

## Presidential Address

### THE CRUCIFIED AND RISEN CHRIST: FROM CALVARY TO GALILEE

#### CRISTO COMPAÑERO: CRUCIFIED AND RISEN

“Señor, me has mirado a los ojos; sonriendo, has dicho mi nombre.” “Lord, you have looked into my eyes; smiling, you have called my name.” So goes the refrain of one of the most well-known and beautiful Latin American hymns. That single line poignantly expresses the core Christian belief so prominent in the gospels and, especially, in the writings of St. Paul: God loved us first. “You have looked into my eyes; *smiling, you have called my name.*” The theme is also central, of course, to the Christian mystical tradition:

Cuando tú me mirabas,  
su gracia en mi tus ojos imprimían;  
por eso me amabas,  
y en eso merecían  
los míos adorar lo que en ti vían.<sup>1</sup>

“When you looked at me,” writes St. John of the Cross, “your eyes imprinted in me your grace: for this you loved me again, and thereby my eyes were made worthy of adoring what in you they saw.”

Before I look at Christ, Christ has already looked at me lovingly. Every other article of Christian faith, every theological statement, is little more than a footnote to this central belief: my entire life is a *response* to a Lover whose very gaze and call have created me, named me, and compelled a response. In a 1985 apostolic letter to the youth of the world, our late Holy Father, Pope John Paul II spoke movingly of this “look of love” as the sum and substance of the Christian message:

It is . . . my hope that . . . you will experience what the Gospel means when it says: “Jesus, looking upon him, loved him.” May you experience a look like that! May you experience the truth that he, Christ, looks upon you with love! He looks with love upon every human being. The Gospel confirms this at every step. One can also say that this “loving look” of Christ contains, as it were, a summary and synthesis of the entire Good News. . . . We need this loving look. We need to know that we

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<sup>1</sup>St. John of the Cross, “Cántico Espiritual,” s. 32.

are loved, loved eternally and chosen from eternity. . . . When everything would make us doubt ourselves and the meaning of our life, then this look of Christ, the awareness of the love that in him has shown itself more powerful than any evil and destruction, this awareness enables us to survive.<sup>2</sup>

Yet the reality of such a love is also the most unbelievable, literally in-credible aspect of Christian faith—unbelievable in the sense of a belief that truly governs and frames our entire lives, so that we live as if Christ really does look upon us and, smiling, calls out our name. This is the truth that is folly to those of us who crave security, comfort, and power. Because we *know* that we are unworthy of such unconditional love, we must look after ourselves; such a love is folly to those of us who know that our hopelessly broken world is unworthy. It never occurs to us that, though unworthy, we might be *made* worthy. Overwhelmed by the sheer destructiveness of which we human beings are capable—whether on the windswept streets of Baghdad or in the sterile parlors of our gated McMansions—we can only find the figure of Christ and his message at best quaint or irrelevant, at worst a cruel hoax. Oh, we might answer “yes” on those surveys that ask us if we believe in God, but our burgeoning weapons stockpiles, xenophobic immigration laws, compulsive consumerism, widespread chronic depression, and addictions of all kinds all suggest a very different belief, a very different answer to the question “do you believe in God?”

St. Paul’s words are as true today as they were 2000 years ago; belief in Christ is simply foolish—*except* for those who, on the surface, would appear to have the *fewest* reasons to hold such a belief. As Jon Sobrino observes: “The poor have no problems with God. The classic question of theodicy—the ‘problem of God’, the atheism of protest—so reasonably posed by the nonpoor, is no problem at all for the poor (who in good logic ought of course to be the ones to pose it).”<sup>3</sup> A great irony of our post-Enlightenment world is that the rejection of God’s love in the face of human suffering has come principally from those sectors of society most “blessed” by economic prosperity and material security. Indeed, it was precisely their inattentiveness to the experience of the poor and marginalized that caused the great modern prophets of “enlightenment” to fail so miserably in their confident predictions of religion’s demise. “It amuses me,” wrote Ignacio Ellacuría not long before he was martyred, “when people say ‘God has disappeared from the world’, because God has disappeared from Europe or from the European universities; or that the world has entered a post-Christian age and I don’t know what else. It’s possible that here [in the West], yes. But this is not the world.”<sup>4</sup> Not only has religious faith not succumbed to the forces of secularization, but faith continues to

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<sup>2</sup>John Paul II, Apostolic Letter “Dilecti Amici,” 31 March 1985, para. 7.

<sup>3</sup>Jon Sobrino, *Spirituality of Liberation* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1988) 166-67.

