Chapter Two

Romero the Preacher

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I was not privileged to know Monseñor Oscar Romero personally, but I have met him in the words he spoke and in some of the people among whom he still lives. For this grace, I am most grateful. I hope that my reflections help in some small way to inspire preaching for our day after the manner of his own.

Two words have been used consistently to describe Monseñor Romero: prophet and martyr. But what does it mean to be a prophetic preacher and martyr? What qualities are necessary for this, as exemplified by Monseñor Romero, and how can one become such a preacher? There are few prophetic giants. Only at certain times does God raise up for us the likes of an Isaiah, a Jeremiah, a Miriam, a Huldah, or a Romero. But in all ages there is need in the church of prophetic preaching that denounces sin and announces God’s grace.

When I think of the biblical prophets, what usually comes to mind is the image of a wild man, a John the Baptist, whose fanatical diet and bizarre clothing set him apart from normal persons, or an Elijah, who can call down an all-consuming fire from heaven. I think of fire and brimstone, and a harsh call to repent (or else). What less often comes to mind is the steady, prayerful presence of an Anna, who, after eighty-four years of faithfulness, stands in the very temple of God, worshiping, fasting, and praying, night and day, speaking of God’s grace to all who are looking for redemption (Luke 2:36-38). I think that in Monseñor Romero we find a prophet who is both. Similar to Anna, he took up residence in a simple dwelling right alongside the chapel of the Hospital of Divine Providence. His fasting and prayer, night and day, shaped his spirit so that, like Anna, he could speak of God’s grace to all who were looking for redemption, and, like Elijah, he could become fiery in his denunciation of those forces that impeded God’s action.
FROM DIDACTIC PREACHER TO PROPHETIC PREACHER

Many have spoken about Romero’s “conversion”—how on the night of Rutilio Grande’s murder he suddenly changed from being a shy, conservative, bookish scholar, fearful of anything that might immerse the church in conflict, to a fearless spokesperson for the poor, unafraid of alienating the powerful elite who had once been his friends. Romero did not like to use the word “conversion” to describe the change in himself, but preferred to speak of his “evolution.” Conversion is often understood to mean ceasing to do evil and turning toward doing good—this does not apply at all to Oscar Romero. Those who knew him describe him as having always been a pious man with a heart that was pure. For fifty-nine years before Rutilio Grande was murdered, he had been devoted to God—serving God, and seeking God’s will. His decades of faithfulness to God and his work at cultivating an honest and open heart were what prepared him for the new moment that began after Rutilio Grande’s murder.

There are not as many descriptions of Monseñor Romero’s preaching before March, 1977, when he became a prophetic preacher. My guess is that before that date he was a didactic preacher, one who expounded on the meaning of the Scriptures as text, a preacher who explained the Church’s teaching as an enforcer. Perhaps he was contrasting his own former way of preaching with his latter way when he said (on November 6, 1977) that “Christianity is not a collection of truths to be believed, of laws to be obeyed, of prohibitions. . . . Christianity is a person, one who loved us so much, one who calls for our love. Christianity is Christ.” Not unlike the apostle Paul, who was a sincere student of the Law, and blameless in its observance, Oscar Romero also rigorously sought to bring to the truth those whom he perceived to be on a mistaken path. What shifted in him on the night of his friend’s murder was his perception of where truth was to be found.

PREACHER OF LOVE FOR AND FROM THE POOR

I think what enabled Monseñor Romero to become a prophetic preacher was first and foremost his love for and from the poor. There is a famous story told of his once having been presented a half-eaten tomato by a poor campesino when he visited a desolate rural village. Repulsed, the new archbishop turned to one of the priests accompanying him and whispered, “Why would anyone offer me a half-eaten tomato?” The priest replied, “This is all they have to offer. It is their last possession, their sign of love, their gift to you.” This stunned Romero, and was one of many painful steps in his journey toward understanding the plight of the poorest of his people and choosing to become one with them.

