and teachings for their own lives. Much of this reflection led to the desire and pursuit of political reform.

The so-called “Fourteen Families” of oligarchy in El Salvador denounced these groups as being Marxist and, increasingly, the government-sponsored military and other mercenaries targeted those in small Christian communities, union members, striking workers, priests, nuns, and other lay leaders. Romero denounced violent action against non-violent protestors even as killings multiplied. On June 21, 1975, Salvadoran national guardsmen hacked five campesinos to death in the village of

Tres Calles. Romero immediately wrote a letter to the head of the national guardsmen, Colonel Arturo Armando Molina. The colonel responded: “You know that cassocks are not bulletproof.” This was the first of many death threats against Romero.

Nevertheless, the government, military, and oligarchy were delighted with Romero’s appointment as archbishop of San Salvador in 1977. They did not expect Archbishop Romero to support the small base communities which were multiplying and continuing to apply the Gospel to economic, political, and social reforms. Romero was remembered as very loyal to the Vatican and as someone unlikely to disrupt the status quo. What many did not realize was the extent of the conversion of spirit

February 23, 1977	Óscar Romero installed as Archbishop of San Salvador <i>“Pray for me.”</i>
March 12, 1977	Father Rutilio Grande, S.J., killed by a death squad along with a boy and an older gentleman <i>“Whose pastor am I? Of a people that suffers or a people that oppresses?”</i>
ca. 1977–79	Romero creates an archdiocesan commission to investigate what happened to the men and women who “disappeared” <i>“My mission is not to defend the powerful but the oppressed, and here I am.”</i> <i>“I ask, I demand in the name of our citizens that they investigate and end this spiral of violence since we know they have the power to stop this.”</i>
1979	Four priests killed. Approximately 3,000 campesinos murdered each month. <i>“I want to acknowledge in front of everyone the solidarity expressed today for these dear priests, many of whom are in danger, and offer the greatest sacrifice as Father Grande did. Whoever touches one of my priests touches me.”</i>
March 23, 1980	In a homily, Romero urges soldiers to disobey orders to kill. <i>“I wish to make a special appeal to men of the army and in particular to the ranks of the National Guard and the police. Brothers, these are your people. You are killing your own peasant brothers, and in the face of an order to kill given by a man, the law of God should prevail: “Thou shall not kill.”</i>
March 24, 1980	Óscar Romero murdered while celebrating Mass.
March 30, 1980	More than 50,000 people gathered to pay their last respects to Romero. The crowd was attacked, and forty people died. Hundreds were wounded.



Romero had undergone while he was bishop in Santiago de Maria.

With the killing of more campesinos, civil war in El Salvador seemed imminent. Less than a month after his installation, Romero's friend, Fr. Rutilio Grande, S.J., was killed on a country road while on the way to Mass. An old man and young boy who were giving Fr. Grande a ride were also murdered. Romero was shocked. At Fr. Grande's wake, the local workers touched Romero's heart with their accounts of Fr. Grande's ministry and his faith that God would send them a new champion. Romero wrote in his diary that he felt a new call.

Romero demanded that the government investigate the killings of Fr. Grande and the disappearances and killings of the campesinos. He told government officials that he would no longer stand side by side with them at public events. He cancelled all Masses throughout the archdiocese and instead directed everyone to attend one Mass at the cathedral in San Salvador. The Mass was attended by over 100,000 people and alarmed the government even more.

In 1979, four more priests were killed. Campesinos were now being slaughtered at a rate of about 3,000 per month. Through all of the turmoil, approximately 80,000 Salvadorans were murdered and another 300,000 disappeared. The Archbishop wrote to US president Jimmy Carter telling him to stop providing aid to the Salvadoran government. After four churchwomen were killed, Carter did temporarily suspend aid, but when President Ronald Reagan took office, monetary aid from the United States to the Salvadoran government resumed.

Romero used his homilies and the radio to communicate that good would come out of evil and that the Church's role was to be prophetic. He eventually chose to direct his comments directly to the soldiers:

Brothers, you are from the same people; you kill your fellow peasants. . . . No soldier is obliged to obey an order that is contrary

to the will of God. . . . In the name of God, in the name of this suffering people, I ask you—I implore you—I command you in the name of God: stop the repression!

