

ROMERO: AN ECUMENICAL INSPIRATION FOR THE 2020s¹

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INTRODUCTION: A LENTEN JOURNEY

In March 2020, just before the coronavirus lockdowns, I had the opportunity of participating in a pilgrimage of lament and hope in El Salvador with students from Duke Divinity School. We visited places of profound pain and met with witnesses of unspeakable horrors. We travelled to El Mozote and spoke with survivors of a massacre on December 11, 1980 where an army battalion killed up to 1000 men, women, and children. We also encountered witnesses to hope. One of these was a group called Mujeres EcuMénicas por la Paz (Ecumenical Women for Peace). These women came from different denominations: Catholic, Baptist, Presbyterian, Anglican, Methodist, and Pentecostal. Their diversity was denominational and vocational. Some were scholars. Some were pastors. Some worked for non-profit organizations. All shared a common longing and conviction. They longed for real national reconciliation; they believed Christian unity was the way; they were all inspired by Romero.

Today, I want to reflect on how the conjunction of ecumenical movement and the ministry of reconciliation inspired by Romero can contribute to the renewal of Christian community and the formation of a new “we” from the peripheries for the whole church. First, I will consider briefly a few challenges for movements and ministries for ecumenism and reconciliation. Second, I will consider the witness of Saint Óscar Romero as a pilgrim of ecumenism and reconciliation. Third, I will share how the work of the Center for Reconciliation at Duke Divinity School attempts to embody Romero’s ecumenical and reconciling inspiration in Latin America. I will conclude by returning to an Easter Letter from the Ecumenical Women for Peace in El Salvador.

ECUMENISM AND RECONCILIATION IN DIALOGUE

In scripture, there is ample witness to the centrality of ecumenism and reconciliation to the mission of the church. Among the many texts that could be considered, two stand out as foundational. For the ecumenical movement, Jesus’ prayer in John 17:21 “that they may be one” connects the unity and mission of the

¹ Portions of this presentation are found in Edgardo Colón-Emeric, “Diversity and Community: Mentoring toward a New We,” *Mentoring Matters: Millennials and the Future of the Academic Vocation*, Todd C. Ream, Jerry Pattengale, and Christopher J. Devers, editors, Intersity Press, forthcoming.

church to Jesus' unity with the Father and his mission to the world. The living out of this prayer is associated with the work of institutions like the World Council of Churches. In one of its Assemblies, it presented the command and cost of God's longed for unity in clear terms, "The achievement of unity will involve nothing less than a death and rebirth of many forms of church life as we have known them. We believe that nothing less costly can finally suffice" (ND 3). Implicit in this rebirth is the ministry of reconciliation.

Paul's passage in 2 Corinthians 5:16-21 with its declaration that in Christ all things have been made new serves as a kind of great commission for the church's ambassadorial presence in the world. An important witness of this ministry is Martin Luther King Jr. whose leadership in the civil rights movement in the United States was propelled by a clear vision of the goal of the church's struggle: "It is true that as we struggle for freedom in America we will have to boycott at times. But we remember that as we boycott that the boycott is not an end within itself...[The] end is reconciliation; the end is redemption; the end is the creation of the beloved community" (Marsh, 48). It is fitting that the celebration of the birth of Martin Luther King Jr. often coincides with the Week for Prayer for Christian Unity. Both the Civil Rights movement and the ecumenical movement were animated by a common purpose: announcing God's gift of communion and denouncing and removing whatever obstacles impede this communion. At the same time, both the ecumenical movement and the movements for social reconciliation have experienced missteps and misconceptions along the way.

The ecumenical movement has been confused with a search for the lowest common denominator and with the dead ends of ecumenisms of return (come back to Rome) and with generic interdenominational cooperation. Rightly and wrongly, ecumenism has been rejected as relativist, Eurocentric, and neo-colonial. The slow, meandering movement of the World Council of Churches and Christian bilateral dialogues has given rise to disillusionment and frustration as the fissures in the ecclesial landscape widen not only among church communions but within them. In light of these challenges, one can speak not only of an ecumenical winter but an ecumenical ice age.

