

Romero ★★★½

Year of Release: 1989

Review by Randy Parker

Country: USA

Verdict: See It

Romero is just the sort of movie that should be seen by all Americans but which probably will be seen only by those brave souls who have the courage to make the trip across town to the local art-house. In telling the story of slain Archbishop Oscar Romero, the movie brings to light the atrocities occurring in El Salvador—the squalid living conditions, the suffering peasants, the corrupt and oppressive government—all without the slightest hint of sensationalism. It provides an intimate look at the way the U.S. is spending our tax dollars in Central America. And let me tell you, the movie makes you ashamed to be an American.

Raul Julia portrays Oscar Romero, the mild-mannered El Salvadoran priest whom the Vatican appointed as Archbishop in 1977; the church saw him as someone who wouldn't rock the boat as a new President assumed power in El Salvador. And indeed, Romero brought to his post a conservative way of thinking, seeing the church as a nonpolitical, stabilizing force. But he reconsidered his position after witnessing the government's mistreatment of the people. He became progressive, demanding that the church take a political stance against the government's wrong-doings. The government came to see Romero as a danger-

ous radical, and in 1979 he was assassinated.

Romero doesn't hit you over the head to make its point. Director John Duigan and screenwriter John Sacret Young keep the tone quiet, the pace deliberate. They let the pain and horror of the abductions and mass slaughters speak for themselves. The most frightening moment occurs when Romero leads a crowd of followers into a church occupied by the military; you hope desperately that the trigger-happy soldiers will keep their cool.

Julia's performance as the conflicted Archbishop is subtle yet powerful. He fully conveys Romero's deep faith, his commitment to the people, his willingness to put his life on the line for the sake of justice, and his frustration at being caught in the middle of a power struggle in the Roman Catholic Church.

Romero is a compelling biography, a stirring drama, and, most importantly, an educational experience. It may infuriate you, it may even bore some of you, but undoubtedly it will raise your consciousness. If every American were to see *Romero*, you can bet that we would see some changes in U.S. foreign policy in Latin America. But unfortunately, not every American will see *Romero*, just you brave souls who seek out the film.