The very next day, on March 24, 1980, Óscar Romero was shot and killed by a paid assassin while saying Mass at a hospital chapel. When 50,000 people gathered for the funeral of the archbishop, bombs were thrown into the crowd. Gunfire killed forty and wounded hundreds. Soon afterward, El Salvador was immersed in a civil war that would last for twelve years and claim 75,000 lives.

Tracing the Political Situation in El Salvador

The roots of the violence in El Salvador that resulted in a twelve-year civil war from 1979 to 1992 can be traced to Spanish colonization of the nation beginning in the sixteenth century. Though El Salvador declared independence from Spain in 1821, the legacy of colonization continued into the twentieth century.

After independence, a tiny oligarchy called the "Fourteen Families" ruled El Salvador by employing mercenaries to make sure that the Mestizos and other native people would be the laborers, essentially serving as serfs. A series of unstable governments was typically in charge, always under the auspices of the aristocrats. Any revolts by the campesinos were quelled. In 1932, after a peasant revolt, the military killed 40,000 native people; most of them had no connection to the revolt at all. This ethnocide was known as *La Matanza* or "The Slaughter."

From 1933 to 1980 all but one president in El Salvador was a military dictator. Elections were rigged even as the pretense of democracy was put before the people. When, in 1972, a candidate of reform, José Napoleon Duarte, was defeated in one of the most fraudulent elections of all, the peasants



realized that reform was not likely to occur through the democratic process. Strikes, demonstrations, and parades of protests followed. Meanwhile, guerrilla operations to quell these uprisings increased.

The civil war in El Salvador began after the assassination of Archbishop Romero. While the civil war was conducted between the government and the opposition group, FMLN, it is important to understand the war in terms of larger global issues.

The United States and its allies and the Soviet Union and its allies were enemies in the period known as the Cold War (1948–1991). Although countries around the world did not all fall neatly into the categories of democracy or communism, the world was seen by many as divided between the United States and the Soviet Union and their allies.

Both the United States and the Soviet Union felt they had an important political stake in Central America and especially El Salvador. In the early 1960s, the Catholic Church in El Salvador supported efforts by the Christian Democratic Party and the United States government to encourage economic development. However, economic exploitation continued and the United States became very apprehensive of the FMLN. The United States believed that the FMLN was a threat to democracy and an opportunity for socialism or communism to grow in El Salvador. Hence, the United States strongly supported the government with financial and military aid. The Soviet Union manifested its

influence especially through the Nicaraguan revolution of 1979.

The civil war lasted until 1992. Finally an agreement was reached between the government and the FMLN. Both sides approved the establishment of a “Commission on the Truth” and also agreed to several reforms of the constitution, the judiciary, and the electoral system. The military was also downsized. The final peace treaty—the Accords of Chapultepec—were signed in Mexico City.

The Catholic Church in El Salvador

Catholicism came to El Salvador in the sixteenth century with the colonization of the region by Spain. At the time of Archbishop Romero’s installation, the Church remained a friend of the wealthy, the government, and the military as it had been for years. But as human rights abuses increased, the Church began to oppose the government’s social injustices, especially the government-sanctioned murders through the military and death squads. Although many of the abuses were carried out by the state-sponsored military, the FMLN were also responsible for grave abuses.

The grass roots movement of small ecclesial communities frequently employed the methodology of “liberation theology” that advocated turning to Scripture while reflecting on the lived reality. This theological method involved social analysis that sometimes included Marxist dimensions and worried some Church leaders. Nevertheless, the common thread between the liberation movement and the wider Church during this era was the call for a more equitable distribution of political power and economic wealth between the rich and the poor.

3. CATECHESIS AND THE FILM

Preparing Students to View the Film

Preview the entire film before showing it to your class or group. You may notice some issues that might be of concern based on the background or sensibilities of the audience. Address the issues prior to the presentation. Listed below are three issues to consider:

1. *Personal Experience.* There may be some teens in your group who live or have lived in places where the violence or repression resembled El Salvador at the time of Romero. These students may have come from either the upper class or from the repressed majority. Some teens may have relatives who have come from countries with similar unrest or have even lost loved ones in civil conflicts. And, of course, many teens today live in neighborhoods where violence is common.

