



The Scandal of Redemption

*When God Liberates the Poor,
Saves Sinners, and Heals Nations*

OSCAR ROMERO

Foreword by Michael Lapsley

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Oscar Romero

Edited by Carolyn Kurtz



PLOUGH PUBLISHING HOUSE

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Foreword

MY VIEW OF OSCAR ROMERO is shaped by my own journey. When Romero was shot while celebrating Mass on March 24, 1980, I was living in Lesotho, a small mountainous kingdom completely surrounded by the Republic of South Africa, having been banished from South Africa for speaking out against injustice, as Romero and many other religious leaders were doing at the time. The South African state was enforcing apartheid, a form of constitutionalized racism. The United Nations had declared that apartheid was a crime against humanity, and the international Christian community had said that it was heresy or false doctrine, yet the apartheid state still claimed divine guidance and insisted that it was a Christian state.

Like Romero, following Jesus was my desire from early childhood. At the age of seventeen, I left New Zealand and traveled to Australia to begin training for the priesthood of the Anglican Church as well as to join an Anglican religious order, the Society of the Sacred Mission.

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My religious order transferred me to South Africa in 1973. I imagined that when I arrived I would find three groups of people: the oppressed, the oppressors, and the third group to which I would belong: the human race. My first rude awakening was the realization that the color of my skin made me part of the oppressor group even if I did not wish to be. The day I arrived in South Africa I stopped being a human being and became a white man.

I was expelled from South Africa in September 1976. Just three months earlier, on June 16, 1976, the police and soldiers had begun shooting school children. This was a defining moment in my own life journey.

For Archbishop Romero, the turning point was the assassination of Father Rutilio Grande on March 12, 1977. As Romero said: "When I looked at Rutilio lying there dead I thought, 'If they have killed him for doing what he did, then I too have to walk the same path.'"

Unlike Archbishop Romero, I chose to join the political liberation movement. Like Romero, however, the only weapon I ever used was my tongue. For me, joining the liberation struggle was about recovering my own humanity, in solidarity with people of color struggling for their basic human rights. Soon after the blood of children poured out in the streets of South Africa, I was elected to be the national chaplain to Anglican students.

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I began to speak out against the killing of children and the widespread detentions and torture.

The news of Romero's assassination certainly made me stop and consider what my actions might cost, and I'm sure people of faith engaged in similar struggles for justice around the globe could say the same. But more than that, his words and his witness gave us courage and determination to apply the words of Jesus even more clearly and boldly to the situations we faced. In 1982 there was a massacre in Maseru where forty-two people were shot dead by the South African Army. I was not there at the time but was believed by some of the church authorities to be one of the targets of the massacre. It was then that I made a vow that my own life would be dedicated to help end apartheid and build a society in which little children would go to bed safe and wake up safe.

Because I was on a hit list of the South African government, for several years I had to live in Zimbabwe, with armed police guards twenty-four hours a day. There, in April 1990, three months after Nelson Mandela was released from prison, I received in the post a letter bomb hidden inside the pages of two religious magazines. In the blast I lost both of my hands and an eye, and my eardrums were shattered.

When the bomb went off, I felt that God was with me in my crucifixion. I also felt that Mary, the mother of

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Jesus, understood what I was experiencing. The prayers and love of people around the world were the vehicle that God used to make my bombing redemptive, to bring life out of death and good out of evil.

And once again, Romero's example spoke directly to me. I recalled his last words, moments before he was shot at the altar. "May this body that was immolated and this flesh that was sacrificed for humankind also nourish us so that we can give our bodies and our blood to suffering and to pain, as Christ did, not for our own sake but to bring justice and peace to our people."

I was particularly challenged and inspired by an interview Archbishop Romero gave just days before his death, in which he indicated that he wanted whoever would murder him to know that he forgave him. To this day, I don't know who sent me that bomb in April of 1990. But if that person is still a prisoner of what he did, I have a key and I would be happy to turn it.

