

Maura Clarke and companions

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Maura was bleeding profusely and knew that death was likely waiting for her after every short and gasping breath. Yet, she noticed that the men had already sprinted back to their van. Their guns were still warm from the bullet they had discharged and the death they had wrought in Maura and her sisters: Ita Ford, Jean Donovan, and Dorothy Kazel. It was odd to see five grown men sprinting from the defenseless, dying (or perhaps dead) nuns back to the safety of the van. They ran as if they expected some retribution to spring forth from the bloody wounds in the chests and heads of the women who had not even resisted. They turned up the radio as loud as it could go and peeled out--spraying gravel--as they fled the scene. Maura wondered if the radio was meant to silence the memory of atrocity and murder in their minds and wondered if they even knew what song was playing.

Maura had come to El Salvador because of Oscar Romero's plea for ministers of the Gospel to come and spread the Faith to people suffering injustice and oppression. Before coming to El Salvador, she had worked in the United States of America and Nicaragua providing assistance and pastoral care to the poor and needy. When Oscar had made his plea, Maura had been quick to respond and soon found herself serving her suffering Lord in the city of Chalatanengo. She had served alongside Ita Ford in a local parish. Upon returning from a conference in Nicaragua where she had reaffirmed her commitment to stay in El Salvador, she and Ita were picked up at the airport by Donovan and Kazel. They were tailed from the airport by a group of Salvadorian soldiers in civilian clothing. These men were soldiers trained to serve the interests of the State before even their own calling. To call them a "death squad" would be appropriate according to history but it would also grant them the privilege of rationalizing their atrocity--so, it is best to call them murderers. They followed the women to an isolated spot, stopped their vehicle, drug them from the van and began to beat them savagely. The women offered no defense and instead offered prayers and tears.

It was clear that the goal was to eliminate these "undesirables" in such a way as to make it look plausibly deniable. There would be no doubt that these women--who had helped take care of the enemies of the State in the Salvadorian Civil War--had been murdered but it would be plausibly deniable if they made it look like an act of chance not sponsored by the State. So, to make it look more barbaric--and truly to make it more so--the soldiers raped the nuns before shooting them and leaving them to die. In the logic of State sponsored death, one atrocity covers over another and allows the State to execute great evil under the cloak of denial and confusion.

When asked if she would leave the evils in El Salvador Maura had said that she would remain "to search out the missing, pray with the families of prisoners, bury the dead, and work with the people in their struggle to break out of the bonds of oppression, poverty, and violence." She had stayed and she had suffered for her commitment to Christ's calling and mission in the world. Finally, she died and was buried in Chalatanengo as she had desired. She would not forget the people of El Salvador and they would not forget her.

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