The movements for social reconciliation have also experienced stormy weather. Often, reconciliation is reduced to an individual (and even private) transaction between the sinner and God. Not nearly as frequently, but often enough, reconciliation is set in opposition to liberation. In the United States, the theologies of James Cones and J. Deotis Roberts have been pitted against each other on this point. The reasons for this characterization are real but overstated. Both emphasize the importance of liberation as a check against accounts of reconciliation that

connote conformity with the status quo. Both understand liberation and reconciliation to be soulmates.

Adverse conditions for movements and ministries of reconciliation are not unique to the United States. In South Africa, then President F.W. de Klerk asked that the word “reconciliation” be added to the “truth commission” as a conceptual handbrake to slow the process of social transformation. A history of misuses has lowered the value of the currency of reconciliation. Curtiss Paul de Young’s analysis is correct, “reconciliation is often understood today as assimilation, appeasement, a passive peace, a unity without cost, and maintaining power with only cosmetic changes.” Willie Jennings’ diagnosis is more dire, “all theological discussions of reconciliation (are) ideological tools for facilitating negotiations of power; or socially exhausted idealist claims masquerading as serious theological accounts.” Hard words. “In truth,” Jennings continues, “it is not at all clear that most Christians are ready to imagine reconciliation.” One Christian who was ready to imagine and embody reconciliation in the most challenging of circumstances was Saint Óscar Romero.

OSCAR ROMERO: A PILGRIM FOR ECUMENISM AND RECONCILIATION

Oscar Romero became Archbishop of San Salvador during a turbulent time for people in Central America. Vast income inequality, failed attempts at land reform, and rumors of a Cuban style revolution sowed unrest. Some expected the Church to serve as a bastion of national stability while others dreamed of a Christian guerilla movement. In this context, Romero was seen by many as a safe choice, a pastor who would not rock the already floundering ecclesial boat. His election to the country’s premier ecclesial post was greeted with a mixture of dismay and relief. However, both reactions misread the man and the moment. On March 12, 1977, his friend, Father Rutilio Grande was murdered while driving to El Paisnal. Naturally, the experience rattled Romero. He now knew beyond the shadow of a doubt that he was the pastor of a persecuted church. Economic, political, and paramilitary forces were devouring his flock. In response, Romero became a pilgrim for church unity and national reconciliation until he was cut down by the death squad’s scythe on March 24, 1980 while preaching from John 12:24, “unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” Romero’s vision of ministry is summed up by the motto he adopted for his episcopacy: *sentir con la iglesia*.¹ The phrase has its origins in the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius. It means to think, sense, feel with the church. *Sentir* denotes a posture of reflection and solidarity with the church in its complicated journey through the ages. *Sentir con la iglesia* is how the people of God keep their bearing amidst the waves that threaten to sink the church. *Sentir con la Iglesia* means reading the signs of the times in order to turn the rudder just enough to keep a true heading. Romero’s embodiment of this Ignatian motto unites the savior and Salvadoran history. A true *sentir con la Iglesia* is an act of social analysis, spiritual

discernment, and ecclesial commitment. It embraces tradition and innovation, the universal and the local. It is action and contemplation with, in, and from the church. Ricardo Urioste paraphrases Romero's *sentir con la iglesia* as "being one with the Church."ⁱⁱⁱ It means being one with the church in its sufferings and in its struggles for liberation and reconciliation.

