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## ¡Presente!

### The Prophetic Legacy of Monseñor Oscar Romero

*Carmen M. Nanko-Fernández\**

Catholic Theological Union

Some twenty-five years ago, Monseñor Oscar Arnulfo Romero's daily living was cut short at the age of 63, as he celebrated a memorial mass in the chapel of the Divine Providence cancer hospital in San Salvador. Last year, the twenty-fifth anniversary of Romero's death (March 24) fell on Holy Thursday, a significant moment in a sacred week during which Christians recall and retell the narratives that ground the foundations of our faith. His eerily prescient words also remind us, that like the Jesus he followed to his death, Romero's prophetic ministry — the legacy we remember and try to live today — was only three years in the making. Romero once observed, "As a Christian, I don't believe in death without resurrection. If they kill me, I will rise again in the Salvadoran people..." In addressing the prophetic legacy of Monseñor Oscar Romero I propose four images for consideration.<sup>1</sup>

#### **Pablo Gargallo: *The Prophet***

If you have ever been to the sculpture garden of the Hirshorn Museum on the Smithsonian Mall in Washington DC, you would have tripped across a statue by the Spanish artist Pablo Gargallo entitled simply "The Prophet." Created in the early 1930s, an age that was sadly short

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\*This essay was the 2005 Romero Lecture at Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington DC.

<sup>1</sup>The images that appear in this essay are by Jean-Pierre Ruiz, ©2006. All rights reserved.

on prophets, this sculpture powerfully communicates what our imaginations conjure when we think of those who assumed the prophetic mantle. The figure with mouth shaped in the “O” of proclamation, and arm raised in the air, certainly reminds us why prophets make people nervous.



Pablo Gargallo, *The Prophet* (1933) Washington D.C.

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From this work of art one gets a hint of a prophetic mission to agitate and aggravate. It is prophets who awaken those who slumber in the presence of injustice and arose the suspicion of those content with the status quo. The prophet's sense of urgency makes the indifferent very uncomfortable. If you look at Gargallo's *Prophet* you get the impression that any strong wind will blow him away, that is of course until you look closely at his feet. The feet are disproportionately large and firmly planted; no wind will carry this prophet away. Therein lies the heart of the prophetic mission, in order to engage one must be grounded.

Romero was a prophet in this sense of the term. He was grounded in his community, all Salvadorans were his responsibility as pastor, as shepherd: los campesinos and the wealthy, government leaders and the popular resistance, the soldiers and the guerillas. Romero recognized the complexity of the Salvadoran church he accompanied where the poor sometimes constituted the ranks of the armed forces and the insurgents as well as the company of those victimized by their violence.

Romero was pastor of the vulnerable and of the perpetrators, and in that role he chided all parties to assume their obligations to each other and their common good. He called upon the Salvadoran elites, the privileged and powerful minority “to be converted, to remember their very grave responsibility to overcome disorder and violence not by means of repression but through justice and the participation of the ordinary people.”<sup>2</sup>



**Gargallo's *Prophet*, detail**

Romero the pastor was well aware of the sufferings of the ordinary soldier. One of his theologians, Jon Sobrino writes that “[i]n fact, he became the echo of the soldiers’ cries – after all, they were themselves of the people.”<sup>3</sup> Sobrino goes on to record how Romero had once, in the context of a homily, even read from a letter he had received from troops bemoaning their poor pay, and requesting not only better food, clothing and treatment, but, in their own words, “that we not be sent out to repress the population.”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Archbishop Oscar Romero, “The Church’s Mission amid the National Crisis: Fourth Pastoral Letter of Archbishop Romero, Feast of the Transfiguration, August 6, 1979,” in *Archbishop Oscar Romero, Voice of the Voiceless: The Four Pastoral Letters and Other Statements*, translated from Spanish by Michael J. Walsh (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1985, tenth printing 1999), 141-142.

<sup>3</sup>Jon Sobrino, *Archbishop Romero: Memories and Reflections*, translated from Spanish by Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1990) 115.

<sup>4</sup>Sobrino, *Archbishop Romero*, 115. Romero homily, dated January 20, 1980.

