

## **GALILEAN JOURNEY REVISITED: MESTIZAJE, ANTI-JUDAISM, AND THE DYNAMICS OF EXCLUSION**

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*The article explores Virgilio Elizondo's Galilean Journey and its critiques, particularly the claim that he uses anti-Jewish rhetoric. While acknowledging the legitimacy of some concerns, the author argues that in both its object of study (the New Testament portrayal of Jesus as Galilean) and its hermeneutical location (marginalized contemporary believers), Elizondo's work provides regulative principles for interpretation that guard against the dangers of anti-Jewish, supersessionist readings of the Gospels. The key lies in viewing Jesus' prophetic ministry as a model of faithful dissent against forces of marginalization and exclusion.*

“Surely you are not also from Galilee, are you?  
Search and you will see that no prophet  
is to arise from Galilee” (Jn 7:52).

RECENT DECADES HAVE SEEN critiques by scholars doing historical-Jesus research of his portrayal in theologies inspired by the preferential option for the poor.<sup>1</sup> Virgilio Elizondo's landmark work, *Galilean Journey: The Mexican-American Promise*, has been criticized by some for anti-Jewish rhetoric in its portrait of Galilee, and of Jesus' conflicts with Jewish religious authorities in Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup> Mary Boys treats Elizondo's work as emblematic of liberation theologies, asserting, “Scholarship simply

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, the critique of Jon Sobrino in John P. Meier, “The Bible as a Source for Theology,” in Catholic Theological Society of America, *Proceedings of the Forty-Third Annual Convention*, ed. George Kilcourse, 43 (June 15–19, 1988) 1–14, at 3.

<sup>2</sup> Virgilio Elizondo, *Galilean Journey: The Mexican-American Promise*, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1983, 2000).

does not support the sweeping generalizations they draw, and the anti-Judaism in their work is appalling.”<sup>3</sup>

The basic tension that Elizondo identifies, however, is not his own invention. It is rooted, rather, in the Gospel narratives themselves and raises complex issues for certain readers of the Second Testament. The deadly conflict between Jesus and some Jerusalem authorities poses special problems for a culturally contextualized theology like *Galilean Journey*, which wrestles with experiences of marginalization in the Mexican-American experience. In what follows, I argue that Elizondo’s focus on the critical-prophetic nature of Jesus’ ministry fortifies and encourages Christian efforts toward justice, and (while granting some points of his critics) cannot be fairly said to advocate for the superiority of Christianity over Judaism. I suggest, rather, that the critiques serve to focus attention on the complex hermeneutics of interpreting (for a post-Shoah world) the first-century intra-Jewish conflicts that led to the death of Jesus. Thus, we are led to ask, How can Christians hold fast to the prophetic dimension of Jesus’ ministry, portrayed in the Gospels as a confrontation with Jewish religious authorities, without falling into, or being vilified for, anti-Judaism?

On the one hand, if Christian accounts of Jesus omit his critical stance toward the religious hypocrisy, legalism, and exclusionism of important elements of first-century Jewish leadership, then significant dimensions of his preaching and ministry are lost. Indeed, it would seem these lessons should be at the forefront of Christian self-examination regarding the sad consequences of later efforts to establish Christian identity in contradistinction to Judaism. On the other hand, when such themes are linked to anti-Jewish caricatures and supersessionist theological ideas, the tragic legacy of Christian mistreatment of Jews is inevitably perpetuated and their contribution to liberation threatened. I argue, therefore, that both historical Jesus research and theologies grounded in the option for the poor have important, complementary, and sometimes mutually corrective roles to play in seeking a solution to this dilemma.

Biblical scholarship has identified sections where the Gospels retroject conflicts between nascent Christianity and Judaism into the time of Jesus, and literary and archeological sources continue to deepen our understanding of the religious, cultural, and political character of the Galilean region where Jesus spent most of his life. At the same time, the transhistorical problem of Christian anti-Judaism increasingly demands a hermeneutic to assist in the reception of these biblical accounts among Christian faith communities in a post-Holocaust environment. In what follows, I argue that Elizondo’s theology and the U.S. Latino/a theologies his work has

<sup>3</sup> Mary C. Boys, *Has God Only One Blessing? Judaism as a Source of Christian Self-Understanding* (New York: Paulist, 2000) 314 n. 19.

helped to initiate (1) offer important insights on questions of marginalization, alienation, and power, and (2) provide valuable hermeneutical resources for the ongoing reception of Gospel accounts of Jesus' ministry and its attendant conflicts.<sup>4</sup> I also suggest that Elizondo's principles be turned around to assist in the interpretation his own work, so that its ongoing reception remains true to its liberative spirit.

Elizondo frames his analysis of the Galilean Jesus in his account of the dynamics of *mestizaje*, that often-violent encounter of cultures at the heart of the Mexican-American experience.<sup>5</sup> He recognizes the powerful forces of exclusion faced by mestizos/as in a borderland existence, including a double rejection by those on both sides of the border. Elizondo finds hope in Jesus the Galilean who himself experiences this double rejection, and whose ministry, as narrated in the Gospels, incarnates three principles that serve to overcome such exclusion: (1) the Galilee principle: God loves what human beings reject;<sup>6</sup> (2) the Jerusalem principle: God calls and empowers the marginalized to resist the powers of exclusion and domination;<sup>7</sup> and (3) the Resurrection principle: only the power of love can conquer evil.<sup>8</sup>

This article argues that, viewed within the larger context of the mestizo/a's double rejection and the aforementioned principles, the basic insights of *Galilean Journey* work against anti-Jewish readings by interpreting Jesus' conflict with Jewish authorities as the prophetic battle against exclusion of a Galilean firmly rooted within the Jewish tradition. Drawing from his experience of traditional Mexican-American fidelity to ecclesial and social bodies despite marginalization, Elizondo ultimately envisions Jesus as a faithful dissenter. In this way, Jesus offers a path to resist all forms of

<sup>4</sup> Here, the work of feminist theologians, in its self-criticism and (re-)constructive vision, illustrates analogous possibilities. See, for example, Judith Plaskow, "Anti-Judaism in Feminist Christian Interpretation," in *Searching the Scriptures: A Feminist Introduction*, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (New York: Crossroad, 1993) 116–29; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus, Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet: Critical Issues in Feminist Christology* (New York: Continuum, 1994).

<sup>5</sup> Noting this violence helps to overcome a romanticization of "*mestizaje*." On its limits, see Roberto Goizueta, "La Raza Cós mica? The Vision of José Vasconcelos," *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology* 12 (1994) 5–27.

<sup>6</sup> Elizondo writes, "What human beings reject, God chooses as God's very own" (*Galilean Journey* 91).

<sup>7</sup> Elizondo asserts, "God chooses an oppressed people, not to bring them comfort in their oppression, but to enable them to confront, transcend, and transform whatever in the oppressor society diminishes and destroys the fundamental dignity of human nature" (*ibid.* 103).

<sup>8</sup> Elizondo writes, "Only love can triumph over evil, and no human power can prevail against the power of unlimited love" (*ibid.* 115).

exclusion, epitomizing Elizondo's view that resistance springs from fidelity to and love of one's own tradition.

I begin by analyzing the structure and content of *Galilean Journey* as a constructive theological project, which draws a mutually critical correlation between Elizondo's interpretation of the contemporary situation of Mexican-American *mestizaje* and his understanding of the significance of the Galilean dimension of the identity of Jesus. My second part considers critiques that *Galilean Journey* evidences anti-intellectual romanticism, anti-Jewish rhetoric, and/or antihistorical anachronisms. My third part examines how Elizondo's distinctive hermeneutical location shapes the aforementioned principles, which, I argue, serves to adjudicate the claims made against the text. Elizondo's principles, I will propose, draw our attention to traces of the logic of exclusion in the accusations themselves. Overall, my goal is to revisit the portrait developed in *Galilean Journey* of Jesus as a faithful dissenter who speaks and acts against the dynamics of exclusion suffered by marginalized Jews and certain others in first-century Palestine and to demonstrate its ongoing significance for people of diverse races, cultures, and religions today.