<sup>4</sup>Ignacio Ellacuría, “Las iglesias latinoamericanas interpelan a la iglesia de España,” *Sal Terrae* (Marzo 1982): 224 (my translation).

thrive and grow—particularly among the very peoples whose suffering is supposed to represent the most convincing argument *against* religious faith.

What the poor have discovered is the liberating truth that—contrary to so much of the empirical evidence—we are indeed loved, that life is the gift of an extravagant love, and that life, therefore, is worth living . . . no matter what. The struggle is worth it. Paradoxically, it is the encounter with death, poverty, sin, and human powerlessness in all its guises that liberates us to fully embrace life itself. Recall the scriptural context of Christ’s words, cited above by John Paul II: “Jesus, looking upon him, loved him.” The words refer, of course, to the rich young man and immediately precede Jesus’ command to him to “go sell all that you have and give it to the poor, and come follow me” (Mk 10:21). The rich young man went away sad, unable to accept the power of Jesus’ loving gaze for liberation, liberation from his riches.

In the Christian tradition, the liberation and empowerment offered us by God is symbolized above all in the figure of the Crucified and Risen Christ. And it is the poor who are the unlikely witnesses to the central claim of the Christian faith: “God so loved the world. . . .” “Be the problems of the ‘truth’ of Christ what they may,” writes Sobrino, “his credibility is assured as far as the poor are concerned, for he maintained his nearness to them to the end. In this sense the cross of Jesus is seen as the paramount symbol of Jesus’ approach to the poor, and hence the guarantee of his indisputable credibility.”<sup>5</sup> The Cross is the guarantee that he does, in fact, remain with us, that he does, in fact, walk with us even today:

A vague, undifferentiated faith in God is not enough to generate hope. Not even the admission that God is mighty, or that God has made promises, will do this. Something else besides the generic or abstract attributes of the divinity is necessary in order to generate hope. This distinct element—which, furthermore, is the fundamental characteristic of the Christian God—is something the poor have discovered viscerally, and in reality itself: the nearness of God. God instills hope because God is credible, and God is credible because God is close to the poor. . . . Therefore when the poor hear and understand that God delivers up the Son, and that God is crucified—something that to the mind of the nonpoor will always be either a scandal or a pure anthropomorphism—then, paradoxically, their hope becomes real.<sup>6</sup>

God’s nearness as symbolized by the Crucified is not the consequence of Christian belief so much as the *foundation* of belief. When everyone else has abandoned us—even mother or father—Jesus Christ *stays*. As the great twentieth-century French philosopher Simone Weil observed, “The love of our neighbor in all its fullness simply means being able to say to him [or her], ‘What are you going through?’ ”<sup>7</sup> On Calvary, Jesus Christ asks each one of us, “What are you going through?”

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<sup>5</sup>Sobrino, 171.

<sup>6</sup>Sobrino, 166-67.

<sup>7</sup>Simone Weil, *Waiting for God* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001) 115.

The Crucified is not only a symbol of suffering but, even more than, a symbol of invincible hope, hope in a liberation experienced not first in some future victory but in the present, silent solidarity of the One who, like the Mother who accompanied him to Calvary, stays when everyone else has left. This hope born of compassion, or shared suffering, is beautifully conveyed by the Brazilian poet and Bishop Pedro Casaldáliga:

Because your solitude is mine as well;  
And all of me is but a wound, where  
Some blood wells up; and where  
A dead man waits, I reclaim the spring,  
Dead with him already before my death.<sup>8</sup>

For those who have known such hope, “perfect joy will not come at the hour of triumph; perfect joy was already experienced in the moment of silent obedience.”<sup>9</sup> Silent obedience—like Christ on Calvary. Our silence meets God’s silence.

Yet the anguish of Calvary is experienced as painful only because it is experienced in its relationship to perfect joy, reconciliation, communion. It is the experience of God’s loving presence—however temporary, tenuous, or fragile—that makes Calvary so unbearable. It is the promise of Easter that makes Good Friday so wrenching:

Esta vida que yo vivo es privación de vivir y así es contino morir hasta que viva contigo. . . .	(This life that I live [cries John of the Cross] is not life at all, and so I die continually until I live with you. . . .
Estando absente de ti que vida puedo tener? Sino muerte padecer la mayor que nunca vi? . . .	When I am away from you what life can I have? Except to endure the bitterest death I’ve known? . . . ) <sup>10</sup>

In a postmodern society where power and wealth only barely disguise an underlying silent desperation, where ubiquitous electronic gadgetry offers endless distractions from the harrowing void of everyday existence, where the strongest desire of teenagers is to become numb (whether by means of an alcoholic binge, a drug overdose, or a self-inflicted gunshot), in this world it will ironically be left to the mystic and to the poor person to proclaim the truth of the Crucified and Risen Christ as the sign of God’s extravagant love for each one of us.

