

**Kevin CLARKE. Oscar Romero: Love Must Win Out. Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2014. Pp. 153. \$12.95 paperback. ISBN 978-0-8146-3757-9. Reviewed by [Anthony MARANISE](#), Christian Brothers University, Memphis, TN. 38104**

Clarke's biography of the martyred Salvadoran archbishop, Oscar Romero, provides a firm foundation upon which readers can build their appreciation for his mission, ministry, and sacrifice which will undoubtedly lead to his canonization. Though concise, this work omits no details instrumental in understanding the hostile political climate of El Salvador in the late 1970s as well as the adversities encountered by Romero, his priests, and the faithful. Previous biographies (as well as the feature film about his life released in 1989) have portrayed Romero as one who was initially rather disconnected from the Salvadoran poor until, after having been named archbishop of San Salvador, he began to witness their repression and the numerous atrocities perpetrated against them by the government and wealthier citizens. Unlike these other biographies, Clarke does well to emphasize the archbishop's spiritual solidarity with the Salvadoran poor as a facet already ingrained within his personality and individual spiritual formation from his youth. Further, he sheds new light based in research and journalistic detail, on what he refers to as the archbishop's "political reorientation," saying, "Romero had always been spiritually committed to the poor. He was not simply serving the poor, he was, in fact, learning from them."

Divided into eight chapters with an introduction and conclusion as literal "bookends," Clarke's biography examines critical aspects of Romero's life from his boyhood to his assassination, making sure to include details of the larger socio-political goings-on at each stage, including the impact his death had and continues to have on the Salvadoran people and Church. The book "begins at the end" of Romero's life in the heart-wrenching chapter one chronicling the final hours of the archbishop and emphasizing the faithful courage with which he publically spoke the words that would ultimately lead to his murder as he was saying Mass. Chapter two offers readers an interior view not only into the upbringing of Oscar Romero, but also into the pivotal decisions and reactions which would prepare him for God's service later in life. It is primarily in this chapter wherein readers learn of his early interactions with his country's poor as well as of the violent, bloody Salvadoran *matanza* of 1932 which would have been the archbishop's first experience with such brutality, however removed from it he was, at that time having been a seminarian. Charting Romero's intellectual, political, and spiritual development in chapters three through five from his days as a young priest to his time as an auxiliary bishop to his ultimate appointment as archbishop, Clarke reveals how Romero gradually, but certainly begins to shift from an almost romantic, idealized view of his vocation as a conservative-academic to a more realistic one wherein he not only confronts social injustice, but truly begins to "feel

with the Church.” Chapter six continues to provide socio-political insight into the troubles of Salvadorans during Romero’s episcopacy, but speaks even more to the turmoil he had to face within his own local Church and within the Church hierarchy. As Romero embraced his seemingly newfound courage to advocate for social justice, he also drew a larger following thus making himself and nearly anyone affiliated with the Church, targets. Though not exclusively, chapters seven and eight detail the more violent encounters faced by both the archbishop and his flock during the times of major political repression. However practical – and grisly, at times – the details of these two chapters may be, their contents (including many quotes from the archbishop’s own writings and homilies as well as reflections from those who knew him) illustrate the instances of humility, courage, and resolve which have already earned Romero a sort of “canonization by popular opinion” among a majority of Central and South American persons.

Clarke’s conclusion provides an account of continual violence in El Salvador (maybe even the worst of it) after the archbishop’s murder, including that which occurred at his own funeral, but also tells of an El Salvador that still to this day “keeps Romero alive” as it strives to better attain the peace and justice he advocated. More than a biographical account, this book, interwoven with the ever-hopeful Christ-centered spirituality of Romero’s own words, serves as evidence of an individual long-deserving of formal sainthood. Though a brief, yet informative read, this is an excellent resource for scholars, religious, and lay persons alike; moreover, it is a tribute not only to Romero, but to all who have died innocently in search of justice.