

## Anticipation high ahead of Romero anniversary

Pat Marrin | Mar. 4, 2010



A woman carries an image of the late Salvadoran Archbishop Oscar Romero during a march in San Salvador Oct. 29. (CNS/Reuters/Luis Galdamez)

Published statements from both the church and the government in El Salvador are raising hopes that the 30th anniversary of the death of Archbishop Oscar Romero may occasion an official announcement of his beatification.

San Salvador Archbishop José Luis Escobar Alas told a press conference Feb. 7 that the bishops of El Salvador had written to Rome to ask that Romero be canonized "as soon as possible." Escobar cautioned that he had received no official word from the Vatican, but said the bishops would like to be able to give everyone the good news that Romero was declared "Blessed" on the anniversary day. Romero was assassinated while saying Mass on March 24, 1980.

Salvadoran President Mauricio Funes, who represents the political wing of the leftist rebels in El Salvador's 1980-92 civil war, said when he was elected in March 2009 that he sought the "kind of government envisioned by Monseñor Romero," including a commitment to the "option for the poor," a phrase found in church documents and in liberation theology, which holds that the Gospel rejects the historic disequilibrium between privilege and wealth of the few and the vast poverty of the majority in many Latin American countries.

In a Jan. 17, 2010, statement, Funes formally apologized for the government's role in human rights abuses during the civil war. Last November, he acknowledged official complicity in the 1989 murders of six priests, their housekeeper and her daughter on the campus of the Jesuits' Central American University in San Salvador. Funes is widely expected to mark the Romero anniversary with a similar admission of government involvement in Romero's death, clearing away any concerns that canonization might create a breach between the Vatican and the Salvadoran state.

Romero's canonization could strengthen both Funes' political and economic reforms and the church's call for a process of truth and reconciliation, stalled by a general amnesty for war crimes that was built into the 1993 peace accords. Romero's canonization would also help the church counter the wave of conversions of Latin America's historically Catholic population to Pentecostal movements.

The cause for sainthood seemed on track in 2005 with formal verification from the Vatican that Romero's writings contained no doctrinal errors and with strong support from Pope John Paul II, who had personally added Romero's name to a list of slain church workers during a ceremony in Rome in May 2000 for contemporary martyrs.

But John Paul's death in 2005 and the election of Pope Benedict XVI seemed to slow the process over charges by some in the hierarchy that Romero is too closely tied to liberation theology's emphasis on social transformation and church involvement in politics. While Benedict praised Romero in 2007 as a "great witness for the faith and a man of great Christian virtue who worked for peace," he also permitted an aggressive probe of the writings of Jesuit Fr. Jon Sobrino, El Salvador's most prominent liberation theologian and a key advisor to Romero in the final years of his life. Sobrino, a tireless promoter of Romero as an embodiment of the "church of the poor," said in August 2009 that he feared Romero's canonization would be delayed for political reasons and that his legacy would be watered down over time.

What happens -- or does not happen -- during the upcoming ceremonies in San Salvador will be closely watched for signs that the road to sainthood is either open or being extended. Romero, controversial in death as in life and already revered throughout the world, is likely to continue to influence the direction of both church and state in the Americas.

[Patrick Marrin, editor of *Celebration*, NCR's sister publication, will be in El Salvador to cover the Romero anniversary.]

**Support independent reporting on important issues.**



---

**Source URL (retrieved on 07/26/2017 - 01:33):** <https://www.ncronline.org/news/global/anticipation-high-ahead-romero-anniversary>

**Links:**

[1] <https://www.ncronline.org/donate?clickSource=article-end>