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FROM CONFLICT TO RECONCILIATION: DISCIPLESHIP IN THE THEOLOGY OF JON SOBRINO

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Building on the theology of Jon Sobrino, the author constructs a Christian spirituality of reconciliation that empowers the human person to confront the challenges of entrenched socioeconomic conflict with honesty, hope, and faith in God's reconciling promises. Such a spirituality, he argues, urges Christians to engage in a mission of mercy that becomes practical in the transformation of oppressive structures, the restoration of personal relationships, and the pursuit of a Christian utopia.

THE CHRISTIAN FAITH, STRIPPED TO ITS CORE, rests on the conviction that in Christ God has reconciled the world to God's self.[1] This is the good news that the gospel proclaims and that Christians are called to embody. While reconciliation has been a central theme of Christian faith since apostolic times, Christian understanding of what reconciliation means has expanded over time. Traditional Protestant and Catholic approaches to the subject often stressed the enmity between God and humanity. This emphasis, as German theologian Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz notes, has "tended to address only the sinner and lost sight of the many who were 'sinned against.'"[2] In other words, attention to reconciliation between God and

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[1] As Friedrich Schleiermacher notes, "The original activity of the Redeemer . . . would be that by means of which He assumes us into this fellowship of His activity and His life" (*The Christian Faith*, ed. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1960] 425). I am grateful to Richard Lennan and the anonymous referees of this article for their help on earlier versions.

[2] Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz, *The Art of Forgiveness: Theological Reflections on Healing and Reconciliation* (Geneva: WCC, 1996) 15. Rodney L. Petersen offers a similar assessment: "In the history of the church the practice of forgiveness has been clearly tied to penitence, most often privatized as a part of individual religious

the individual has been accompanied by a neglect of the social dimensions of reconciliation and, by extension, its political implications.

More recent theological reflection has sought to appropriate God's reconciling work as a model for how human beings are called to relate to one another, overcome their conflicts, and seek reconciliation among themselves. In the last 20 years, particularly after the achievements reached by the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the late 1990s, Christian theologians have increasingly turned their attention to the interpersonal, social, and political aspects of reconciliation.[3]

Yet, in spite of numerous social conflicts in Latin America that have given rise to the need for reconciliatory efforts, reconciliation has been a thorny subject among Latin American liberation theologians, and little has been written on it from a liberationist perspective.[4] This may stem in part from a reluctance by liberationists to engage a theme that has often been misused in the continent. The notion of reconciliation was enlisted by those in power in numerous nations to bolster political amnesties that protected human rights violators at the expense of justice.[5] Moreover, some Latin American bishops have proposed as an alternative to liberation theology a theology of reconciliation that endorses the perpetuation

practice since the early medieval period" ("A Theology of Forgiveness: Terminology, Rhetoric, and the Dialectic of Interfaith Relationships," in *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Religion, Public Policy, and Conflict Transformation*, ed. Raymond G. Helmick and Rodney L. Petersen, foreword Desmond Tutu (Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation, 2001) 3–26, at 4.

[3] Robert Schreiter notes a dramatic increase in possibilities for initiating processes of reconciliation beginning in the late 1980s as a consequence of the end of military dictatorships and civil wars in Latin America, the collapse of the Berlin Wall, and the resurgence of indigenous people with the UN's International Year of the World's Indigenous People in 1993. See Schreiter, "Religion as Source and Resource for Reconciliation," in *Reconciliation in a World of Conflicts*, Concilium 2003/5, ed. Luiz Carlos Susin and María Pilar Aquino (London: SCM, 2003) 109.

[4] José Comblin and Jon Sobrino have written several insightful articles on forgiveness and reconciliation, but no systematic theology of reconciliation has been published from a Latin American liberationist perspective. See Sobrino's articles: "Christianity and Reconciliation: The Way to Utopia," in *Reconciliation in a World of Conflicts* 80–90; "Latin America: Place of Sin and Place of Forgiveness," and "Personal Sin, Forgiveness, and Liberation," both in *The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1999) 58–68, 83–102. See also, José Comblin, *Reconciliación y liberación* (San Isidro: Centro de Estudios Sociales [CESOC] 1989).

[5] Roy H. May Jr. notes that "amnesty has been decreed to protect human rights violations in Chile (1978), Brazil (1979), Honduras (1981), Argentina (1983), Guatemala (1982), El Salvador (1987, 1992, 1993), Surinam (1989), and Peru (1995)" ("Reconciliation: A Political Requirement for Latin America," *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* [1996] 41–58, at 54).

of the same social conditions that caused the conflicts while ignoring the need for structural change.[6]

Nonetheless many of the major themes addressed in theologies of reconciliation have been central to Latin American liberation theology since its inception. This article examines, from the perspective of Latin American liberation theology, the challenge to reconciliation posed by entrenched social conflict. It argues that Jon Sobrino's Christology offers the basis for a Christian spirituality of reconciliation, one that empowers the human person to engage the challenges of a conflicted reality with honesty, hope, and faith in God's reconciling promises. While prioritizing the contribution of the victims in the process of overcoming enmity, Sobrino's approach also envisions a Christian praxis that upholds the need for both personal forgiveness and the social restoration of justice without favoring one value at the expense of the other.[7]

To build this case, I identify the basic criteria for a Christian spirituality that effectively addresses deeply-rooted socioeconomic injustice. The second section explores Sobrino's approach to spirituality and to the particular spirit that he insists should guide the human person's engagement of reality. This initial treatment of his understanding of spirituality provides the foundation for the final section that builds on his Christology to identify the contours of a discipleship of reconciliation.

FEATURES OF A CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY AS CONTEXTUAL

Any authentic expression of Christian spirituality will contribute to healing historical reality and fostering reconciliation among human beings and with God. But a spirituality that defines itself as a Christian spirituality of *reconciliation* must explicitly attend to the demands that ensue from situations of injustice, oppression, and enmity.

[6] Gregory Baum, "A Theological Afterword," in *The Reconciliation of Peoples: Challenge to the Churches*, ed. Gregory Baum and Harold Wells (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997) 184–92, at 188. The late Cardinal Alfonso López Trujillo of Colombia, for instance, claimed that "a theology of reconciliation restores the Christian character to the notion of liberation, which has been denied by Marxist analysis or the ideological categories of antagonism and struggle" (*Liberación y reconciliación: Breve recorrido histórico* [Lima: Editorial Latina, 1990] 71–72). All translations are mine unless noted otherwise.

[7] In this article the term "Christian praxis" broadly refers to a way of life that seeks to transform society in light of Christian revelation. Sobrino distinguishes between *practice* and *praxis*. He defines Jesus' *practice* as "the broad sweep of his activities in the service of the kingdom." He then identifies a group of activities as the *praxis* of Jesus "because its correlative is society as such and its purpose the transformation of society as such" (*Jesus the Liberator: A Historical-Theological Reading of Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. Paul Burns and Francis McDonagh [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993] 161).

In sketching a spirituality of reconciliation rooted in Sobrino's Christology, it is important first of all to note that his work is written out of and in response to the socioeconomic reality of El Salvador. Sobrino critically observes that the term "reconciliation" is usually enlisted to describe armed struggles (wars, terrorism, etc.) and their solutions, but less so to describe how to overcome a more original and pervasive type of conflict: "socio-economic oppression . . . that which generates the slow death of millions of human beings, their lives, and also their dignity and culture."[8] Thus the spirituality of reconciliation that I draw from Sobrino's work is most relevant to situations characterized by socioeconomic injustice, though it could also be applied to other situations of overlapping and mutually reinforcing enmities (e.g., racism, classism, sexism, and nationalism).