Romero the prophet, at the same time, appealed to the army, the Guardia Nacional and the police, to take back their own consciences. Reminiscent of the biblical prophets, and in a moment captured poignantly by actor Raúl Julia in the film *Romero*, he commanded, "In the name of God, and in the name of this suffering people, whose laments rise to heaven each day more tumultuous, I beg you, I beseech you, I order you in the name of God: Stop the repression!"<sup>5</sup> On the evening following this Sunday sermon, which was preached in the cathedral and heard by millions on national radio, Romero was dead.

Near to the heart of Romero were El Salvador's poor, the campesinos. However his embrace of the disenfranchised was neither a naïve nor trendy appropriation of the preferential option for the poor. Romero's concern for those who were in need was not a canonization of their poverty rather it was recognition of their agency. He advocated solidarity with those who were poor by acknowledging the power of campesinos to evangelize others, to act on their own behalf, to contribute to the common good and to participate in the creation of a just nation. And it this same respect for the agency of those who are marginalized that allowed Romero to challenge the vulnerable to not neglect their own responsibilities as well. He writes, "In the name of the preferential option for the poor, there can never be justified the machismo, the alcoholism, the failure in family responsibility, the exploitation of one poor person by another, the antagonism among neighbors..."<sup>6</sup>

Prophets see what is and cajole communities to be what they should be because prophets are grounded in their own communities. Prophets are agents for transformation who can envision what is possible because they too are invested. Prophets are instruments of healing and repairers of the breach because they too experience the effects of brokenness.

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<sup>5</sup>James R. Brockman, *Romero: A Life* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1989, 1990 third printing), 241-242. This also appears in Sobrino, *op.cit.*, 115-116. Full text available in Archbishop Oscar Romero, "The Church: Defender of Human Dignity," (March, 23, 1980) in *A Martyr's Message of Hope* (Kansas City, MO: Celebration Books, 1981), 115-161. Translation by the National Catholic Reporter Publishing Company.

<sup>6</sup>Romero, "Fourth Pastoral Letter," in *Voice of the Voiceless*, 140.

## San Juan Bautista in San Juan, Puerto Rico

If you were to take a walk along the Avenida Ponce de León in San Juan, the capital of Puerto Rico, your attention would be drawn to an overwhelming figure situated on the promenade. With no hat upon his head to shield him from the sun and tropical rains, San Juan Bautista — St. John the Baptist — stands with one finger jutting boldly into the air. Is this a posture of prophetic admonition or apocalyptic warning?

Or is it a preacher's punctuation of a point? As a tourist, the bronze statue of the city's patron saint, framed by sky and sea, is a definite Kodak moment worthy of being captured digitally or on film. But to comprehend the dynamic tension of the prophetic, one needs to photograph the statue from behind in order to see through the eyes of the prophet/saint. Only then does one become aware of the object of the upraised fin-



**Juan Bautista, San Juan, Puerto Rico**

ger – the majestic capitol building, the seat of the legislature. Herein lies the task of the prophetic mission: *to speak truth to power*.

To those in power, the outspokenness of the prophetic voice can be unwelcome and unsettling. Sleeping giants do not appreciate being awakened; flawed policies are often best served by ignorance; leaders who are unjust prefer national amnesia. In his brief stint on the national and international stage, Romero grew, reluctantly and courageously, into the dangerous task of speaking truth to power.

Romero spoke with his actions as well his words. For example, the once politically cautious cleric broke with tradition and protocol and refused to attend the inauguration of General Carlos Humberto Romero (no relation), whose rise to power was marked by violence and repression. This violence claimed the life of Romero's friend,

and, some would say, awakened his social conscience. The murder of Fr. Rutilio Grande, and his companions that day, a little boy and an old man, empowered the newly appointed archbishop to visibly break ranks with some of his fellow bishops and the papal nuncio. Not only did he refuse to attend the inauguration, he decreed that there would be only one Mass in his entire archdiocese on the Sunday following their funeral. Through this action he made clear the implications of the loss for the church of this one priestly life.<sup>7</sup>



**Juan Bautista, speaking truth to Puerto Rico's Capitolio**

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In the course of his brief ministry as archbishop, Romero would take on the Salvadoran supreme court and the judiciary while supporting the actions of attorneys who denounced “anomalies in the proceedings of the main penal court where the judge does not allow lawyers to enter (court) with their defendants,”<sup>8</sup> defendants who often bore the signs of torture. He congratulated those “Christian and non-Christian lawyers for the great sense of justice with which they

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<sup>7</sup>Archbishop Oscar Romero, “La Misa Única,” (20 de Marzo de 1977). Homily available on the world wide web at <http://bit.ly/2qZTNbW>. Romero’s homilies are available in Spanish at <http://bit.ly/2qZPHk7>.

