

Topics

Murder in El Salvador

Impoverished El Salvador is poorer still after the assassination of Oscar Arnulfo Romero, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of San Salvador. The Archbishop, gunned down as he celebrated mass Monday night, was a champion of peace in a land consumed by violence. He understood the risks. Now violence has consumed him too.

El Salvador has been reaping the bitter harvest of decades of social injustice. With most centrists driven to the sidelines by electoral fraud and political intimidation, very little now stands in the way of a brutal clash between alienated peasants and a besieged oligarchy. Almost alone among moderates, Archbishop Romero retained the trust of the despairing poor. He preached against violence but did not equate that with submissiveness by the poor. He stood for an honest effort to build a more just society.

When a hard-line military regime was overthrown last fall by a junta that promised reform, the Archbishop was sympathetic but skeptical. Above all, he called on the Government to commit itself to national reconciliation. Even the bold new redistribution of land, he warned, would end in disaster if it was coupled with repression.

Senseless Cuts

The Archbishop's murder invites the same disaster unless those who would honor his memory are prepared to heed his message.

—

A Poor Way to Slice Food

As a letter today from the Secretary of Agriculture rightly points out, the \$1-billion cut in food stamps that we recently proposed among many possible budget savings is less attractive than it first appeared. Although food stamp benefits do overlap with school lunch subsidies for millions of poor children, the programs together seem to fill critical nutritional needs of the young. Ending the duplication in one swoop would be an unfortunate way to balance the Federal budget; it could jeopardize the health of those who rely most on food stamps.

Still, as we observed, if the Federal budget is to be cut fairly and expeditiously, even the poor cannot remain immune. Last week, the House Budget Committee dealt neatly with the problem. It decided to continue the double subsidy, but it proposed saving about \$450 million on food stamps by tightening eligibility standards and adjusting benefit levels for inflation once, rather than twice, each year. The committee

was wise to use a knife instead of a cleaver. The Senate should take note.

■

Shards of Spring

One nasty sign of spring in New York seems to be sculpture-bashing. For the second year in a row, a carved granite work that a Madison Avenue gallery had placed on the sidewalk was demolished. The vandalism could not have been done on a whim; it required rope and a truck, each time.

The sculpture's neighbors had invested a great deal in it. The first repairs took two months and cost \$4,000, and the identification with its fate has been remarkable. It became more than a work of art; it was a symbol of good over evil. That may have been naïve, but the neighborhood's sense of betrayal, now that the sculpture has been smashed again, is very real.

Too real, perhaps. The sad truth may be that the sculpture belongs inside. Why another invitation to vandals, another repair? Perhaps an open house for all the galleries along Madison Avenue — on a springtime weekend and with the art safely indoors — would be a better ritual. It would give pleasure without challenging those whose esthetic is destruction.