

ÓSCAR ROMERO, CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING, AND LAND REFORM

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In my presentation, I focus on Romero's involvement in the reform of Salvadoran agriculture and the conflicts related to the concentration of landholding. While there were colonial precedents for large landholdings (such as the *hacienda*), in El Salvador, like in much of Latin America, the concentration of agricultural was a much later development, an unexpected consequence of nineteenth-century liberal enclosure movements. The dispossession of the peasantry that accompanied the concentration of land caused social unrest in El Salvador throughout the twentieth century, particularly in the late 1970s while Romero was archbishop. Central to this unrest was the clamor for reforms designed to facilitate the peasantry's access to land and to dignified working conditions, and the increasingly brutal resistance to these efforts.

Against this backdrop, I examine Romero's rationale for supporting land reform, beginning with his work as bishop of Santiago de María, a poor, rural region targeted by President Colonel Arturo Armando Molina's 1974 *Proyecto de Transformación Agraria*. I trace that support until Romero's death in the midst of the *segunda Junta Revolucionaria de Gobierno's* implementation of a land reform in March 1980. I argue that Romero's advocacy for justice in the distribution of agricultural land takes its principal bearings from Catholic Social Teaching and its account of property and possession, an account shaped by the belief that creation is a common gift. Additionally, Romero's reliance on social teaching helps us to see how that advocacy not only concerns access to land but is part of a more comprehensive politics, which I call a politics of common use. Finally, I look at why the practice of this politics led to suffering and death for Romero and for many others in El Salvador and beyond.