My reflections on my own journey of healing, as well as on the journey of the people of South Africa, led me in time to establish the Institute for Healing of Memories. As part of the global work of this non-governmental organization, in November 2016 I was invited for the first time to visit the land of Oscar Romero, the only country named after the Savior of the world, to see if in some modest way we could contribute to the healing

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journey of the Salvadoran people. On All Saints Day 2016, at the Wall of Truth and Memory in San Salvador, I participated in an ecumenical memorial for the thousands disappeared and killed during the Salvadoran civil war. And I was able to kneel at the tomb of Oscar Romero, as well as at the spot where his assassination and martyrdom took place.

Tragically, the land of the Savior is still characterized by huge social violence and inequality. But Romero's witness lives on. As José Osvaldo Lopez, an Anglican in El Salvador, writes:

With the life and works of Romero, I am certain that Jesus himself passed through El Salvador, leaving us a clear and strong message by his life example as a person and a pastor. Romero is for me not simply a pastoral model, but above all an enormous challenge, one that requires me as a Christian to assume a critical attitude against social and structural injustice. Yet Romero does not only challenge me to denounce injustice. Above all he invites me, calling on me forcefully, to love those around me. . . . By loving my brothers and sisters, I will not only be imitating Romero but also Jesus, with whom I will be contributing to building a better world. And in the end, I will be part of the construction of the true kingdom of God on earth.

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As I seek to make my own humble contribution to the healing of the human family, I continue to be inspired by the life and legacy of Oscar Romero. It is my hope and prayer that through this book he will do the same for another generation of people who hunger and thirst for righteousness. I have no doubt that if you read this book with an open heart, it will deepen your own faith and commitment to work for justice and to participate in God's dream for all of us.

*Father Michael Lapsley, SSM
Director, Institute for Healing of Memories
South Africa*

INTRODUCTION

Who Was Oscar Romero?

OSCAR ROMERO spent just three years as Archbishop of San Salvador, but by the time he was murdered in 1980 he had become a shepherd to the people of El Salvador and the outspoken advocate of its oppressed peasants. In those three years, he built an inspiring and challenging legacy for all those who seek to follow Christ today.

Romero's deep faith in God and his love for and trust in the church as a people committed to Christ still ring through his homilies. These weekly sermons preserve the record of atrocities committed against his people during the beginning of the Civil War in El Salvador; more importantly, they record Romero's response to the violence in his country. Over and over, he challenged those in power to care for their countrymen; he encouraged the campesinos to pray, to counter hatred with love; he pleaded with the people to live more truly by the vision of the New Testament; and he reminded his entire audience of how Jesus came to earth in poverty, enduring the pain and humiliation of the cross before the triumph of

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his resurrection. Because Christ knows all the suffering on earth, Romero says, we can believe in and work for his kingdom on earth.

BORN IN 1917, Romero was no child of privilege. With his five brothers and sisters, he slept on the floor of the small family home. The local school only offered three years of education, and though he displayed an aptitude for learning, his father began to train him as a carpenter. But when Romero was thirteen, he told his parents he wanted to study for the priesthood. He entered seminary when he was fourteen, completing his studies in Rome. In 1942, at the age of twenty-five, he was ordained as a priest, and from 1943 to 1967 he served as pastor of the cathedral parish of San Miguel, El Salvador.

It was, in many ways, a conventional story. But the times were not conventional. In 1962, Pope John XXIII convened the Second Vatican Council to address the relationship of the Roman Catholic Church to the modern world. The council closed three years later, having enacted sweeping reforms. The council emphasized that the church is God's people, not a human institution, and that it is God's means to serve the world by bringing Christ's salvation into it.

Three years later, in 1968, the bishops of Latin America met at Medellín, Colombia, to consider how the reforms

of Vatican II should be applied to their own countries. The church, affirmed the bishops, must serve society. To do so, it must understand how power is used and abused – how people are subject to systematic economic and political exploitation. And the church must bring the gospel of Jesus into these concrete realities. This Gospel is not only a message of personal salvation from sin and entrance into the eternal kingdom of God, but also the transformation of injustice in the present. The kingdom, the bishops believed, could come on earth as it is in heaven, and it was part of the proper work of the church to help bring it to reality.