In the remainder of this paper, I would like to explore some implications of such a love as is embodied in the Crucified and Risen Christ. How might the lived

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<sup>8</sup>Quoted in José Ignacio González Faus, *La interpelación de las iglesias latinoamericanas a la Europa postmoderna y a las iglesias europeas* (Madrid: Colegio Mayor Chaminade, 1988) 121-22 (my translation).

<sup>9</sup>González Faus, *La interpelación*, 124.

<sup>10</sup>St. John of the Cross, “Coplas del alma que pena por ver a Dios,” ss. 2, 3.

faith of the poor help us understand the implications of that love for us today, in the world and church of the twenty-first century? How might reading the scriptural witness from the perspective of the victims of history help us proclaim the goodness of life as gift to a postmodern, consumerist society whose superficial successes so often only mask an underlying cynicism and even despair? “The danger,” warns Simone Weil, “is not lest the soul should doubt whether there is any bread, but lest, by a lie, it should persuade itself that it is not hungry.”<sup>11</sup> Therein lies despair. Consequently, it is not the satiated but the hungry person who can teach us about bread, not the conqueror but the crucified victim who can teach us about the resurrection: “Human beings are so made that the ones who do the crushing feel nothing; it is the person crushed who feels what is happening. Unless one has placed oneself on the side of the oppressed, to feel with them, one cannot understand.”<sup>12</sup>

“PUT YOUR FINGER HERE . . .”

Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

Eight days later, his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. The doors were shut, but Jesus came and stood among them, and said, “Peace be with you.” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing.” Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:24-28 RSV)

When the resurrected Christ appears to the cowering disciples, he shows them the wounds. Indeed, he demands that the disciples look at the wounds and insists, in the case of Thomas, that the unbelieving disciple put his hand in his side. What must have been an extraordinarily shocking, stomach-churning scene is powerfully depicted in the famous Caravaggio painting of Thomas peering curiously into the wound in Jesus’ side, probing deep inside the open wound, the apostle’s fingers peeling back folds of skin as if to examine just how deep the wound is. What must Thomas have thought at that moment? Or any of the other disciples in the room? What must have been running through their minds or, more importantly, through their hearts—they who, only three days earlier, had fled in terror from their friend as he was being dragged off to Calvary? Luke tells us they were “startled and frightened” (Luke 24:37) upon seeing their friend walk into the room.

No wonder the disciples were frightened! They thought they were seeing a ghost . . . a ghost from their past. Indeed, they must have been scared to death at the sight of the man they had just betrayed, who was now confronting them with the very visible, concrete signs of that betrayal—the wounds. The disciples had

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<sup>11</sup>Simone Weil, *Waiting for God* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001) 51.

<sup>12</sup>Weil, *Waiting for God*, 51.

probably assumed that, now that Jesus was dead, they could put the past behind them, chalk it up to a misguided idealism, and go on to live the lives of good, upstanding fishermen, tax collectors, and etc. (A little, perhaps, like those of us who have been able to put behind us the failed ideals and hopes of the 1960s and move on to become successful investment bankers, lawyers, entrepreneurs, and college professors.) However, all of a sudden, into that seemingly secure room walks Jesus himself to remind his friends of that troubling past, to prick consciences that had just begun to find some equilibrium, some “sense of closure” as we are wont to say today. Moreover, Jesus sticks his messy wounds in their faces! He doesn’t say “let bygones be bygones,” or “forgive and forget.” Instead, he refuses to allow his disciples to forget what they had done to him; Jesus forces them to confront the painful consequences of their abandonment and betrayal: “Look and see . . . ,” put your hand here. . . . Do *not* forget what you have done to me!

In the Caravaggio painting, Jesus is depicted literally grabbing Thomas’s hand at the wrist and thrusting Thomas’ fingers into the wound, like a second lance—notes theologian Alejandro García-Rivera—that must now restore what had been ruptured by that first lance on Calvary; before there can be a restoration of companionship, there must be a restoration of memory, the memory of innocent suffering or, what García-Rivera has so aptly called a “wounded innocence.”<sup>13</sup> Far from implying a forgetting of past suffering, Christ’s bodily resurrection implies an acknowledgment that past injustices are *never* erased by future victories. Past suffering remains forever a part of the history of the resurrection; the wounds remain forever inscribed on the body of Christ. The resurrected Christ is and will always be *also* the Crucified Christ. Like St. Paul, Christians will always preach a simultaneously “Crucified *and* Risen Christ.” The resurrection of the body does not justify the crucifixion; it justifies the *Crucified victim*—the *whole* victim, abandoned soul *and* scarred body. If the crucifixion was bodily, so too must the resurrection be bodily—anything less would be an injustice to the victim.