By receiving their love, so generously and genuinely offered to him, he also allowed their pain and suffering to touch his heart and to further transform him. These crucified people became the manifestation of God’s love to him in flesh and blood. Just as the author of 1 John asserts, “in this is love, not that we have loved God, but that God has first loved us” (1 John 4:10). So Archbishop Romero’s notorious love for the poor was born from their first having loved him.

This love was at the core of his preaching. On December 25, 1977, he urged, “Let us not tire of preaching love, it is the force that will overcome the world. Though we see that waves of violence succeed in drowning the fire of Christian love, love must win out; it is the only thing that can.” The first characteristic, then, of a prophetic preacher, is a fierce love for and from the poorest of God’s people.

UTTER DEVOTION TO GOD

Hand in hand with love of God’s neediest ones, a prophetic preacher is also utterly devoted to God. As I have already mentioned, Romero was a very pious and devout person, from a very young age. He constantly sought God in fervent prayer and in assiduous study of the Scriptures, and in his preaching he constantly alluded to and quoted from them.

But what opened up more fully in him, after Rutilio Grande was murdered, was a new understanding of God—that God is to be found in the very faces of the poor. On February 5, 1978, he preached, “The guarantee of one’s prayer is not in saying a lot of words. The guarantee of one’s petition is very easy to know: how do I treat the poor? Because that is where God is. The degree to which you approach them, and the love with which you approach them, or the scorn with which you approach them—that is how you approach your God. What you do to them, you do to God. The way you look at them is the way you look at God.”
A CONDUIT OF LOVE
A prophet, then, is both utterly attached to God and utterly bound to God's people. This enables the prophet to be the bridge between the two, to be a conduit of love in both directions. Prophetic preachers do not call attention to themselves, rather they point to the One whose messenger they are. Romero was aware of this, when he said on March 16, 1980, "I invite you to listen to the hoarse, imperfect echo of my words. But do not regard the instrument; regard the One who bids me tell you of God's infinite love."9

As prophet, Romero preached the word of God—a word from God, not about God or concerning God. He spoke in the name of God, even as he said, "I make no other claim than that of being a simple preacher of the word of God."10

PREACHER OF AN INCARNATE GOSPEL
A prophet does not preach a generalized, disembodied, abstract love. Rather, prophets like Romero preach a particularized, historicized, and incarnate gospel.11 So Romero preached on November 27, 1977, "We cannot segregate God's word from the historical reality in which it is proclaimed. It would not then be God's word. It would be history, it would be a pious book, a Bible that is just a book in our library. It becomes God's word because it vivifies, enlightens, contrasts, repudiates, praises what is going on today in this society."12

As Romero was very well aware, such a word not only consoles, but also disturbs. On December 10, 1977, at the ordination of two priests, he preached:

It is very easy to be servants of the word without disturbing the world: a very spiritualized word, a word without any commitment to history, a word that can sound in any part of the world because it belongs to no part of the world. A word like that creates no problems, starts no conflicts. What starts conflicts and persecutions, what marks the genuine church, is the word that, burning like the word of the prophets, proclaims and accuses: proclaims to the people God's wonders to be believed and venerated, and accuses of sin those who oppose God's reign, so that they may tear that sin out of their hearts, out of their societies, out of their laws—out of the structures that oppress, that imprison, that violate the rights of God and of humanity. This is the hard

service of the word. But God's Spirit goes with the prophet, with the preacher for he is Christ, who keeps on proclaiming his reign to the people of all times.13

Romero elaborated again on this theme on April 16, 1978:

A church that doesn't provoke any crises, a gospel that doesn't unsettle, a word of God that doesn't get under anyone's skin, a word of God that doesn't touch the real sin of the society in which it is being proclaimed—what gospel is that? Very nice, pious considerations that don't bother anyone, that's the way many would like preaching to be. Those preachers who avoid every thorny matter so as not to be haraessed, so as not to have conflicts and difficulties, do not light up the world they live in. They don't have Peter's courage, who told that crowd where the bloodstained hands were that had killed Christ: "You killed him!"14 Even though the charge could cost him his life as well, he made it. The gospel is courageous; it's the good news of him who came to take away the world's sins.15

On June 4 of the same year, he reflected again:

Let's not meditate on a word that is disincarnated from reality. It's very easy to preach a gospel that's the same here in El Salvador as it would be in Guatemala, or in Africa.

