

## Wounds and Empowerment

Diego Irarrazaval \*

There are many countercultural experiences with the wounded/risen Lord. Often like Thomas (Jn 20:24-29) one feels the need to acknowledge wounds and open one's heart to new life. One wishes to see the end of unceasing crucifixion throughout history. In today's world 85 persons have as much wealth as three and a half billion persons <sup>1</sup>.

### 1) Narratives that imply historical healing.

My starting point is radical discipleship in Central and South America. First narrative. A priest whom I knew in Santiago, Juan Alsina, told the military that killed him at the edge of the Mapocho river: "please do not blindfold me, because I want to see you, and give you forgiveness" <sup>2</sup>; so it happened on 19/9/1973. After this and other horrible events, Chilean society took 30 years to begin to acknowledge widespread torture <sup>3</sup>. Alsina and others gave the first steps towards reconciliation.

Second narrative. According to Maya civilization, violence demands reparation. During and after the civil war in Guatemala (60's to 90's), those who killed about 200 thousand did not publicly acknowledge their crimes. So, sons and daughters of the victims took their place and gave forgiveness on their behalf. Rigoberta Menchú explained it thus:

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<sup>1</sup> OXFAM, *Working for the few*, World Economic Forum, Davos, 20/1/2014. [www.oxfam.org](http://www.oxfam.org) Half of the world's wealth is owned by 1% of its population.

<sup>2</sup> Last words of martyr Juan Alsina (31 years old), according to the soldier who shot him and picked the body from the river bed, during a civilian-military dictatorship, as recorded by a friend of Alsina who was able to interview that soldier (Miguel Jorda, *Testimonio Martirial de Juan Alsina*, Santiago: San Pablo, 1993, 31). (My translation).

<sup>3</sup> Only in 2004, after more than 30 years, there has been an official report on Political Prisoners and Torture in Chile; see report on [www.latinamericanstudies.org/chile/informe/htp](http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/chile/informe/htp)

“cruelty has no place in our (maya) future”, assassins have been “incapable of asking and being forgiven (by fellow guatemalans) so we (daughters and sons of victims) asked for pardon”<sup>4</sup>; as we all know, that happened together with a heroic struggle for human rights (with the motto: *Nunca Más*, that is, never again such violence).

Third narrative. Throughout our continent (and specially in Mexico), levels of armed and drug violence are crucifying millions of civilians; however, in small ways, life is reaffirmed; for example, organized crime in Cherán devastates forests and kills without mercy; so people organize each evening more than 200 soup kitchens and Christian altars in the streets and thus regain their right to “create life in spite of pain and injustice”<sup>5</sup>.

These three narratives may seem too local; as a matter of fact, they are healing humanity and the earth. Crucial theological contents arise from these and other south and central American events, and also throughout a world full of violence, and within peoples who resist evil and search for alternatives. Lessons of a healing empowerment are given by people’s unending suffering, resilience, unconditional forgiveness, and reconstruction of justice. When rooted in such experiences, intellectual work is not reduced to conceptual standards, rather it is challenged by cruel pain and by the goal of liberation. It admires wounded people’s behavior, who in explicit or implicit ways become sacraments of a kenotic Christ who heals.

Everyday distress, resilience, struggle make it possible to comprehend a crucified/risen Christ. Millions of people are not only victims, they silently (and often in

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<sup>4</sup> Witness given in 2011 in Villa Grimaldi, a Chilean Torture Center (now called Park of Peace) by Rigoberta Menchú (1992 Nobel Peace Prize); her parents were killed in Guatemala; about 200.000 died during 30 years of civil war.; report in [www.youtube.com/watch?v=wMEHsgYWpIQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wMEHsgYWpIQ). See biography by Elisabeth Burgos, *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia*, Mexico: Siglo XXI, 1986.