Second, a spirituality of reconciliation should deal with the main challenges encountered by those who work toward effective processes of reconciliation: the sometimes-competing quests for truth, justice, and forgiveness. More specifically, this spirituality must attend to three indispensable dimensions in any process of reconciliation: (1) the truthful uncovering of the events and sources of conflict, (2) an expression of justice that responds to the claims of the victims and seeks to construct a more harmonious socioeconomic order, and (3) the forgiveness necessary to restore communal life.[9]

Third, a spirituality of reconciliation ought to help overcome those temptations and distortions to which the practitioners of reconciliation are subject. Here I am concerned not only with those attempts at reconciliation that, out of personal interests or political convenience, willfully disregard the need for truth, justice, and forgiveness, but I am also pointing to those distortions that are not contemplated in the agents' original plans. This insight comes from Sobrino's close witness of the movements of liberation in Latin America and particularly in El Salvador, and the recognition that even Christian-inspired pursuits of a society's liberation and reconciliation are always subject to human limitations and sinfulness. Even the best-intentioned attempts at reconciliation are commonly derailed by, among other things, the gradual displacement of the victims and their demands as the central concern for the reconciliation process; the mystification of violence as the most effective means to transform society; the tendency to demonize the oppressor; the oppressors' unwillingness to take

[8] Jon Sobrino, "Conflicto y reconciliación: Camino cristiano hacia una utopía," *Estudios centroamericanos* 661–62 (2003) 1139–48, at 1147.

[9] Sobrino insists on the need to include these three dimensions in the Salvadoran process of reconciliation: "In El Salvador, after the end of armed conflict, we insisted that the way to reconciliation needs three steps: truth, justice, and forgiveness" ("Christianity and Reconciliation: The Way to Utopia," in *Reconciliation in a World of Conflicts* 80–90, at 82).

responsibility for their actions; and the victims' understandable difficulty in forgiving their perpetrators, which closes the possibility of social reconciliation and their own liberation.[10]

Fourth, any rendering of a Christian spirituality of reconciliation must demonstrate how following Jesus within one's context and individuality can effectively inform the manner in which Christians seek to overcome situations of enmity. Hence, I propose a spirituality of reconciliation that can be best understood as a process organized around the essential moments that structured Jesus' life and the Spirit who animated it. This spirituality illustrates how the creative following of Jesus can help overcome enmity and conflict within the general conditions of socioeconomic injustice and oppression that characterize the situation in most of Latin America but also elsewhere. It also provides a corrective to many of the distortions that can accompany the practice of reconciliation.

SOBRINO'S FUNDAMENTAL *THEOLOGAL* SPIRITUALITY[11]

For Sobrino spirituality is far more than the enactment of devout practices that nurture the individual's religious well-being, or the means to abandon this "profane" world in order to reach some "sacred" sphere. To the contrary, spirituality touches on all aspects of human life and the manner in which the human person relates to reality. In Sobrino's words, "Spirituality is simply the spirit of a subject—an individual or a group—in its relationship with the whole of reality."[12] His approach focuses on the human person's capacity for self-transcendence through his or her engagement of the world. Hence, while Sobrino acknowledges that the relationship between our spiritual and historical lives may take different forms, he forcefully rejects those spiritualities that isolate the human person from the demands of his or her historical situation.[13]

[10] Here I am drawing on Sobrino's insight that there are negative by-products proper to the practice of liberation. See his "Spirituality and Liberation," in *Spirituality of Liberation: Toward Political Holiness* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988) 23–45, at 27–28.

[11] *Theologal* is a technical term in Ignacio Ellacuría's and Jon Sobrino's theology that finds its origins in Xavier Zubiri's work, and should not be confused with *theological*. While the term *theological* refers to the study of God, *theologal* seeks to express the grounding of all reality in God. A *theologal* dimension of reality refers to the "God dimension" or "graced" dimension of reality, and a *theologal* spirituality refers to the spirit with which the human person encounters God and makes God present in historical reality. See Kevin F. Burke, S.J., *The Ground Beneath the Cross*: *The Theology of Ignacio Ellacuría* (Washington: Georgetown University, 2000) 40 n. 48.

[12] Jon Sobrino, "Presuppositions and Foundations of Spirituality," in *Spirituality of Liberation: Political Holiness* 13.

[13] Sobrino, "Presuppositions and Foundations of Spirituality" 13.

To illuminate the proper relationship between the human person and reality, Sobrino largely relies on the theological work of Karl Rahner, and especially on that of Ignacio Ellacuría.[14] In a manner analogous to Rahner,[15] Ellacuría conceives creation as grounded in God and the human person as a being open to God's self-communicating presence.[16]

Ellacuría locates the human person as firmly embedded in reality and argues that a key characteristic of all humans is the capacity to encounter and engage this reality in a holistic manner.[17] This encounter takes place through the noetic, ethical, and praxical functions of human intelligence.[18] It is through these dimensions that the human person engages, transforms, and is transformed by reality.

While Ellacuría establishes the basic epistemological structure that conditions the human person's proper engagement of reality, Sobrino identifies the spirit—or disposition—that actualizes this engagement.[19]

[14] For Sobrino, Rahner's theology reveals a God who, though remaining a holy mystery, is ultimately a God who encounters us in history in order to act on our behalf. In other words, it is a God who is chiefly a saving God; see "Reflexiones sobre Karl Rahner desde América Latina: En el XX aniversario de su muerte," *Revista latinoamericana de teología* 61 (2004) 3–18, at 9.

[15] Martin Maier has rightly argued that Ellacuría rearticulates Rahner's notion of the supernatural existential by transposing it from the subjective human level to the level of historical reality. See Maier, "Karl Rahner: The Teacher of Ignacio Ellacuría," in *Love That Produces Hope: The Thought of Ignacio Ellacuría* [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2006] 128–43, at 138). In his "Historia de la salvación," in *Escritos teologicos*, 2 vols. (San Salvador: UCA, 2000) 1:597–628, at 604, Ellacuría approvingly mentions Rahner's treatment of the supernatural existential.

[16] Ignacio Ellacuría, "The Historicity of Christian Salvation," in *Mysterium liberationis*, ed. Ignacio Ellacuría and Jon Sobrino (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993) 251–88, at 276.

[17] Such an encounter of reality has a well-defined structure and comprises three interrelated dimensions: (1) realizing the weight of reality (*el hacerse cargo de la realidad*); (2) shouldering the weight of reality (*el cargar con la realidad*); and (3) taking charge of the weight of reality (*el encargarse de la realidad*). See Ellacuría, "Hacia una fundamentación del método teológico latinoamericano" 1:219–34, at 208. Here the translation of Ellacuría's terminology is taken from Burke, *Ground Beneath the Cross* 100–108.

[18] See Ellacuría, "Hacia una fundamentación del método teológico latinoamericano" 1:208.