The restoration of the disciples’ memory makes Jesus’ approach even more incredible. In the face of the disciples’ betrayal and abandonment of Jesus, Jesus now approaches them with open arms, invites them to become reconciled, and sits down with them to break bread, to share a meal. The memory of innocent suffering, inscribed on the body of the resurrected Jesus, confronts the disciples not in order to condemn them but precisely to invite them to become reconciled, to invite them to participate in Jesus Christ’s resurrection. In the mirror that is Jesus’ scarred body, the disciples see themselves convicted, challenged to repent, and invited to become reconciled. As García-Rivera observes, Caravaggio depicts Thomas grabbing his own side even as the apostle thrusts his hand into Jesus’ side, seemingly experiencing in himself the pain of Jesus’ wounds.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Alex R. García-Rivera, *A Wounded Innocence: Sketches for a Theology of Art* (Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 2003).

<sup>14</sup>García-Rivera, *A Wounded Innocence*, 121.

If the resurrection affirms the Father's ultimate refusal to abandon the Son to the forces of death, so too does it call for a reconciliation that transforms Christ's estrangement from his disciples into a renewed community. When the resurrected Christ presents himself to the disciples, he thus invites them to believe, not just that he himself has been raised from the dead, but that a reconciled community of faith has now been made possible . . . if they will but acknowledge the enduring wounds and recognize themselves mirrored in those wounds, that is, if they accept Jesus' loving invitation to conversion.

Yes, the resurrection will indeed ensure that our hope is not in vain, but not even the resurrection can erase the wounds; the resurrected, glorified body of Jesus Christ still bore (and bears) the wounds of companionship, compassion, solidarity . . . and betrayal and abandonment. The wounds on Christ's glorified body are the incarnated memory of the *relationships* that defined his life and death. Jesus' wounds are the direct, inevitable consequence of his compassionate relationships with the poor, sinners, prostitutes, and other "unsavory characters." Because he dared to love *these* persons, he was crucified. The wounds are also the consequence of betrayed friendships, the betrayal Jesus suffered when his disciples abandoned him and fled out of fear for their own lives.

If it is truly the victory of life over death, then, the resurrection must vindicate and restore not just the life of the individual person "Jesus Christ"; the resurrection must also vindicate and restore the relationships that themselves have helped define Christ. The resurrection of Christ's body must be more than the restoration to life of an autonomous, isolated individual; it must be the resurrection of *Cristo Compañero*, Christ-as-companion. The resurrection is the victory of companionship over abandonment, the victory of community over estrangement. Also resurrected are those relationships that had been severed at Calvary when Jesus had been abandoned by his friends.

#### THE DENIAL OF SUFFERING

The response to Christ's invitation—"put your fingers here . . . and believe"—is what defines Christian faith. Through the simple, yet courageous act of placing his hand in Christ's side—and therefore acknowledging his own complicity in the events that led to Calvary—Thomas made explicit the necessity of acknowledging the suffering of the innocent victim and acknowledging our complicity in that suffering as integral dimensions of Christian faith.<sup>15</sup> Had Thomas recoiled from Christ's wounds in fear, the Resurrected Christ could justifiably be identified with

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<sup>15</sup>The scriptural text does not explicitly mention that Thomas placed his hand in Jesus' side. However, whether he put his hand into the wounds or not, Thomas was visibly, physically confronted with them. That seems to be the point. And one could then say that devotion and art (Caravaggio) have risked even excess by imagining the hand in the side.

an unspoiled victory that overcomes death by erasing it from our memory; this would truly be the conquering Christ, the imperial Christ.

The refusal to see and touch Christ's wounds, wounds that appear on his resurrected body, is *the* mortal sin (in the most literal sense of the term), for it leads inevitably to the death of others and, indeed, to our own death. The murderous consequences of the "denial of death" in contemporary Western societies were examined over a quarter century ago by the social psychologist Ernest Becker, who argued that the anxiety and, even, terror that we experience in the face of our own mortality is the foundational experience around which we construct our selves and our societies.<sup>16</sup> This need to deny our mortality, our ultimate powerlessness in the face of death, is what drives us to construct personal identities, social institutions, ideologies, and belief systems that can make us feel invulnerable and ultimately invincible. Invariably, however, we eventually discover that the world we have constructed to shield us from our own mortality and powerlessness has resulted in the very opposite; it is a world that inflicts death in all its forms. What Becker details is precisely the process by which the individual strives to exempt him or herself from the common lot of all persons, our common mortality. And that process ultimately deals death, to the "others" against whom the individual must assert his or her singular invulnerability, and death to the individual him or herself, since the need to presume oneself invulnerable leads to total isolation—from other persons, from God, and even from oneself.