<sup>5</sup> Jorge A. Gonzalez “Cherán, Mexico: unidad frente al crimen organizado”, *Mensaje* 608 (2012), 49 (my translation). Everyday at 8 p.m., neighbors share food, prayer, images of popular piety, in the streets of Cherán; and thus they avoid gangs taking over public space.

symbolic forms) demand radical transformations in today`s world. God`s saving power comes from below, “*la salvacion viene de los pobres*” (Jon Sobrino) <sup>6</sup>. Instead of being obsessed with secularism and loss of social-moral power, communities of faith may humbly speak of a kenotic God, and may continue doing prophetic theology.

## 2) Emerging theological paradigms.

Faith-understanding responds to cries of people and of nature, and it is merciful and passionate (*compasiva y apasionada*). In other words, it is in solidarity with the little ones of the earth, and it passionately seeks life in its fullness. Christian discourse is challenged by the Beatitudes (addressed to people with all kinds of hunger and sadness) and by Romans 8:18-27 (that deals with oppressed bodies and environment). If this is so, theology focuses on mistreated persons that are given a joyful Kingdom, and also focuses on birth pains of creation. The downtrodden are blessed with happiness, and all of creation is made free. Since our bodies and earth are structurally wounded, they cry (theologically) for the Kingdom now and hereafter.

Everyday pain and cries for healing open the door to systematic understandings of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Speaking in broad terms, in Latin America dialogue has been taking place between church leaders, scholars, and ordinary communities of faith. It was given a green light during the Episcopal Conference held in Medellin, with its creative reception of Vatican II. From the 1960`s onwards there have been outstanding hermeneutical developments in theological anthropology, Christology, ethics, exegesis, grass roots biblical work, and in other areas. Although the liberation perspective is often seen as only focusing on socio-political change, it is wholistic, and it has a gamut of

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<sup>6</sup> Jon Sobrino, *Fuera de los pobres no hay salvación, pequeños ensayos utópico-proféticos*, Madrid: Trotta, 2007, 77 (my translation).

methodologies. Its common denominator is compassion with all who are suffering <sup>7</sup>, a critical faith understanding, and communion with all people loved by God. So, it may be described as *compasiva y apasionada* (in solidarity with fragile entities, and also passionate for fullness of life in the midst of scarcity). It is a relational paradigm in theology.

Healing is seen in terms of wholistic liberation and of concrete healing of sin: inequality, privatization, triviality, traffic of arms and drugs (in most areas of Latin America), unlimited market and technological illusions, totalitarian desire for things and for instantaneous relationships (that make people unhappy!). It is good to underline what Jung Mo Sung says sharply: “the insatiable desire to consume is more and more controlling society at a global scale” <sup>8</sup>. More people are being wounded by the illusions of the technology-market than by violation of human rights in times of dictatorships. The problem is not daily consumption of goods, but rather sacralized desires and complicities (that are widespread and often invisible obstacles to reconciliation and to an eschatological faith). As a friend says “consumerism is the death of Christian eschatology; there can be no rupture with the status quo, no inbreaking kingdom of God, but only endless superficial novelty” (William Cavanaugh) <sup>9</sup>.

In terms of doctrine and ethics, a couple of major issues. In the midst of a postmodern and epocal change, some cling to absolutes of faith, many align themselves to a liberal-individual vision, and also some seek reconnections to God`s always surprising self

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<sup>7</sup> See Leonardo and Clodovis Boff, *Como hacer teología de liberación*, Bogotá: Paulinas, 1986, 11-12: “sin un mínimo de compasión por la pasión que afecta a la gran mayoría de la humanidad, no es posible tener ni comprender la teología de la liberación”.

<sup>8</sup> Jung Mo Sung, *Um camino espiritual para a felicidade*, Petrópolis: Vozes, 2007, 132.

<sup>9</sup> W. Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed, Economics and Christian Desire*, Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2008, 93. Also phenomenological studies: David Lyon, *Jesus in Disneyland. Religion in postmodern times*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000; Vincent Miller, *Consuming Religion, Christian faith and practice in a consumer culture*, New York: Continuum, 2005; Alfredo Silletta, *Shopping Espiritual, las sectas al desnudo*, Buenos Aires: Martinez Rosa, 2007.

communication in history. The latter draws from biblical and ecclesial resources; and it is an alternative to collapsing neo-scholastic and neo-liberal frameworks. A priority is to confront mainstream refashioned neo-scholastic and also neoliberal thinking. As is well known, onto-theological and liberal standards are less significant to new generations. Thus, theological discourse may be relevant to plural contemporary journeys of faith, to people's of the earth undergoing pangs of childbirth, to interreligious and to nonreligious persons.