[19] As J. Matthew Ashley explains, for Sobrino "'being human with spirit,' and [Ellacuría's] 'confronting reality' are tantamount to the same thing once one understands what 'spirit,' 'human,' and 'reality' mean. To 'have spirit' or to live in terms of a transcendent horizon is precisely to engage reality as a multi-dimensional field of elements and dynamisms, most fully instantiated and actualized at the level of human history (in other words, as *historical* reality)" ("The Mystery of God and Compassion for the Poor: The Spiritual Basis of Theology," in *Hope and Solidarity: Jon Sobrino's Challenge to Christian Theology*, ed. Stephen J. Pope [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008] 63–75 at 65–66).

Building on Ellacuría's philosophical framework, Sobrino advances the need for a spirit that affirms the individual's transcendent character and seeks to actualize this transcendence within history through his or her comprehensive and transformative engagement of historical reality.

Since the life of a human person may be moved by different types of spirits, Sobrino distinguishes an authentic spirituality as the spirit or disposition with which we most fully engage reality and most honestly confront the situation in which we live. Consequently, Sobrino tells us that an authentic spirituality entails "being-human-with-spirit—which responds to the elements of crisis and promise residing in reality, unifying the various elements of a response to that reality in such a way that the latter may be definitely a reality more of promise than of crisis."[20]

To properly respond to the demands of reality, Sobrino identifies three basic and interrelated dispositions that embody the spirit that every human person should manifest in his or her daily life: *honesty with the real*, *fidelity to the real*, and *a willingness to be carried by the more of reality*. Although deeply interrelated and impossible to isolate from one another, these dispositions stress distinct dimensions of the human person's encounter with reality.[21]

Sobrino argues that to properly engage our immediate reality we must confront it with a spirit of *honesty* that will enable us to truthfully discern and compassionately respond to the presence of sinfulness and grace therein. This honesty also requires that we place ourselves in the midst of these circumstances and take a stance vis-à-vis the ethical demands that the different forces of a given reality (e.g., social arrangements, modes of economic production, cultural values, interpreting ideologies) place upon us. Such honesty is more than overcoming ignorance by moving from a state of nonknowing to one of knowing; it involves overcoming our inherent tendency to avoid, conceal, and distort the truth to serve our own interests.[22]

[20] Sobrino, "Spirituality and the Following of Jesus," in *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology* 677–701, at 678 (translation altered).

[21] While Ellacuría's threefold dimension of engaging reality implicitly assumed the presence of the transcendent in each one of these dimensions, Sobrino, building on his colleague's work and rooted in his own personal experience, explicitly adds a human disposition or spirit that actualizes our encounter with the transcendent: the willingness to be carried by the grace in reality. Thus, I suggest that *honesty with the real* stresses the noetic dimension (i.e., Ellacuría's realizing the weight of reality); *fidelity to the real* emphasizes both the ethical and praxical dimensions (i.e., Ellacuría's shouldering the weight of reality and taking charge of the weight of reality); and *willingness to be carried by the more of reality* underscores the transcendent dimension of encountering reality.

[22] Sobrino, "Spirituality and the Following of Jesus" 681.

For Sobrino, the brokenness of reality will elicit a compassionate response from any healthy human being who engages this reality with honesty. He thus insists that compassion is the primordial act of the Holy Spirit through which the human being is perfected and becomes whole.[23] "It is that in terms of which all dimensions of the human being acquire meaning and without which nothing else attains to human status."[24] Compassion, as we will see, assumes both the interiorization of the suffering of another and the willingness to overcome this suffering. It becomes practical and takes different forms depending on the nature of the suffering one beholds and the context in which the victim is embedded.

Sobrino's second disposition calls the human person to nurture a spirit that remains faithful to the real. This fidelity, Sobrino tells us, "is simply and solely perseverance in our original honesty, however we may be burdened with, yes, engulfed in, the negative element in history. . . . We shall know only that we must stay faithful, keep moving ahead in history, striving ever to transform that history from negative to positive."[25] The fulfilling of such faithfulness is also an act of spirit that is always costly and in some cases, brings with it the demands that Christians associate with the passion and the cross.

Finally, as human persons engage reality with a spirit of honesty and faithfulness, they discover that reality not only makes difficult demands but also contains what Sobrino calls a *more*—a goodness and a promise that carries them and lightens their burden. In other words, faithfulness is nurtured by an expectant and active hope that enables the subject to bear the cost of such perseverance. Honest and faithful subjects are called to embrace a spirit of trust that allows them to recognize and rely on the ultimate goodness of reality, and thus be moved and guided by this goodness. Sobrino insists that reality, for all its brokenness, calls us to have hope: "the hope it calls for is an active impulse . . . it is a hope bent upon helping reality become what it seeks to be. This is love. Hope and love are but two sides of the same coin: the conviction put into practice, of the possibilities of reality."[26]

Taken together, these three dimensions constitute what can be defined as a fundamental spirituality that best realizes the human relationship with God and with historical reality. Echoing Rahner's theology of grace, Sobrino contends that "anyone who enters into a correct relationship with this reality is corresponding to God objectively, and . . . God will bestow

[23] See Marcus J. Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time: The Historical Jesus and the Heart of Contemporary Faith* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994) 47–61, 82–87, 103.

[24] Sobrino, "Spirituality and the Following of Jesus" 682.

[25] Sobrino, "Presuppositions and Foundations of Spirituality" 18.

[26] Ibid. 19.

self-communication to this person, although this communication may not be in a thematic reflexive form."[27] These spirits or dispositions represent both the correct mode in which any human person should relate to reality and the positive response of the human person to God's revelation in history. As Sobrino notes, through these dispositions the "mystery of God indeed becomes present *in* reality. Transcendence becomes present *in* history."[28]

While this fundamental spirituality is relevant to all human beings, Sobrino acknowledges that it already assumes the Christian understanding of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. For Christians this fundamental spirituality comes to fruition in following Jesus, since it is through him that the true human being and the true spirit with which we should engage reality are made known. Thus in the next section I move from Sobrino's fundamental spirituality to construct an expressly Christian spirituality of reconciliation.

CONSTRUCTING A CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY OF RECONCILIATION

According to Sobrino, our following of Jesus has to take into consideration two distinct dimensions that respond to two interdependent spheres of his existence: one christological, the other pneumatological. These dimensions mutually refer to each other and converge in generating a way of being in the world that seeks to recreate Jesus' life and respond to the movements of the Spirit today. The christological dimension points to the structure of Jesus' life and the path or channel his life lays out for us: incarnation, mission, cross, and resurrection. The pneumatological dimension refers to the Spirit, who strengthened and enabled Jesus to undertake the journey of creatively bringing God's will to fruition within the challenges and opportunities of his historical situation. This Spirit likewise enables us to realize the dispositions of honesty, fidelity, and trust that empower us creatively to follow Jesus within our historical situation.[29]

Although I propose that each of these fundamental dispositions correlates to a particular moment in the overall structure of Jesus' life—namely: honesty with the real correlates with his incarnation; fidelity to the real correlates with his mission and cross; and letting oneself be carried by the real correlates with his resurrection—each disposition is always present in every moment of our lives. Moreover, in enlisting the structure of Jesus' life

[27] Ibid.

[28] Sobrino, "Spirituality and the Following of Jesus" 686, emphases original; translation altered.