Be sensitive to the possibility that this story may be upsetting to these students. At the same time, be aware that some students may be compelled to contribute very helpful lessons and insights. Even if no one volunteers to share a personal story, it is a good idea to remind all of the students to speak as if there was someone in the group who has a personal experience with being either the privileged or the oppressed in a similar situation.

2. *Violence.* The campesinos are at the center of this story of El Salvador and Archbishop

Romero. Because of the terrible persecution of these men and women, the film contains graphic images of violence: footage of shootings, images of people who have been attacked and shot, verbal descriptions of torture, photographs of corpses, and so on. This violence can be disturbing. When you preview the film, gauge your students' sensibilities and capabilities for viewing the material. Assess its propriety given the grade level of your students and their maturity and sensitivity.

3. *Subtitles.* The language of the film is Spanish. Actual tapes of Romero's journals and homilies are used throughout, as are interviews with people who knew him, the majority of whom



are fellow Salvadorans. English subtitles are used in the film. English subtitles mean that students who are looking away from graphic imagery also cannot see the subtitles. You may want to read the subtitles aloud in such situations.

Using the Full-Length Film

At 87 minutes, the entire film can be viewed over two class periods in most high schools. The film can also be shown in one sitting in a parish program (e.g., youth group, adult education, social justice workshop, etc.) A general outline for sharing the full-length film with a group follows:

1. Distribute the handout, “Background Information for *Monseñor, the Last Journey of Óscar Romero*” (pages 17–18). Introduce the story of Archbishop Romero, El Salvador, and the campesinos.
2. Preview the following terms associated with Catholic social teaching present in the film: poverty, preferential option for the poor, spiritual and corporal works of mercy, solidarity, common good, violence, just-war, pacifist, and non-violence. See “Major Catholic Social Teaching Themes in the Film” and “Glossary of Selected Terms” (pages 2–5 and pages 28–29).
3. Play the film in its entirety.
4. Use all or a combination of questions from the handouts on pages 16–27 to facilitate discussion after the film.
5. *Optional:* Assign one or more of the Reflection Essay Topics (page 20) and one of the Research Projects (page 21) for further study and reflection after the session.

Using the Film in a High School Classroom

This film provides opportunities for students to achieve a deeper, more complex understanding of the principles of Catholic social teaching, especially when studied in a Social Justice class and

accompanied by additional assignments to enrich the student’s learning.

This study guide provides material to help instructors present the film over the course of a week. When used with the resources in this study guide, the film can provide a one-week ancillary unit to accompany a course in Catholic social teaching. For example, it is an appropriate unit to accompany the elective course *Option C: Living as a Disciple of Jesus Christ in Society* that is part of the USCCB’s Doctrinal Elements of a Curriculum Framework. This study guide draws explicitly from terms defined in *Catholic Social Teaching: Learning and Living Justice* (Ave Maria Press, 2007). (*Note:* It is recommended that the Romero film and unit be incorporated within the study of Chapter 8 of *Catholic Social Teaching*, “Justice and Peace,” because of the corresponding topic and also because several terms having to do with justice and poverty will have already been introduced in earlier chapters.)

A schedule and format for a five-day lesson plan follows.