### **GALILEAN JOURNEY: REJECTION OF THE MESTIZO TRANSFORMED INTO PRINCIPLES OF HOPE**

The power of Virgilio Elizondo's *Galilean Journey* is rooted in its creative correlation of the gospel of Jesus with Elizondo's own Mexican-American experience.<sup>9</sup> Following David Tracy's understanding of theology as the mutually critical correlation between an interpretation of the faith tradition and an interpretation of a contemporary situation, I would characterize *Galilean Journey* not as a work of historical-Jesus research but as a foundational correlational text of Latino/a systematic theology with important christological implications in its own right.<sup>10</sup>

Elizondo explicitly identifies the Mexican-American experience as the setting for his theological reflection. Methodologically, the historical influence of Latin American colleagues on Elizondo draws our attention to the see-judge-act method inherited from Catholic Action and powerfully used in the episcopal documents of Medellín and a number of liberation theologians.<sup>11</sup> In Elizondo's work, this method first yields a "seeing" of the basic

<sup>9</sup> Throughout my analysis of the text proper, I prefer to use Elizondo's own phrase "Mexican-American" rather than "Hispanic" or "Latino/a."

<sup>10</sup> For a succinct elucidation of the method, see David Tracy, "Theological Method," in *Christian Theology*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson and Robert H. King (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) 35–60.

<sup>11</sup> Clodovis Boff articulates this method as a triad of "mediations." So, see-judge-act translates into the use of socioanalytical, hermeneutic, and practical

sociocultural reality of Mexican-Americans: the situation he calls *mestizaje*. Second, Elizondo interprets this situation in light of the Gospels, and, true to his correlational approach, highlights corresponding aspects in the sociocultural situation of the Gospels and of Jesus himself.<sup>12</sup> And third, Elizondo formulates the aforementioned principles as implications of God's work in Jesus of Galilee for Christian action and discipleship today.<sup>13</sup> In what follows I summarize each of these themes and suggest their significance for theology today.

### Seeing the Reality of the Mexican-American Experience: *Mestizaje*

Without question, Elizondo's focus on *mestizaje* as a reality demanding theological reflection represents one of the most significant and enduring contributions of *Galilean Journey*.<sup>14</sup> For Elizondo *mestizaje* involves the (often violent) meeting of two cultures and possesses a dual nature. The term connotes both the suffering inherent in conquest and marginalization and the positive potential linked to the creation of new identities. Elizondo asserts that Mexican-American identity is a product of two *mestizajes*: (1) the Spanish-Indigenous encounter that originated in the European conquest of Mexico and helped produce the Mexican people and their culture, and (2) the Nordic-Protestant wresting of Northern Mexico into U.S. hands and the creation of the Mexican-American reality. The genius of Elizondo's approach lies in his recognition of both the deplorable nature of the conquests and the painful struggles that have produced *mestizaje*, and his illumination of the resilient beauty of the Mexican and Mexican-American peoples and cultures that have appeared in their wake.

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mediations. "Epistemology and Method of the Theology of Liberation," in *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, ed. Jon Sobrino and Ignacio Ellacuría (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1990) 57–85. For an ecclesiastical example of the method, see Oscar Romero, *Voice of the Voiceless: The Four Pastoral Letters and Other Statements*, trans. Michael J. Walsh (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1985).

<sup>12</sup> Here Elizondo's innovative work fulfills the 1965 mandate of Vatican II stated in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World: "In every age, the church carries the responsibility of reading the signs of the times and of interpreting them in light of the Gospel, if it is to carry out its task" (*Gaudium et spes* no. 4, in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott [New York: America, 1966] 202).

<sup>13</sup> Elizondo never explicitly refers to the see-judge-act model, but I believe it a fruitful way to interpret the three major parts of the text: "The Mexican-American Experience" (see), "The Gospel Matrix" (judge), and "From Margination to New Creation" (act). See Elizondo's essay in this issue for his indebtedness to this pastoral model.

<sup>14</sup> Elizondo develops this category more fully in his *The Future Is Mestizo: Life Where Cultures Meet*, 2nd ed. (Boulder, Colo.: University of Colorado, 2000).

Elizondo outlines the cruel power dynamics that often attend *mestizaje* in three “anthropological” laws: group inclusion/exclusion, social distance, and elimination of opposition.<sup>15</sup> The first law specifies the dangerous tendency of human beings to separate and classify each other, creating polarities of “us” versus “them” in the name of group purity.<sup>16</sup> The second law indicates that these insider-outsider, superior-inferior polarities, when reified in social structures of domination, create social distances that order and condition even genuinely positive interpersonal relationships—witness how acts by the dominant group may, even unconsciously, involve paternalism or an implicit call to assimilation. The third law says that “anyone who threatens to diminish or destroy the barriers of group separation must be eliminated.”<sup>17</sup> Grounded as they are in the commitment to group purity, Elizondo’s laws capture the fear and animosity that too often result from *mestizaje*.

Elizondo asserts that the mestizo/a blurs codes of group purity, and that this leads to a pattern of double rejection. He evocatively describes the situation of Mexican Americans who are not “Mexican” enough to achieve full acceptance by relatives and friends in Mexico, and are not “American” enough for U.S. citizens. This rejection manifests itself economically, politically, culturally, psychologically, and religiously, so that even the overcoming of oppressive obstacles is fraught with ambiguity. Despite these problems, however, Elizondo identifies creative possibilities in *mestizaje*, especially in the powerful religious symbols of Mexican-American culture.

Surprisingly perhaps, Elizondo does not attempt to excavate or construct an aboriginal or autochthonous religiosity in opposition to colonially imposed Christianity, a move that might reify the very barriers he denounces. Instead, he exalts the beauty of Mexican-American religiosity and specifically that of his own Roman Catholic tradition as a rich resource and site of resistance and survival. For Elizondo, “Christianity was not so much superimposed upon as implanted and ‘naturalized’ in the Mexican-American way of life.”<sup>18</sup> Having detailed the cruel dimensions of the double *mestizaje* of Mexican Americans, Elizondo abjures benign views of the conquest. However, rather than reject the religiosity that emerges from the conquest, he extols its beauty and creative possibilities. Accordingly, he identifies elements in Mexican-American religiosity—its images, rituals,

<sup>15</sup> Elizondo, *Galilean Journey* 17–18.

<sup>16</sup> It is interesting to note how Elizondo’s first “law” resonates with the basic insight of Edward Said’s highly influential *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978). This is not to imply any overt relationship, but rather to signal how subsequent Latino/a theologians will read *Galilean Journey* in relation to postcolonial theory.

<sup>17</sup> Elizondo, *Galilean Journey* 18.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* 32, emphasis original.

devotions, saintly figures, etc.—that serve not only as symbols of struggle, suffering, and death, but also as symbols of a new creation.<sup>19</sup> These popular traditions mediate a sense of ultimate belonging. Since Mexican-American religiosity is profoundly Christian, Elizondo turns to the figure of Jesus, particularly Jesus the Galilean Jew, to both articulate the characteristics of this new creation and to elicit new understandings of Christian sacred texts concerning Jesus Christ.