[29] Sobrino's spirituality has a profoundly trinitarian character: by following the structure of Jesus' life empowered by his same Spirit one finds, collaborates with, and makes God present in history.

to systematize a Christian spirituality of reconciliation I am, for the sake of clarity, following the key events of his life in chronological order. It should be kept in mind that Jesus' resurrection already impacts all aspects of Christian discipleship, and thus the insights we draw from this event will inform every aspect of our following of Jesus.

Incarnation: The Honest and Compassionate Engagement of Conflicted Reality

Within the overall context of Sobrino's Christology, the incarnation models the honesty and compassion with which Christians are to engage their historical reality. Jesus' life shows that engagement is the only adequate response to a suffering and conflicted world and is thus critical for a Christian spirituality of reconciliation. Jesus' kenotic movement illustrates God's loving solidarity with humanity and invites us to take a similar turn toward the other, particularly toward the suffering other.[30] In a historical context permeated by conflict and injustice, an honest apprehension of reality elicits a compassion that compels the subject to side with those who suffer. In other words, the encounter with suffering summons us to stand in solidarity with the victims of oppression and against the forces behind such oppression.

Honesty in a World of Sin, Lies, and Death

Human history confirms that honesty and the compassion it generates are rare. The truth able to challenge the inadequacy of our social arrangements is all too often obscured and manipulated by those in power according to their particular interests. About the situation of Latin America and El Salvador in particular, Sobrino writes:

> We live in a culture of concealment, of distortion, and thus in effect we are living in a lie. There is not only *structural injustice*, not only *institutionalized violence*—as the bishops emphasized in Medellín—but also *institutionalized concealment, distortion, and lies*. And vast resources are used to maintain that structure.[31]

Sobrino argues that this situation is the product of many national and international organizations, governments, corporations, and other powerful minorities (e.g., national oligarchies) who profit from the country's status quo and the suppression of truth. Following Ignacio Ellacuría, Sobrino

[30] Sobrino claims that "this decentering of God in favor of human beings, poor, weak, and victimized, is the fundamental thesis of the Christian religion" (*Where Is God? Earthquake, Terrorism, Barbarity, and Hope*, trans. Margaret Wilde [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004] 134).

[31] Ibid. 33, emphases original.

adopts the term *civilization of wealth* to describe the overall cultural values, beliefs, and socioeconomic and political arrangements that result from the interrelated tapestry of powerful national and transnational organizations that control most of the Western nations.[32] These powerful players have taken advantage of technological advances in organization, information, and transportation to structure a market-oriented economic order that has as its main goal the accumulation of capital and the maximization of profit for the elite.[33] This economic order has increased the gap between rich and poor nations, generated poverty and marginalization for the great majorities, undermined local cultures, and consistently led to violent conflict between the powerful and the powerless.[34]

This situation begs for a spirit of honesty that can enable us to overcome our tendency to evade reality and place our interests above the truth that reality mediates. The appropriation of such a spirit marks the beginning of a process of conversion toward Christian discipleship—the start of a new life journey that seeks to follow Jesus' way of being in the world. This following of Jesus urges us to attend to conflicted reality, immerse ourselves in the world of the victims, and take an ethical stand amid the ambiguity and dynamism therein. "This incarnation," Sobrino states, "is hard, but it is a conversion which leads to solidarity with the poor and seeing reality in a very different way, overcoming the mechanisms we use to defend ourselves from reality."[35]

[32] Sobrino borrows the term *civilization of wealth* from Ellacuría; see Sobrino, "Utopia and Prophecy in Latin American," in *Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology* 289–328.

[33] On the effects of globalization in Latin America, see Franz J. Hinkelammert, "Globalization as Cover-Up: An Ideology to Disguise and Justify Current Wrongs," in *Globalization and Its Victims*, ed. Jon Sobrino and Felix Wilfred (London: SCM, 2001) 25–34; and Luis de Sebastian, *Problemas de la globalización* (Barcelona: Cuadernos Cristianisme i Justicia, 2005).

[34] Sobrino, "*Extra Pauperes Nulla Salus*," in *No Salvation Outside the Poor: Prophetic-Utopian Essays* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008) 35–76, esp. 35–48. The United Nations Economic Commission for Latin American and the Caribbean (ELCLAC), for instance, notes that "globalization has not only engendered growing interdependence; it has also given rise to marked international inequalities. Expressed in terms of a metaphor widely employed in recent debates, the world economy is essentially an 'uneven playing field,' whose distinctive characteristics are a concentration of capital and technology generation in developed countries and the strong influence of those countries on trade in goods and services. These asymmetries in the global order are at the root of profound international inequalities in income distribution" ("Inequalities and Asymmetries in the Global Order," in *Globalization and Development*, 75 [New York: United Nations, 2002]); also at http://www.eclac.cl/publicaciones/xml/0/10030/Globalization-Chap3.pdf (all URLs cited herein were accessed January 12, 2013).

[35] Sobrino, "Place of Sin and Place of Forgiveness" 62.

Compassion: Solidarity with the Victims

The core of a liberationist spirituality of reconciliation is the encounter with God in the world of the victims. The world of the poor communicates two essential insights for such a spirituality: it denounces that which rejects God's plan and perpetuates the sinful causes of conflict, and it discloses God's healing presence and will for a reconciled world.

The situation of the victims cuts through layers of complex economic and social structures that conceal vast mechanisms of oppression and radically exposes the agents behind their victimization. In exposing these failures, the victims condemn the counterfeit narrative of the oppressors and the bogus justifications of passive spectators who would like to prolong their comfortable blindness to reality. More importantly, the victims bear a truth that demands the recognition of their grievances and the restoration of their dignity.

While the world of the oppressed is certainly not exempt from the presence of sin, the poor and the victims nonetheless stand as a privileged locus within which to experience and encounter God. As the bishops in the Third General Conference at Puebla attested, the poor have an "evangelizing potential. . . . For the poor challenge the church constantly, summoning it to conversion; and many of the poor incarnate in their lives the evangelical values of solidarity, service, simplicity, and openness to accepting the gift of God."[36] These are the evangelical and humanizing values evident in the experiences of the base communities and in the spirit of renewal they have brought to the broader church as they have worked to transform the oppressive political reality in which they live.[37] Among the different values that emerge from the world of the victims, I want to underscore why solidarity is so crucial for a spirituality of reconciliation.

The murder of Archbishop Óscar Romero and priests, religious, and lay ministers attracted worldwide attention to the Salvadoran civil war in the 1980s. Romero's death prompted a call for solidarity to which many people from international and relatively affluent backgrounds responded with material aid and concrete actions that sometimes led them directly to participate in the lot of the victims. In these encounters, the victims caused many nonvictims to reexamine the purpose and meaning of their lives. Sobrino tells us that such nonvictims "under[went] the experience of being sent to others only to find their own truth. At the very moment of giving, they [found] themselves expressing gratitude for something new and better

[36] Final Document of the Third General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate, Puebla de Los Angeles Mexico (no. 1147), in *Puebla and Beyond: Documentation and Commentary*, ed. John Eagleson and Philip Scharper, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1980) 265–66.

[37] Sobrino, "*Extra Pauperes Nulla Salus*" 63.

than they [had] been given."[38] For many Christians, examining the world from the perspective of the poor led to new insights into their faith and new ways to respond to the mystery of God.