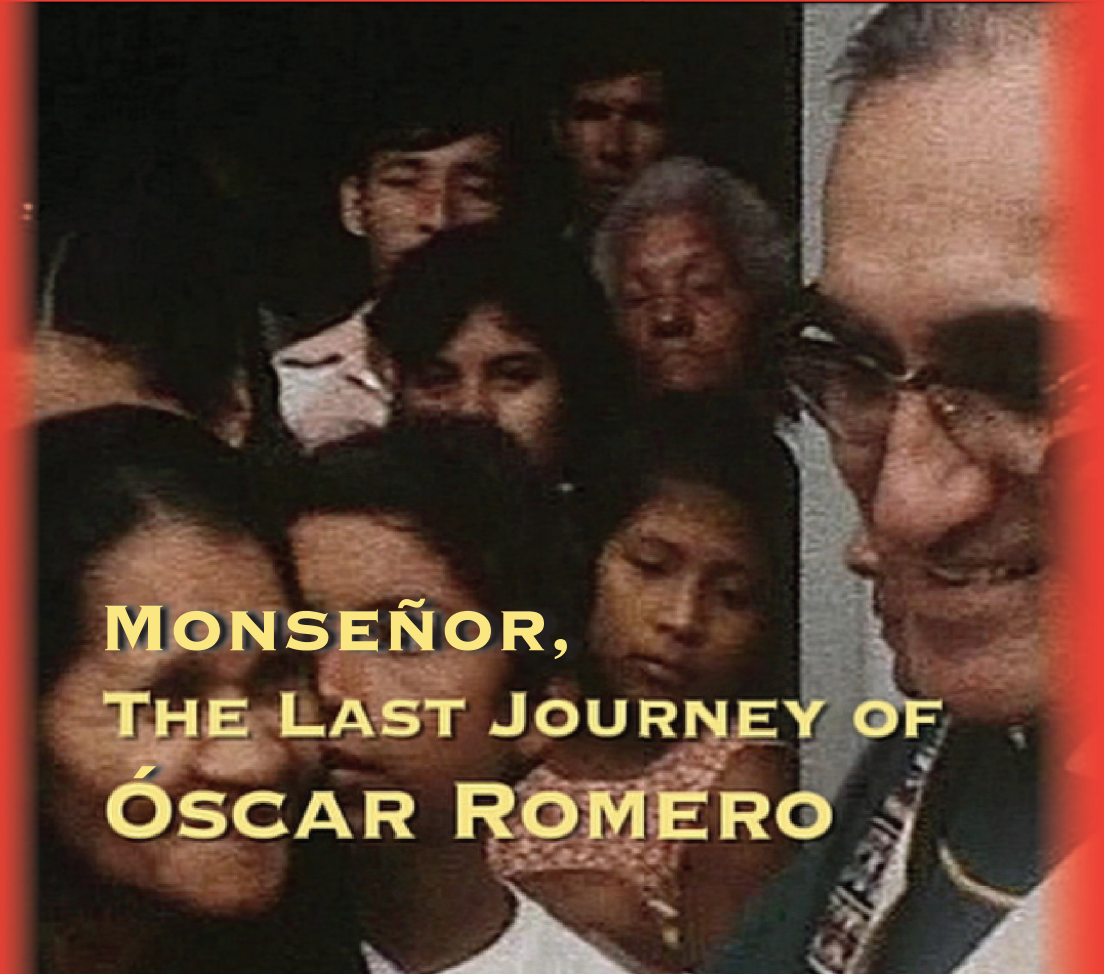
2. What was the message that Romero gave to soldiers in his last homily?
Romero asked the soldiers to give up their military orders while putting God's Law first. He shared this message with the soldiers: "I wish to make a special appeal to men of the army and in particular to the ranks of the National Guard and the police. Brothers, these are your people. You are killing your own peasant brothers, and in the face of an order to kill given by a man, the law of God should prevail: 'Thou shalt not kill.'"
 3. What concrete evidence linked the government and military to Romero's death?
A notebook was found in Santa Tecla that outlined a complete plan for the assassination of Romero (cf. <http://www.elfaro.net/es/201003/noticias/1403/>)
 4. How did the people interviewed near the end of the film remember Romero?
The number of people who turned out to mourn Romero's loss was testimony to the people's love for him. One woman said that in Romero, "Christ passed through El Salvador." Another woman said, "Oh my God, to be with someone like that! What more could you ask of life?"
- Remind the students of the Individual and Group Assignments due on Day 5. If there is any time left in this period, allow the students a chance to work on essays or projects and to practice debates.

Day 5: Application and Review

- Write the following on a board:
 1. **What did you like about the film?**
 2. **What is one lesson the film taught you?**
 3. **Why do you think Romero is called a "martyr for the Magisterium"?**

Have the students write brief responses to each question. Collect the responses and read a sampling to the entire class.
- Reserve time for students who have chosen to debate one of the issues on the Individual and Small Group Assignments handout. Encourage the students to provide printed or digital references to support the points they make for their side of the debate.
- Collect the reflection essays and research projects. You may wish to spend part of this period or future class times allowing students to orally share essays and results of their projects.
- *Option:* Sponsor a "Romero Day" at your school. Assign students to make posters and other promotional materials announcing the event. (Direct the students to the "Romero Quotations" chart on page 7. These quotations can be used on the posters and promotional materials or as part of a streaming flash or PowerPoint display.) Invite other students to the event. Students can give presentations based on their essays and research projects. You can also reserve time for the entire film to be shown.