Of course, it's the same gospel, just as it's the same sun that brightens the whole world. But just as the sunlight turns into flowers or fruits, according to the needs of the nature that receives it, so God's word has to be incarnated in reality.

And that is what is difficult about the church's preaching. Preaching the gospel without getting involved with reality doesn't bring on any problems, and it's very easy to fulfill the preacher's mission that way. But to cast the gospel's universal light on our own Salvadoran miseries—and also on our Salvadoran joys and successes—that's what is most beautiful about God's word. That way we know Christ is talking to us, to the community of our archdiocese gathered here to meditate on his divine word.16

PREACHER OF TRUTH
Another characteristic of prophetic preachers is that they tell the truth, the whole truth, to all the people, and they do it out of love. Romero plainly and pointedly denounced the idolatry of the powerful who worshiped "the god of money, the god of power, the god of luxury, the god of lust. So many gods enthroned among us!" he exclaimed. "Don't mix those idolatries with the worship of the
true God! You can't serve two lords, the true God and money. You can follow only one." When he warned the rich against their unjust wealth, Romero vividly challenged them, "Pull the rings off your fingers before they cut off your hands!" Speaking these hard words was no easy task, but it is essential to preach the truth in love, that is, to proclaim the gospel as good news that can free oppressed peoples, and their oppressors, from their bonds. Romero remarked, "No one finds it harder to tell the evils of his own people than I, who have the pastoral duty—by mandate of the gospel and of Jesus Christ, who takes away the world's sins—to say what is sin and what must not prevail, by what ways to walk: conversion, faith, mercy."

As difficult as this task of correction was, Romero also emulated Christ, who, in Romero's words, "corrected those of his time, he did not hate them. He loved them, because he wanted to snatch them from the claws of idolatry, of false positions, that they might seek the true way where they can find the mercy God offers." Romero eloquently juxtaposed his calls to repentance with declarations of his and God's love, as in this address on September 10, 1978: "Dear brothers and sisters, especially those of you who hate me, you dear brothers and sisters who think I am preaching violence, who defame me and know it isn't true, you that have hands stained with murder, with torture, with atrocity, with injustice—be converted. I love you deeply. I am sorry for you because you go on the way to ruin."

Romero's beloved poor were not exempt from the prophet's critique. When a word of correction was needed, he gave it, as in this preaching on February 5, 1978:

Dear poor people, dispossessed people, you who lack house and food, your very dignity demands your advancement. It is a pity that you, the poor, should not respect yourselves as you ought and that you try to drown—in drink, in bad habits, in excess—a dignity that could be God's light, God's presence on earth. We do not praise poverty for itself. We praise it as the sign, as the sacrament of God in the world. A sacrament must be respected, because it is a sign of God. The poor must respect themselves, must better themselves, must work to the extent that the scope of their economic and social powers enables them.

**Preacher of Hope**

A prophetic preacher not only denounces evil, both personal and systemic, but also announces hope. The preacher of hope articulates a vision for another way of being and announces God's power to bring it about. The preacher of hope shows a way that leads to well-being for all, to a community marked by forgiveness, repentance, and reconciliation, where sinners being converted can dwell in peace, united in God's love. A preacher of hope is marked by immense inner freedom, peace, and joy (as was Monseñor Romero). On May 20, 1979, he preached:

It is wrong to be sad. Christians cannot be pessimists. Christians must always nourish in their hearts the fullness of joy. Try it, brothers and sisters. I have tried it many times and in the darkest moments, when slander and persecution were at their worst: to unite myself intimately with Christ, my friend, and to feel a comfort that all the joys of the earth do not give—the joy of feeling close to God, even when humans do not understand me. It is the deepest joy the heart can have.