Three hundred million people under these bishops' care in Latin America were living in poverty and experiencing the daily injustice of political oppression. Therefore, shepherding these people must include not just exhorting them to holiness and extending Christ's offer of forgiveness, but also improving their circumstances. The extreme poverty of many in a society where a few lived in luxury was a situation that cried out for redress. And so the church must cry out too, taking what came to be called the "preferential option for the poor."

"Peace is not found," wrote the Medellín bishops, "it is built. The Christian is the artisan of peace. This task . . . has a special character in our continent; thus, the people of God in Latin America, following the example of

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Christ, must resist personal and collective injustice with unselfish courage and fearlessness.”

This recognition became the seed of liberation theology. Romero never aligned himself explicitly with the movement, but he embraced many of its radical critiques of the existing order, and certainly believed that the gospel called him to speak up for the least powerful.

While some liberation theologians defended the use of armed force in their efforts to achieve structural change, Romero did not. He simply told the truth about what following Jesus would look like for the ruling class of El Salvador, and for the people. This was a radical message. The bishops were saying that the call of the gospel would not let them leave unjust social arrangements alone: that love for both the poor and the oligarchs demanded change. In El Salvador, and elsewhere in Latin America, many church leaders had allied themselves with the upper class. But by the 1970s, some parish priests had begun to emphasize social justice and economic reform, reflecting Christ’s concern for the poor and his call to share wealth. Some priests were also encouraging the formation of “base ecclesial communities” in which believers gathered to read and discuss Christian teaching on their own. Priests were often only irregularly available, so these communities provided spiritual encouragement for the peasants.

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The teaching discussed in these base communities often focused on the church's social doctrine, and peasants began to talk boldly about the injustice they saw in their society. Many landowners feared these new groups, denouncing them as communist. Tensions grew as the priests carried out the recommendations of Vatican II and Medellín, giving the government excuse to expel foreign priests, who they claimed were stirring up trouble.

THROUGHOUT THIS STORMY HISTORY, Oscar Romero had been at work. During his time as pastor of San Miguel, his parishioners had appreciated his lively preaching and the many parish activities he organized. When, in 1966, he took over as editor of the archdiocesan newspaper, they read what he had to say. But he was by no means one of the radical priests who were making so much trouble. Ordained a bishop in 1970, he was assigned to San Salvador, the capital city. Many churchmen there, including the elderly Archbishop Luis Chávez y González, had embraced the radical message of the Medellín meeting. Bishop Romero was not part of this contingent. Though increasingly troubled by what he saw, he was still attempting to walk a line. When the police massacred five peasants in his district, he

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protested strongly in a letter to the president but kept his public comments to a minimum.

When the time came for a new archbishop to be appointed, those who backed Romero were the elites of San Salvador. They considered him “safe.” With their support, in 1977 Romero was appointed by the Vatican to be Archbishop of San Salvador – effectively responsible for shepherding the Catholic Church in all of El Salvador.

The installation of the new archbishop was not the only change in leadership going on in El Salvador that February. A presidential election had been held two days before Romero took up his new role. Thanks to massive voter fraud, including assaults and intimidation at the polls, the government party candidate, a darling of the oligarchs, was named the winner. A massive crowd, as many as sixty thousand people, flocked to the city’s central square – to celebrate Mass, and to protest the election results: one purpose bled into the other. After the Mass, the police called for the gathered people to disperse. Most did – but the police opened fire on the two thousand or so who remained. The protesters ran to seek sanctuary in San Rosario, the church that bordered the square, and were besieged until the former archbishop, Chávez y González, arranged a truce.

Protests continued and two days later troops once again fired on the crowd in the square. Somewhere between forty and three hundred people were killed.