These relationships between victims and nonvictims illustrate the type of solidarity needed in an unequal and conflicted world—that is, a solidarity capable of generating a profound sense of coresponsibility among victims and nonvictims alike, and of fostering a mutually beneficial sharing of gifts among them.[39] This understanding of solidarity defies the traditional notion that assistance always flows in one direction—from the nonpoor to the poor—and thus undermines existing patterns of social paternalism and domination.

While this solidarity among unequals must acknowledge the vast gap that separates victims from nonvictims, it ultimately reaffirms the true communal and interrelated nature of humankind. For Christians, it enacts the understanding that we are called to mercifully bear with one another.

Solidarity with the victims inherently places us in opposition to the oppressors and their oppressive structures. As I show in the following section, it is in the midst of this conflict that Christian spirituality calls for perseverance to one's honest apprehension of reality by proclaiming the reconciling promise of God's kingdom, denouncing and forgiving sinful reality, and remaining available to the mystery of God's will.

God's Kingdom: A Reconciling Mission Animated by a Spirit of Fidelity

Jesus' followers today are entrusted with the same mission he inaugurated: to pursue the fullest realization of God's reconciling kingdom in history. If through our personal actions of solidarity with the victims of history we proclaim the values of God's kingdom and strengthen the hope that such a reign is possible, through our denunciations of oppressive structures—whether religious, social, economic, or political—and our efforts to build a more just society, we witness to the sociopolitical implications that ensue from this reconciling reign. By working on behalf of the kingdom, Christians enact their fidelity to God's revelation and persevere in their initial compassionate response to a world of suffering.

In Sobrino's view, compassion is the principle that elicits, grounds, and informs all our efforts to transform sinful reality and forgive the oppressor.

[38] Jon Sobrino, "Bearing with One Another in Faith: A Theological Analysis of Christian Solidarity," in *Principle of Mercy* 144–72, at 151.

[39] Sobrino describes this solidarity as "poor people and nonpoor people mutually bearing one another, giving 'to each other' and receiving 'from each other' the best that they have, in order to arrive at being 'with one another'" ("Extra Pauperes Nulla Salus" 63). For Sobrino's understanding of solidarity, see his "Bearing with One Another in Faith" 144–72.

From a reconciling perspective, our efforts on behalf of the kingdom concretize a mission of mercy that becomes practical in the pursuit of both social justice and interpersonal forgiveness. Sobrino affirms that Christians are called to both "forgive sinful reality" and "forgive the oppressor."[40] Following the insights of the Latin American bishops' conferences at Medellín and Puebla, he argues that a Christian praxis must first focus its efforts on both the eradication of structural sin and the corresponding humanization of its victims, and then attend to the personal rehabilitation of the oppressor.[41] While the social and interpersonal dimensions of the reconciling mission are deeply interrelated and equally important, the chronological priority that this praxis gives to the struggle for social justice underscores that our reconciling efforts must begin with what is most urgent—addressing, albeit imperfectly, the structural causes of widespread oppression, conflict, and affliction. As we will see, assigning such temporal priority does not relax the tension between the pursuit of justice and the offering of forgiveness, nor does it assume that full social justice must be achieved before forgiveness can be extended. Rather, it presumes that our pursuit of justice is already informed by a profound compassion that is always willing to extend forgiveness.

Forgiving Sinful Reality: From a Civilization of Wealth to One of Poverty

The problem encountered by Jesus' followers in most of Latin America is not merely that the kingdom is "not yet"—i.e., that it does not exist in its fullness. Rather, this kingdom and the fullness of life it brings are actively denied by the presence of sin, which in turn spawns conflict and death.[42] Hence, the task of "forgiving reality"[43] in pursuit of an increasingly reconciled society entails the profound transformation of those socioeconomic structures and cultural values that generate sin and promote enmity among human beings.

While a complete reconciliation among human beings and with God will come only with the fulfillment of God's kingdom, the values that we can draw from Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom offer us a basic standard from which Christians can both prophetically evaluate the prevailing conditions of injustice and envisage an alternative for the conflicted situation

[40] Sobrino, "Place of Sin and Place of Forgiveness" 58–68.

[41] Ibid. 59–62.

[42] Sobrino, "Christianity and Reconciliation" 88. Sobrino also notes that while the definitive *mediator* (Jesus) of the kingdom has arrived, the *mediation* (God's reign) is not yet fully present in history. See Sobrino, "Central Position of the Reign of God in Liberation Theology," in *Mysterium Liberationis* 372.

[43] Sobrino uses the term "forgiving reality" to indicate the need to transform those aspects of reality that represent a denial of God's will for humanity. See his "Place of Sin and Place of Forgiveness" 60–61.

in which they live. God's kingdom establishes the fundamental values to which humanity must aspire and thus provides an overarching vision for a society rooted in truth, human dignity, and fraternity.

God's kingdom therefore provides the basic direction for a historical project: a utopia that both denounces all that stands against the integral flourishing of the human person and mediates Christian hope to the public forum.[44] Such utopia must not be hijacked by a set of otherworldly platitudes that make its historical realization, at least in its initial stage, an impossibility. As a rational and viable historical project, this utopia enables the mediation of Christian faith into the indispensable political praxis that seeks the renewal of the human person and society.

Though inspired by the values of the kingdom, this utopia is a human project that is vulnerable to human sinfulness and fallibility. As such, it must not be conflated with the kingdom. God alone will ultimately fulfill God's kingdom, whereas the Christian utopic vision takes shape through our continuous, imperfect, and provisional attempts to make God's kingdom present in history.[45] Because of the inherent provisional character of any Christian utopia, our reconciling praxis must remain open to the unforeseen possibilities of God's grace while taking into consideration the limitations and opportunities present in a particular context.

When speaking about the characteristics of a historically viable Christian utopia that aims to historicize the reconciling values of God's kingdom, Sobrino consistently relies on Ellacuría's formulation of the *civilization of poverty*.[46] Far from proposing a society of "paupers," Ellacuría proposes a civilization of work, love, and austerity structured according to Jesus' beatitudes. Such a civilization would be the Christian alternative able to supplant the civilization of wealth described above. Citing Ellacuría, Sobrino

[44] "Utopia," Sobrino tells us, "establishes the content of humanness: that which human beings must reach for and by which all progress will be judged human or inhuman . . . and establishes the hope that humanness is possible" (*Where Is God?* 120).

[45] This discussion raises the question of what the relationship is between our efforts on behalf of the kingdom—our utopic vision and projects—and the kingdom itself. Here, the words of *Gaudium et spes* no. 39 are helpful: "while earthly progress must be carefully distinguished from the growth of Christ's kingdom, to the extent that the former can contribute to the better ordering of human society, it is of vital concern to the kingdom of God" (http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html).