Preachers of hope, like Romero, are noted, too, for their simplicity, humility, and gratitude. These virtues fed Romero's spirit, enabling him to become bold in confronting and denouncing the powerful, and refusing to be afraid of anything. His unequalled courage and solid incorruptibility made his word efficacious and credible, as he fed the hope of the crucified peoples entrusted to his care.

**Willing to Suffer—even to Death—for the Gospel**

When Archbishop Romero took the poor to his heart after they took him to their own, those who had once been his friends turned on him. He had once moved with ease among the rich and powerful, and had regarded these people as devout and orthodox. But as Romero increasingly made his home with the poor, his former allies were the ones who abandoned him, while pastoral workers of Rutilio Grande's ilk, whom Romero had previously regarded with suspicion, stood with him.

Every prophet experiences this kind of divided response, akin to what happened to Jesus on his first day of public preaching.
in his home synagogue. As Luke tells it, at first the crowd marveled at his gracious words, but then they turned on him, and tried to push him off the cliff to his death, when he spoke about God's love for the ones on the margins (Luke 4:18-30). Once, reflecting on Jeremiah 38:4, Romero remarked about the fate of the prophet:

See how the accusations against the prophets of all times are the same. When the prophet bores the consciences of the selfish, or of those who are not building with God’s plans, he is a nuisance and must be eliminated, murdered, thrown into a pit, persecuted, not allowed to speak the word that annoys.

But the prophet could not tell them anything else. Read in the Bible how Jeremiah often prays to God, “Lord, take this cross away from me. I don’t want to be a prophet. I feel my insides burning because I have to say things even I don’t like” (Jer 20:7-10).

It’s always the same. The prophet has to speak of society’s sin and call to conversion, as the church is doing today in San Salvador: pointing out whatever would enslave sin in El Salvador’s history and calling sinners to be converted, just as Jeremiah did.26

One of the most insidious means of countering a prophet is not through direct and open opposition, but through subtle attempts to discredit him by calling into question the source of his word. Monsenor Romero was not exempt from such attacks. His detractors charged that his words were not his own, that he was being manipulated, that the word he preached was not the word of God—a tactic that allowed these critics to exempt themselves from taking his word to heart. Romero spoke about this in his homily of July 8, 1979:

This is the terrible thing about our society. It is a society that rejects the word of the gospel when that word does not suit its selfishness, when it does not suit its injustice. Suddenly a thousand questions arise. ‘Where does he get all these ideas? Who is manipulating him in this way? These can’t be his own ideas!’ And all of these foolish accusations, instead of becoming real questions (“Is he right or isn’t he?”), remain purely rhetorical ones, and the victim is simply rejected.27

Romero never fled these risks. He asserted on September 9, 1979, “if it is really God’s word, it can explode, and not many are willing to carry it. If it were defused, no one would be afraid to.”28

PREACHER OF RESURRECTION
As Romero’s prophetic preaching became stronger, so did the opposition and the death threats. Romero knew full well what is the fate of a prophet and he knew that the possibility that he would be called to lay down his life for his flock was a real one. In his now famous words, from an interview given two weeks before his death, he proclaimed:

I have frequently been threatened with death. I must say that, as a Christian, I do not believe in death but in the resurrection. If they kill me, I shall rise again in the Salvadoran people. I am not boasting; I say it with the greatest humility.

As a pastor I am bound by a divine command to give my life for those whom I love, and that includes all Salvadorans, even those who are going to kill me. If they manage to carry out their threats, I shall be offering my blood for the redemption and resurrection of El Salvador.

Martyrdom is a grace from God that I do not believe I have earned. But if God accepts the sacrifice of my life, then may my blood be the seed of liberty, and a sign of the hope that will soon become a reality.