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The violence was not confined to the city: the National Guard had arrested and tortured a parish priest in a rural district who was considered one of the troublemakers; other priests were being expelled.

THEN, THREE WEEKS after Romero's appointment, one of those troublesome priests, Rutilio Grande, was shot down by gunmen. Everyone suspected that the government and the clique of oligarchs were responsible: Father Grande had been one of the most outspoken of those who were critical of the regime, defending the peasants, and had been active in helping to organize base communities. He had also been Archbishop Romero's dear friend.

Romero traveled to the rural church where Grande's body had been taken, and spent that day praying and listening to stories of violence and exploitation from the peasants whom Grande had served, and stories of his care for them. At the homily for the funeral Mass, Romero called Grande's death what it was: an assassination. He said what everyone knew: Father Grande had been killed precisely for speaking up on behalf of the peasants.

"We have asked the legal authorities to shed light on this criminal act," Romero said, "for they have in their hands the instruments of this nation's justice and they must clarify this situation. We are not accusing anyone nor are we making judgments before we have all the

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facts. We hope to hear the voice of an impartial justice since the cause of love cannot be separated from justice. There can be no true peace or love that is based on injustice or violence or intrigue.”

His meaning was unmistakable. It was the violence and intrigue in the government-supported military itself that he had in his sights. But even in this, he refused to compromise the gospel:

Who knows if those responsible for this criminal act and who have been excommunicated are listening to the radio in their hideout and hearing these words? My dear criminals, we want to tell you that we love you and we ask God to pour forth repentance into your hearts.

Romero returned to San Salvador, where he met with the bishops and priests who served under him. And then he acted. He closed all the country’s Catholic schools for three days of mourning. The following Sunday, he had every priest in El Salvador refrain from saying Mass. Instead, he held a single Mass outside San Salvador Cathedral. The crowds were larger even than those at the Mass and protest two weeks earlier. Romero showed his people that he would not be distancing himself from the kind of work that Grande had been doing. Grande had, he said, given his life in the proclamation of the

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gospel, and Romero publicly thanked the other priests who were doing the same kind of work. After the homily, he demanded that the government investigate the events surrounding the assassination of Grande, saying that he would not participate in any formal governmental event until the assassins had been brought to justice.

ROMERO HAD DECLARED HIMSELF. And from that moment, he would not back down, and he would not be quiet. For the following three years, in his homilies – which were broadcast over the radio – and in the archdiocesan newspaper, Archbishop Romero spoke to the people, to the oligarchs, and to the government, and he spoke truth.

His homilies called his listeners to Christ's message of love and radical forgiveness, and to the need for justice. He called those in power to take care lest they violate that justice. He called all to Christ, teaching the message of the gospel and the hope of eternal life in Christ's kingdom even as he also taught the campesinos who listened to him that the love and justice of this kingdom was something that they could and should hope for, pray for, and work for now, in El Salvador, in their lives. He warned them away from the guerrilla warfare to which some, in desperation, were turning; the way of Christ pointed to a better response. But this response was not passivity or acquiescence:

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We have never preached violence, except the violence of the love that led Christ to be nailed to a cross. We preach only the violence that we must each do to ourselves to overcome selfishness and to eliminate the cruel inequalities among us. This is not the violence of the sword, the violence of hatred. It is the violence of love and fraternity, the violence that chooses to beat weapons into sickles for work.

All conversion, all change, began with the heart; with God drawing people to him to shape them into a community of love. And this community could and must include those who had formerly been enemies; Romero extended Christ's forgiveness to the government's killers as well.

There is no justice without truth. Murders of peasants and attacks on priests were common in El Salvador, and would become more so in the years to follow. But they were under-reported, the news often distorted. The press was in the pocket of the wealthy. The Jesuit seminary had been bombed six times the previous year, and opposition leaders and those who spoke up were regularly "disappeared," but El Salvador's newspapers were reluctant to investigate these government crimes.

