

THE *SENSUS FIDELIUM* AND THE CRUCIFIED  
PEOPLES —SELECTED SESSION

Topic:	<i>Sensus Fidelium</i> and the Crucified Peoples
Conveners:	Kevin F. Burke, S.J., Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University John Thiede, S.J., Marquette University
Moderator:	Michael Lee, Fordham University
Presenters:	John Thiede, S.J., Marquette University Elizabeth O'Donnell Gandolfo, Furman University

John Thiede's paper explores the *sensus fidelium* as it relates to the place of the crucified people in the liberation Christology of Jon Sobrino, beginning with the way that Sobrino expands the common understanding of the *sensus fidelium* in his approach to Christology, especially in his reflections on the crucified people in *Jesus the Liberator* and *No Salvation Outside the Poor*. This emphasis shifts the *sensus fidelium* from being centered on the hierarchy to being centered on, and faithful to, the poor and the marginalized. The move utilizing Sobrino's Christology may not seem at first to be a logical one. In the end, however, the focus on the crucified people helps us to move our sense of fidelity beyond the Pope and the bishops, to a fidelity to all baptized Christians. When we focus on those truly on the margins, the crucified people, we can be more faithful to all those baptized in the church of Jesus Christ. In the same vein, Sobrino coins the term "the martyred people" as he reflects on the deaths of exemplary martyrs such as Rutilio Grande, Oscar Romero, the U.S. missionary women, and the martyrs of the UCA to focus attention on our own fidelity as theologians and pastoral agents. We honor and remember these martyrs by name, but they also remind us of the many who died more anonymous deaths for their faith in Jesus Christ. The martyred peoples also remind us to remember the nameless, those who die for their faith and give their lives in the extreme, and show us how to be faithful to Christ Jesus to the ultimate end.

In her paper, "To Feel With the Suffering Christ: San Romero and the *Sensus Fidelium*," Elizabeth O'Donnell Gandolfo explores the conference theme in relation to the faithful witness of Archbishop Oscar Romero and his pastoral motto, *sentir con la iglesia* (to think and feel with the church). Gandolfo argues that Romero embodied this motto in a radically christological way: the phrase *sentir con la iglesia* summoned his fidelity not only to the institutional church but to Christ, whom he came to encounter most vividly in the "crucified" poor of El Salvador. For Romero, to think and feel with the church meant knowing the historical reality of his people and being moved, deep in the heart of his being, with love and compassion for their suffering. It also meant entering into risky relationships of solidarity with those who suffer, and standing as one with them in their communal struggles for justice and liberation. Romero's *sentir con la iglesia* thus required intimate contact with, knowledge of, and appreciation for the Salvadoran *sensus fidelium*. Gandolfo therefore suggests a correspondingly christological interpretation of the conference theme, in which our search for the *sensus fidelium* requires a humble encounter of dialogue, compassion, and solidarity with the suffering Body of Christ in the world. A reimagining of the *sensus fidelium* in this direction reframes debates surrounding

many contentious topics in contemporary Catholicism, such as gay marriage, women priests, artificial contraception, abortion, and divorce and remarriage. Gandolfo asks how our engagement with these issues might change if we were to view the *sensus fidelium* neither as an occasion for an opinion poll nor as a call to universal agreement with the magisterium, but rather as a shared “feeling” and practice of humble and compassionate solidarity with those who suffer due to official church teachings on these matters.

There were 28 people in attendance, including 24 participants of whom 13 asked questions or made a comment. In the lively conversation that ensued, several key themes emerged. The first raised the question of a contrast between *sensus fidelium* and *consensus fidelium*, which parallels a contrast between the desire for a noetic content and a corresponding criteria for judgment, on one hand, and a call and a praxis that demand discernment, on the other. A second theme emerged around the notion of the university as a place of *proyección social*, especially with regards to the Jesuit University of Central America (UCA) in San Salvador. Several participants in the discussion noted that thinking of the poor—that is, the university making an option for the poor as a university—not only changes students but also changes the university in its structures and priorities. A third line of conversation applied that same line of thinking to the institutional church with particular attention to the witness of Archbishop Romero. Finally, a number of comments noted that the *sensus fidelium* centered on the poor opens up numerous resources for rethinking how the Church approaches other pressing moral issues that do not appear immediately connected to the preferential option for the poor.

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