

## A RESPONSE TO ROBERTO S. GOIZUETA

Not too long ago a colleague (and also a respected friend) opined at a colloquium that the Latin American love of gory, bloody crucifixes and, also, the devotional popularity of Good Friday must be a remnant of a medieval sadistic Spanish mysticism of suffering. The longer I tried to explain that Good Friday attracts Hispanics more for its power to console than to self-inflict suffering, the clearer it became that I was not persuasive. Thus, it is not without some sense of vindication and delight to listen to such an eloquent and, at times, brilliant defense of this most popular of devotions in the Hispanic and Latin American ecclesial tradition. Indeed, I find myself in the not-so-enviable position to respond to such a persuasive case.

Nonetheless, though I applaud your strategy and many of your conclusions, I believe an important ingredient of a Latino anthropology, indeed of any anthropology, has been overlooked. I find, for example, your focus on the wounds of the risen Jesus a brilliant starting point for your reflection. That is why I find it perplexing that the physical materiality of the body is diminished in your presentation. Seeing the body as "simply the outward aspect of the spirit," as your quote from Karl Rahner expresses, may allow the emphasizing of the communal dimension of the bodily condition, but only at the expense of overlooking the crucial cosmological dimension of the bodily condition.

A body outside the context of a cosmology becomes something less than a "flesh and blood" body. Indeed, it is problematic to insist that stripped of its cosmological context such a body actually suffers *real* wounds. The consequences of espousing a purely communal body also diminishes the fullness of your relational anthropology. We are not simply constituted by social and communal relationships but by a vast universe of relational ties.

This point becomes extremely important in the context of the Latin American and Hispanic ecclesial tradition. The Spanish came preaching a gospel of redemptive transformation to a people who believed in a gospel of cosmic order. The birth of the Latin American church saw the fusion of these two perspectives. Any one who has sung *las mañanitas* outside the entrance of the church on the feast day of Our Lady of Guadalupe while the sun slowly rises over the horizon can testify to this double dimension in the Hispanic faith experience of redemption. It is this double dimension of Hispanic soteriology, cosmic order and redemptive transformation, that I fear has been lost in your otherwise brilliant and eloquent analysis. At least, it is so as far as I am able to understand your point. Let me, then, take a few moments to describe how I understand your approach and conclusions.

You begin by indentifying the obstacle to understanding the Hispanic popularity of Good Friday as an individualistic anthropology perpetrated by the United States, indeed, all Western society. In stark contrast to such individualism, you propose a relational anthropology. As I discern your strategy in demonstrating such a relational anthropology, it involves the clever modification of a modern political anthropology. Borrowing a technique from the political theology of the Continent, you eschew building a theological anthropology based on the typical locus of the *imago Dei* and opt for an anthropology based on the more dynamic model of Kempis' *imitatio Christi*.<sup>1</sup> Rather than focusing on the human being as the image of God, you place our humanity on the dynamic conforming of the following of Christ.

While an *imago Dei* anthropology tends toward an individual focus, an *imitatio Christi* anthropology reveals the communal relationality of our humanity. Such an anthropology left as is, however, poses a problematic to your project. It is a terminal one-sided relationship. A dynamic conforming of the following of Christ takes us not only to the foot of the cross but onto the cross itself. As such, it supports the belief of those who charge our folks with a sadistic mysticism of suffering. It is here that I see you make a brilliant move. By reflecting on the wounds of the risen Jesus, you push the *imitatio Christi* anthropology past the cross into the resurrection experience. Now we continue to follow the risen Jesus in his invitation to see and touch his wounds.

Jesus' invitation transforms the single directionality of the earlier *imitatio Christi* into a doubly directional imitation of Christ. Not only do we define our humanity by conforming to the following of Christ, but Jesus now follows after us in invitation. As such, invitation becomes accompaniment and conforming becomes solidarity. Not only do we see the risen Jesus but the risen Jesus now sees as we see. Thus, if I have correctly interpreted your thought, you have given us not only a fully relational anthropology but a postmodern version of the *imitatio Christi*.

As such, your postmodern anthropology allows no one vision of humanity to be considered normative. This has an added benefit in that it provides a basis by which to understand the racial and cultural mixing that characterizes our people, namely, that human hybridity Virgilio Elizondo coined as "mestizaje." Thus, you have transformed an earlier *imitatio Christi* from a one-directional anthropology of subjective praxis into a doubly directional anthropology of intersubjective praxis. In this sizeable achievement I find in your thought both brilliance but also fault.