4. REPRODUCIBLE HANDOUTS



Research Projects

Choose one of the following research projects. Cite at least three references in your submission.

Project 1

Colonialism, as the term is widely used, refers to European political domination and settlement of territory outside of their national boundaries between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries. Many colonies gained independence from their countries of origin by the 1960s. *Post-colonialism* describes the struggles of societies making the transition from political dependence to independence. A primary issue in El Salvador was that descendants of the Spanish conquerors were owners of a large percentage of the country's land and were able to keep control of not only the economy but also of the government and the military.

Research a second country that previously was a colony, tracing the political and economic development of that nation from colonialism to the present. Compare and contrast this second country's evolution with the evolution of El Salvador. *Suggestions*: South Africa, Guatemala, Mexico, the Philippines, Vietnam.

Project 2

Archbishop Óscar Romero promoted non-violence as the way to bring attention to the injustices in his own country and to ultimately solve those injustices. Choose a second non-violent movement, and compare and contrast it with the non-violent movement in El Salvador. In your comparison, examine (1) the circumstances that led to violence, (2) the non-violent approach of the movement, and (3) its ultimate success or failure. *Suggestions*: Leymah Gbowee and the Liberian Mass Action for Peace, Liberia; Nelson Mandela, South Africa; the Orange Revolution, Ukraine; the Mothers of the Disappeared, Argentina; the Singing Revolution, Estonia; the 2011 Egyptian Revolution.

Project 3

Research the lives and circumstances surrounding the deaths of others who gave up their lives in El Salvador and other Central American nations while working to end injustice in the name of Jesus Christ and the Gospel. Compare their stories with that of Archbishop Romero. For example, choose from one or more of the following:

Martyrdom of Four Church Women: Ita Ford, Maura Clarke, Dorothy Kazel, and Jean Donovan in El Salvador (December 2, 1980).

Martyrs of the University of Central America: Ignacio Ellacuria, Segundo Montes, Armando Lopez, Joaquín Lopez y Lopez, Ignacio Martin-Baro, Juan Ramón Moreno, Julia Elba Ramos, Marisette Ramos in El Salvador (November 16, 1989).

- Br. James Miller, F.S.C., in Guatemala (February 13, 1982).
- Fr. Stan Rother in Guatemala (July 28, 1981).
- Sr. Carla Piette, M.M., in El Salvador (August 23, 1980).

Debate

Either individually or with a group, prepare evidence to support one side of a debate topic. Pair up with another individual or group with a counterview. Plan to debate the topic in front of your classmates.

Debate Topic 1

Using and adapting the just-war theory (see page 4), was the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) justified in using force against the government who was using death squads against its people?

Debate Topic 2

Economically, are the majority of the people of El Salvador better off today than they were in the 1970s? What about politically?

Debate Topic 3

Do United States citizens have a moral obligation to pressure their government to close the combat training school for Latin American soldiers called the “Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation,” formerly known as the “School of the Americas”? Graduates have been linked to many of the assassinations in El Salvador, including the assassination of Archbishop Romero.

The Events in El Salvador and Archbishop Romero (continued)

5. What was the role of the oligarchy in the Church before and after Romero declared the Church would have a preferential option for the poor?
6. How did Romero bring about a change in the attitude of the Salvadoran priests?
7. How did Romero come to the conclusion that he must make a preferential option for the poor after the death of his friend, Fr. Rutilio Grande?
8. Which part of the Sermon on the Mount did Archbishop Romero use frequently in his preaching?
9. Why did Archbishop Romero ask lawyers to research what happened to the people who disappeared?

The Violence and Romero's Message Intensify

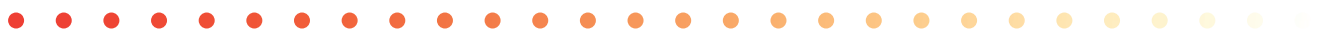
After watching the film segment of *Monseñor, the Last Journey of Óscar Romero* that depicts the escalating war between the government and its people, answer the following questions:

1. Identify the three stages of violence in the Salvadoran conflict.
2. How did Archbishop Romero's homilies provide hope for the poor of El Salvador?
3. What did it mean to say that the "Word" was Romero's voice of justice?
4. Why were some people willing to risk their lives to bring justice to all in El Salvador?