[46] See, for instance, Sobrino, "The Crucified People and the Civilization of Poverty," in *No Salvation Outside the Poor* 1–18; and "The Kingdom of God and the Theologal Dimension of the Poor," in *Who Do You Say That I Am: Confessing the Mystery of Christ*, ed. John C. Cavadini and Laura Holt (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2004) 109–45. For Ellacuría's treatment of the "culture of wealth" and the "culture of poverty" see especially his "Utopia and Prophecy in Latin America," in *Mysterium Liberationis* 289–328.

describes the civilization of poverty as one that "rejects the accumulation of capital as the engine of history, and the possession-enjoyment of wealth as the principle of humanization; rather, it makes the universal satisfaction of basic needs the principle of development, and the growth of shared solidarity the basis of humanization."[47]

Like Ellacuría, Sobrino acknowledges the numerous and important advances achieved by the civilization of wealth among first-world nations in the sciences and culture, as well as in recognizing (at least in theory) the dignity of the human person.[48] However, mindful of the human and material cost that has accompanied the pursuit of wealth and power by Western nations, Sobrino argues that turning historical reality toward a more humane civilization requires a U-turn and a profound transformation of the world at the global and local levels: "We must fight against sin by destroying and building. We must destroy the idols of death, that is, we must destroy the structures of oppression and violence. We must build new structures of justice."[49]

Because the kingdom was first offered to the poor, Sobrino argues that it is the poor—particularly those who have made an option for themselves and the other poor—who offer the most adequate utopian vision: one that is not conceived from the illusionary world of abundance and self-gratification, but one that rather envisions "the existence and the guarantee of an essential core of basic life and of human family."[50] Thus a Christian ministry of reconciliation will strive to develop new economic, political, and cultural models that guarantee basic human needs and enable a more humane civilization rooted in simplicity and solidarity.[51] Whether labeled a "civilization of poverty" or not, any working utopia should guarantee the minimum material necessities, uphold the values of

[47] Ignacio Ellacuría, "Utopia y profetismo desde América latina," *Revista latinoamericana de teología* 17 (1989) 141–84, at 170; quoted in "Crucified People and the Civilization of Poverty" 14.

[48] Sobrino, "Crucified People and the Civilization of Poverty" 16.

[49] Sobrino, "Place of Sin and Place of Forgiveness" 61.

[50] Sobrino, "Extra Pauperes Nulla Salus" 61. For a description of the privileged role of the poor in helping us discern the content of God's kingdom, see *Jesus the Liberator* 79–87.

[51] Ellacuría, "Utopia y profetismo" 170; quoted in "Crucified People and the Civilization of Poverty" 15. Treating the specific social arrangements that might best foster the common good or the appropriate relationship between the state and civil society in Latin America go beyond the scope of this paper. Nonetheless, justice should not be understood only as a matter of redistributing economic resources or promoting democratic electoral processes. Justice, in its core biblical meaning, refers to one's right relationship with God and others, with special concern for the powerless or marginalized. See John R. Donahue, S.J., *What Does the Lord Require: A Bibliographical Essay on the Bible and Social Justice* (Saint Louis: Institute of Jesuit Resources, 2003) 23.

human fraternity, and aim at a new social paradigm that incorporates the noblest human traditions—Christian and non-Christian—around which the different elements of society can come together to create a more humane and reconciled world.[52]

Forgiving the Oppressor

Integrally related to the mission of transforming reality and promoting God's kingdom is the delicate and difficult task of forgiving the oppressor. Sobrino describes oppressors as mediators of the antikingdom and agents of the idols who bring about death.[53] By extending forgiveness to their persecutors, victims introduce the possibility of restoring broken relations and begin to concretize the promises of the kingdom. Such fidelity, Sobrino tells us, presupposes a particular vision of God as the "transcendent beginning of reconciliation."[54]

Sobrino notes that the Christian God has been revealed as a wholly decentered God who loves and forgives us first, and who stands on our side even when we stand against God. This is a God who seeks no retribution even as the Son is put to death. God's act of raising Jesus arrives without reprisal against those who abandoned or betrayed the crucified one, and God does not wait for their conversion before acting. Instead God appears without rights before humanity and "remains at their mercy and offers them a future."[55]

For Sobrino, Christian forgiveness is an expression of a deep love that never gives up on the persecutors' potential to be humane. This love seeks to convert and re-create sinful humans for the ultimate purpose of bringing them into loving communion with God and others. In his ministry, Jesus loved the oppressors by confronting and unmasking them and even by warning them of a final condemnation.[56] Although the oppressors repeatedly reject him, Jesus never gives up on them and cries for their forgiveness even as he is hanging on the cross. Indeed, Jesus the forgiving victim is animated by his hope in the sinners' conversion and the miracle of reconciliation. "From this hope," Sobrino claims, "arises the attitude of forgiving up to seventy times seven, hoping for the triumph of love, or—when hope seems to be totally against hope—leaving eschatological forgiveness to God."[57]

[52] Sobrino, "Crucified People and the Civilization of Poverty" 16.

[53] Sobrino also defines the oppressors as the "*analogatum princeps* of personal wrongdoing in sin" ("Place of Sin and Place of Forgiveness" 62).

[54] Sobrino, "Christianity and Reconciliation" 82.

[55] Ibid. 84.

[56] Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator* 104.

[57] Sobrino, "Place of Sin and Place of Forgiveness" 64.

Forgiveness is necessary for both victims and victimizers, but the former are the only ones who, in history, can extend pardon to their oppressors. For the victims, extending forgiveness opens the possibility that they might be liberated from a reality that is often characterized by justifiable but poisonous feelings of resentment, or worse, by a crippling internalized sense of worthlessness that the oppressors have projected onto them throughout their prolonged victimization. Thus freed, these victims can begin to turn their attention to the oppression into which the oppressors have fallen.

For the victimizers, asking for and receiving gratuitous forgiveness begins to liberate them from their guilt and recover their human dignity. "We come to be truly human," Sobrino writes, "not only by making our own selves—often in Promethean fashion—but by letting ourselves be made human by others."[58] In allowing themselves to be carried by the grace mediated by the victims, the victimizers encounter salvation and the invitation to participate in and become coresponsible for the well-being of reality.

As we have seen, a Christian spirituality of reconciliation is rooted and shaped by compassion, and it is this compassion that moves us to forgive reality through justice and to personally forgive the sinner. In fact, Sobrino insists that strict justice, without any forgiveness, would lead personal and social relationships into a state of chaos. This is the case not only because of justice's inability to effectively deal with countless offenses, but particularly because forgiveness is indispensable to "break the vicious circle of offense and retaliation"[59] that usually characterizes conflicted situations. Put bluntly, how can justice alone redress the murder of a life, years of oppression, or undo the suffering that has already been inflicted?

This is not to say that forgiveness dispenses with the recognition of past injustices, the possibility of some degree of compensation for the victims, or holding the perpetrators to account. On the contrary, offering or accepting forgiveness already assumes that a wrong is being acknowledged. Indeed, though the willingness to forgive is neither prior to nor dependent on achieving justice, there will be no lasting historical reconciliation unless there is repentance, justice, and accountability for previous injustices.

But unlike justice, forgiveness underscores the gratuitous dimension of love through which the victim is willing to renounce his or her legitimate rights for the sake of the sinner and the hope of reconciliation. In Sobrino's words, "If forgiveness of reality stresses the efficacy of love, forgiveness of the sinner stresses the gratuity, unreason, and defenselessness of love. We do not forgive out of any personal or group interest, even a legitimate one, but simply out of love."[60]

[58] Sobrino, "*Extra Pauperes Nulla Salus*" 67.
[59] Sobrino, "Place of Sin and Place of Forgiveness" 64.
[60] Ibid.

