Thomas M. Kelly

When the Gospel Grows Feet: Rutilio Grande, SJ, and the Church of El Salvador: An Ecclesiology in Context. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2013. Pp. xv + 279. Pb, \$29.95.

This book makes several valuable contributions to the ongoing reception and interpretation of Latin American liberation theology by the broader church, particularly in North America. First of all, it includes a helpful appendix, which translates a significant text by Rutilio Grande, S.J. that is not well known among English-speakers: “Aguilares: An Experience of Rural Parish Evangelization.” In addition to this resource, there are three major achievements to highlight, namely a detailed focus on the neglected figure of Rutilio Grande, an elucidation of a distinctively pastoral approach to liberation, and a vivid presentation of a kingdom-oriented ecclesiology.

Although the first four chapters—on Spanish imperial conquest, pre-conciliar body-soul dualism, and the councils of Vatican II and Medellín respectively—cover rather familiar historical and theological territory, they may provide helpful background for some readers. The text picks up steam with the entrance of young Rutilio in the fifth chapter, and reaches its full clip with chapters seven through nine, which detail his mature pastoral and prophetic response to the socio-economic plight of his people. I want to underscore the power of Kelly’s decision to focus on Grande. This sort of dedicated attention has been given to Archbishop Oscar Romero with great benefit. In Spanish, one can consult Rodolfo Cardenal’s *Historia de una esperanza: Vida de Rutilio Grande* (El Salvador: UCA Editores, 2002) (which informs Kelly’s account), but the fact remains that there is very little on Grande in English. Nonetheless, as Kelly argues persuasively, “it is impossible to understand the ministry and sacrifice of Oscar Romero without the background of his close, personal friend whom he called ‘a brother’ [i.e., Grande]” (217). And if one cannot understand Romero, neither can one understand Jesuits Ignacio Ellacuría or Jon Sobrino. In effect, an entire far-reaching tradition of Salvadoran praxis and critical theological reflection which continues to bear fruit throughout the wider church cannot be fully accessed without Grande. He is a key that unlocks the significance and motivations of this tradition. For this reason alone, Kelly’s close study of Grande is a tremendous asset for English-speakers, including students, scholars, lay ministers, and clergy.

But the rare focus on Grande is not the only feature that makes this book a worthwhile read. Crucial too is the productive theological use that Kelly makes of Grande’s historical witness. In particular, Kelly discovers in Grande an incomparable example of the “pastoral strain of liberation theology” (153). As Kelly explains it: “The pastoral version of liberation begins in evangelization

called for by the church, which has significant social and political consequences" (153). Grande's approach to liberation does not start with Marxist or any other sort of given political allegiance; nor, however, does it serenely eschew concrete social and historical engagement. Rather, it begins with the gospel and then seeks ways to let it "grow feet" or come to life in the material realities of the local community. Grande's innovative ministry in Aguilares (which involved lay leadership and community-formation, scripturally and experientially based education, the organization of agricultural cooperatives, the continual deepening of prayer and spirituality, and active solidarity with the land reform movement) provides a concrete, contextual image of such a pastoral approach. Liberation here is not an idea. It is a communal praxis. As much as Grande's pastoral approach to liberation can be contrasted with Marxian and escapist-individualist alternatives, it can also be contrasted with any self-professed liberation theology that does not have "feet" on the ground—that is, a living community of the poor as its base and driving force.

Kelly suggests that for North Americans, the lesson here is to become more cognizant of the urgent demands and crises in our own local communities, and to adapt some of Grande's collaborative and practically engaged pastoral strategies to our own contexts. Kelly takes Omaha (the location of Creighton University, where he teaches) as an instructive case study. The practice of letting the gospel grow feet—that is, the pastoral approach to liberation exemplified by Grande—is not limited to the El Salvador of the 1970s and 1980s. Kelly shows that it has relevance as a model in other situations, for example in the midst of Omaha's racially skewed distribution of resources and opportunities, in which African American and Hispanic populations are regularly disadvantaged. The reader is compelled to consider what an embodiment of the gospel would look like if it were rooted in communities struggling with this North American injustice.

The last contribution that I want to note has to do with ecclesiology. By subtitled his study "an ecclesiology in context," Kelly indicates that he is interested in more than biography or a localized reflection on liberation theology. He is interested in the church as such. He wants readers to keep in mind questions about the nature and mission of the church while considering the concrete example of Grande's ministry and martyrdom. Kelly argues that "to be 'church' in the manner realized by Rutilio Grande was to give one's life in the effort to build the kingdom of God" (xv). In the powerful words of Grande himself: "My friends, as a Church Body, the Church and each one of us who make it up [...] we are all prophets. As an ecclesial body we are continuers of the mission of Jesus Christ. This body which is the Church, and which covers entire communities, has a mission, like homework, to announce and make possible a

favorable environment for the kingdom of God here, in this world" (211). If Grande's is an ecclesiology "in context," it is also an ecclesiology with the capacity to reverberate far beyond its original context. The proclamation and cultivation of a kingdom-favorable environment is an authentic mark of true Christian ecclesiality wherever it occurs. Kelly has done a service to the worldwide (Catholic) church by recovering Grande's experience-tested insights on this matter.

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DOI 10.1163/22141332-00301005-34