For Romero, the pulpit was a privileged place for exercising this *sentir*. In one of his homilies celebrating the transfigured Christ as the Divine Savior of El Salvador, Oscar Romero tells the story of how Father Damian prayed for the "grace of leprosy" so that he might remain stationed among the community of lepers that he was serving in the island of Molokai. One day while celebrating the Mass, as he raised the Eucharistic host, he noticed that his hand showed the first sign of leprosy. From that day, he always addressed his community as "we lepers."ⁱⁱⁱⁱ This first-person plural pronoun is not the royal we. Or perhaps we can say that it is the royal "we" that has Christ as its source and exemplar. If anyone is in Christ, or, if Christ is in anyone, there is a new *sentir*, a new *we*. There are two dimensions of Romero's new *we* that I wish to emphasize.

First, *sentir con la iglesia* means becoming a new *we* with the church of the poor. In his homilies, Romero identifies the church of the poor with the community of the beatitudes. It is the church of "the poor who hunger for God, of those who feel that without God all things are empty and impure."^{iv} It is the church of those who have learned that their poverty does not lessen their dignity as bearers of the image of God.^v *Sentir con la iglesia* means becoming a new *we* of peacemakers who understand that justice is necessary for peace (*opus justitiae, pax*), but justice alone is not enough. Love is necessary in order to hear feel God in the voices of the vulnerable. In an interview, Romero was asked about the significance of the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius for mission of the church in the current moment. He replied: "The Spiritual Exercises should teach us to read Christology from our Latin American context which helps us feel (*sentir*) in the humanity of the eternal Christ, the hurts, the anguishes, the hope of our Latin American people."^{vi}

According to Romero, for this Christ centered *sentir* to develop we need to welcome the gift of tears. We need their cleansing water to wash our eyes from the ideologies and vices that have clouded and damaged our vision. Recognizing Christ in the needy requires intentional formation and catechesis. For Romero, this catechesis could come from attending to the liturgical seasons. For instance, "Advent should alert us to discovering the face of Christ in each brother we greet, in each friend with whom we shake hands, in each beggar who asks me for bread, in each worker who wants to use his right to organize in a union, in each *campesino* looking for work in the coffee fields."^{vii} Developing a Christ-centered *sentir* takes practice. In a homily preached at *El Hospitalito* on May 14, 1979 for National Nursing

Day, Romero exhorted the healthcare professionals in attendance to see “in each sick person the twofold face of Christ, the suffering face, pained, dying, and the glorious face which that passion gave him.”^{viii} Only those who have cried by a beloved’s bedside have the eyes to see the glory of God by the world’s gravesides. Second, *sentir con la iglesia* means being a new *we* with the ecumenical church. Originally, the *sentir con la Iglesia* of the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius was meant to be worn as a shield in the battle against the Protestant Reformers. In the context of El Salvador, this *sentir* eventually became an olive branch to those outside the Catholic Church. I say eventually because early in his ministry Romero’s attitudes to Protestants reflected those of most Latin American Roman Catholics then (and sometimes still today). For instance, in his write up on the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in 1951, Romero resorts to calling Protestants apostates who weaken the witness of the church in El Salvador and beyond. As the Catholic Church opened itself to ecumenism with Protestantism during the Second Vatican Council and as Protestants in and outside El Salvador identified themselves with the sufferings of the Archdiocese, Romero’s *sentir* with the ecumenical church evolved. In contrast to his previous belligerent posture, he speaks joyfully of the celebrations of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in 1978.

They were eight unforgettable nights. The sanctuary in which we gathered each night, whether Catholic or Protestant, acquired the human warmth of a true home where all felt that they were in their own house. There, while remaining faithful to the various personal convictions which still prevent a full communion, we felt that there was a common denominator which glued us together: being Christians.

Romero’s Christ centered *sentir* became attractive to Protestants for the manner in which he integrated the preferential option for the poor and the ecumenical imperative, the cry from the peripheries and the call to unity. The olive branch to Protestants became a lifeline for the archdiocese.