<sup>8</sup>Archbishop Oscar Romero, “The Holy Spirit: Renewal of Our World,” (May 14, 1978) in *A Martyr’s Message of Hope*, 18.

are putting their finger on a sore spot,” and sincerely desired that “all of our lawyers truly be the hope for a justice that is so absent in our situation.”<sup>9</sup>

Politicians of the right and the left were not immune from Romero’s calls to responsibility. These calls intensified with each priest and lay worker he buried and with the countless disappeared whose stories were documented in his weekly Sunday homilies and in the dossiers that were prepared in his archdiocese for the attention of those he thought should pay heed.

*Standing up to power — whether it be a  
government or the Aryan nation, an abuser  
or the neighborhood drug dealer — can cost  
you your livelihood and sometimes even  
your life.*

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From the Vatican to Washington, from the churches to the academy Romero sought not only to draw international attention to the explosive socio-political situation in his homeland but to talk about the political dimension of the Christian faith: “in the precise sense of the repercussions of the faith on the world, and also of the repercussions that being in the world has on the faith.”<sup>10</sup>

Speaking truth to power has consequences, as the lives of the prophets show. From Ezekiel’s exile to Jeremiah’s tenure in a cistern, from Elijah’s flight into the wilderness to John the Baptist’s loss of his head, the cost can be dear. Conscientious objectors serve time in prison, as some in the U.S. armed services discovered in their opposition to the war in Iraq, and as peaceful trespassers learn every year at the School of the Americas. Whistleblowers more often than

<sup>9</sup>Romero, “The Holy Spirit: Renewal of Our World,” 19.

<sup>10</sup>Archbishop Oscar Romero, “Louvain Address, The Political Dimension of the Faith from the Perspective of the Option for the Poor,” (February 2, 1980) in *Voice of the Voiceless*, 178.

not lose their jobs and their reputations. They rarely wind up on the cover of *Time* magazine, let alone star in their own popular versions of *Norma Rae*.

Romero was aware that his “well-trained tongue” and its ability to rouse the weary were a threat to those in power. He accepted his prophetic role albeit reluctantly for he understood that there would be a price to pay. In response to a companion’s query regarding increased threats on his life, Romero replied, “I tell you the truth, Doctor, I don’t want to die. At least not now, I’ve never had so much love for life! And honestly, I don’t think I was meant to be a martyr. I don’t feel that calling... I don’t want to die now. I want a little more time...”<sup>11</sup>

Romero’s reluctance is both understandable and healthy: We would be wise to remain suspicious of those too eager to embrace death, their own as well as others. Those who hold a cavalier disregard for life or a romanticized version of death can only be false prophets. With the potential for loss so great, how can anyone ever be anything but a reluctant prophet?

Standing up to power — whether it be a government or the Aryan nation, an abuser or the neighborhood drug dealer — can cost you your livelihood and sometimes even your life. However, Nuyorican biblical scholar Jean-Pierre Ruíz reminds us that the integrity of (prophetic) words must rise from the texture of prophetic lives: “prophets cannot hope to advance by suppressing other voices... [T]he truth must be allowed to speak for itself, even when it arises only faintly from the din of competing voices.”<sup>12</sup>

## La Rogativa, San Juan, Puerto Rico

Wandering through the streets of Old San Juan, Puerto Rico, you just might find yourself in the Plazuela de la Rogativa where you will see

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<sup>11</sup>Jorge Lara-Braud, “I want a little more time,” in “The Reluctant Conversion of Oscar Romero: Memories of the Archbishop on the 20th Anniversary of his Assassination,” *Sojourners Magazine* (March-April 2000). Available online at <http://www.sojo.net>

<sup>12</sup>Jean-Pierre Ruíz, “Rivers of Nihilism, Streams of Hope: Theological Responses to Cornel West’s Race Matters,” presented at the Catholic Theological Society of America, New York, June 9, 1995.

the sculpture by Lindsay Daen,<sup>13</sup> which commemorates the unusual way in which the people of San Juan averted a siege of the city by the British fleet in 1797. When the governor ordered a rogativa, a religious procession to invoke the assistance of the saints, the women of the city, accompanied by the bishop, marched through the streets of the endangered capital carrying blazing torches, praying and singing.