Each of Archbishop Romero's homilies included a summary of the events of the week: he gathered reports of as many of the disappearances, murders, and attacks as he could, quoting eyewitness testimony and pointing

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out the frequent falsity of the official version of events as reported by the compromised news media. He was not reckless in accusation, but he also did not hesitate to use his homilies to present evidence showing the complicity of the national security forces in various assassinations. He spoke these homilies to an audience that eventually included half of El Salvador's city-dwellers and three quarters of the campesinos – except when the Salvadoran military succeeded in jamming the signal that came out of the cathedral in downtown San Salvador. Twice, the radio station was damaged by bombs; twice, Romero rebuilt it. His listeners included peasants in distant villages and urban workers, members of the government and of the army, anti-government guerillas in their camps and not a few of the oligarchs themselves, in their living rooms in San Salvador.

Never for a moment, however, did Romero lose track of the central purpose of these homilies: not to report the news of the day but to proclaim the gospel. “I want to reaffirm that my sermons are not political,” he said. “Naturally, they touch on politics, and they touch on the reality of the people, but their aim is to shed light and to tell you what it is that God wants.”

During the three years of Romero's leadership, pressures only increased. There were moments of hope – a military coup installed a new government, and he

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continued to try to work with the country's political leaders, who sought both his support and his silence. He offered his support in whatever he felt was beneficial for the people, but was never silent in the face of ongoing repression. During this time, Romero also faced a growing rift in the church hierarchy: many opposed him, believing that he was only stirring up trouble, afraid of repercussions. Particularly hard was the opposition of all but one of his fellow bishops: this lack of unity, he saw, contributed to the escalating repression and violence inflicted on the suffering people.

He met with leaders of the leftist revolutionary groups who periodically occupied church buildings. He offered the hospitality of the church to those who needed sanctuary from the vengeance of the military, but refused to condone the violence or the kidnappings that were the tactics of the guerilla groups. For his willingness to speak with members of these groups, and for his condemnation of the violence of the military, he was called a communist, accused of abandoning or politicizing the gospel.

In spite of this severe opposition, Romero sought every week to lead his flock to faith, hope, and love through following Christ. He sensed that his time was short. In the years he served as archbishop, dozens of priests who spoke out against the violence of the regime and the economic inequalities of the country were

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imprisoned, tortured, or expelled. Five were murdered. He realized that in all probability, his own turn was coming. In late February of 1980, he wrote:

I express my consecration to the heart of Jesus. . . . I place under his loving providence all my life, and I accept with faith in him my death, however hard it be. . . . For me to be happy and confident, it is sufficient to know with assurance that in him is my life and my death, that in spite of my sins I have placed my trust in him and shall not be disappointed, and others will carry on with greater wisdom and holiness the works of the church and the nation.

Several days later, in an interview, he told the reporter, “You can tell them, if they succeed in killing me, then I pardon them, and I bless those who may carry out the killing. But I wish that they could realize that they are wasting their time. A bishop will die, but the church of God – the people – will never perish.”

On March 23, in his homily, he spoke directly to the army:

Brothers, you are a part of our own people. You are killing your own brother and sister campesinos, and against any order a man may give to kill, God’s law must prevail: “You shall not kill!” (Exod. 20:13). No

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soldier is obliged to obey an order against the law of God. No one has to observe an immoral law. It is time now for you to reclaim your conscience and obey your conscience rather than the command to sin. . . . In the name of God, then, and in the name of this suffering people whose laments rise up each day more tumultuously toward heaven, I beg you, I beseech you, I order you in the name of God: stop the repression!

Archbishop Oscar Romero was shot to death the next day, on March 24, 1980, as he held a memorial Mass for a friend's mother.

ROMERO'S ASSASSINATION was only one of an estimated seventy-five thousand deaths during what became a full-fledged civil war in El Salvador. But through his death his witness has only grown. Romero was entrusted with teaching and leading Christ's flock in a particular place and time, and that is what he did. He followed his Lord. He called wrong wrong. He spoke on behalf of the poor, called for faith in God, and enjoined all to obey Christ's teachings. He pointed men and women of every position towards the hope of the gospel and pleaded for unity among believers.