### **The Galilean Jesus and Judgment: Reading Culture and a Cultural Rereading of the Gospels**

Elizondo's exploration of *mestizaje* and the value he places on Mexican-American religiosity establishes *Galilean Journey* as an important and creative theological work. How he uses these insights to carry out a cultural rereading of Jesus as a Galilean, however, defines his contribution to Christology, a contribution that must be situated correctly so that it is not confused with historical Jesus research. For, while his work explores the historical world, actions, and words of the first-century Jesus of Nazareth, *Galilean Journey* is neither a work of biblical scholarship nor a part of "third quest" historical Jesus research.<sup>20</sup> Elizondo clearly states that he views his work as pastoral theology,<sup>21</sup> a culturally conditioned reading of the Gospels that turns to the Second Testament to shed light on the contemporary situation of Mexican Americans, but that also draws from the Mexican-American experience to "turn up previously hidden aspects of the gospel message."<sup>22</sup>

Elizondo's description of his correlational method places him in what Elizabeth Johnson identifies as the "second wave of renewal in Catholic Christology."<sup>23</sup> Rather than using the Chalcedonic formula of Jesus Christ's full divinity and full humanity as a starting point, theologians of this post-Vatican II generation turn to the scriptural narratives about

<sup>19</sup> Certainly, foremost among these is La Morenita, Our Lady of Guadalupe, whom Elizondo has named elsewhere as "mother of the new creation"; see Virgilio Elizondo, *Guadalupe: Mother of the New Creation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1997).

<sup>20</sup> Outstanding examples include the multivolume project that began with John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, 3 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1991); and the work of John Dominic Crossan, a leading member of the Jesus Seminar: e.g., *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991).

<sup>21</sup> Elizondo, *Galilean Journey* 47.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Consider Jesus: Waves of Renewal in Christology* (New York: Crossroad, 1990) 49. Johnson describes the "first wave" as occurring in the 1950s and 1960s "when theologians pondered the dogmatic confession of Jesus Christ's identity" that yielded a "deeper appreciation of the genuine humanity of the Word made flesh, and of the dignity and value of every human being" (*ibid.*).

Jesus' historical ministry.<sup>24</sup> What results is a reading of Jesus that is not less faithful or traditional, but one that, in light of modern historical consciousness, is focused on the "history of Jesus" so as to render a more faithful discipleship among believers today. Johnson writes:

If Jesus is the revelation of God and stood for definite purposes and upheld certain values, then the significance of that for believers is inestimable. What he does in the concrete, matters; it embodies the way of God in this world which patterns our way as disciples today. . . . Jesus does not just have a human nature in the abstract, but a very concrete human history. We need to put that story into dialogue with our own lives today.<sup>25</sup>

Although Elizondo makes assertions regarding the historical reality of Jesus of Nazareth, *Galilean Journey* does not attempt to reconstruct the life of the "historical Jesus," and does not try to discern the intentions of the biblical authors. Instead, it rereads the Gospel narratives concerning Jesus' cultural reality in the borderland area of Galilee from the perspective of today's borderland dwellers. When Elizondo develops the notion of Galilee as a symbol of multiple rejection, he draws not just from the biblical texts and the work of biblical archeology and history, but from the very experience of multiple rejection that is part of the contemporary Mexican-American *mestizaje*. Thus Elizondo's provocative image of Jesus the Galilean as a "borderland reject"<sup>26</sup> correlates: (1) the Christian confession of Jesus Christ as a fully-human being—incarnated in the specific body, time, place, and culture of a first-century Galilean; (2) the biblical account of Jesus' ministry occurring primarily in the marginal area of Galilee; and (3) the Mexican-American experience of borderland marginalization.

For Elizondo, taking Jesus' humanity seriously demands attention to his cultural reality as a Galilean. Theologically, the incarnation is not abstract, but involves God becoming a human being with a cultural reality, and that is crucial for understanding what God reveals to humanity in Jesus Christ. One aspect of this revelation is that the cultural reality of the Galilean Jesus is marked by the kind of double rejection experienced by mestizo/as today. Elizondo draws this comparison:

The image of the Galileans to the Jerusalem Jews is comparable to the image of the Mexican-Americans to the Mexicans of Mexico. On the other hand, the image

<sup>24</sup> Examples cited by Johnson include Karl Rahner (in his later years), Edward Schillebeeckx, Hans Küng, Walter Kasper, Gerald O'Collins, James Mackey, Monica Hellwig, and William Thompson.

<sup>25</sup> Johnson, *Consider Jesus* 50.

<sup>26</sup> Elizondo, *Galilean Journey* 54. Methodologically, Elizondo's openness to biblical explanatory methods moves away from Gadamer's comprehensive rejection of method and more closely to the "arc of understanding" found in the work of Paul Ricoeur.

of the Galileans to the Greco-Romans is comparable to the image of the Mexican-American to the Anglo population of the United States. They were part of and despised by both [Mexicans and U.S. Anglos].<sup>27</sup>

We have already seen that Elizondo emphasizes not only the destructive potential of *mestizaje* in the “anthropological” laws of group inclusion/exclusion, social distance, and elimination, but also its creative potential for bringing about new life. Jesus’ ministry epitomizes the latter, inasmuch as he manifests the scandalous, transgressive nature of *mestizaje* by valorizing as most beloved by God what has been rejected by human beings. Elizondo asserts that the Galilean ministry of Jesus announces good news that subverts the polarizing barriers of human exclusion and, in doing so, directly confronts the powers that most benefit from the entrenched status quo.<sup>28</sup> If Galilee represents the margins, then Jerusalem, and specifically the rejection of Jesus and his message by some of the Temple authorities, represents the oppressive center. Accordingly, it is the movement of the Gospel narratives themselves from Galilee to Jerusalem and their ultimate culmination in the Resurrection that provides the pattern for Elizondo’s constructive theological statement in the Galilee principle, the Jerusalem principle, and the Resurrection principle.<sup>29</sup>

### **The Galilean Journey as Action: Three Principles and the Legacy of Latino/a Theology**

Elizondo’s three principles signal the engagement of his christological reflection with the “preferential option for the poor” and Christian discipleship as prophetic praxis.<sup>30</sup> The Galilee principle—“what human beings reject, God chooses as his very own”—succinctly summarizes the preferential option for the poor,<sup>31</sup> and functions as a fundamental guide for

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. 52.

<sup>28</sup> Specifically, Elizondo argues that the Galilean ministry of Jesus—preaching, healing, and table fellowship with powerful and marginal persons alike—was the result of his rejecting the rejection he faced as a Galilean and announcing the universal love of God-Abba to other “rejects” of this time and place. This led to his confrontation with systems carrying out that rejection and eventually the cross. Ibid. 50–78.

<sup>29</sup> For a clarification of Elizondo’s treatment of Jerusalem, see his essay in this issue.

<sup>30</sup> In identifying these categories as important developments of the 20th century, I do not wish to imply that they are innovations, but rather that this nomenclature identifies important motifs throughout the Christian tradition.

<sup>31</sup> Elizondo, *Galilean Journey* 91. Perhaps the theologian who has developed this notion the most in the past few decades is Elizondo’s good friend, Gustavo Gutiérrez. In addition to his landmark work, *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll,

Christian discipleship.<sup>32</sup> The Jerusalem principle lifts up the agency of oppressed people as a way to avoid fatalism and paternalism in their confrontation with structural evils, including racism and the abuses of liberal capitalism. And the Resurrection principle—“only love can triumph over evil, and no human power can prevail against the power of unlimited love”<sup>33</sup>—crowns Elizondo’s theological correlation, marking out parameters for Christian discipleship grounded in the disciples’ encounter with the risen Jesus of Galilee.