Allow me to again underline urgent challenges placed on theologies by the transcendental desire of consumption, discrimination and scars inflicted on latinamerican women and on youth. These scars are becoming more scandalous than when in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century the Churches drew away from workers and also from people in the sciences. The 21st century may be another great wave of "institutional suicide", since numerous women and youth reasonably do not participate in a Church that fails to listen and heal their wounds.

In this context one is enlightened by emerging "relational" theologies<sup>10</sup>; their goal is not a fortified identity (christian/catholic), nor do they replace social liberation with cultural reconciliation. What is happening in the 90's and in this first decade of the 21 st century in Latin America is praiseworthy, although it has its shortcomings and hermeneutical dilemmas. For example, often philosophical and social scientific language are juxtaposed to theological resources. In spite of limitations, several outstanding "relational" perspectives are being carried out today in terms of Christology, pneumatology, eco-theology, feminism, indigenous and mestizo, afro-american, and inter-

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<sup>10</sup> Major different hermeneutics (see footnote 10) have a common horizon, that may be described as "relational", since the understanding of the Christian faith systematically interacts with non Christian sources of faith.

religious discourse <sup>11</sup>. Each one has its features, and all of them are like a rainbow of insights; they do have a relational thrust, which is relevant for reconciliation.

Catholic theological inquiry has a eucharistic thrust. There is an ongoing debate over solidarity with wounded people and the kenotic Christ, since we are communities of the resurrection. In other words, an understanding of God's presence in humanity and creation requires a renewed comprehension of Christian reconciliation and celebration, in the midst of a multicultural humanity and for the sake of planetary survival.

### 3) Universal relationships in God (*relacionalidad en Dios*).

Bonds are registered in everyday experience. Young and old, urban and rural, men and women, we are all co-relational beings, and thus we are images of God (who is a corelational trinity). Narratives about creation (Gen 1-2) bond us to all living creatures and to God that declares all is good, and new testament narratives have love as the key to everything (and love is a way of speaking of relationships without boundaries). Thus, the first and the second testament place the foundations of what is being called relational-relationality (*relacionalidad*).

Ecclesial experience is also a gateway in this direction. It takes place in celebrations through concrete signs, and in the sharing of wisdom, mercy and tenderness. Table-fellowship is a major sign, and so are also water and oil in the beginning of our personal journeys, eucharistic bread and wine, caring of each other and being reconciled, sexual and family interaction, ministry in all its dimensions.

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<sup>11</sup> See critical and committed appraisals of theologies in the Americas: J.J. Tamayo (eds.), *Panorama de la Teología Latinoamericana*, Estella: Verbo Divino, 2001; J.J. Tamayo, *Nuevo Paradigma Teológico*, Madrid: Trotta, 2003; J.J. Tamayo, L.C. Susin (coord.), *Teología para otro mundo posible*, Madrid: PPC, 2006; S. Torres, C. Abrigo (coord.), *Actualidad y Vigencia de la teología latinoamericana*, Santiago: UCSH, 2012.

The universe is a network of bonds. Humanity engages in a journey of thousands of years. The triune God, manifested through the spirit of Jesus Christ, may be described as relation of relationships (*relacion de relaciones*). In theological discourse we are talking of a relational paradigm; its meaning arises from the depth of mystery, since the paradigm is relevant when it worships the Trinity and its kenotic/paschal mystery.

My general conclusion is that healing of wounds and empowerment belong to conciliar theology and its signs of the times. It hopefully assesses contemporary solidarity with the downtrodden, it also critically examines desires in consumer global society, and moreover it confronts ahistorical piety and academic neutrality. All of this leads towards a responsible and fruitful theology and spirituality of reconciliation. This implies healing the wounded and removing them from the Cross. In this way, humanity is empowered and it celebrates life.