The selections in this book come from Romero's radio homilies and from the diary he kept for the last several years of his life (1977–1980). Originally addressed to

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his own people, to inspire and encourage them as they sought God's kingdom in the midst of unimaginable hardship, his words now speak across time and across all historical and cultural contexts to anyone who seeks God's justice and redemption today. Romero's signal, despite all opposition, has gotten through.

Carolyn Kurtz

Saturday, April 8

A visit to the town of Dulce Nombre de María in the department of Chalatenango, arranged with the Oblate Sisters of the Sacred Heart, who work in that city and have some problems locally. Nevertheless, my arrival there and my visit were very moving experiences for me: the meeting in the town, the celebration of Mass, the meeting we had later with the celebrants of the word, catechists, and other groups active in the church. It is a community that gives real hope, a community that is alive. . . .

A disagreeable detail when I entered the town was the aggressive posture of a member of the National Guard, who only got out of the middle of the street when the crowd that accompanied me at that time was very near. I noticed how surprised people, especially the children, were by this gesture, and I could easily see that they are planting seeds in Dulce Nombre de María of what they call "a psychological war." I saw

this in the people who arrived from the small villages – a kind of fear, worse because they had circulated a rumor that I was going to come with some guerillas and they tried to dissuade the people from going to participate in the ceremony and the meetings that we had planned.



I

The Creator

HOW WONDERFUL IT IS, sisters and brothers, to feel governed by God, placed under God's sovereignty! That is what the Holy Bible means when it says that there is no power that does not come from God and that authority must be obeyed because it comes from God (Rom. 13:1). But the Bible also says that the human sovereign, the one who commands, must not command anything apart from what God wants; moreover, it says that authority is to be respected only because it reflects God's sacred power. When human authority contravenes God's law and violates the rights, the freedom, and the dignity of human beings, then it is time to cry out as Saint Peter did in the Bible, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). All power comes from God, and therefore rulers cannot use their authority capriciously but only according to the Lord's will. God's providence aims to govern the nations, and the rulers are only his ministers, servants of God like all the rest of his creatures.

The Creator

THE BIBLE SAYS that he is a just God (Wis. 12:13–18): “You do not judge unjustly.” “Your power is the source of justice.” Consider the richness of this concept of justice. Justice is the manifestation of power. A power is not true power unless it is just. God himself, who can do what he wills, does not abuse power; indeed, he cannot abuse it because he is just; he is justice par excellence. God’s power is illuminated by his infinite justice. “You judge with moderation.” This is the eternal serenity of God; he does not get impatient. He is the God who holds the reins of all peoples and all human beings, and that is why his justice is restrained; it is justice that is serene and holy.

Still another title that comes from today’s readings is “merciful God.” “Your universal sovereignty makes you spare all.” “You govern us with great indulgence because you can do whatever you want.” . . . Dear sisters and brothers, this is our God. Let us not forget him; let us respect him, realizing that he is the source of all the joy and the confidence of our faith. May the God that Jesus Christ reveals to us as Father, as providence, as goodness, always capture our hearts so that we will serve him not out of fear but out of love.

ONLY WHEN WE SEE the God of our Lord Jesus Christ illuminating our dawns, our seas, and our

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volcanoes will we understand that God has created a world out of love to give it to his children, with whom he wants to enter into the communion of family. In this way we understand how the earth groans beneath the weight of sin (Rom. 8:22) because humanity has not understood that the whole of creation exists for the happiness of all human beings and not for us to be comfortably settled here on earth.