**Lindsay Daen, *La Rogativa* (1971), San Juan, Puerto Rico**

Viewing the sight from their vessels, the British navy abandoned the siege, thinking the lights and the noise indicated the arrival of military reinforcements. The least powerful, its women and children had saved the city. Overlooking La Fortaleza, the official residence of the governor that dates back to the Spanish colonial era, this sculpted sentry reminds the powerful of deliverance at the hands of those whom they might consider insignificant, the ordinary and the weak, armed only with prayer.

Romero's choice to learn from the sufferings and struggles of his own people placed him clearly on the side of the powerless, the vul-

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<sup>13</sup>Born in New Zealand, Lindsay Daen (1923-2001) made his home in Puerto Rico.

nerable and the weak. These lessons from *la vida cotidiana*, the daily living of the ordinary, shaped his own commitment to make a preferential option for the poor. His initial hesitance and political caution melted as his daily encounters with *la lucha*, the struggles of the lost, the broken, the disappeared and those they left behind, made incarnate the words and teachings of the Second Vatican Council and the Latin American Councils of Medellín and Puebla. As Salvadoran Inocencio Alas observed, “there is baptism by water, and there is baptism by blood. But there is also baptism by the people.”<sup>14</sup>

Romero’s baptism by his people, which was evident, in particular in his Sunday homilies, has been lost in translation. In English we tend to get Romero in excerpts, we print the words that are profound, and we either miss the ordinary, or too easily dismiss *vida cotidiana*, the daily living. In his weekly sermons Romero often recapped the horrors of the week, putting names and faces and giving contexts to the beaten, tortured, murdered and disappeared. He commented on the taking of hostages, the occupation of towns and churches, and the actions by all sides in this civil unrest that negatively impacted his people. In some ways he functioned, through the radio broadcasts of his homilies, as the CNN of the oppressed.

Romero privileged daily living as the place of both struggle and hope. As ministers and theologians we are familiar with the litany of signs that the biblical prophets associated with the in-breaking of the reign of God’s justice and compassion: the poor and oppressed would receive the good news; liberty would be proclaimed to captives and release to prisoners; mourners would experience comfort and the brokenhearted would be bound. And while all of us are not called, or willing, or even able to be prophets, all are invited to participate in the in-breaking of God’s reign in our daily living. Do we recognize these signs in our own daily living? Mentoring a child, serving a meal to the hungry, visiting the imprisoned, healing the sick, sheltering the homeless, reconciling our families, keeping vigil with the dying, defending human rights, protecting the undocumented in our land,

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<sup>14</sup>Inocencio Alas, “They will have to deal with me,” in “The Reluctant Conversion of Oscar Romero: Memories of the Archbishop on the 20th Anniversary of his Assassination,” *Sojourners Magazine* (March-April 2000). Available online at <http://www.sojo.net>

conserving the environment, protesting the disenfranchisement of the vulnerable, struggling for peace – these actions, the simple and the grand, participate in the prophetic; they illuminate the tension between “what should be” and “how things really are.”



**Barry Woods Johnston, *Romero* (1996), National Cathedral, Washington D.C.**

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Romero comprehended the significance of the seemingly unmemorable and ordinary as the words of his last homily demonstrate. On the evening he died, he celebrated a memorial mass commemorating the first anniversary of the death of Doña Sara Meardi de Pinto, the mother of Jorge Pinto, publisher and editor of one of the few weekly newspapers that advocated for justice.

Reflecting on the same gospel from John that we hear in our chapel service today, Romero preached, “We simply and gratefully remember this noble woman who understood the restlessness of her son and of all who work for a better world, who knew as well how to plant her share of wheat grain in the suffering of the people .... Maybe this blessed woman... could not do things directly, but she inspired

those who could by understanding their struggle, and above all, by praying.”<sup>15</sup> Upon the completion of this homily, shots rang out. A man who had been baptized in the blood of his people died remembering the daily living of a woman many might have considered insignificant.

## **Mons. Romero in Washington’s National Cathedral**

High in a niche in the narthex of the Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul, popularly known as the National Cathedral, stands a small stone sculpture of Archbishop Oscar Romero vested for Mass and holding a chalice in his right hand. Installed in 1996, this piece by Barry Woods Johnston, peers from its perch witnessing the comings and goings of the mighty and the meek at this monumental house of worship.