May my death, if it is accepted by God, be for the liberation of my people, and as a witness of hope in what is to come. You can tell them, if they succeed in killing me, that 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 die.29

A LIVING GOSPEL
In the final analysis, this prophetic preacher was not only a conduit for the word of God, but was himself the very incarnation of the gospel for his people. As Ignacio Ellacuría, who would also join him in the ranks of Salvadoran martyrs, put it, “With Archbishop Romero, God has visited El Salvador.”30 Or, as Jon Sobrino said, “Romero himself was a gospel, a piece of
good news from God to the poor of this world, and then, from this starting point in the poor, to all men and women.” In his very person “Romero made the Word of God dwell among Salvadorans—made that Word to ‘pitch his tent’ (John 1:14) among the poor, the campesinos, the tortured, the imprisoned, the orphans and widows, the slain.”

This is the ultimate meaning of martyr, literally, “witness.” Being a martyr has not so much to do with the death of the prophet, as it has to do with his or her life. As a martyr, Oscar Romero’s whole life was an utterly transparent witness to the passionate love of God for God’s people—a love so strong that he was even willing to lay down his life for the beloved.

THE LEGACY OF THE MARTYRED PROPHET
When a prophet such as Romero dies the death of a martyr, his witness continues in various ways. There remain many who attempt to discredit, or worse yet, to domesticate his powerful word. Bland declarations such as, “He was a good man,” tame his radically prophetic word and obscure the true impact of his life. No less insidious are those who relegate Romero’s legacy to the past, calling him “a saint for his day,” ignoring the power his life has for continuing to challenge us to incarnate the gospel today. The opposite extreme, glorifying his memory beyond anything that can be emulated, is an equally effective way to kill the prophet. But if Oscar Romero is to continue to live among us, this generation must emulate his prophetic life and witness according to the needs of our own time and place.

Romero never claimed to have a corner on the market of prophecy. In fact, he talked about the role of the whole people as prophetic. He said, “I have never felt like I was a prophet in the sense of being the only prophet of the people. I know that you and I, the people of God, together compose the prophetic people.” On another occasion he elaborated further, “The prophetic mission is a duty of God’s people. So, when I am told in a somewhat mocking tone that I think I am a prophet, I reply: ‘God be praised! You ought to be one too.’ For every Christian, all God’s people, every family, must develop a prophetic awareness, convey an awareness of God’s mission in the world, and bring a divine presence that makes demands and also rejects.”

Oscar Romero does truly live in the prophetic peoples of today’s church. He lives yet among his own Salvadoran people, “in shelters, relocation camps, remote regions of the country, in some religious and professionals.” And he lives in all those who have the courage to move, as he did, from being didactic preachers of a body of truths, to being prophetic preachers of the truth that God is found most clearly in the crucified peoples of our day. He lives in all who accept half-eaten tomatoes. He lives in all who allow themselves to be loved by (and to love) those who are made poor, and to keep this love always at the center of their preaching. He lives in all those who risk living utterly devoted to God, in simplicity and humility, in fervent prayer, immersed in the Scriptures, allowing themselves to be conduits of love.

Oscar Romero lives among any who dare to preach not empty words of general truths that offend no one, but who proclaim an incarnate gospel, naming concrete, specific injustices in their time. He lives when preachers announce truth, hope, and resurrection, exuding inner peace, joy, and freedom that comes from the heart of God. He lives whenever preachers take bold public steps, as he did, when he refused to participate in governmental functions during his tenure as archbishop, as a protest against the government’s injustice. He lives whenever prophetic communities open their doors to the neediest, as he did on Easter Monday, 1978, when he opened the seminary in downtown San Salvador to all displaced victims of violence. He lives whenever prophetic communities put their plans and projects on hold, to respond to God’s demands, as Romero suspended construction on the cathedral in San Salvador until justice and peace would be established.

Oscar Romero lives whenever leaders and educators dedicate themselves to communal study to discover together the truth, as when Romero suspended classes for three days in all Catholic schools so that all in the diocese could study, reflect, and pray together with the Bible and the documents from Vatican II and Medellin. He lives whenever whole dioceses pray in one voice, as when Romero canceled Sunday Masses on March 20, 1977, at all parishes in the diocese so that all would gather for a single celebration at the Cathedral, calling attention to the need to stand united against the violence and oppression. He lives whenever communities of believers protest military spending on unjust wars, following Romero’s example, as when he wrote a public letter to
President Jimmy Carter in February, 1980, asking him to cancel the millions of U.S. dollars of military aid that was fueling the conflict in El Salvador. He lives whenever voices are raised in protest against senseless killing, as Romero did on the day before his death, when he appealed directly to the members of the armed forces to stop the killing, stop the repression.  