*Galilean Journey* has fueled the development of U.S. Latino/a theologies for 30 years, particularly in the study of popular religiosity, *mestizaje*, and the everyday reflection of Latino/a communities on Jesus Christ.<sup>34</sup> Latino/a theological reflection on Jesus has focused on the Galilee principle of valorizing the marginalized, the Jerusalem principle of prophetic resistance, and the Resurrection principle of new creation.<sup>35</sup> Latino/a authors have made some of their most distinctive contributions elaborating the notion that Jesus dignifies the marginalized and shares an identity with them. In *Jesus Is My Uncle*, Luis Pedraja portrays a Jesus who responds to the cultural alienation felt by U.S. Latino/as.<sup>36</sup> Locating marginalization in culture and language as well as in economics, U.S. Latino/a theologians complement Latin American liberation theology as a genuine reflection on the particularity of the U.S. Latino/a situation. This comes through in the work of Miguel De La Torre, who explores the *Ajiaco* Christ of Cuban christological reflection, devotion, and artistic depiction.<sup>37</sup> Such portrayals capture how Latino/a theology interprets the preferential option for the poor through what Elizondo calls the “Galilee principle,” the identification of God with the marginalized person as embodied in both the person and ministry of Jesus Christ.

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N.Y.: Orbis, 1973, 1988), see his concise explanation in “Option for the Poor,” in *Mysterium Liberationis* 235–50.

<sup>32</sup> Elizondo, *Galilean Journey* 103.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* 115.

<sup>34</sup> The following is indebted to the summary of Michelle A. Gonzalez’s Hispanic Christology, “Jesus,” in *Handbook of Latina/o Theologies*, ed. Edwin David Aponte and Miguel A. De La Torre (St. Louis: Chalice, 2006) 17–24. Her tripartite division of this work is: mestizo Jesus, liberating Jesus, and accompanying Jesus.

<sup>35</sup> Of course, this designation is merely heuristic. In fact, most authors combine all three themes in some way. Another dimension of Hispanic research has focused on the reception of Jesus as expressed in symbols of popular religiosity. See, e.g., Orlando Espín, *The Faith of the People: Theological Reflections on Popular Catholicism* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1997) 77–82.

<sup>36</sup> Luis G. Pedraja, *Jesus Is My Uncle: Christology from a Hispanic Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999).

<sup>37</sup> Miguel A. De La Torre, *The Quest for the Cuban Christ: A Historical Search* (Gainesville: University of Florida, 2002).

The Jerusalem principle asserts that God's love for the rejected should not pacify but rather empower the marginalized to transform the structures of rejection. Accordingly, U.S. Latino/a theology has always had a strong prophetic critique and a vision of Jesus as liberator, emphasizing active Christian discipleship expressed in communal and social resistance to oppressive structures. Though the legacy of Iberian colonial Christian devotion can seem to some a profoundly interiorized, emotional, and fatalistic spirituality, U.S. Latino/as have transformed this devotional background into the material for social resistance. Even a cursory glance at the many *Via Crucis* devotions around the United States demonstrates how Latino/a communities wed profound Christian religiosity with protest of social evils and exploitation.<sup>38</sup> Jesus is not just the victim with whom one identifies but the liberator whose mission the disciple carries forward. For many U.S. Latino/as, Jesus' prophetic critique also empowers women struggling for liberation from oppression as sub-alterns within a marginalized population.<sup>39</sup>

As seen in this reference to the *Via Crucis*, U.S. Latino/a reflection on Christ highlights the liberative dimensions of esthetic-transformative practice. Themes such as beauty, celebration, and a relational anthropology witness to the Resurrection principle of love that triumphs over evil.<sup>40</sup> Despite deep and lingering marginalization and exclusion, U.S. Latino/a theology resonates with the language of new hope, new creation, and reconciliation. Though much work remains, the richness and variety of Latino/a theologies reflect and expand upon the important legacy of Elizondo's *Galilean Journey*. The future reception of this classic, however, is threatened by serious allegations that require honest scrutiny if *Galilean Journey* is to continue to bear fruit.

### JOURNEY IN THE WRONG DIRECTION? GALILEAN JOURNEY AND ANTI-JUDAISM

Critics of *Galilean Journey* invariably focus their most vehement opposition on two short sections—"Galilee: Symbol of Multiple Rejection" and "Jerusalem: Symbol of Established Power"<sup>41</sup>—built around geographical and

<sup>38</sup> Karen May Davalos, "'The Real Way of Praying': The *Via Crucis*, Mexicano Sacred Space, and the Architecture of Domination," in *Horizons of the Sacred: Mexican Traditions in U.S. Catholicism*, ed. Timothy Matovina and Gary Riebel-Estrella (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 2002) 41–68.

<sup>39</sup> Ada María Isasi-Díaz, "Christ in Mujerista Theology," in *Thinking of Christ: Proclamation, Explanation, Meaning*, ed. Tatha Wiley (New York: Continuum, 2003).

<sup>40</sup> Perhaps the most powerful example of this theme, and indeed a theological synthesis of all of the above-mentioned themes, can be found in Roberto Goizueta, *Caminemos con Jesús: Toward a Hispanic/Latino Theology of Accompaniment* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1995).

<sup>41</sup> Elizondo, *Galilean Journey* 51–53 and 68–70 respectively.

metaphorical polarities that Elizondo seeks to overcome, and to which his constructive theological-pastoral proposals respond. Though brief, detractors argue that the errors found in these sections overshadow the work as a whole.

Critics find fault particularly with the manner in which *Galilean Journey* construes Jesus' Galilee against what appears to be its polar opposite, the oppressive center of Jerusalem. Some accuse Elizondo of anti-intellectual romanticization of Galilee, an anti-Jewish juxtaposition of Jesus and the Jewish authorities of Jerusalem, and/or nonhistorical and ideologically driven eisegesis, reading his contemporary theory of *mestizaje* into the ancient world of Galilee. Any ongoing reception of Elizondo's text must take these critiques seriously. Ironically, their implications lead to the very types of exclusion that Elizondo ostensibly condemns. Among the various critics of *Galilean Journey*, the most pertinent voice for its future reception in Latino/a circles has to be that of Jean-Pierre Ruiz.<sup>42</sup>

Ruiz briefly analyzes *Galilean Journey* in the context of a larger conversation among biblical scholars and systematic theologians. Lamenting the fragmentation and isolation of work in these areas, Ruiz, citing Stephen Fowl, notes sadly how historical criticism of the Bible has "largely become separated from the theological ends it was initially meant to serve. While most biblical scholars of both Testaments still continue to identify themselves as Christians, they generally are required to check their theological convictions at the door when they enter the profession of biblical studies." Furthermore, Ruiz asserts that historical-critical approaches have been challenged by feminist and other explicitly contextual interpretations of the Bible "that have unmasked it as a set of contextual discourses that reflect the interests and the presuppositions of economically privileged western European Christian male readers." While *Galilean Journey* would seem a salutary example of both biblical-theological cooperation and the unmasking biased discourses, to Ruiz it represents the unconscious reinforcement of deleterious and hegemonic discourses due to its naïve use of source material.

Ruiz levies two central accusations against Elizondo's work in *Galilean Journey*: (1) anti-intellectualism in its construction of Galilean Judaism and, more perniciously, (2) unexamined anti-Judaism flowing from sources in German biblical scholarship, promoting a stark distinction between Jesus and Galilean Judaism on the one hand, and Jerusalem and the Jewish authorities on the other.<sup>43</sup> In light of these accusations, Ruiz calls

<sup>42</sup> Jean-Pierre Ruiz, "Good Fences and Good Neighbors? Biblical Scholars and Theologians," *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology* 14 (May, 2007), [http://www.latinoteology.org/2007/fences\\_neighbors](http://www.latinoteology.org/2007/fences_neighbors) (accessed March 16, 2009; site requires subscription). Because this is now an electronic journal, citations of the article will not contain page references.

<sup>43</sup> For this second accusation, Ruiz follows much of the argument laid out in Boys, *Has God Only One Blessing?*

for a reexamination of *Galilean Journey's* "hidden assumptions" and the "unexamined implications of its discourse about mestizaje."