There is a danger with anniversaries, especially the milestones, silver and gold. With distance from the original contexts that shaped our martyrs comes a temptation to romanticize lives that require no embellishment. We opt for a banal and safe spiritualizing of the truly prophetic. We can lose sight of the power of the prophet to bear witness across time and place. If we are still commemorating Oscar Romero more than twenty-five years after his martyrdom, even setting him in stone in cathedrals in Washington and Westminster Abbey in London, then his influence clearly has exceeded his three memorable years as a local archbishop. But is he really *present* to us?

In her book *Friends of God and Prophets*, Elizabeth Johnson describes a Latin American ritual of responding to the names of martyrs with the affirmation *Presente*, “a multivalent term asking that the saint be present, implying that the saint is present, and most basically, affirming the power of the resurrection which makes it possible for the saint to be present. It is a powerful response that commits the community to honor their memory by emulating their lives.”<sup>16</sup>

Our Washington Romero has witnessed our national prayers in times of profound pain, crisis and transition. In his shadow our

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<sup>15</sup>Archbishop Oscar Romero, “In Death is Our Life,” (March 24, 1980) in *A Martyr’s Message of Hope: Six Homilies* (Kansas City, MO: Celebration Books, 1981), 165. Translation by the National Catholic Reporter Publishing Company.

<sup>16</sup>Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets: A Feminist Theological Reading of the Communion of Saints* (Ottawa: Novalis, 1998), 254.

presidents, present and past, our justices and legislators, diplomats and dignitaries, and via the reach of television and the Internet, we too have mourned our dead; struggled with grief; prayed for wisdom and longed for peace. *But is Romero present?*

This is a particularly potent question, for those of us who live, work, study, teach, preach and minister in the back yard of the White House and in an era where our sense of national identity is sadly defined by an act of violence and our national response is war. Romero and his El Salvador were not strangers to terrorism and war. Concerned by what he described as “the absolutization of national security,” Romero writes in his fourth pastoral letter: “The omnipotence of these national security regimes, the total disrespect they display towards individuals and their rights, the total lack of ethical consideration shown in the means that are used to achieve their ends, turn national security into an idol, which, like the god Molech, demands the daily sacrifice of many victims in its name.”<sup>17</sup>

Do we hear Romero’s caution echo across a quarter of a century as we grapple with Guantanamo Bay and Jose Padilla’s imprisonment without due process? Do we heed Romero’s wisdom, born of his own experiences of violence and injustice, as we argue the boundaries of torture and the protection of national borders?

Does Romero’s command to the Salvadoran armed forces to “stop the repression” resonate as we struggle to articulate the difference between supporting troops and defending the justness of a questionably grounded war? Would the abuses of Abu Graib exist if we took seriously Romero’s reminder to his own people in the Salvadoran armed forces – “No soldier is obliged to obey an order against the order of God. No one has to fulfill an immoral law”?<sup>18</sup>

*Adsum* (in Latin)! *I am ready and willing* (in English)! *¡Presente!* This very same acclamation appears in the Roman Catholic rites for the ordination of deacons, presbyters and bishops, where it is the candidate’s affirmative response to the church’s call to serve. Romero

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<sup>17</sup>Archbishop Oscar Romero, “The Church’s Mission amid the National Crisis: Fourth Pastoral Letter of Archbishop Romero, Feast of the Transfiguration, August 6, 1979,” in *Voice of the Voiceless*, 135.

<sup>18</sup>In Brockman, *Romero: A Life*, 214. From Romero’s last Sunday homily preached on March 23, 1980.

himself responded to this call as he was ordained, first as deacon, then as priest, and again in 1977 as archbishop, three short years before his murder. ¡Presente! In many ways it is the affirmation professed by all of us who minister, in all our communions and denominations.