Romero’s *sentir con la iglesia* led him to embrace Brother Roger of Taizé. *Sentir con la iglesia* meant sharing the microphone during several of his Sunday homilies with the Presbyterian pastor Jorge Lara Braud to bring words of solidarity from the National Council of Churches in the United States. Romero’s identification with the church inspired the testimony of Medardo Gomez, a Lutheran Salvadoran Bishop. Bishop Gomez was not a martyr, but he was a confessor who experienced kidnapping and torture for promoting what he called a theology of life, a Lutheran version of liberation theology formed in dialogue with Romero’s ministry and the Salvadoran context. Medardo Gomez speaks of Romero as “nuestro Obispo” and “martyr for the one, universal, apostolic church in El Salvador.” Long before the beatification and canonization of this martyr, Bishop Gomez called the archbishop as Saint Romero of “our America.” In Medardo Gomez’s use of pronouns, a new

sentir is being born, a new we is being articulated from the voice of the voiceless and the ecumenical dream.

From the margins, his *sentir* reaches beyond the borders of his troubled El Salvador and his beloved Catholic Church to offer a vision of reconciliation that is inclusive of all those who have the struggle for the same *sentir* that was found in Christ Jesus (cf. Phil 2:5). Here I turn to the teaching of the Argentine Methodist theologian, José Míguez Bonino.

A few caveats are in order before I proceed. First, the Methodist Church was not established in El Salvador until 1994, so Romero could not have visited a Methodist congregation in his archdiocese. The contacts between Romero and the Methodists are indirect. Second, one of Elsa Tamez's books *La hora de la vida: Lecturas bíblicas* is found in Romero's personal library. The fact that Romero owned a book by this Methodist biblical scholar does not mean that he read it. Third, there is an odd story circulated by one of Romero's opponents Freddy Delgado. Delgado depicts Míguez Bonino as a former Catholic priest and undercover agent for the Jesuits working to position Romero as the successor to Archbishop Chávez y González. These were lies. The real story of Míguez Bonino is more hopeful.

Míguez Bonino was the sole Latin American Protestant observer at Vatican II. His presence there was sufficiently well received that he was also invited to attend succeeding Catholic bishops' conferences in Medellín and Puebla. Míguez Bonino and Romero could have met at the latter, but I have no evidence suggesting they did. Instead, what I find in Míguez Bonino is a similar ecumenical and missional *sentir con la iglesia*. He may not have been inspired by Romero, but he was inspired by the Holy Spirit who inspired Romero.

Míguez Bonino calls for honesty regarding the status of our ecumenical work. As he sees it, "the 'ecumenical' or 'non-ecumenical' character of our social witness is already a sign! Our separation or unity are 'social practices' which have meanings and consequences." The Second Vatican Council began to "shake off the imperial dust that has accumulated on Saint Peter's throne since the time of Constantine." The world looks to the church for something more than statements however precise and profound. It looks for love. The world does not need a church of anathemas; it needs a church that becomes visible and attractive through tangible and transformative acts of service and social solidarity. At the heart of this service is the church's witness to the truth of God and the truth of the world. According to Míguez Bonino "only the fullness of freedom creates the conditions for the proclamation of the Truth that correspond to the nature of Christian Truth, a Truth that preferred the cross to a dozen legions of armed angels ready to defend him." Something is not truly known until it is loved. Thus, the way to unity is the way of

charity and the way of truth. Romero exemplified this. His ecumenism was motivated by his embodiment of the truth of the gospel and unquenchable love for God and God's persecuted people. *Sentir con la iglesia* requires open hearts, intellectual humility, and steadfast commitment to Christian dialogue for the sake of mission among the margins. This is Romero's ecumenical inspiration for our times.

A sign of this ecumenical inspiration was evident at the celebration of the jubilee of the Methodist-Catholic dialogue in 2017. On that occasion, Ivan Abrahams, General Secretary of the World Methodist Council said, "We walk side by side, each in service to the world in our response to climate change, human trafficking, abuse of human rights and global terror. In our responses to these challenges, we are called to be a church with fast feet and extended hands, to be in solidarity and embrace the poor and marginalized." In his response, Pope Francis stated, "When, as Catholics and Methodists, we join in assisting and comforting the weak and the marginalized – those who in the midst of our societies feel distant, foreign and alienated – we are responding to the Lord's summons."