In what he terms, "a rare and unfortunate combination for a volume that began as a doctoral dissertation," Ruiz detects a "ruralist romanticism verging on anti-intellectualism" in Elizondo's description of the Galilean Judaism that nurtures Jesus' worldview. He says Elizondo contrasts the "refreshing originality" of Galilean Judaism characterized by "the commonsense, grass-roots wisdom of practical expertise," with the "intellectual preoccupation" of Jerusalem. And he attacks Elizondo's assertion that "Galilean faith in the God of the fathers was thus more personal, purer, simpler, and more spontaneous. It was not encumbered or suffocated by the religious scrupulosities of the Jewish intelligentsia."<sup>44</sup> Ruiz, however, discerns another, much deeper problem in *Galilean Journey*. He argues that some of the biblical scholarship supporting Elizondo's overstatement of the tensions between Galilee and Jerusalem evidences the specter of an unexamined anti-Judaism.<sup>45</sup>

Ruiz's central indictment on this score is that "at the heart of Elizondo's inadvertent anti-Judaism is his uncritical embrace of Western European exegetical discourses that were themselves irreparably racialized."<sup>46</sup> The key piece of evidence is the fact that Ernst Lohmeyer's *Galiläa und Jerusalem* (1936) appears in Elizondo's bibliography.<sup>47</sup> In this work, Lohmeyer sets Galilee against Jerusalem as part of a two-site origin theory of Christianity,<sup>48</sup> contrasting a universalistic, Son of Man eschatology associated with Galilee, with a nationalistic, Jewish eschatology emerging from Jerusalem. Once the two sites are thus juxtaposed, Ruiz asserts that a supersessionist, and ultimately anti-Jewish/anti-Semitic, view of Christianity as triumphing over Judaism follows. This leads Ruiz to the startling claim that "here then, are the twisted roots of Elizondo's 'Galilee principle' and his 'Jerusalem principle.'"<sup>49</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Elizondo, *Galilean Journey* 51–52.

<sup>45</sup> Indeed, it leads Ruiz to assert that "odd anti-intellectualism cum anti-Judaism is a persistent motif in *Galilean Journey*."

<sup>46</sup> Ruiz, "Good Fences and Good Neighbors?" Here Ruiz is indebted to the broader analysis of Shawn Kelley, *Racializing Jesus: Race, Ideology, and the Formation of Modern Biblical Scholarship* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>47</sup> Elizondo elsewhere cites Lohmeyer in the text as part of a triad of recent scholars (along with R. H. Lightfoot and Willi Marxsen) who have pointed to Galilee as a significant theological motif in the Gospels. Elizondo, *Galilean Journey* 50.

<sup>48</sup> Here Ruiz refers to Susannah Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1998).

<sup>49</sup> Lest there be any doubts about the implications of this tie, Ruiz adds that shortly after Lohmeyer's work appeared, Walter Grundmann (who does not appear in Elizondo's bibliography) suggested that Jesus' taking of the title "Son of Man" "proved his Galilean, and thus his Aryan, origin."

Ruiz views *Galilean Journey* as a tragic instance of irresponsible theological research, a negative example that underscores his call for greater cooperation between systematic theologians and biblical scholars. To be clear, Ruiz does not accuse Elizondo of being anti-Semitic, but rather criticizes what he sees as an inadvertent anti-Judaism in *Galilean Journey* owing to its naïve or ignorant use of sources. Thus, Ruiz concludes his essay by admonishing systematic theologians to bear in mind the contextuality of exegetical discourses, which by implication is a standard met by neither Elizondo nor the many theologians who have drawn upon *Galilean Journey* for inspiration.

Though the charge of anti-Judaism (latent or otherwise) represents the most serious criticism of *Galilean Journey*, it is sometimes accompanied by questions of hermeneutical method. Jeffrey Siker seconds Ruiz's criticism that *Galilean Journey* enacts an underlying anti-Judaism in its portrayal of Jerusalem's Judaism as an ossified, legalistic religiosity.<sup>50</sup> He goes beyond Ruiz's charge of ruralist romanticism, however, arguing that Elizondo simply makes claims without foundation. The problem is a hermeneutical one for Siker. He views Elizondo as reversing the "proper" interpretive strategy of "moving from the historical Jesus to a theological appropriation of Jesus," charging that "it appears that Elizondo is really working the other way around, applying the reality of modern mestizo culture in an anachronistic manner onto the map of first-century Galilee and claiming it as an historic reality."<sup>51</sup> Thus, he portrays Elizondo's hermeneutical strategy as an ideological effort to provide a scriptural basis for a theological interpretation of *mestizaje*.

Siker believes that Elizondo does not rely on historical Jesus research in his reconstruction of Galilee and so questions the entire notion of a mestizo Jesus. For Siker, "this anachronistic rendering of first-century Galilee in the image of the borderlands of the American Southwest can undergird Elizondo's theological project only if he is willing to advocate what increasingly appears to be an historical fiction, Galilee as the land of *mestizaje*."<sup>52</sup> What further complicates the scenario is Siker's understanding of *mestizaje*. He states that "Elizondo poses the idea of *mestizaje* in Hegelian terms as the transcendent synthesis of what appear now to be two lesser realities."<sup>53</sup> The implications of Siker's diagnosis leads to a conclusion

<sup>50</sup> As with Ruiz, Siker understands the Galilee-Jerusalem distinction as ultimately supersessionist. "Elizondo's image of a decrepit and ossified Judaism in Jerusalem employs a now discredited Christian caricature of Judaism as the dying religion that gave way to nascent Christianity" (Jeffrey S. Siker, "Historicizing a Racialized Jesus: Case Studies in the 'Black Christ,' the 'Mestizo Christ,' and White Critique," *Biblical Interpretation* 15 [2007] 43).

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* 40.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* 41.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* 46.

similar to Ruiz's: not only is *Galilean Journey* bereft of support from biblical research, but given the nefarious nature of its latent anti-Judaism, both the text and the theological enterprise of relating the Galilean Jesus to the notion of *mestizaje* are called into question.

### GUIDE FOR THE JOURNEY: JESUS, GALILEAN JEW AND FAITHFUL DISSENTER

Elizondo's critics, then, not only raise substantive questions about *Galilean Journey* but also pose broader questions regarding the relationship between biblical-historical research and the contemporary appropriation of sacred texts by theologians and communities of faith. Though voicing a relative sympathy for his wider theological program, the basis of their concerns resides in what they perceive to be misguided or erroneous claims about the historical Jesus and the Galilee he inhabited. Thus, historical Jesus research is assumed to provide constructive counterevidence and much-needed norms for what can and cannot be said about Jesus.<sup>54</sup> Of course, historical Jesus scholarship is not without its own problems. From ongoing debates among scholars who study Jesus and first-century Galilee, to critics of the entire enterprise who view the historical Jesus as the wrong object of study, historical research on Jesus must not be seen monolithically or simplistically as a clear standard against which all claims about Jesus can be judged. Moreover, as contemporary hermeneutics has demonstrated, the reader's own "horizon of understanding" must be factored in as a crucial component in the process of interpretation. Indeed, I believe this has been the area of Elizondo's primary contribution to theological discourse.<sup>55</sup>

Accordingly, while the final section of this article addresses the aforementioned criticisms of *Galilean Journey*, it also outlines what I see as fundamental hermeneutical and methodological parameters for the proper use of historical Jesus (and Galilee) research, and suggests how these may correct problematic aspects Elizondo's thought. My claim is that, on the one hand, both Elizondo's critics and more recent historical research on Jesus and Galilee provide important correctives to aspects of *Galilean Journey*. On the other hand, however, I will maintain and use Elizondo's three "principles," which undermine the logic of exclusion, to address

<sup>54</sup> This is true particularly in the case of Boys and Siker. And while Ruiz warns against the naïve appropriation of historical research and its underlying racialized discourses, he offers neither constructive counterevidence nor an alternative construction.