In the language of social psychology, Becker thus articulated the consequences of erasing or ignoring the wounds on the risen body of Christ—the consequences of interpreting the resurrection apart from its concrete, physical history, a history that includes the crowing cock as well as the still-visible wounds. Those consequences are always violent and horrific. The corollary of our obsessive need to feel invulnerable in the face of our mortality is the need to avoid all pain, all suffering, for these appear in our lives as unwanted reminders that we are not in control of our own lives, that we are indeed vulnerable. If death is the ultimate enemy, the ultimate threat to our sense of security and invulnerability, so too are all those partial deaths that foreshadow our common end: illness, old age, poverty, failure, abandonment. So these must be avoided at any cost. Indeed, our consumer culture is premised upon and driven by the promise that all these forms of human vulnerability are avoidable . . . if we have a large enough bank account, the right kind of insurance, the latest model automobile, or the most effective deodorant ("never let them see you sweat"). Likewise, authentic human relationships of mutual love and trust are to be shunned, since these always involve a dimension of vulnerability and even pain in the face of an other who, however much we may seek to control, always remains beyond our control; if one "falls" in love, one might "get burned." So we surround ourselves with "things" that promise security and invulnerability, and we run from "persons," since these will demand vulnerability and the possibility of

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<sup>16</sup>Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (New York: Free Press, 1997).



pain. We fall in love with cars, houses, mobile phones, and computers even as we remain “unattached” from human persons.

But not just any persons—weak, powerless, vulnerable persons in particular. Wounded persons. For it is these who are especially threatening to our sense of invulnerability. For all the Western obsession with our bodies, the true measure of how much we value the human body is not how we treat our own tanned, toned, well-fed bodies but how we treat the bodies of poor persons. It is these who are the mirrors of our own souls, whose very existence threatens our sense of invulnerability, security, and control. In fact, the very existence of the wounded in our midst is so terrifying that we must eradicate them or, at least, hide them from view, “get them off the streets”—so that we won’t have to see them . . . and their uncomfortable wounds. So, argues Becker, the violence inflicted on the weak among us—from the Jews in Nazi concentration camps to the children left to die in the poverty of our contemporary concentration camps, the ghettos of Western cities and Third World rural villages—is simply the social face of the denial of death. If we deny death we inflict it. But we also inflict it on ourselves. The fear of pain and vulnerability that causes us to shun real human relationships, to shun that true love that always involves surrender and vulnerability in the face of an other, ultimately kills our interior life, our ability to feel anything—neither pain nor joy, nor love.

And the result of this pathological fear of our own fragility as human beings is the despair that lies just beneath the surface of our most “successful” communities and families. To scratch that well-manicured veneer is to discover the silent despair that manifests itself in a myriad of self-destructive ways. Suicide is the inevitable consequence of injustice. Thus, the suicide rate among suburban white males—the highest for any demographic group—is simply the corollary of the murder rate among inner city African American and Latino males. The former is a direct result of our failure as a society to confront the latter. Sadly, our teenagers are taking quite seriously the postmodern call for the “erasure of the subject.”

The most threatening “subjects” are precisely those who are the weakest, most powerless and fragile, for these represent the repressed, dangerous memory of our *common* mortality. There is thus a direct, intimate relationship between the struggle for social justice and the possibility of experiencing ourselves as loved, experiencing our own lives as gifts of an extravagant Lover. The act of solidarity with the wounded other is, at the same time, an acknowledgment of our common woundedness, our common powerlessness. It is also an acknowledgment of our complicity in the infliction of those wounds. And that is why we continue to erect ever-higher barriers between ourselves and “them,” so that we will not really have to face them, and thus face *ourselves*. In the end, what we fear most is not “those” persons, but *ourselves*, our weak, fragile, vulnerable, wounded selves. So we avoid touching—or even seeing—the wounds. We avoid risking the act of solidarity, or companionship with the victims of history.<sup>17</sup> Not because we hate *them* but because we hate

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<sup>17</sup>Not exclusively Christian, moreover, this is also the message of the Buddha,

ourselves. The uncomfortably physical, visible, palpable bodies of the poor are reminders that, whether or not we stand at “the end of history,” what is certain is that the history of the victims has not ended:

What has ended, perhaps, is the history of grand ideological dramas, of divine deceptions, of grand justifications for supposed gestures of progress. . . . But the history of the victims does not appear to have ended, the subversive memory that reveals how our presumed greatness was composed simply of blood and death.<sup>18</sup>

Of its very essence, the truth of Christ’s claims (and the claims of Christians through the ages) is an *embodied* truth, namely, that of the Crucified and Risen Lord. The paradigm of that embodiment is the Christ who presented himself to his disciples after the resurrection, wounded and glorified. It is also the Christ whose resurrected body is revealed not just in the upper room but in the very midst of our always-futile attempts to wall ourselves off from others.

