

Regarding Cormie's presentation, Hathaway elaborated on the difficulties of reception with respect to his arguments. Learning theories point out that there are those matters learners want to know and those matters learners cannot risk knowing. Too many Christians do not want to risk or cannot risk learning from the experience and the cultural and economic analyses of alternative movements. This resistance to learning can impede discerning the presence of the Spirit in alternative voices.

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METHOD IN THEOLOGY

Topic: The Theological Method of Ignacio Ellacuría
 Conveners: Richard Liddy, Seton Hall University
 J. Michael Stebbins, Gonzaga University
 Presenter: Kevin Burke, Weston School of Theology

In his paper, "Toward a Theology of the Signs of the Times: The Achievement of Ignacio Ellacuría," Kevin Burke presented Ellacuría's theological method as a theology of the Reign of God that "generates concrete essays in historical soteriology that respond to the signs of the times." After providing some biographical information on Ellacuría, Burke stated that his presentation would consist of two parts: an exploration of how theological method arises from an encounter with historical reality, and an examination of how theology serves the Reign of God by reading the signs of the times.

Burke's point of departure was Ellacuría's theory of human knowing. For Ellacuría, knowing is an encounter with reality involving three interconnected dimensions: the noetic (realizing the weight of reality), the ethical (shouldering the weight of reality), and the praxical (taking charge of reality). The implication of this theory of knowledge is that "every act of theological reflection and production is simultaneously a noetic exercise, a deployment of one's fundamental ethical stance, and historically real praxis." Ellacuría draws attention to the social interests that lie behind theological production and emphasizes that theology serves an ecclesial institution, which is itself either an ally or adversary of the social forces at work. Burke stated that for Ellacuría "every theology is a political theology, whether it acknowledges this fact or not." This situation necessitates the historicization of nature and of concepts; the first is the process of historical reality realizing itself, the second is an investigation into how closely concepts correspond to historical reality.

In the second part of his presentation, Burke discussed four affirmations drawn from the work of Ellacuría. (1) Theology is an ecclesial discipline which serves the mission of the Church, a mission that is focused on the Reign of God,

rather than on the church as an end in itself. Finding resonances with the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, Burke suggested that Ellacuría understood theology as a form of discernment. In Ellacuría's view, "the task of theology is to articulate the connection between historical reality and the Reign of God from a concrete historical place and in service of a concrete ecclesial praxis."

(2) The object of theology is the realization of the Reign of God. Ellacuría identified liberation theology as a theology of the Reign of God and not merely a theology of the political. Theology not only reflects on the reign of God, it participates in the historical realization of that Reign. Because of the pervasiveness of sin, conflict appears as part of the verification that the ecclesial praxis guided by theology is authentically aligned with the Reign of God.

(3) Christian theology not only speaks about salvation, but is salvific. Theology is reflection on the God who saves in history and a response to God's self-communication. The elemental source of ultimate questions is the human desire for salvation, which for Ellacuría is a thirst for life. Theology seeks to realize salvation, both as concept and as historical reality.

(4) Theology discharges its task by engaging, embracing, and realizing the signs of God's presence made manifest in history. Ellacuría created not a correlation between theology *and* the signs of the times but a theology *of* the signs of the times. Theology is able to discern the salvific presence of God in history because historical reality is permeated by grace.

Burke concluded his presentation with a quotation from Ellacuría's final theological essay, "Utopia and Propheticism": "The signs of the times and the soteriological dynamic of the Christian faith historicized in new human beings insistently demand the prophetic negation of a church as 'the old heaven of a civilization of wealth and of empire' and the utopian affirmation of a church as 'the new heaven of a civilization of poverty.'" Burke observed in closing that Ellacuría's greatest concrete essay in historical soteriology was his own death on behalf of the Reign of God.

The scheduled respondent was unable to attend, so the floor was opened for discussion immediately. A critique of Ellacuría's use of the term "historization" as Eurocentric was raised. Burke agreed but also noted that Ellacuría's later work gave more attention to popular religion. One participant emphasized the importance of looking at the lives of the martyrs. Another asked Burke if Ellacuría understood history as progressive. While answering no, Burke did acknowledge an optimism in Ellacuría's work but insisted that his focus remained on the suffering of the people. A significant portion of the discussion was generated by Pilar Aquino's question about the programmatic implications of Ellacuría's thought in a university setting. Burke recommended a reading of Ellacuría's own writing on the role of the university. Other participants shared the problems they have encountered in attempting to educate for justice in their universities.

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