Forgiveness certainly cannot be forced upon the victims; the capacity to forgive is a gift and a grace accepted in gratitude by those who know themselves to have been forgiven.[61] When offered freely, Christian forgiveness is a radically generous praxis that facilitates the sinner's conversion and makes us images of God; it is a praxis rooted in the logic of love that cannot be avoided if reconciliation is to take place. Forgiveness, however, is a risky endeavor. The victims' extension of forgiveness can always be ignored, rejected, or, even worse, manipulated against the victims themselves. But full reconciliation demands not only truth and justice but also the victims' forgiveness and the perpetrators' repentance. Only when all these moments converge can we begin to speak effectively about the promise of a new and harmonious relationship lived in solidarity.

A Redemptive Cross: Living with a Spirit of Fidelity to the End

For Sobrino, Jesus' crucifixion was a direct consequence of his honest and compassionate incarnation in a conflicted world. Jesus did not seek the cross as such, nor was the crucifixion part of some divine plan that required his suffering in order to expiate human sin and satisfy a judging God. Rather, it was the historical outcome of loving others without limit in a sinful world.[62] Thus, Jesus' cross reveals the extent of his fidelity to God and to the mission that God entrusted to him, as well as the cost of such fidelity. In an analogous manner, those who follow Jesus today and take up the cross of engaging in a compassionate praxis that seeks to eradicate evil are likely to be persecuted and endure a fate similar to that of Jesus.

When Sobrino describes the Christian task of taking responsibility for the sinful and conflicted character of reality, he makes a distinction between *overcoming* and *redeeming* its evil.[63] He suggests that we should try to *overcome* violence's evil through all legitimate and effective means, such as confronting injustice and the original causes of the violence,

[61] Sobrino adds: "Those who forgive open their eyes and know just what is being forgiven: responsibility in the continued crucifixion of entire peoples. To be able to see with new eyes the genuine reality of the world, to be able to stare it in the face despite its tragedy, to be able to perceive what it is to which God says a radical 'no,' is (logically) the first fruit of allowing oneself really to be pardoned" ("Personal Sin, Forgiveness, and Liberation," in *Principle of Mercy* 95–96).

[62] Thus, we may say that, for Sobrino, Jesus' cross was a historical and not a theological necessity.

[63] Jon Sobrino "La teología y el 'principio de liberación,'" *Revista latinoamericana de teología* 35 (1995) 115–40**,** at 135; see also "*Extra Pauperes Nulla Salus*" 64. Elsewhere speaking of God in the cross, Sobrino affirms that "what this crucified God reminds us of constantly is that there can be no liberation from sin without bearing of sin, that injustice cannot be eradicated unless it is borne" (*Jesus the Liberator* 246).

fomenting solidarity, and proposing negotiations and dialogue between the conflicting parties. These are ways that we can struggle against evil without necessarily taking on its consequences.

In contrast, *redemption* emphasizes that eradicating the sin and injustice that permeates our social relationships cannot be accomplished from a distance. It requires from us a solidarity that is willing to take up and endure the consequences of sin. "What is most distinctively Christian," Sobrino writes, "is to redeem violence. This only takes place when we eradicate it, and in order to achieve that we must not only struggle against it from outside [violence itself], but we have to bear with it from within. To do this—and to do it for love of the victims—is what exemplifies the love of the martyrs."[64] For Sobrino, the suffering of Jesus—and that of the martyrs—has a redemptive dimension insofar as this suffering stops, absorbs, and reverses the inherent tendency of evil and violence to generate even more violence.[65]

Resurrection: Letting Ourselves Be Carried by a Spirit of Trust

Jesus' resurrection ushers in the promise of final justice and an offer of forgiveness that is the product of a love tested by suffering and death. In the resurrection, God responds to the unjust execution of the innocent victim Jesus and reveals Godself as a just liberator, thereby renewing our hope in a future that is God's. Jesus' postresurrection appearances convey God's forgiving love and function as commissioning events in which the disciples are welcomed back into the community and entrusted with Jesus' reconciling mission. The appearance stories underscore how Christ, the sinless victim, offers perfect forgiveness and teaches us to forgive. His pardoning is utterly gratuitous and potentially transforming; its purpose is none other than the purpose of all love: "to come into communion."[66]

Although freely offered, Christ's forgiveness urges all to examine and accept our complicity for the brokenness of a reality that continues to produce victims. To be sure, we do not all bear equal degrees of responsibility

[64] Jon Sobrino, "Apuntes para una espiritualidad en tiempos de violencia: Reflexiones desde la perspectiva salvadoreña," *Revista latinoamericana de teología* 29 (1993) 189–208, at 202. In this same article Sobrino upholds the logic of the "just war"; thus he acknowledges that in some extreme circumstances the limited use of violence may be necessary to protect the lives of innocent victims and avoid greater evils.

[65] Sobrino writes: "The victims' suffering, by its nature ['disarms'] the power of evil, not magically but historically. This is a way of trying to explain conceptually the saving element of Christ's suffering on the cross: sin has discharged all its force against him, but in doing so sin itself has been left without force" ("*Extra Pauperes Nulla Salus*" 65).

[66] Sobrino, "Place of Sin and Place of Forgiveness" 63.

for the conflicted nature of reality, for although we are all sinners some sinful actions are qualitatively more serious and yield greater negative effects than others. Yet sober acknowledgment of the current human condition demands that we avoid unwarranted idealization of any particular group and thus render them above accountability, for an integral part of following the crucified and sinless victim is the call to continuous conversion. This conversion is enabled by the Spirit, who makes Christ's risen life present in history. It is this same Spirit of the resurrected Christ who empowers us to live as persons raised to life amid the very brokenness of history.

Appropriating the Reconciling Spirit of the Resurrection

Sobrino approaches the resurrection with an eye toward how it may affect our lives and discipleship today. The fact that the eschatological event of the resurrection was perceived in history and that it transformed the lives of Jesus' disciples, he argues, indicates that at least in some analogous and limited way, we must also be able to share today the experiences enjoyed by those first witnesses. In the resurrection all initiative and agency rests solely in God who raises Jesus from the dead and gives the disciples the necessary grace to experience the risen Christ. Sobrino contends that this gratuitous bestowal of grace was accompanied by the disciples' receptivity and affinity to Jesus and by a hopeful expectation that predisposed them to experience and recognize him as risen.

To explicate how followers of Jesus today might analogously grasp the Spirit of the resurrected Christ, Sobrino adapts Immanuel Kant's three famous anthropological questions to map out the christic stance toward reality: What can I know? What ought I to do? For what can I hope? To these questions, Sobrino adds one of his own: What can we celebrate in history today?

For Sobrino, appropriating the manner in which Jesus hoped, acted, and knew predisposes the disciple to encounter and be transformed by the risen Christ. Sobrino claims that inasmuch as we follow the crucified Jesus, the risen Christ becomes present "so that this following can here and now be shot through with the triumphant aspect of the resurrection of Jesus."[67] As I will show, in this discipleship the Spirit of the resurrected Christ allows us to be carried by the "more"—that is, the grace—of reality.

In the following pages, I examine how this christic stance of hoping, acting, and knowing as Jesus does enables us to appropriate the graces of the resurrection. Building on Sobrino's work, my analysis stresses how the appropriation of Jesus' resurrection drives this spirituality of reconciliation

[67] Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator: A View from the Victims*, trans. Paul Burns (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2001) 13.

and how the Spirit of the risen Christ molds and renews those who follow Jesus with the same honesty, faithfulness, and trust with which he lived.