#### THE RECONCILED COMMUNITY

For the resurrection story in the gospels does not stop, of course, with the risen Christ’s encounter with the apostles in that closed room. The apostles are commanded to go to Galilee. The place where the renewed, reconciled community of faith will be revealed, the place where the fullness of Christ’s resurrection will be unveiled, is a region familiar to them all. “Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee” (Matt 28:7). “Then Jesus said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; go and tell my disciples to go to Galilee, and there they will see me’ ” (Matt 28:10). The identity and mission of the new *ekklesia* are thus closely linked to Galilee; the renewed community will have Galilee as its birthplace.<sup>19</sup>

Like everything in the Bible, the choice of Galilee has theological significance. It is no mere coincidence that, in the Synoptic accounts, Jesus comes from

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Siddhartha Gautama. In the famous story of his childhood, Siddhartha’s path to enlightenment did not begin until he was able to escape the luxurious compound in which he had been raised and, once outside its walls, came face to face with a corpse, a beggar, and a sick person—the “three sights” of human mortality. Having seen himself mirrored in those persons, and recognizing that he himself would eventually become like them, he decided to leave behind his luxurious lifestyle in search of enlightenment. Like Siddhartha’s face-to-face encounter with human mortality, Thomas’ act of placing his hand into Jesus’ side brought him face-to-face with his own weakness and powerlessness, and with his own sinful participation in the acts which inflicted the wounds. For Thomas and the disciples, as for Siddhartha, their conversion began with the recognition that, in the words of Martin Luther, “we are *all* beggars.”

<sup>18</sup>José Ignacio González Faus, 111.

<sup>19</sup>I understand that I am conflating two gospel traditions here. One tradition (John) has the risen Jesus meet and part from the disciples in the Upper Room. Another (Matthew) has him part from them in Galilee, where, finally, “they see him.”

Nazareth, in Galilee, meets his end in Jerusalem, and, finally, returns to Galilee, where he appears to the apostles after his resurrection (Mark 14:28; Matt 26:32, 28:7, 10, 16). The theological significance ascribed to the Galilean borderland is rooted in the history, geography, and culture of the region. As Virgilio Elizondo notes, Galilee “was an outer region, far from the center of Judaism in Jerusalem of Judea and a crossroads of the great caravan routes of the world. It was a region of mixed peoples and languages.”<sup>20</sup> Contiguous with non-Jewish territories and geographically distant from Jerusalem, Galilee was often viewed by first-century Jews as “a Jewish enclave in the midst of ‘unfriendly’ gentile seas . . . ,”<sup>21</sup> hence its centuries-old name “Galilee of the Gentiles.” “The area as a whole,” writes sociologist and Scripture scholar Richard Horsley, “was a frontier between the great empires in their historical struggles.”<sup>22</sup> The Roman administrative cities of Sepphoris and Tiberias were centers of Hellenistic-Roman culture. Consequently, Jewish worship in these cities was “dramatically affected by the influences of Hellenistic-Roman culture and political domination.”<sup>23</sup> “It is possible, perhaps even likely, . . . ” argues Horsley, “that some Jews considered themselves faithful even while they utilized what would be classified as pagan or Greco-Roman symbols as a matter of course in their everyday lives.”<sup>24</sup> Their religious-cultural diversity made Galileans objects of resentment and opposition:

Galilee was heir in some form to the traditions of the Northern Kingdom. . . . Torah was important, as was circumcision in Galilean society, but not the written and oral Torah as interpreted by the Judean and Jerusalem retainer class and enforced where they could by the Temple aristocracy. Rather Galilee was home to popular legal and wisdom traditions. . . . Galilee was also ambivalent about Jerusalem, the Temple, the priestly aristocracy, temple dues and tithes.”<sup>25</sup>

In short, Horsley contends that Galilean Jewish practices could be described as a kind of popular religion:

The distinction anthropologists often make between the “great tradition” and the “little traditions” may be of some help in formulating the issues. A “society” may

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<sup>20</sup>Virgilio Elizondo, “Elements for a Mexican American Mestizo Christology,” *Voices from the Third World* 11 (December 1988): 105.