Oscar Romero lives whenever pastors refuse to abandon their people, and are willing to give their very lives for them. He lives whenever church leaders dare to dialogue with all sides, not only with those who agree with them. He lives whenever those who have decision-making power in the church follow the example he gave in preparing pastoral letters: carefully listening to the faithful through almost endless meetings, taking polls of the common people, composing multiple rough drafts, working collaboratively for months before finalizing his pastoral letters. He lives whenever bishops and church leaders publicly acknowledge their need to be learners, not only teachers, as when he remarked, “I believe that the bishop always has much to learn from his people. Precisely in those charisms that the Spirit gives to the people the bishop finds the touchstone of his humility and of his authenticity.”  

Oscar Romero lives whenever those in positions of authority have the courage to humbly ask forgiveness of the community, as Romero did on September 10, 1978, when he said, “Authority in the church is not command, but service. Among Christians, those who do not become simple as children cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. To my shame, as a pastor, I beg forgiveness from you, my community, that I have not been able to carry out as your servant my role of bishop. I am not a master, I am not a boss, I am not an authority that imposes itself. I want to be God’s servant and yours.”  

He lives whenever the ministry of the priesthood is recognized as belonging to all Christians, and when lay preachers, especially women preachers’ voices are heard—including at our Eucharistic celebrations—as Romero announced on December 10, 1977, “One day, there will be no more Masses, no more need of temporal priests, because all of us, through the labors of priests, of bishops, of catechists, of lay ministers of the word, of all God’s priestly people, will have achieved humanity’s incorporation into Christ, and Christ will be one priest, formed in his historical and eternal fullness by all of us who in the course of history have made with him one sole priesthood, one sole offertory, one sole Mass that will last eternally to sing God’s glory.”  

He lives when preachers are bold and wise in using the communications media to proclaim truth, as Romero did in broadcasting by radio his weekly Sunday sermons.  

Oscar Romero lives whenever preachers are willing to engage in the arduous process that he used in preparing his Sunday homilies. As Sister Teresa, one of the sisters who lived at the hospital where he resided, attested, he would pray at length, and would review the important events of the week. When he thought he had to take a prophetic, forthright, and provocative position, he would ask advice extensively. He would still be working late on Saturday night. He would have his Scripture commentaries and homiletic aids out on his desk, along with notes of his own and the newspapers of that week. He would stay up working until after midnight, sometimes until two or three in the morning. Sister Teresa would see him praying again before retiring, and then, finally, the next morning he would preach his homily.  

Oscar Romero lives, too, in a paradoxical way, in the many communities where the so-called “Romero Prayer” gives hope and courage to those who work tirelessly without always seeing the results of their labors. This prayer assures those who plant seeds without seeing them flower, that our incomplete steps are opportunities for God’s grace to enter and do the rest. It reminds us that we are ministers, not messiahs, we are prophets of a future not our own.  

I say Romero lives in a paradoxical way when people pray this prayer attributed to him, because it was actually based on a homily written by Bishop Ken Untener of Saginaw, Michigan, when he was rector of St. John Provincial Seminary in 1979, and was delivered by John Cardinal Deardon of Detroit, at the Mass for Deceased Priests on October 25 of that year. By a strange twist, which no one has yet been able to accurately trace, the prayer has been popularly attributed to Oscar Romero. I picture Romero and Untener—two kindred spirits, two powerfully prophetic preachers—glorying now in knowing each other and Christ face to face, and holding us in the embrace of the communion of saints as they taste the greater fullness of that future for which we long.
To conclude these reflections on Oscar Romero as Preacher, I think Dom Pedro Casaldáliga, bishop of São Félix, Brazil, said it best. Referring to Monsenhor Romero’s death, he prayed:

Saint Romero of the Americas, our shepherd and our martyr, no one shall ever silence your last homily.