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<sup>1</sup>I am indebted to Peter Casarella of the Catholic University of America for pointing out this dimension of Continental political anthropologies at the 1998 meeting of the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians in the United States (ACHTUS).

In the end, does not your intersubjective, relational anthropology dissolve the "here and now" materiality of the human body in the intersubjectivity of praxis? Does this not also lose the bodily subject of the crucifixion? And if the materiality of the body gets "dissolved," don't you diminish the understanding of relationality by limiting it to a purely social or communal context? Don't you ignore, indeed, separate us from understanding the whole universe of relational ties which also constitute us? Perhaps, more seriously, does not the loss of a cosmology to accompany your anthropology lead to the loss of a foundation to assert eschatological hope in the face of suffering?

To make my point clearer, let me return to the marvelous example of Doña Carmen and the *Divino Rostro*. Her words, "I know he understands and that gives me the strength to go on," are not the words of a sadistic mysticism of suffering. These words, however, do reveal for me the crucial question towards understanding the Latino tradition of Good Friday: what, exactly does the divine face of the wounded Jesus understand that gives Doña Carmen strength?

One answer, of course, is that the divine face of the wounded Jesus truly understands Doña Carmen's suffering. The Divine Face "sees as she sees," and, thus, shares and accompanies her in her suffering. Another possibility exists, however, as an answer. If Doña Carmen's creedal confession, "I know he understands," is placed in the context of the double dimension of Latino soteriology, i.e. cosmic order and redemptive transformation, a needed dimension of a truly relational anthropology emerges. The divine face of the wounded Jesus not only "sees" as Doña Carmen sees but "sees" her, "sees" her both in her bodily condition and communal soul. The *Divino Rostro* "sees" her in the universe of relationships that have come together from the beginning of time to form this "here and now" Doña Carmen, but also sees forward into the unimaginable future of relationships that someday will give an account of her suffering.

Such totality of sight finds the basis of Christian hope and I suspect it is such hope that consoles Doña Carmen in the gaze of the wounded divine face. Such "seeing," however, is not possible in mere intersubjectivity. It is only by taking the "here and now" materiality of the body seriously that such cosmological totality of sight can be demonstrated and Christian hope founded. It makes me wonder if your wonderfully nuanced notion of intersubjective praxis might not benefit from a viable theological aesthetics.<sup>2</sup>

Such analysis leads me back to the text you so eloquently quote from the gospel of John: "Put your fingers here; look, here are my hands. Give me your hand, put it in my side." As such, Jesus merely repeats the invitation that he offered to the incredulous apostles a few verses earlier. In that earlier case,

<sup>2</sup>E.g., Alejandro García-Rivera, *The Community of the Beautiful: A Theological Aesthetics* (Liturgical Press, forthcoming 1999).

however, Jesus offers the "peace of God" and then "he breathed on them." Harmonious peace and dynamic spirit are the blessings received in the encounter of the apostles with the wounds of the risen Jesus. Are these not also the blessings received by Doña Carmen in her encounter with the wounds of the *Divino Rostro*?

As such, the "peace of God" and the "breath of the Spirit" parallel the double dimensions of the soteriology in the ecclesial tradition within which Doña Carmen stands. Cosmic order and redemptive transformation are the foundations by which Doña Carmen is consoled and given strength. At least, the way I read Doña Carmen's consolation comes not only from a Christ who sees as she sees, but also a Christ who sees all that she cannot see and her role and place in that totality. It is not only the Christ of Luke's "follow me" that guides my reading but also the Christ of John's prologue, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word became flesh."

If my reading is correct, then one can understand the popularity of Hispanic devotion to Good Friday not only as an opportunity to share in each other's suffering, but also the event upon which Christian hope is founded through the wounded and crucified Jesus who sees where all this suffering began and where it is going. As such, the belief in such a hope lies not only in the unity of the crucifixion and resurrection, but in the prior unity of Creation and Redemption. It is little wonder, then, that another equally intense devotion of Hispanics is the eschatological vision of Mary as the Lady of the twelfth chapter of Revelation arraying the moon, and the sun, and the stars about her even as she announces a redemptive transformation.

You have given us a brilliant and eloquent anthropology based on a creative and original version of the imitation of Christ. I believe that if you account for the cosmology implicit in the wounds of the risen Christ you will strengthen an already profound anthropology, and bring it even closer to the roots and history of the Latin American and Hispanic ecclesial tradition. In any case, I am wiser tonight for having listened to your presentation.

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