Just prior to that momentous meeting, the delegation of the Methodist-Catholic dialogue visited the Scavi and, in the presence of the bones of Peter, we prayed the Lord's Prayer. As we prayed in that damp, cramped room, the weight of centuries of complicated histories was lifted and a new *sentir* was possible. Lying in the tomb was our Peter. Together we pray to our Father. We pray for our daily bread: our sacraments, our hunger for justice. We pray for forgiveness for our trespasses: our Borgia popes, our crusaders, our inquisitors, our conquistadors. The following day, back in our conference room, we reflected on this new *sentir*. Fifty years of dialogue have not gotten us too far; we still have a lot of work to do, but we are not working in vain. A new we is being formed.

Sentir con la iglesia means *soñar con la iglesia*, to dream with the church, and in learning to pray together, we learn to hope together, and dream together. A new *sentir* is possible and pressing if the church is to address the social injustices and exclusions of our time. Romero, as a pilgrim of ecumenism and reconciliation can inspire pastors, theologians, congregations, and ecumenical dialogues. It is also an inspiration for the initiatives of the Center for Reconciliation and the dreams of a new we.

THE CENTER FOR RECONCILIATION AND THE DREAMS OF A NEW "WE"

The Center for Reconciliation at Duke Divinity School has partnered with other Christian institutions in midwifing initiatives and institutes for reconciliation in East Africa, Northeast Asia, Latin America and North America. All these initiatives share a common vision: the Word made flesh and dwelt among us and draws us into a common pilgrimage of transformation reconciliation. In this pilgrimage, a new we is

cultivated by a series of practices like social dislocation, solidarity with Christian witnesses from the peripheries, and sustained critical and prayerful reflections on questions like: 1) Where are we going? Reconciliation towards what? 2) What is going on? And how did we get here? 3) What does hope look like? What are the stories that interrupt us? 4) Why me? Why bother? Each day is accompanied by a gift: new creation, lament, liberation, and vocation leading to a commission.

In this final section, I share with you the example of the Americas Initiative for Transformation and Reconciliation. Although the final day of the institute in our initiatives in East Africa and Northeast Asia conclude with the prayer commonly called the Romero Prayer, the inspiration of Romero's ecumenical witness is particularly poignant.

Each of the initiatives connected with the Center for Reconciliation responds to the needs of the particular context by incorporating local and regional partners. In the case of the Americas Initiative, in addition to the support of churches, universities and seminaries, there are Christian NGOs like the *Programa Latinoamericano de Tierras* which addresses the persistent challenges around landownership and use in Latin America; there is *Memoria Indígena* which empowers indigenous churches to recognize and be recognized for their indigenous identity; there is *Peace and Hope International* which addresses issues of environmental justice, peacebuilding, and violence prevention. I list these not only to name some of our partners but because they also name the wounds in the Latin American and diaspora contexts in need of healing.

What are we learning from the American Global South? I need to note that this initiative is only 18 months old. In other words, it is very much in its infancy. Our partnerships are not yet fully formed and we are still seeking to include more Catholic institutions and more Afro-Latino perspectives. However, our first year of encounters gathered scholars and practitioners with many years of service.^{ix} For now, let me offer a few preliminary lessons.

First, the American Global South groans for a new ecumenism that helps us imagine a new *we*. In the words of Rolando Perez, a sociologist at the Pontifical University in Lima, Peru, "In Latin America, we are still a society that strongly resists looking at those whom we consider to be the *other*... We are profoundly disconnected from our memory, and it is impossible to talk about reconciliation without being connected to our collective memory." Many feel restlessness with this status quo. The slogan "another world is possible" resonates with vibrancy across diverse sectors of society, particularly among the youth. In this connection, it is significant to remember that the Latin American Catholic Church in Puebla committed itself to a preferential option for the poor and the young. If the restlessness of the poor and

the cry of the poor are signs of the times, then Romero's counsel is still true: "Let us not despair, because if this is the hope of Latin America, then there is a lot of hope in El Salvador because there are many poor and many young." The youth along with the poor can be our chief ecumenists. At the same time, the restlessness and visions of the new generations need to be connected to the dreams and memories of previous generations. A new *we* is not possible without reckoning with the histories of exclusion and violence in which the American Global South was conceived. The groans for a new *we* clamor for the recovery these suppressed memories.