<sup>55</sup> For a concise summary of the relevant developments in hermeneutics, see Richard E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University, 1969).

some of the concerns raised above, and to highlight certain problematic aspects of the critiques themselves.

### Reading Jesus: Historical, Historic, and Historicized

Historical research on Galilee and Jesus helps to clarify two shortcomings identified by the aforementioned critics of *Galilean Journey*. First, recent studies undermine the polarities embodied in two outdated and extreme portraits of Galilee at the time of Jesus.<sup>56</sup> It appears that the region conformed neither to the portrait of a staunchly Jewish enclave with no outside cultural exchange or influence favored by some commentators, nor to the portrait of a cosmopolitan, pluralistic region with a limited or non-Jewish identity promoted by others.<sup>57</sup> The more likely scenario is of a Galilee that, though possessing a diverse population and including the imperial cities of Tiberias and Sepphoris, remains profoundly Jewish in identity and rooted in the symbol system of Jerusalem.<sup>58</sup> And for all the cultural interaction that may have occurred, Galilee seems to have been a tense and conflictual setting, not a sunny cosmopolitan land. Thus, to the degree that Elizondo sees Galilee in the latter terms, this scholarship represents a helpful corrective.

Second, recent studies have provided valuable information about Galilean tensions with Judea and the Temple authorities of Jerusalem. Recognizing that these tensions have been exploited by anti-Jewish theologies, most contemporary scholarship insists that they must be interpreted in the context of intracommunity struggles typical of a vibrant and complex

<sup>56</sup> For a helpful summary of current research on Galilee, see Mark Rapinchuk, "The Galilee and Jesus in Recent Research," *Currents in Biblical Research* 2 (2004) 197–222.

<sup>57</sup> There are differing ways to portray this reality. For example, Douglas Edwards argues that the villages of Galilee had access to urban markets and engaged in intra- and interregional trade, while Richard Horsley envisions a more traditional agrarian society, but with a greater population diversity than Judea's. Douglas Edwards, "The Socio-Economic and Cultural Ethos of the Lower Galilee in the First Century: Implications for the Nascent Jesus Movement," in *The Galilee in Late Antiquity*, ed. Lee I. Levine (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992) 53. Richard A. Horsley, *Galilee: History, Politics, People* (Valley Forge, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 1995) 243.

<sup>58</sup> Debate continues over whether to characterize Sepphoris and Tiberias as predominantly Jewish or Gentile. Richard Batey argues for a reevaluation of Jesus' sayings because of Nazareth's proximity to a Greco-Roman city like Sepphoris, while Eric Myers and Mark Chancey see little evidence of its Hellenized character in the first century. See Richard Batey, "Sepphoris and the Jesus Movement," *New Testament Studies* 46 (2001) 402–9; Eric M. Myers and Mark Chancey, "How Jewish was Sepphoris in Jesus' Time?" *Biblical Archaeology Review* 26.4 (July–August 2000) 18–33, 61.

first-century Judaism. How to do so remains a debated topic. Richard Horsley situates Jesus and the early Jesus movement within a stream of Galilean resistance movements in the Late Second Temple period.<sup>59</sup> Arguing that Galilee's development is historically distinct from that of Judea, Horsley stresses traditions of Galilean independence within Israel and resentment of the Jerusalem establishment, while emphasizing its profound Jewish identity. Sean Freyne envisions much closer relations between Galilean Jews and their counterparts in Judea, arguing for an orthogenetic relationship with Jerusalem grounded in a shared worldview and symbol system.<sup>60</sup> He insists that this shared worldview implies a Jesus deeply familiar with the Jewish Scriptures of his day.<sup>61</sup> From stories of conquest and settlement to the universalizing vision of the Isaian corpus, Jewish tradition nurtures creative and critical elements in Jesus' ministry and preaching. In this way, Jesus' conflicts with the Temple authorities find their proper context in his synthesis of various strands of Jewish thought.<sup>62</sup>

Though disagreements abound regarding the particulars, contemporary historical scholars studying Jesus and Galilee generally agree that Jesus' conflicts with the Jerusalem authorities do not lead to the conclusion that he is condemning or moving beyond Judaism. This consensus serves as an important corrective to the tenor of some of Elizondo's comments about the novelty of Jesus' preaching or message,<sup>63</sup> which can sound as if Jesus

<sup>59</sup> See Richard A. Horsley, "Popular Messianic Movements around the Time of Jesus," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 46 (1984) 471–95; and Horsley, "Like One of the Prophets of Old: Two Types of Popular Prophets at the Time of Jesus," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 47 (1985) 435–63.

<sup>60</sup> Sean Freyne, "Urban-Rural Relations in First-Century Galilee: Some Suggestions from the Literary Sources," in *Galilee in Late Antiquity* 75–91; and Freyne, "Behind the Names: Galileans, Samaritans, *Ioudaioi*," in *Galilee through the Centuries: Confluence of Cultures*, ed. Eric M. Meyers (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1999) 39–56.

<sup>61</sup> In making this claim, Freyne invokes Gerd Theissen's criteria of historical plausibility, relying on influence and context, as superior to the older principle of dissimilarity that stressed the uniqueness of Jesus over against his Jewish traditions. Sean Freyne, *Jesus, A Jewish Galilean* (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2004) 11–12.

<sup>62</sup> As Freyne avers, "These various strands provide a broader and richer set of associations for Jesus' word and deed against the temple, without in any sense removing him from his own tradition as this had been articulated by prophetic voices. . . . It was a potent mix of wisdom and apocalyptic, creation and restoration, and Jesus' particular synthesis of the various stands, allied to his passionate concern for the poor, who had been marginalized by the temple system, help to make the incident both predictable and intelligible" (*Jesus, A Jewish Galilean*, 162–63).

<sup>63</sup> E.g., Elizondo states, "It is equally evident that from the very beginning [Jesus' followers] had difficulty accepting and understanding his ways, especially in the light of their laws, customs, and tradition." He then claims, "Yet from the very beginning he begins to break with many of their traditions. Every 'tradition' that was supposed to be a way of forcing the kingdom to come is questioned or

is breaking with Judaism itself. Historical research on Jesus allows us to frame his position as that of a critical and prophetic “insider” who is faithful to Judaism—a position, as will be demonstrated, analogous to what Elizondo himself ultimately assumes.

Thus I would agree, on the one hand, that historical research on Jesus and Galilee provides an important corrective to contemporary formulations about Jesus, including those of Elizondo. At its best, this research enacts a negative function, guiding what cannot be said about Jesus without dictating what can be said,<sup>64</sup> and providing leads for new theological ideas. On the other hand, I would argue that this important function does not diminish serious difficulties with both the nature and the object of these studies themselves. As Terrence Tilley notes, several critics of the so-called Third Quest seem to highlight the need for new approaches.<sup>65</sup> Seen in authors as varied as Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, James D. G. Dunn, and Larry Hurtado, these new approaches shift the focus from the historical Jesus to what Tilley calls the “historic Jesus,” the person remembered by his followers who enact that memory in story, worship, ritual, and action.<sup>66</sup> Tilley summarizes the methodological significance of this shift:

The fundamental methodological point we can take from their work is crucial: practices like living in and living out the *basileia tou theou*, worship, and remembering in the community do not merely count in understanding the significance of Christological claims, but in fact constitute the context of discipleship, the context in which the imaginative and faithful Christological claims in the developing tradition can even have significance.<sup>67</sup>

If Tilley’s thesis is correct, Elizondo’s claims as articulated in the principles he espouses are better tested by examining how they are lived out in believing Latino/a communities and by comparing this with the practical manner in which Jesus’ followers enact his memory—be it through

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transgressed by Jesus—the purity laws, the pious practices, the religious observances” (*Galilean Journey* 65).