5. What stance did Romero ask the guerillas to take in this struggle?

6. Why was Fr. Neto killed?

7. What happened in July of 1979 in a neighboring country?



The Death of Óscar Romero and His Legacy

After watching the concluding film segment of *Monseñor, the Last Journey of Óscar Romero*, answer the following questions:

1. Why did many people assume that the government would assassinate Romero?
2. What was the message that Romero gave to soldiers in his last homily?
3. What concrete evidence linked the government and military to Romero's death?
4. How did the people interviewed near the end of the film remember Romero?

Pacifist

Someone who opposes all war as a means of settling disputes (p. 183).

Peace

A blessing of Jesus Christ that results from both justice and love. Peace exists when people are treated with dignity, are allowed to communicate freely, and relate to each other lovingly as brothers and sisters (p. 175).

Poverty

From a Latin word, *paupertas*, it literally translates as “pauper” or “poor,” and is associated with the lack of means to provide for material needs or comforts. But poverty can also refer to poverty of the soul or poverty of the spirit (pp. 146–148).

Preferential Option for the Poor

A preferential love for the poor that allows one to see things from the perspective of the poor and powerless and to assess lifestyle, policies, and social institutions in terms of their impact on the poor. This choice for the poor follows the example of Jesus who sided with those most in need (p. 60).

Rights

Claims we can make on other people and on society so that we can live a full, human life. There are:

- Universal rights for every human being.
- Inviolable rights that are untouchable because they come from God.
- Inalienable rights that are inherent and beyond challenge; no one has authority to take them away because they are due us as children of God (p. 20).

Solidarity

The virtue of social charity, friendship, and responsible sharing whereby we recognize our interdependence on others and that we are all brothers and sisters of one family under a loving Father (pp. 60–61).

Violence

The use of some form of physical force to injure, damage, or destroy other people or their property (p. 181). There are three levels of violence:

- The first level denies basic human rights, resulting in unemployment, poverty, hunger, loss of participation in society, and early death.
- The second level (counter-violence) is when an oppressed group tries to correct the denial of human rights through violence, whether through individual acts or through organized armed resistance.
- The third level (repressive violence) is when those in power repeat the cycle of violence. To solidify their power over others, those in power (like governmental authorities or military regimes) further solidify the injustices committed against those oppressed. And the whole cycle starts over again (p. 182).

Works of Mercy

The Church’s response to the whole person by instructing, advising, consoling, comforting, forgiving, and enduring wrongs patiently (p. 160).

Films and Videos

Romero, starring Raúl Julia and Richard Jourdan, 1989, 105 minutes (available in the OIT Media Resource Center of the University of Notre Dame).

El Salvador

- Galdámez, Pablo. *Faith of a People: The Life of a Basic Christian Community in El Salvador, 1970–1980*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1986.
- Miller, Spring, and James Cavallaro. *No Place to Hide: Gang, State, and Clandestine Violence in El Salvador*, Human Rights Program Practice Series. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Law School, 2010.
- Moodie, Ellen. *El Salvador in the Aftermath of Peace: Crime, Uncertainty, and the Transition to Democracy*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010.
- Montgomery, Tommie Sue. *Revolution in El Salvador: Origins and Evolution*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1982.
- Peterson, Anna L. *Martyrdom and the Politics of Religion: Progressive Catholicism in El Salvador's Civil War*. Binghamton, NY: SUNY Press, 1997.
- Santiago, Daniel. *The Harvest of Justice: The Church of El Salvador Ten Years after Romero*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1993.
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- Stanley, William. *The Protection Racket State: Elite Politics, Military Extortion, and Civil War in El Salvador*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1996.
- Vigil, Maria López. *Death and Life in Morazán: A Priest's Testimony from a War Zone in El Salvador*. Washington, DC: EPICA, 1989.

Latin-American Church

- Bergman, Susan, ed. *Martyrs: Contemporary Writers on Modern Lives of Faith*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998.
- Berryman, Phillip. *The Religious Roots of Rebellion: Christians in Central American Revolutions*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1984.