When asked by my scholarly colleagues to identify my theological method I often reply, “pastoral hostility.” While this response draws a chuckle from the academic side of the house, the very same response resonates deeply among the pastoral agents with whom I have shared it. When I mentioned my unique methodological insight at a gathering of Latinos/as involved in professional ministries across the United States, curiously they did not laugh. Rather, they expressed gratitude because it seems this paradoxical expression had somehow managed to articulate what they, what we experience daily in their/our respective praxis. They asked for clarification and immediately appropriated the phrase into Spanish deciding that “*hostilidad pastoral*” was the oxymoron that best suited the reality of their/our prophetic ministry.<sup>19</sup>

In light of the “signs of our times” and faced with the struggles manifest in the lived experiences of the varied peoples we accompany, it should come as no surprise that our theological reflection on pastoral praxis may reveal a degree of frustration, loss, fear and even anger. We too may raise the very same questions raised by Monseñor Romero almost thirty years ago as he assumed the responsibilities of his new ministry, as he struggled to discern the meaning of his affirmation “¡Presente!” amidst the complexities of his Salvadoran church. How as pastoral and theological educators do we teach caring in contexts of unfathomable injustice? How as ministers can we be present especially when suffering seems senseless? How as pastors do we labor with inadequate resources and little institutional support? How do we accompany communities where cycles of violence appear impenetrable? How do we navigate the borders of faith and politics? How do we go on?

Like Romero, we are called to engage prophetically, in a manner that honestly acknowledges the anger that unsurprisingly does come. Yet in imitation of this reluctant prophet and passionate pastor, and

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<sup>19</sup>See Carmen M. Nanko-Fernández, “¡Cuidado! The Church Who Cares and Pastoral Hostility,” *New Theology Review* 19:1 (February 2006): 24-33.

here I borrow the words of the poet Martín Espada, this anger “has to be controlled, directed, creatively channeled, articulated but not all-consuming, neither destructive nor self-destructive.”<sup>20</sup> How do we go on – like Romero, without losing ourselves, without forgetting the hope that animates our passion! By remembering, in Romero’s words, that “we are prophets of a future not our own.”

Unfortunately, we have a tendency to sanitize our saints and when we do, we lose our prophetic edge. We forget about that unnerving, yet righteous rage, fueled by a hope that what is, must no longer be and will not be in God’s own time. If we only know a Romero set in stone, then we will miss the begging, demanding and cajoling of a prophet firmly grounded in his community, baptized by his own people. If we edit out Romero’s reluctance to embrace his prophetic role and ignore his own fears of death then we lose the possibility that we too are called to be prophets in our ordinary, daily ministry.

In his last Sunday homily, the day before his assassination, Monseñor Romero prepared his people for Holy Week, giving instructions for the celebration of Palm Sunday services on what would have been the following Sunday. This week in Christian churches and communities across the globe we too prepare for Holy Week. This Sunday many of us will recall Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem, welcomed in Matthew’s gospel with the cheers “Hosanna to the Son of David; blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord; hosanna in the highest.” In some ways, the *Sanctus* is our most bittersweet prayer. With its liturgical and biblical connection to Palm Sunday, it can leave us with a degree of ambivalence because we know that the triumphant entry is prelude to a cruel crucifixion. Yet in its praises of the action of God, this prayer affirms the Easter promise, and fills us with hope. Before his death, Romero commissioned a mass. I leave you today with words from *La Misa Popular Salvadoreña* by Guillermo Cuellar.<sup>21</sup> Another *Sanctus*, bittersweet, because we know

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<sup>20</sup>Martín Espada, “The Puerto Rican Dummy and the Merciful Son,” *Zapata’s Disciples: Essays* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1998), 41.

<sup>21</sup>Guillermo Cuellar, “Santo, Santo, Santo,” from *La Misa Popular Salvadoreña*. Performed by Donna Peña, *El Salvador con la Misa Popular Salvadoreña*, GIA Publications Inc., 1995. English translation, Carmen M. Nanko-Fernández with Jean-Pierre Ruíz.

Romero never lived to hear the misa he commissioned, because we know that the people in whom he is risen are still crucified. Yet in its praises of the action of God, “who accompanies our people, who lives our struggles,” this santo too affirms the Easter promise, and fills us with hope in the “good and great news of liberation.”

Like the city that encounters Matthew’s Jesus, will our encounters with Oscar Romero leave us “shaken?” Will we be asking, “who is this,” much like the crowds of ancient Jerusalem in the gospel and the people of El Salvador over a quarter of a century ago? In Matthew, the crowds replied, “This is Jesus the prophet, from Nazareth in Galilee.”

Each year in March, for the past quarter century, Christian communities great and small gather and ask the very same question: “Who is this?” This is Oscar Arnulfo Romero y Galdámez, the prophet from El Salvador. *¡Presente!*