NOTES
2. José “Checho” Alas, “Monsenor Romero: Pastor, Prophet, and Martyr,” describes how it was during the homily of the single Mass in the cathedral on March 20, 1977, that Romero converted, by letting the people’s spirit carry him while he denounced sin and crime and, moved by the Spirit of God, announced the reign of God. He remarks, “Invaded by that Spirit he became a prophet forever” (p. 6).
5. The Violence of Love, 7.
6. In his book We Speak the Word of the Lord: A Practical Plan for More Effective Preaching (Chicago: ACTA, 2001) 154-55, Daniel Harris lists the following as the marks of preaching, which certainly typify the preaching of Oscar Romero: (1) Teach God and nothing less; (2) Preach for change; (3) Preach as one who lives justice; (4) Preach with compassion; (5) Preach to the whole church; and (6) Preach hope.
7. Sobrino, Memories, 15.
8. The Violence of Love, 34-35.
9. Ibid., 200.
11. On this aspect of preaching, see Christine Smith, Risking the Terror: Resurrection in this Life (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press), 44; Sobrino, Memories, 158.
12. The Violence of Love, 11-12.
13. Ibid., 18.
15. The Violence of Love, 44-45.
16. Ibid., 53-54.
18. Sobrino, Memories, 76.
19. The Violence of Love, 57.
20. Ibid., 87-88.
21. Ibid., 35.
22. Ibid., 133.
23. Sobrino, Memories, 185.
24. Ibid., 76.
27. Sobrino, Memories, 53, 151.
29. Ibid., 99-100.
30. Ibid., 58.
31. Ibid., 58.
32. Ibid., 174.
33. Ibid., 164.
34. Ibid., 54. Sobrino remarks that the Salvadoran bishops’ conference never makes any mention of Romero in its messages, never quotes his words of encouragement to inspire Christians of today, so that he will remain dead and buried.
35. Ibid., 152.
36. The Violence of Love, 87.
37. Sobrino, Memories, 66.
38. Dear, Nonviolent Struggle, 10-11.
39. Sobrino, Memories, 14.
42. Ibid., 86.
43. Ibid., 18-19.
44. Sobrino, Memories, 51-52.
45. The prayer popularly called “The Romero Prayer” is: It helps, now and then, to step back and take the long view. The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is beyond our vision. We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God’s work. Nothing we do is complete, which is another way of saying that the kingdom always lies beyond us. No statement says all that could be said. No prayer fully expresses our faith. No confession brings perfection. No pastoral visitors brings wholeness. No program accomplishes the church’s mission. No set of goals and objectives includes everything. This is what we are about: We plant seeds that one day will grow. We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development. We provide yeast that produces effects beyond our capabilities. We cannot do everything and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that. This enables us to do something, and to do it very well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for God’s grace to enter and do the rest.
Chapter Three

Archbishop Romero: A Bishop for the New Millennium

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I will begin with a personal remembrance and then address the Romero myth with the new millennium as a reference point, pausing to consider a few facets of Romero’s fascinating personality. I will have as my guide two documents by Pope John Paul II: Novo Millennio Ineunte and the post-synodal exhortation Pastores Gregis. Using them, I will attempt to follow the Pope’s suggestion when he invites us: “...to remember the past with gratitude, to live the present with enthusiasm, and to look forward to the future with confidence: ‘Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever’ (Novo Millennio Ineunte, 1).”

Personal Remembrance
I was fourteen years old when I met Monseñor Romero; it was the year I entered the minor seminary. But before meeting him in person, I had heard his voice over the radio both on a radio program called “Morning Prayer” and in the explanations he gave every Sunday—always over the radio—at the time of the Sunday mass. This was prior to the Second Vatican Council, when the mass was celebrated in Latin.

We both belonged to the San Miguel diocese in eastern El Salvador. Like other seminarians I helped him from time to time