<sup>64</sup> For example, Meier identifies four ways that the appropriation of historical Jesus research may serve the interests of theology by working against attempts to reduce faith in Christ to a content-less cipher, to swallow up the real humanity of Jesus in a Docetic manner, to domesticate Jesus, or to co-opt Jesus for political programs. Meier, *A Marginal Jew* 1:199.

<sup>65</sup> See Terrence W. Tilley, “Remembering the Historic Jesus—A New Research Program?” *Theological Studies* 68 (2007) 3–35; and Tilley, *The Disciples’ Jesus: Christology as Reconciling Practice* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2008).

<sup>66</sup> Significant works by these authors include: Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation* (New York: Continuum, 2000); James G. D. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, Christianity in the Making 1 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003); Larry Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003).

<sup>67</sup> Tilley, “Remembering the Historic Jesus” 34.

worship, the transmission of stories through oral tradition, or actions motivated by the confession of Jesus as Christ. While this comparison to the “historic” Jesus enacted by his followers in story, worship, ritual, and action does not replace “historical” Jesus and Galilee research, it does offer a more nuanced and, I would argue, appropriate standard for judging Elizondo’s claims than what critics of *Galilean Journey* have offered to date.

New programs of “historic” Jesus research may indeed open up fruitful avenues of analysis. They nonetheless require a hermeneutics committed both to reading “behind” the text, which characterizes the critics of *Galilean Journey* cited above, and to reading “in front of” the text,<sup>68</sup> which I would argue more properly characterizes Elizondo’s approach. My point is that in *Galilean Journey* Elizondo does not seek to describe the historical Jesus but rather focuses on the theological import for the reader of the Gospels’ portrayal of Jesus as a Galilean. Elizondo reminds us that Galilee, as it is theologically and symbolically evoked in the Gospels, represents a marginality that resonates with the marginal location of U.S. Latino/as who read the Gospels today. This perspective constitutes the particular hermeneutic of *Galilean Journey* and demarcates its unique contribution. Thus, while historical research may provide cautionary or regulative principles of interpretation or be used to suggest new theological connections, it must be employed cautiously, always explicitly acknowledging the historian’s own interpretive horizon.<sup>69</sup>

In this connection, the interpretive locus of marginalized peoples adds an important dimension to the “historical” vs. “historic” Jesus debate. I would argue, in fact, that Elizondo’s three principles “historicize” the Jesus found in the Gospels<sup>70</sup> (to borrow the term from Ignacio Ellacuría) and play a

<sup>68</sup> The nomenclature here comes from Hans Georg Gadamer’s landmark work of hermeneutics, *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Continuum, 1999).

<sup>69</sup> Thus, rather than adopt Gadamer’s more thoroughgoing rejection of interpretive methods (after all, for Gadamer, *Truth and Method* really means *Truth or Method*), I would subscribe to the manner that Paul Ricoeur’s arc of understanding-interpretation-understanding both allows for the contribution of critical-interpretive methods in dealing with our distance from texts and recognizes the reader’s or community’s interpretive horizon. See, e.g., Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University, 1976).

<sup>70</sup> Ellacuría defines this neologism: “Demonstrating the impact of certain concepts within a specific reality is what is understood here as their historicization. Hence, historicization is a principle of de-ideologization” (“La historización del concepto de propiedad como principio de desideologización,” in *Veinte años de historia en El Salvador [1969–1989]: Escritos políticos*, 2nd ed., 3 vols. [San Salvador: UCA, 1993] 1:587–627, at 591). For a further explanation of this term in Ellacuría’s complex philosophy, see Kevin F. Burke, *The Ground Beneath the Cross: The Theology of Ignacio Ellacuría* (Washington: Georgetown University, 2000); and Michael E. Lee, *Bearing the Weight of Salvation* (New York: Crossroad, 2009).

crucial role in his correlational interpretive framework. For it is through the mediation of such interpretive devices that the experience of marginalization typical of South-Texas Mexican Americans of Elizondo's generation is able to illuminate and to actualize the untapped semantic potential of the marginalization of Jesus portrayed in the Gospels. Just as the Gospels historicize in their own narrative and historical worlds the good news announced by Jesus through portraits that highlight the way he resists and overcomes marginalization, so Elizondo's interpretation illumines and historicizes the untapped semantic potential of those portraits for faithful discipleship today. Therefore, while discussions about the "historical" and "historic" Jesus serve to draw our attention to the relationship between the world "behind" the text and the reader "in front of" it, they are enriched when we ask how the Jesus found in each location is "historicized." With this principle in mind, I return to the criticisms of *Galilean Journey*, noting that, while they point to important issues in Elizondo's work, if taken too far, they enact the very logic of exclusion against which they protest.

### Faithful Dissent: Speaking against One's Own

Jean-Pierre Ruiz correctly criticizes *Galilean Journey* for espousing a kind of ruralist romanticization in its portrayal of first-century Galilee. Given the sad history linking negative portrayals of the Jerusalem/Jewish intelligentsia to anti-Semitic scholarship, he is right to address this issue. Sweeping statements contrasting the fresh originality of Galilean faith with the hypocrisy of the Jerusalemite religious rulers do not belong in a scholarly treatment of Jesus and contribute little to our understanding. On the other hand, Ruiz's accusation that the text is anti-intellectual seems to suggest that Elizondo demeans the intellectual task itself. Similarly, he appears to suggest that Elizondo's portrayal of Jesus as critical of Jewish religious leaders places Jesus outside the circle of Judaism itself.

I would argue, instead, that Elizondo's "rural romanticism" constitutes an extension of the Galilee principle, his theological articulation of the preferential option for the poor. *Galilean Journey* attacks the exclusionary anthropological laws of *mestizaje*, finding beauty and dignity in the mestizo who has been marginalized and excluded. The fact that Elizondo lifts up the dignity of the rural peasant is an important trope, representing a point of view found among those who have been marginalized, the self-defense of those who have been told that they do not have the intellectual capacity to match wits with their oppressors. A wealth of examples from Latino/a culture provides a trajectory within which to situate Elizondo's statements.<sup>71</sup> In this world, as St. Paul would suggest to his mainly non-Jewish

<sup>71</sup> Consider the Puerto Rican rhapsodizing of the *jíbaro* figure, or comedic tales of Juan Bobo (a synonym for fool), the cinematic portrayals by the Mexican

followers from the middle and lower classes, the fool confounds the wise and, in doing so, ironically shows where true wisdom abides, which is crucial. Thus, what may seem to some like anti-intellectualism, turns out from another perspective to be a faithful reliance on a God who confounds the wise and unites learning with true wisdom. While I will grant that Elizondo's portrayal requires pruning, I would argue that it captures something real and prophetic in the perspective of the peasant at the margins.

Correspondingly, Elizondo's critique of part of the Jerusalem intelligentsia of first-century Palestine is not a deprecation of the intellect itself but a statement about its proper use. The seemingly contradictory trajectories of Elizondo's own biography make the point: he criticizes an exclusivist intelligentsia while writing his own doctoral dissertation; he is a parish priest from San Antonio on a one-year sojourn in Paris, one of the great intellectual centers of the last 800 years, and funded mainly by the meager savings of his working class mother. In the end, I would argue, Elizondo's critique of Jewish intelligentsia in Jerusalem is no more "anti-intellectual" than that of Ruiz, when the latter (rightfully) questions the "centrist" bias of much contemporary biblical criticism. Both highlight how "intelligentsia" can lose touch with and marginalize others. What remains to be seen, however, is whether Elizondo's criticism of the Jewish intelligentsia of Jesus' time evidences an anti-Jewish bias.

