

CHRISTOLOGY

Topic: Resurrection in El Salvador Twenty-Five Years After Romero
Convener: Tatha Wiley, United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities
Presenters: Kevin F. Burke, Weston Jesuit School of Theology
J. Matthew Ashley, University of Notre Dame

Kevin Burke began his paper, “The Conversion and Resurrection of Archbishop Romero: Theological Sources for Fundamental Christology,” by recalling that three weeks after Oscar Romero was installed as archbishop of San Salvador in 1977, members of a death squad attacked and assassinated Rutilio Grande—a Jesuit priest, pastor, and personal friend of Romero—along with an old man and an altar boy. The three bodies were taken to the church in El Paisnal, where Rutilio was on his way to celebrate mass. When the archbishop arrived, they celebrated mass in the presence of the three victims. After mass Romero asked those present to help him think about how the archdiocese should respond to this crime. From that discussion emerged the dramatic decision to hold only one mass in the archdiocese the following week. A tumultuous and dramatic three-year ministry ensued. In his reflections on Archbishop Romero, Burke noted that Rutilio’s martyrdom is viewed as the key to what many have called “Romero’s conversion.”

Moving away from the language of “conversion,” Burke interpreted the events in El Paisnal and the subsequent changes in Romero’s ministry through the Pauline category of “an encounter with the Risen Lord.” In so doing, he highlighted four crucial elements associated with such encounters in the New Testament. (1) The one who is risen is the crucified one. This implies that the medium of resurrection faith is not death viewed “generically” but the death of the victim, a theme that correlates with the image of Romero and the community of El Paisnal encountering the three victims. (2) The resurrection narratives in the New Testament belong to a genre concerned with being called and sent, something that appeared clearly in the subsequent pattern of Romero’s ministry as archbishop. (3) Resurrection appears as forgiveness, reconciliation, and the overcoming of divisions. It does not simply involve “switching sides,” but represents rather the overcoming of all sides. So, too, Romero’s ministry as Archbishop of San Salvador was characterized by his unrelenting labor on behalf of reconciliation. Shortly before he was killed, he said, “As a shepherd, I am obliged by divine mandate to give my life for those I love, for all Salvadorans, even for those who may be going to kill me.” He then added, “You may say, if they succeed in killing me, that I pardon and bless those who do it.” (4) The experience of the risen Jesus is recalled liturgically at Eucharist and Eucharist itself involves “an encounter with the Risen Lord.” Most of the resurrection encounters depicted in the New Testament involve Eucharistic elements if not an explicit Eucharistic setting (cf. Luke 24:13-35; John 21.) Likewise, the community of El Paisnal gathered in the presence of three martyrs and celebrated Eucharist, leading Romero to later proclaim, “The death of a martyr is a resurrection” and “if they kill me I will arise in the Salvadoran people.”

Matt Ashley titled his paper “The Resurrection of Jesus and Resurrection Discipleship in the Systematic Theology of Jon Sobrino.” He argued that Sobrino’s theology of the resurrection aims first to show the significance of the resurrection for Christian life now, and second to work that significance out from the hermeneutical vantage point of the option for the poor. The risen Christ becomes available through resurrection appearances, which require a certain hermeneutical vantage point: a hope that hopes first (although not exclusively) for the raising to full life of the poor; a praxis devoted to raising them up now by striving for justice for the poor and by giving hope to the hopeless; a knowing that is open to the surprise of finding God revealed in the poor. These are, in fact, the dispositions of one who follows the Jesus of the Gospels. The risen Christ will become present to persons who do this, and they will thereby become able to live in certain limited but crucial ways as persons already resurrected. They will be historical signs of the eschatological triumph of God’s reign. Such persons will be enabled to celebrate God’s presence, even in a history full of sin, and they will be sources of hope and celebration for others. For Sobrino, Oscar Romero and Ignacio Ellacuria provide instances of such a life. Further light can be shed on Sobrino’s (a Jesuit) claims by considering how Ignatius Loyola approaches the resurrection, and life lived in the power of the resurrection, in his *Spiritual Exercises*.

Brief but lively discussions followed each paper. The last segment of the session was reserved for brief descriptions of works-in-progress and recently-published books from those attending the session. This tradition of opening the session to the work of participants generates interest in one another’s work. With about fifty participants, the session was well attended. The presenter for the 2006 meeting will be Tobie Tondi, Rosemont College.

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