<sup>21</sup>Douglas Edwards, “The Socioeconomic and Cultural Ethos of the Lower Galilee in the First Century: Implications for the Nascent Jesus Movement,” in *The Galilee in Late Antiquity*, ed. L. Levine (1992) 54.

<sup>22</sup>Richard A. Horsley, *Galilee: History, Politics, People* (Valley Forge PA: Trinity Press International, 1995) 241.

<sup>23</sup>Richard A. Horsley, *Archaeology, History, and Society in Galilee: The Social Context of Jesus and the Rabbis* (Valley Forge PA: Trinity Press International, 1996) 55.

<sup>24</sup>Horsley, *Archaeology, History, and Society in Galilee*, 63.

<sup>25</sup>Jonathan Draper, “Jesus and the Renewal of Local Community in Galilee: Challenge to a Communitarian Christology,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 87 (June 1994): 35-36.

develop cultural traditions at two levels: the traditions of origin and customary practice continue as a popular tradition cultivated orally in the villages, while specialists codify those same traditions in a standardized and centralized form as an official tradition, which is cultivated orally but perhaps also reduced to written form. Something like this distinction between official tradition and popular tradition may help explain the situation in Galilee as seen both in sources from the first century CE and in early rabbinic literature.<sup>26</sup>

The history of Galilee as a land under contention and a political crossroads resulted in the emergence of popular religious practices which reflected that multi-cultural, multireligious history. In the gospels, this historical reality takes on theological significance as the place that defines the very character of the Christian revelation, for the Good News is incarnated in the person of Jesus Christ, Jesus the *Galilean Jew*. The Crucified and Risen Christ is a Galilean; his ministry and mission begin and end in Galilee.

In order to understand the Good News, insists Elizondo, we must understand the soteriological *value* (or, rather, anti-value) of Galilee, especially its villages, such as Nazareth. Like so many human societies throughout history, the ruling elites in Jesus' world attached a moral, and indeed theological value to the racial-cultural differences of the Galileans:

[T]he Jews of Judea looked down upon the Galilean Jews, for they considered them ignorant about the Law and the rules of the Temple, contaminated in many ways by their daily contacts with the pagans, not capable of speaking correct Greek since their language was being corrupted by the mixture with the other languages of the region. In short, their own Jewish people despised them as inferior and impure. Because of their mixture with others, they were marginated by their own people. For the Jews of Jerusalem, Galilean was almost synonymous with fool! . . . Could anything good come out of such an impure, mixed-up, and rebellious area?<sup>27</sup>

The answer to this question is what Elizondo calls the "Galilee Principle," God chooses "what is low and despised in the world" (1 Cor. 1:28):

That God has chosen to become a Galilean underscores the great paradox of the incarnation, in which God becomes the despised and lowly of the world. In becoming a Galilean, God becomes the fool of the world for the sake of the world's salvation.<sup>28</sup>

The Jewish establishment in Jerusalem could not conceive that God's word could be revealed among the "impure" people of the borderland: "Search and you will see that no prophet is to rise from Galilee" (John 7:52). Yet it is precisely in the very midst of contaminated, corrupted believers that God takes on human flesh.

Moreover, it is precisely in the midst of racial, cultural, and religious impurity that the resurrected Christ, the now-glorified Witness to God's power and love, will

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<sup>26</sup>Horsley, *Archaeology, History, and Society in Galilee*, 173.

<sup>27</sup>Horsley, *Archaeology, History, and Society in Galilee*, 53.

<sup>28</sup>Horsley, *Archaeology, History, and Society in Galilee*, 53.

be encountered: “he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him” (Matt 28:7). Just as the ministry and mission that define Jesus Christ as Son of God had begun in the villages and countryside of Galilee, so will that ministry and mission find their eschatological fulfillment in Galilee: “there you will see him.” The chosen place of God’s self-revelation is there where the Jewish population rubs shoulders with neighboring Gentiles, where Jewish religious practices are subject to Roman and Hellenistic influences, where popular Judaism remains outside the control of Jerusalem’s “official” Judaism. The “impure” and dangerous culture of the borderland is the privileged locus of God’s self-revelation and the place where the new Church will discover its mission.

The way to a new, reconciled community runs through the Galilean borderland, where the racial, cultural, and religious differences that had historically been perceived as threats to the purity of the faith are instead revealed as the cradle of a new life, a life free from that fear of our own vulnerability that compels us to erect ever higher walls between ourselves and others. Yes, the way to authentic community and liberation runs, first, through the Upper Room, where the disciples whose faith had disintegrated at Calvary are confronted with the ironically frightening question: “Why are you frightened?” But, if they are to discover the full meaning of the resurrection, the disciples must venture into the risky territory of Galilee.

