

SPIRITUALITY

JESUS: THE CONCRETE FOUNDATION OF CHRISTIANITY: IMPLICATIONS FOR PRAYER, PRAXIS, AND THE STUDY OF SPIRITUALITY

Presenters: Justin J. Kelly, University of Detroit Mercy
Robert Lassalle-Klein, Graduate Theological Union
Janet K. Ruffing, Fordham University

With presentations and a good discussion, the Spirituality Group focused on Jesus as the concrete foundation of Christianity in terms of prayer, praxis, and the study of spirituality.

In terms of prayer, Justin Kelly asked: "What was the incarnation like for the man Jesus?" Jesus is "lovingly known by God, and knowing he is so known." This knowledge or prayer involves self-emptying, leading to the creation of a new identity—being creatively re-known by God. Kelly cited George Herbert's prayer as "something understood" and the experience of "uplift" of Sally, a Mississippi sharecropper's wife. Prayer points beyond the self, prompting transformation. For Jesus, participating in God is primordial cognition: Jesus *is* what the Father knows him as, his incarnate self-expression. The life and death of Jesus are the realization and working-out of this identity, a continual *kenosis* which makes God fully present to the world.

In terms of praxis, Robert Lassalle-Klein explored the trinitarian dimensions of the role of Jesus in the spirituality of the Jesuit martyrs of the University of Central America. What was the transformative character that the memory of Jesus of Nazareth assumed in their spirituality and how did his memory fan the flame of a life-giving love? What does it mean for us to be Jesus' disciples twenty centuries after his death? It is suggested that the UCA Jesuits recognized the risen Jesus, vibrant and alive in the crucified people of El Salvador. In responding to the agony of the people, the Jesuits were transformed into bearers of Jesus' Holy Spirit to both sides of the civil war, finally playing a critical role in promoting the fragile beginnings of a process of national reconciliation. In the process, having faced the terrible yet beneficent realities of a life for others, their innermost lives were caught up in a holy transformation, incarnated by (and inseparable from) their positive response to God's self-offer through the history of El Salvador.

In terms of the study of spirituality, Janet Ruffing reported on her qualitative research and argued that the kataphatic path of development can be lifelong and not merely a beginning to a final apophatic phase. In her words:

God can be sought and experienced contemplatively whether or not that experience is mediated by something other than consciousness itself. It is God who is disclosing God's self to the person. In neither case can the person control the experience.

Interviewees in Ruffing's research experienced three or more mediated modes of religious experience, often nature, music, and imagery; over time, many life-events became sacramental; relationships with others and the world were transformed, meeting criteria for maturity and authenticity—hence her title, "The World Transfigured."

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THEOLOGY AND THE NATURAL SCIENCES

THE ORIGIN OF LIFE IN THE UNIVERSE

Presenters: Cyril Ponnampereuma, Laboratory of Chemical Evolution,
University of Maryland
Stephen P. Happel, Catholic University of America

Ponnampereuma gave a detailed summary of what we know from the sciences about the chemical evolution leading up to the initiation of life on Earth. The formation of molecules of biological significance, such as the nucleic acids, which are the components of DNA and RNA, and the amino acids which are the building blocks for all the proteins, was a necessary preamble to the emergence of life. There is overwhelming evidence that this prebiotic step in chemical evolution has occurred in many other places in the universe. The analysis of carbonaceous chondrites has revealed the presence of such molecules, and radio astronomers have discovered a vast array of organic molecules in the interstellar medium. We are thus led to the possibility that life may be commonplace in the universe, even though we have not yet unravelled all the details of how the remarkable transition from nonliving to living matter actually took place. Labora-