Second, the ecumenism of Romero's dreams is a gift before it is a task. We should be alert to the fact that it is easy to impose our own vision of beloved community. There is a risk that building for a new *we* leads to new exclusions of people or groups that are seen as problematic in that construction, and who should thus be discarded. For instance, in Latin America, national unity has been built by gentrifying history and marginalizing peoples of African and indigenous descent as unwanted anachronisms. Thus, even if a Christian vision of new creation orients the pilgrimage for reconciliation, this vision is always in need of interrogation by the question of history. What is going on? How did we get here? In other words, dreams of Christian unity and reconciliation cannot be realized without the gift of tears at the wounds of history. However, not all welcome this gift. César Lopes, a Brazilian educator and dean of CETI Continental has heard colleagues point out that, "It is common to discredit the need of grieving as part of the search for justice and the practice of ethics in social relations. This attitude not only cloaks pain and loss, but it also eliminates possibilities of reconciliation with life. It is rarely common to be astonished by violence." The language of lament is richly present in Scripture and Christian liturgy, but it has been lost to many in the church. Lopes observes that "the tendency that we see today is that these texts of lament from the Old Testament are simply ignored. In my community and in many other faith communities, we go through a deep denial of suffering. We have removed lament from Christian life." Without lament, without touching the wounds, without naming the names of victims, as Romero did in his homilies, ecumenism is dishonest with reality.

Third, the ecumenism of Romero's dreams needs to be centered in Christ's journey with the peoples of indigenous and African descent. Jocabed Solano, director of Memoria Indígena and a member of the Guna Dule people of Panama and Colombia, asked the following question to us from her people: "What about us, as part of the body of Christ?" Good question. *Sentir con la iglesia* has often been indifferent to the voices of the indigenous. Solano offered us gifts from her Guna Dule community to the work of reconciliation. She called on us to expand our

vocabulary because in her indigenous language the word for people includes the trees and the river too. She encouraged us to expand our imagery because her Guna Dule father taught her that “we understand that we are living life in harmony when, ‘our house is in balance.’” One of the reasons that our house is not in balance can be traced to the pedagogy of death at work in the conquest of the Americas and the expansion of the West around the world. Romero’s *sentir con la iglesia* invites us to identify ourselves with the indigenous and to learn with them how to respect each other and non-human creatures like brother air and sister water.

Fourth, the ecumenism of Romero’s dreams is fragile. One reason for this fragility comes from the difficulty in not letting our vision of the end be polarized by the ideologies of the present. It is difficult to heed both the call to unity in Christ and the cry of the poor Christ. The Jesus or Justice divide that Romero encountered remains present in many churches in the American Global South and indeed around the world. One example stands out in my mind. While teaching a seminar on the theology of reconciliation in the Amazon, I met pastors who were active in community organizations working for land reform. When I asked them how often they had ever preached on this topic from the pulpit, they said never. The connection between the Sunday gospel and the daily advocacy was not obvious. A new *sentir* needs to be learned, practised, and sustained and I can think of no better teacher than Romero. His ability to read the signs of the times through the lectionary readings is second to none and an example that this can indeed be done.

