

World & Nation

Salvadorans commemorate archbishop

EDITOR'S NOTE: Dan Medinger, editor of *The Catholic Review*, newspaper of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, recently visited El Salvador with a delegation from Maryland.

By Dan Medinger

San Salvador, El Salvador (NC) — With Salvadoran military helicopters buzzing overhead, a crowd estimated at more than 40,000 jammed downtown San Salvador on March 24 to commemorate slain Archbishop Oscar Romero.

Organized by Salvadoran trade unions, students, base Christian communities and mothers of "disappeared" people, the parade poured into the central city square for a noon Mass concelebrated by Archbishop Arturo Rivera Damas, papal nuncio Archbishop Francesco De Nittis, and the priests of the San Salvador archdiocese.

Archbishop Romero was assassinated in 1980 while celebrating Mass in a nearby hospital chapel. His murder remains unsolved.

Participants in the Mass said they noted two differences in what has become an annual public demonstration in this country torn by civil war: the crowd was larger and more vocal than in previous years, and many paraders, masked to avoid identification, marked a new wave of political repression.

Underscoring the second point, Pedro Ortiz, a catechist and pastoral assistant at a San Salvador parish, was detained by authorities March 23. Ortiz had served as a driver and guide for the Archdiocese of Baltimore's delegation to the commemorative event.

Salvadoran authorities admitted to holding Ortiz under a 72-hour detention-without-charge regulation. No one was allowed to see him during the early hours of his detention.

Father Daniel Sanchez, pastor of Mary, Mother of the Poor Church where Ortiz served, feared the catechist faced torture and possible "disappearance." He called for international pressure to free Ortiz.

But participants in the commemoration showed no fear of intimidation during a three-hour unauthorized march through the city, which took place in the heat of the midday sun.

To begin the parade, a group of about 500 representatives of El Salvador's base Christian communities set out from the Basilica of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in downtown San Salvador carrying banners, flags and flowers.

As the group slowly trekked through the streets, a spontaneous litany of quotes from Archbishop Romero and populist movement



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TEARFUL GREETING — A former contra rebel is greeted by family members upon his release from prison. He was one of 100 prisoners released by the Sandinista government in accordance with a preliminary peace agreement.

slogans elicited a chant of "Long live Romero" throughout the parade.

People running along the sidewalk hung Romero signs supporting the populist movement here, while others spray-painted along buildings such messages as "Eight years after his martyrdom Romero lives in the struggle of the people."

Police and military, said to usually be omnipresent, were nowhere to be seen early in the parade. The march grew steadily, merging with other demonstrators representing the unions, student groups and the mothers of people who have disappeared in the political violence.

When the crowd reached its estimated 40,000 size, Salvadoran military helicopters buzzed low along the parade route several times.

Only electric power lines kept the helicopters, armed with machine guns mounted in turrets, from coming closer to the demonstrators. The gun turrets were seen to

swing, aiming at the crowd.

The crowd responded by waving and taunting the gunships.

According to Jean Stokan, a veteran of previous Archbishop Romero commemorations, the annual event had never before been buzzed by helicopters. "That was a definite threat," said Stokan, who was leading the Baltimore delegation.

When marchers reached the city's central square, the San Salvador cathedral was filled to overflowing. Archbishop Rivera Damas, who was absent from last year's commemoration, gave a strong eulogy to his slain predecessor, but was careful not to link himself to the political rally going on outside.

"The life of Oscar Romero was like a banner for us. It was like a seed that was planted," the archbishop said. "Our eyes are very clear that Archbishop Romero was killed by a criminal act, but the life of Romero still lives in the people. He was a voice for people who had no voice."

Archbishop Rivera Damas said Archbishop Romero's worst fears of social injustice and human indignity had come true. But he cautioned the congregation that in the face of the blood spilled in the streets and in the Salvadoran civil war, they should be faithful to God and pursue peace as Archbishop Romero had done.

At the end of the service, the crowd remained for a political rally.

That evening, a U.S. Embassy spokesman downplayed the size of the demonstration.

"It's just the usual suspects," he said.

"The same gaggle of 500 or 600 protesters we see here every day."

Stokan, who works in peace and justice campaigns, called the commemoration a "living resurrection."

"Romero rose again in the spirit of the people," she said. Compared to previous parades, "the tension was so thick in the air, you could just feel it," she observed.

Moderate Catholic leading peace efforts in N. Ireland

London (NC) — Moderate Catholic political leader John Hume, emerging as a peacemaker in troubled Northern Ireland, said prospects are brightening for peaceful discussions between Protestants and Catholics on the future of the British province.

Hume, leader of the province's Social Democratic and Labor Party, said March 29 that he is hopeful for progress despite a recent rise in violence that has left 10 dead in the past month.

He was to meet that day with Tom King, British Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, to discuss the possibility of shared power between the province's Protestant majority and the Catholic minority.

"Mr. King has invited us ... in the context of his talks with the unionists," Hume said in an interview with the British Broadcasting Corp. "I think that an atmosphere for dialogue is developing very well here at the present."

"Unionists" are those Northern Ireland residents who want the province to remain British.

Hume said he was encouraged by Protestant leaders who have said recently they want to help Britain and the Irish republic achieve peace in the province.

The Catholic leader's talks with King followed discussions with Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams, aimed at convincing the Irish Republican Army to declare a cease fire.

Sinn Fein is the legal political wing of the IRA.

Sources in Hume's party said there was little immediate prospect that the IRA would agree to stop the shooting. No details of the session were released, but Adams said the only way that Northern Ireland can move toward peace and justice is for Britain to leave.

A year ago, the Protestant paramilitary group, the Ulster Defense Association, had invited Catholics to discuss power-sharing on the basis of recognizing that the Protestant majority wants the province to remain in the United Kingdom and that the Anglo-Irish Agreement, a political-consultative pact between the Irish republic and Britain, must be scrapped.

The Protestant group also noted that "there is a large ... separatist minority that must be addressed." Separatist refers to Catholics who want Northern Ireland's six counties to be reunited with the republic.

Hume said at the time that the Protestant proposals were "very interesting, particularly given the source they were coming from."

"It's the first time" Protestant leaders admitted "that we have a divided society," he said.

Hume, however, rejected scrapping the Anglo-Irish Agreement. "Suspending it would be a victory for violence and threats of violence," he said.



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A funeral cortege last April for Constable Robert McLean made its way to a cemetery outside of Portrush, Northern Ireland. McLean and a fellow Royal Ulster constable were shot in the back of their heads while on patrol. Political violence in Northern Ireland set a five-year high in 1987, claiming 93 lives.