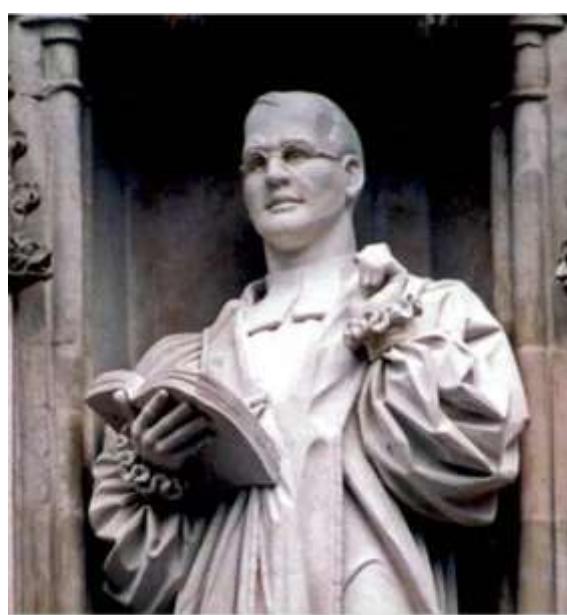


Martyrs of the 20th Century 14th August – prepared by Dr Sophia Errey

Above the West (entry) door of Westminster Abbey in London are ten sculptures honouring martyrs of the twentieth century. The niches had been empty since the 15th c. Several sculptors were commissioned to carry out the figures in French limestone. They were unveiled in 1998.



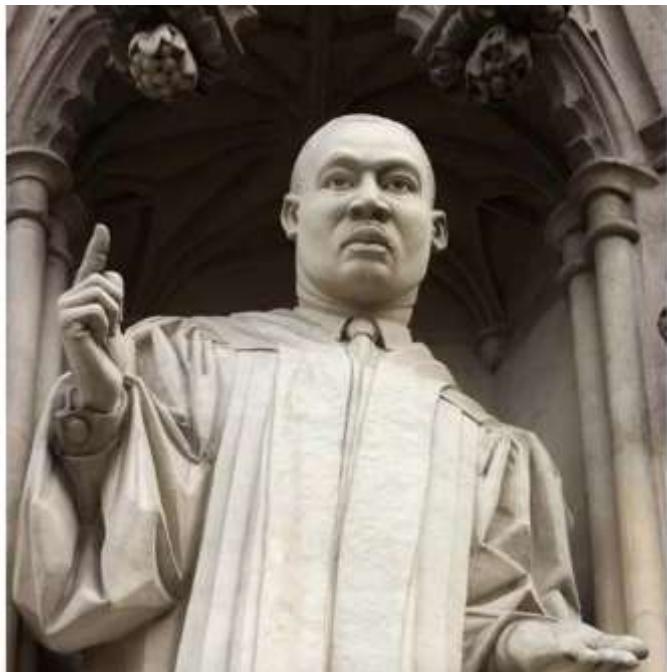
The first figure on the left is **St Maximilien Kolbe** (1894-1941). The sculpture is by Andrew Tanser. Kolbe was a Polish priest who formed a community dedicated to evangelism and works of mercy which developed an important publishing arm. From 1930 to 1936 Fr Kolbe and four brothers worked in Nagasaki. Imprisoned at Auschwitz, he offered himself in exchange for another prisoner condemned to death, knowing the man had a family.



The Lutheran pastor and theologian **Dietrich Bonhoeffer** (1906 – 1945) was represented by Tim Crawley. His writings, including *The Cost of Discipleship* continue to have a powerful influence today. He was among those who opposed the Nazi regime, and church figures who supported it. In 1943 he was arrested for being part of a movement against the government, and was executed a few days before the end of the war.

Tim Crawley also carved the statue of **Martin Luther King** (1929-1968). The Abbey website notes of King's work with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Civil Rights Movement

"King's prophetic vision combined an explicitly Christian language of freedom and justice with an appeal to American democracy. Peaceful protests would affirm the dignity of African-Americans and embarrass their oppressors before the eyes of the world. His approach was essentially Gandhian. Violence bred violence only. Love must reply to hate." His "I have a dream" speech in front of the Lincoln Memorial in 1963 is widely known and admired. On April 4 1968 King was assassinated on the balcony of his hotel in Memphis.



The sculpture of **St Oscar Romero** (1917-1980) is by John Roberts. Romero is a striking example of a Christian whose faith grew and deepened over the course of his life. He was born in San Salvador, decided at 13 to become a priest, and was ordained in 1942. A good speaker, he rose through the church hierarchy, becoming Archbishop of San Salvador in 1977. He was regarded as a safe conservative, but came to realize the oppressive and illegitimate power of the military, and the resulting misery of the people. He increasingly attracted condemnation from the regime, which was responsible for the murder of a succession of priests. In 1979 Romero presented the Pope with a dossier documenting the injustices of El Salvador. On 24th March 1980 he was shot dead at the altar where he was celebrating Mass in the hospital where he lived.

While several women are represented in the Westminster Abbey group **St Maria Skobtsova** (1891 – 1945) who is also commemorated today is not among them. She was born in Riga, Latvia to devout Orthodox parents, and wanted to become a nun, but lost her faith on the death of her father when she was 14. While she was attracted to radical politics she also studied theology, married, and had a child. However, she was appalled by the actuality of the 1917 Revolution. Imprisoned by the new government, she was released by the judge, whom she later married.

In 1923 the pair fled to Paris, where she became increasingly involved in helping refugees and the destitute. When her marriage broke up she was professed as a nun, and set up a "house of hospitality for those in need.

"Her credo was ' Each person is the very icon of God incarnate in the world.'" By 1937 she was feeding 120 persons each day, begging when supplies were insufficient. With the outbreak of war she and her chief helper, Fr Dimitri, were deeply involved in offering all possible help to Jews. They were seized by the Gestapo along with her son, in 1943. While the two men died shortly thereafter Mother Maria survived two years at Ravensbrück before being executed in the gas chamber on Good Friday 1943. The three were recognized as saints by the Patriarchate of Constantinople in 2004.