THERE IS NO ANONYMOUS PERSON among those of us who are here. All of you have your own individual histories, even the humblest of persons, even the smallest child who has come to this Mass, even the poorest and sickest folks listening by radio, all those people about whom nobody will talk in the history books. God has loved each of you singularly, as an unrepeatable phenomenon. God has not made human beings in a mold. . . . It was not my parents who gave me being; they were simply instruments or means that God used to give me life. . . . Even prior to the months of my gestation, I existed in the mind of God as a project which, if brought to fulfillment, would make of me a saint because a saint is nothing else than the full realization of a life according to the design of God.

The Creator

THE WHOLE HISTORY OF ISRAEL is the story of humanity's return to God after breaking away. The whole marvelous book of Exodus tells how the people left slavery in Egypt and journeyed toward the Promised Land; it is a symbol of pilgrimage, of return, of the search for reconciliation. . . . The people had no certainty about the future; they lived believing in the land God had promised them, though they didn't know where it was. They seemed crazy but they weren't crazy; they were people of faith: "God has promised it! He will make it happen!" . . .

There is a wonderful relationship here with our own situation in El Salvador, where the land is being fought over. Let us not forget that the land is closely tied to the blessings and promises of God. . . . Not having land is a consequence of sin. When Adam left paradise, he was a man without land as the result of sin. Now Israel, pardoned by God, has returned to the land and can eat of the fruits and the grains of the earth. God gives his blessings in the form of land. The land contains much of God, and therefore it groans when the unjust monopolize it and leave no space for others. Agrarian reform is a theological necessity. A country's land cannot remain in the hands of just a few; it must be given to all so that all can share in the blessings God gives through the land. . . . There will be no true reconciliation between our people

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and God as long as there is no just distribution, as long as the goods of our Salvadoran land do not bring benefits and happiness to all Salvadorans.

LET US LOOK THIS MORNING, sisters and brothers, on this church which extends far beyond the tiny geographical speck which is El Salvador. We feel that we are sisters and brothers with all the peoples of Central America, of this continent of North America, of Canada, of Europe. And we are all called to follow this light.

What is marvelous to consider is that in this convocation of peoples God – the God of nations – respects the freedom, the customs, and the unique way of being of each people. The reading from Isaiah tells us, “The riches of the sea shall be emptied before you, and the wealth of nations shall be brought to you” (Isa. 60:5). This kingdom of God certainly has no need of our material goods, but we recognize that God is the origin of our coffee crops, our sugar cane, our cotton fields, all our wealth, and all the wealth of the world, and he has a right to all of these things. So we generously offer these things to God, recognizing that he owns them all, just as the magi placed gold, frankincense, and myrrh by the Christ Child’s crib. Everything that the world produces is God’s. The true wealth of the church as God’s kingdom is the realization that all the differences among the

The Creator

world's peoples come from God. God has created in this world a kingdom rich like no other because all the marvels of the earth are his. Everything produced by human cultures belongs to God. It is God who promotes and guides all the wealth and progress of the peoples.

Under the sign of bread and wine the priests of all latitudes of the world tell the Lord that we are offering him, in this bread and in this wine, the work of human hands. When we say “the work of human hands,” we understand this to be the work of all the latitudes of the world. We offer it all to God because without God human labors and human progress have no meaning. We all contribute to this kingdom of God.

Monday, October 9

In the afternoon I went to celebrate Mass in the village of La Loma in the territory of San Pedro Perulapán, a Mass offered for two murdered peasants who were found near the Apulo Highway. I was surprised by the size of the crowd waiting for me. I addressed words of comfort to them. The mothers, wives, children, and other family members and friends of those murdered were present there.

All of them reflected the fear being sowed in these sectors of our dear people — fear that is justified by the repression and abuse of authority by the security forces and, especially, by the armed peasant groups like the organization ORDEN. In fact, while we celebrated Mass, they appeared with their curved knives, some of them unsheathed, and they stood where they could watch the crowd. They wrote down the license number

of the van in which we had come with the sisters.
And there was an aggressive attitude, or, at least, a
mistrustful wariness. I understood the peasants' fears,
why many men sleep somewhere other than at their
homes for fear of being taken by surprise at night.