- . *Stubborn Hope: Religion, Politics and Revolution in Central America*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995.
- Ellacuría, Ignacio. *Freedom Made Flesh: The Mission of Christ and His Church*. Translated by John Drury. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1976.
- Lernoux, Penny. *Cry of the People: United States Involvement in the Rise of Fascism, Torture, and Murder and the Persecution of the Catholic Church in Latin America*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980.
- Moreno, Juan Ramón. *Gospel and Mission: Spirituality and the Poor*. Manila, Philippines: Cardinal Bea Institute, Ateneo de Manila University, 1995.
- Pelton, Robert, ed. *From Power to Communion: Toward a New Way of Being Church Based on the Latin American Experience*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994.
- Sobrino, Jon. *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical-Theological Reading of Jesus of Nazareth*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993.
- . *The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994.

Other

- Golson, Richard J., ed. *Fascism's Return: Scandal, Revision, and Ideology Since 1980*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1998.
- Nelson-Pallmeyer, Jack. *War Against the Poor: Low Intensity Conflict and Christian Faith*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1989.

Internet Resources

Websites

Monseñor Romero
Biblioteca Virtual, Miguel de Cervantes
[www.cervantesvirtual.com/buscador/?q=Romero
&tab=título&f\[cg\]=1&p=1](http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/buscador/?q=Romero&tab=título&f[cg]=1&p=1)

Óscar Romero: Bishop of the Poor, *U.S. Catholic's*
Remembrance of Archbishop Óscar Romero
www.uscatholic.org/óscar_romero

Twentieth Century Martyrs—Óscar Romero
(1917–1980)
[www.westminster-abbey.org/ourhistory/people/
óscar-romero](http://www.westminster-abbey.org/ourhistory/people/óscar-romero)

Select Bibliography and Visual Resources: The
UCA Martyrs, Archbishop Romero, the Four
Churchwomen, and the Church of the Poor in
Central America
[http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/
CollaborativeMinistry/Martyrs/](http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/Martyrs/)

The Jesuit Martyrs of El Salvador: A Research
Guide
(Saint Peter's College Library)
www.spc.edu/pages/1814.asp

“Remembering the Assassination of Archbishop
Óscar Romero, March 24, 1980”
[http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/
CollaborativeMinistry/romero.html](http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/romero.html)

“Archbishop Óscar Romero: A Bishop for the New
Millennium”
<http://kellogg.nd.edu/romero/>

“Heart and Soul: Voice of the Voiceless” BBC
Radio: a 26.30 radio show
[www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p006lyl2/Heart_
And_Soul_Voice_of_the_Voiceless_Episode_1/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p006lyl2/Heart_And_Soul_Voice_of_the_Voiceless_Episode_1/)

Access to Catholic Social Justice Teachings
www.justpeace.org

School of the Americas Watch
www.soaw.org

Resources for Catholic Educators
www.silk.net/RelEd/romero.htm

Interreligious Task Force on Central America
(IRTF)
www.irtfcleveland.org

Selected Articles and Other Internet Resources

Romero the Musical
A heartfelt tribute to Monseñor, a once
anonymous title which has come to mean only
one man, by George Daly and Liam Baures
<http://romerothemusical.com/>

“Seven Sermons of Óscar Romero for Lent”
www.justpeace.org/romero.htm

“The Reluctant Conversion of Óscar Romero”
Sojourners Magazine
[www.sojo.net/index.cfm?action=magazine.article
&issue=soj0003&article=000312](http://www.sojo.net/index.cfm?action=magazine.article&issue=soj0003&article=000312)

The UN Truth Commission on Romero's Murder
[http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/
CollaborativeMinistry/truth-com.html](http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/truth-com.html)

“Father Romero and the Treadmill of Heroism” by
Henry Mitchell
The Washington Post, March 28, 1980
[http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/
CollaborativeMinistry/romero-wp-3-28-80.html](http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/romero-wp-3-28-80.html)



“Death and Lies in El Salvador: The Ambassador’s Tale” by Margaret O’Brien Steinfels
Commonweal, Oct. 26 2001, Vol. CXXVIII, no. 18
[http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/
CollaborativeMinistry/RbtWhite.html](http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/RbtWhite.html)

“Martyrdom and Mercy”
by Leo J. O’Donovan, S.J., President, Georgetown University, *The Washington Post*, Sunday, November 19, 1989.
[http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/
CollaborativeMinistry/WPnov19.html](http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/WPnov19.html)