Fifth, the ecumenism of Romero’s dreams first blooms in the peripheries, among the vulnerable and wounded. Drew Jennings-Grisham, one of the co-founders of *Memoria Indígena* says it well. “When we consider the Indigenous or Native peoples of our continent, the first sign of hope I see is simply that they are still here. Indigenous resistance in the face of so many centuries of colonization and of attempts to dominate, eliminate, or control their lives and bodies, their knowledge and beliefs, is in itself a sign of hope and liberation.” The margins offer rich fertile ground for hope, liberation, and reconciliation, which also means that the new *we* is always endangered. However, the witness of her indigenous ancestors’ persistence encourages Aymara evangelicals like Juana Luisa Condori Quispe to find hope. “As wounded as the land may be by centuries of oppression, consolation and wise counsel always spring from their wisdom, in a way that is congruent with the written word. That despite how dry and arid the Bolivian *altiplano* (highlands) may feel or look, nourishment and life always spring from it. Certainly, the Spirit blows where He wills.” *Sentir con la iglesia* means sentir with the Spirit.

Despite everything that has happened and is happening, this Aymara evangelical still dreams dreams of finding her identity in the Christ who pitched his tent and dwelt among the Aymara people. The Spirit still blows in the altiplano, the jungle,

the barrio and the favela. The ecumenism of Romero's dreams can become ours, if the same *sentir* of a new expansive, reconciling, Christ-centered we is found in us.

AN EASTER LETTER

In closing, I return to the witness of the Mujeres EcuMénicas por la Paz in El Salvador. My students and I met these ecumenical women in a monastery because their group includes cloistered nuns belonging to the order of Saint Clare. Large portraits of Romero hung in prominent places around the building. From across the half wall that separated the nuns from my students and the other ecumenical women, we exchanged greetings of Paz y Bien; we talked; we sang; we prayed; we shared food. I was struck by how these sisters were set apart from the world in order to be peacemakers through their ministries of hospitality, reflection and prayer.

On this Gethin Abraham-Williams Memorial Lecture, as we consider the multiple pandemics of our times, the divisions in our communities, and the brokenness of our world, it may seem that we can do so little. Against the troubles of our days, the church appears to be as helpless as the body of Christ hidden in a tomb. Romero's ecumenical inspiration as embodied by the peoples of the Americas Initiative, and the little sisters of Saint Clare in San Salvador remind us that an ecumenism for justice and peace is pressing, possible, and promised. Reconciliation is not an elective course or a niche ministry. Ecumenism is not the work of professional theologians and ecclesial diplomats. The ecumenism of Romero's dreams is the work of the people of God heeding the call to unity and the cry of the poor. By the power of the Spirit, the young person choosing worship over sleeping in is an ecumenical reconciler; a warm greeting, an ecumenical statement; a gathering of CYTUN, a joint declaration on the doctrine of social justice.

Returning from El Salvador to a global shutdown, the Ecumenical Women for Peace shared with me an Easter Letter written by the Sisters denouncing the injustices exposed by the pandemic and announcing the vindication of Jesus as God's justice. They cited words from Pedro Casaldáliga that I share with you as a note for ecumenical inspiration.

Nuestra esperanza es muy concreta. Tiene nombre. Y tiene carne, espíritu, historia... Nuestra esperanza tiene nombre y apellido. El nombre es "Jesucristo". Y el apellido es "Resucitado". La respuesta de Dios es Jesús. Él es el "sí" de Dios, el amén de Dios.

ⁱ Óscar Romero, *Cuadernos espirituales: Mons. Óscar Arnulfo Romero, 1966-1980*, unpublished transcriptions, Biblioteca de Teología Juan Ramon Moreno, June 9, 1970.

ⁱⁱ Santiago Mata, *Monseñor Romero: Pasión por la Iglesia* (Madrid: Ediciones Palabra, 2015): Kindle Locations 2141-2142.

iii Homilías, 5:229

iv Homilías IV, 29

v Homilías II, 423

vi Óscar Romero in *Ejercicios espirituales en, desde y para América Latina : retos, intuiciones, contenidos*, 102.

vii *Homilías IV*, 34

viii *Diario*, May 14, 1979

ix There is a website where you can find out more information (iaptr.com).