Nineteenth-century anti-Jewish readings of the Gospels divorce Jesus from his Jewish heritage and Hellenize the early Jesus movement in making the case for a supersessionist Christianity. Elizondo, however, makes no argument for the superior origins of Christianity over against Judaism. He does not advocate Lohmeyer's two-site origin theory, much less Grundmann's notion of a pagan or Aryan Jesus. *Galilean Journey* falls into danger when it amplifies aspects of the conflict between Jesus and the Jerusalem authorities. And vague statements about the Jewish law becoming a burden or about the legalistic scrupulosity of Pharisees not only beg verification but also evoke harmful stereotypes. Despite these shortcomings, however, Elizondo does not divorce Jesus from his Jewish identity. Rather, he emphasizes Jesus' identity as a Jew who, while remaining firmly rooted in his tradition, must face the double marginalization of a mestizo:

As a Galilean confronting Jerusalem, Jesus confronted a structured system to which at the same time he did and he did not belong: he was not one of the in-group, but neither was he a total outsider. In his Galilean identity, he questioned the official structures. *But still, he was a Jew; he questioned the system from within.* . . . As a Galilean he demonstrates the role of a marginal person who by

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icon Cantinflas, or even the retelling of Juan Diego's confrontation of episcopal authority.

reason of being marginal is both an insider and an outsider—partly both, yet fully neither.<sup>72</sup>

Rejection by one's own constitutes a central theme in Elizondo's treatment of *mestizaje*. Accordingly, I would argue that scholarly evaluation of Elizondo's treatment of the Jewishness of Jesus and his Galilean context must move beyond its present, somewhat narrow, focus on the self-identity of Jesus to include the perception by others of the Jewishness of Jesus—specifically, the views of the first-century Jewish intelligentsia and leadership in Jerusalem. The claim that Jesus was critical of the authorities in Jerusalem does not make Jesus any less Jewish.<sup>73</sup> Baldly stated, the claim that it does can be said to echo the logic of first-century and contemporary elites who interpret such protests as heretical. On the other hand, Elizondo brings the insight from the borderland that, while those on the border may identify with the center, those living at the center(s) often reject people from the border in the name of purity. Elizondo's Jerusalem principle, then, provides a model for critical fidelity grounded in the prophetic ministry of the Galilean Jesus and its historical rejection by the Jerusalemite authorities. In fact, neither the Jerusalem principle nor its sources lead inevitably to an anti-Jewish or an anti-intellectual Jesus.

In light of this discussion on “historicizing” Jesus, the final charge that Elizondo's theological ruminations on *mestizaje* reverse the “proper” strategy of assessment seems unfounded. First-century Galilee, like all places, is a constructed and contested space, and Jesus' own ministry has been examined fruitfully using that notion.<sup>74</sup> Though historical research has much to offer, it is subject to the same problems of construction as contemporary theology and offers no more an “objective” place on which to base its conclusions.<sup>75</sup> Elizondo does not superimpose *mestizaje* on Galilee but rather rereads the Gospel narratives from the perspective of *mestizaje*, bringing a fresh perspective that actualizes the untapped semantic potential of the marginalized Galilee portrayed in the Gospels. Elizondo's work,

<sup>72</sup> Elizondo, *Galilean Journey* 107, emphasis added.

<sup>73</sup> Meier's summary is instructive: “Jesus, the poor layman turned prophet and teacher, the religious figure from rural Galilee without credentials, met his death in Jerusalem at least in part because of his clash with the rich aristocratic urban priesthood. To the latter, a poor layman from the Galilean countryside with disturbing doctrines and claims was marginal both in the sense of being dangerously antiestablishment in the sense of lacking a power base in the capital. He could be easily brushed aside into the dustbin of death” (*A Marginal Jew* 1:9).

<sup>74</sup> See Halvor Moxnes, *Putting Jesus in His Place: A Radical Vision of Household and Kingdom* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003).

<sup>75</sup> Even archeology is ambiguous in this respect. See Marianne Sawicki, *Crossing Galilee: Architectures of Contact in the Occupied Land of Jesus* (Harrisburg, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 1998).

like other explicitly contextual theologies of marginalized peoples, offers distinctive insights into issues of power and exclusion particularly from a location of marginalization that has too often been overlooked by elite interpreters.<sup>76</sup>

Finally, the accusation that Elizondo's understanding of *mestizaje* involves a Hegelian sublation of inferior races is an unfortunate example of a dangerous logic of exclusion, particularly the mistaken assertion that Elizondo's focus on raising up the dignity of those facing double rejection is based on the exclusion of others. Elizondo argues that a society is enriched when it embraces the "mixture" of the mestizo/a, but he never suggests that this should happen at the expense of the other. Ultimately, Elizondo's view of *mestizaje* corresponds to the Resurrection principle that "only love can triumph over evil," and that love rejects all forms of exclusion.

## CONCLUSION

Christian claims that Jesus opposed the Jewish authorities have too often tragically focused on the term *Jewish*, whereas they should emphasize *authorities*. Jesus was a faithful Jew whose prophetic critique springs precisely from fidelity to his own religious tradition. The Gospels attest that Jesus assumed a critical prophetic stance toward the excesses of some of the authorities of his day, a stance similar to that of Jesus' prophetic predecessors, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Amos. This is the tradition of Paul's confrontation with Peter, Catherine of Siena's admonishment of the Avignon papacy, and Martin Luther King Jr.'s scolding of clergymen who sided with the segregationists. The assertion that Jesus criticizes the religious authorities of his own tradition need not, indeed must not, be understood to imply that Jesus is moving outside his tradition. Ironically, claiming so enacts the logic of his adversaries among the elite. Equating faithful dissent with the betrayal of one's tradition perpetuates the age-old strategy of exclusion directed against the mestizo/a, the borderland figure abandoned by both sides.

The deepest pain of the mestizo/a, so powerfully articulated by Elizondo, consists in feeling loyalty and a sense of identification with two groups, yet being rejected by both. For some, rejection flows from characteristics not voluntarily possessed—one's culture, race, gender, etc. For others, exclusion follows from a stance: called a traitor for protesting a

<sup>76</sup> For a feminist correlate to this principle, see Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Changing the Subject: Women's Discourses and Feminist Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994). Elizondo himself, through his work as founder of the Mexican American Cultural Center and pastor of San Fernando Cathedral in San Antonio, has been profoundly affected by the insights of "ordinary" Latino/as.

nation's unjust war, or a heretic for excoriating the church's injustice and scandal. Purity codes, be they racial/ethnic or ideological, enact logics of exclusion grounded in one-dimensional portraits of those who protest as "the other."

In this article, I have argued that scholars of the historical Jesus and Galilee offer important correctives to aspects of the views of Virgilio Elizondo and other contemporary theologians. On the other hand, I have insisted that theology has an important, sometimes corrective, role to play as well. While John Meier describes Jesus as a "marginal Jew in a marginal province at the eastern end of the Roman empire,"<sup>77</sup> Elizondo offers insight into the significance of that marginality from the margin itself. He reminds us that "marginal" is not an innocent term; it means marginalized. He correlates the double rejection of U.S. Latino/as with the situation of the Jewish Jesus of Galilee, whom the Gospels portray as the object of a double rejection that leads to his execution.

I hope that scholars of both the historical Jesus and the preferential option for the poor will continue to enrich each other's work and end the scourge of anti-Judaism in Christian theology. In this article, I have, on the one hand, argued that biblical scholarship offers a helpful corrective to certain aspects of *Galilean Journey*. On the other hand, I have tried to show how, by lifting the veil on the logic of exclusion, Virgilio Elizondo amplifies the words and illumines the lives of contemporary prophets, authentic disciples of the Galilean Jesus, who carry on his ministry in the Galilees of today's world.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Meier, *A Marginal Jew* 1:25.

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