Echoing Jesus’ own words to his disciples, the late Holy Father John Paul II repeatedly cried out: “Be not afraid!” Be not afraid of putting your hand in Jesus’ side. Be not afraid of proclaiming, “My Lord and my God” in the face of innocent suffering—and in the face of unbelievers. But also . . . be not afraid of seeking Christ’s glorified body there where His liberating presence is revealed on the borders between Jews and Gentiles, between believers and unbelievers, between godly and ungodly. Be not afraid of the borderland, for that is where we will see him, that is where the Church will be born. Have confidence in the abiding power of Jesus’ resurrected body, which is revealed precisely in the vulnerability of the borderland, among those whom the established leadership deems to be “impure”! “Be not afraid and tell my disciples to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

For the resurrected Christ, the borderland becomes *itself* the wound which terrifies, but which we are invited to see and touch. In the evocative words of the Chicana writer Gloria Anzaldúa, the border “es una herida abierta [is an open wound]. . . .”<sup>29</sup> Indeed, Jesus’ parallel commands to “place your hand in my side” and to “go to Galilee” have at least this in common: both strike at the very heart of our human fragility, because both these commands imply that, if we are to recognize the Crucified and Risen Lord, we must risk defilement, we must touch the untouchable. But it is a risk well worth taking because Jesus has assured us that “there you will see me.”

We are all called to an ever deeper confidence in the power of the Spirit to reveal God’s liberating presence in precisely those places in our Church and world

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<sup>29</sup>Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera* (Aunt Lute Books, 1999).

from which, we are convinced, nothing good can come. Like the disciples, we must have the courage, indeed the faith, to leave behind the spiritual and theological security of Tabor for the unexpected otherness of Calvary, the fragile if comforting security of the Upper Room for the foreignness and vulnerability of Galilee. Faith in the resurrection demands that we reject the assumption that “no prophet is to rise from Galilee.” Instead, Jesus asks us precisely to venture into Galilee, not only to *proclaim* the good news, but to *discover* it there: “Be not afraid . . . there you will see me.” The Crucified and Risen Christ thus empowers us to overcome the fear of proclaiming the Good News among unfriendly peoples. But Christ also empowers us to overcome the fear of discovering the Good News among unfriendly peoples, among the impure. The assumption that no prophet is to rise from Galilee is thus revealed as a sign not of faith but of fear, fear of the resurrected body of Christ, a fear from which only He can set us free. Erecting ever higher, seemingly more secure barriers against the threat of religious corruption can never, ultimately, be a viable Christian response to those whom we consider impure, precisely because we can never be sure that what we are defending against is not, in fact, the unexpected, unanticipated appearance of the resurrected Christ calling out to us: “Be not afraid. . . . Go to Galilee. . . . There you will see me.”

The disciple need not fear the impurity of Galilee and its surroundings. We should remember Cardinal Newman’s wise words: “the stronger and more living is an idea, that is, the more powerful hold it exercises on the minds of men [and women], the more able is it to dispense with safeguards, and trust to itself against the danger of corruption.”<sup>30</sup> And what idea is stronger and more living than that of Christianity?<sup>31</sup> This does not imply some sort of naïve idealism; Jesus does not *do away* with borders or demand that they be eliminated. Rather, he transforms them from instruments of exclusion and division to *loci* of revelation. If you want to *see me*, the resurrected Jesus tells us, you have to risk it! You have to risk going into that very place from where your fathers said (your *fathers* said) no prophets could come. You have to risk the possibility that the purity of your faith will be threatened. But . . . do not be afraid. In the very midst of that vulnerability, you will see me. In the midst of that fear of corruption and contamination, you will see me. On the border between belief and unbelief, you will see me.

The conversions of the Upper Room and the revelation of Christ’s body in the borderland of Galilee are *both* part of the Easter story. The courage demanded of the apostles is not just that of proclaiming the truth of Christ’s resurrection *to* the impure Galileans but also of somehow recognizing Christ’s resurrected body *amidst* that very impurity. This latter aspect of the resurrection inspires at least as much fear as the former, and demands at least as much courage. Is Jesus Christ the Way, the Truth, and the Life? Has he truly looked into our eyes and, smiling, called out

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<sup>30</sup>John Henry Cardinal Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1909) 188.

<sup>31</sup>Ladislas Orsy, “Justice Begins at Home,” *The Tablet* (16 January 1999).

our names? Ask Thomas the Apostle. Ask also the “impure,” “corrupted” believers living in the borderlands. Ask the lowly and rejected of the world, those persons whom the world has thrown out. Ask the many Galileans living among us today.

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