According to Sobrino, the resurrection "introduces a hope into history, into human beings, into the collective consciousness, as a sort of life experience capable of giving shape to everything."[68] This hope is staked on the promise of a reconciled eschatological community rooted in God's merciful justice where the victims of history will be restored to life—a community constituted above all by the poor and the victims and, by extension, the forgiven victimizers.[69] In Sobrino's words,

> the utopia of Jesus, the kingdom of God, can be properly described as the ideal of reconciliation, especially because in that kingdom will be present those who are always absent—the poor and the weak. And they will be there with their oppressors, now forgiven and converted; in other words, as a new world.[70]

The promise of the kingdom refers not only to our hope in God's victory over death, but also comprises our hope in God's power over injustice and in God's eagerness to forgive the victimizers.

In Sobrino's view, hoping as Jesus hoped entails a willingness to participate in the hope of those who are crucified today. Indeed, while the hope generated by the resurrection is available to all, it responds in a particular manner to the aspirations of those who unjustly bear the consequences of oppressors' sins. Sobrino explains that "the hope of the poor focuses on a future grasped simultaneously as gift and promise, and as a call to action."[71] It is the hope for life not simply in the sense of guaranteeing basic rights and livelihood, but it is also the hope of becoming a person, "a genuine creature of God and no longer the perennial victim of idols."[72] While this hope is nurtured by the poor's partial triumphs against injustice and by their active solidarity with one another, its roots are in God. In the ultimate analysis, the hope of the poor can be understood as "a primordial act of confidence in reality despite all, a hope explicated as confidence in a God who is Father."[73]

In examining the impact of this resurrecting hope on a spirituality of reconciliation I again emphasize that only by partaking of the victims' hope and situation can nonvictims claim such a hope as their own. This is then

[68] Sobrino, "The Resurrection of One Crucified," in *No Salvation Outside the Poor* 99–108, at 102.

[69] For Sobrino, Jesus' resurrection "implies communion with others, a logical presupposition in cultures in which individualism has not taken root: speaking of the 'fullness' of an isolated individual makes little sense" ("Resurrection of One Crucified" 106).

[70] Sobrino, "Conflicto y reconciliación" 1147.

[71] Sobrino, "The Hope of the Poor in Latin America," in *Spirituality of Liberation* 157–68, at 162–63.

[72] Ibid. 163.

[73] Sobrino, "Spirituality and Liberation" 33.

also a "decentering" hope that calls us to loving actions on behalf of the other, as it invites us to trust in the "more" of reality.[74]

It certainly risks presumption for a nonvictim, including me, to speak of the significance that the resurrection has for the victims. One must speak with care and due humility, mindful that the victims are, as Sobrino writes, "the great 'other' for us."[75] Speaking, as it were, from the "outside," one may say that their hope is first a hope for an end to suffering. This hope nurtures the victims' conviction that God is on their side and that justice will be done, which strengthens the struggle against the negativity of this world. By holding to the hope of the resurrection and to the conviction of the ultimate victory of justice, victims can make an authentic option for themselves and become agents in their own process of reconciliation.

Such hope endows victims with a new confidence to hold on to their aspirations for justice. It also enables them to reject the alienating values of the dominant group, including the desire for retribution—that is, the desire to impose upon their former oppressors the conditions the victims were made to endure. Confidence in the promise of the resurrection fosters both a sense of gratitude to God and the conviction that a just future is possible. This prospect in turn frees former victims to extend to their persecutors the forgiveness that Christ offers to all in the cross and the resurrection. "Positively speaking," Sobrino writes, "the experience of gratuity entails gratitude to something greater than oneself, and the response of the one who has been forgiven and 'graced' multiplies spirit and practice exponentially."[76] The experience of knowing ourselves as accepted and forgiven moves us to conversion and to extend the same forgiveness to others.[77] In this sense, the hope of the resurrection implicitly demands that we not give up on the oppressors trapped under the weight of sin, nor therefore on the possibility of their eventual conversion.[78]

The resurrection orients our praxis toward a future life in God. It commits us to proclaim the hope unleashed by Christ's resurrection and to serve the content of that hope by striving to respond to its promises in our time. By engaging in a praxis that seeks to make the resurrected hope a

[74] Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator* 45.
[75] Sobrino, "Resurrection of One Crucified" 103.
[76] Sobrino, "Spirituality and the Following of Jesus" 693.
[77] Sobrino writes: "The logic of the forgiven and grateful one—with all due caution when it comes to the enthusiasm of converts—is what opens the heart to a limitless salvific, historical practice" ("Personal Sin, Forgiveness, and Liberation" 91.
[78] It should be clear that understanding the hope of the resurrection as one that stresses the victory of God's justice over injustice does not mean that the hope for the resurrection becomes de-universalized, but rather that this hope demands certain conditions and a particular setting—the world of the victims—from which it embraces all, victims and nonvictims. See *Christ the Liberator* 43.

reality, we gain a better grasp of the resurrection and extend to others its hope in practical and credible ways.

For those who strive to grasp Jesus' resurrection today, the fact that Jesus was raised by God not only entails the expectation that one day they will be raised but also calls them to engage in the mission of lifting up the victims of this world.[79] Sobrino argues that to predispose ourselves to grasp the resurrection, our actions must be analogous to God's action of raising Jesus from death.[80] In other words, for Sobrino, we ourselves should become "raisers" who seek justice for the victims of injustice and people whose actions are inspired by transcendent values rooted in eschatological ideas such as justice, peace, and reconciliation.

Even when our reconciling actions are limited and fallible, the discipleship of reconciliation that unfolds from the resurrection is one that seeks to anticipate and make present, even if in a provisional and imperfect manner, the eschatological promise of God's kingdom. As Sobrino notes, "We have to take all possible steps, limited and even ambiguous though they may be, to achieve minimum but important and necessary objectives—agreement, cease fires, etc.—but these have to be guided by the utopia of the shared table."[81]

Our acceptance of Christ's resurrection has a profound effect on how we understand and relate to historical reality, for it prompts us to comprehend history as a promise—a gratuitous mystery in which the future is not conceived as a mere extrapolation from the present. Grasping the resurrection requires a stance characterized by a spirit of trust and openness toward God's grace. Such a stance rejects the tendency to try to control reality and instead fosters an attitude that acknowledges that we do not have all of the answers. This epistemological humility both makes room for the newness that comes from God's unexpected grace and, in a manner of speaking, allows us to be carried by the "more" of reality. As Sobrino writes, "Only an intelligence that does not want to seize everything, decide on everything, accept as possible only what it can know by extrapolating from what it already knows, can be shot through with grace."[82]

[79] Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator* 47. [80] Ibid. 47–48.

[81] Sobrino, "Conflicto y reconciliación" 1147. The "shared table" is an eschatological metaphor that Sobrino borrows from one of Rutilio Grande's last homilies, preached on February 13, 1977, a month before he was murdered. That day, Grande proclaimed, "We come to share at this table which is a symbol of our brotherhood, a table with a stool and a big napkin for each human being. We have a common Father, and therefore all of us are brothers" (quoted by William J. O'Malley, S.J., "El Salvador: Rutilio Grande, S.J.," in *The Voice of Blood: Five Christian Martyrs of Our Time* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995) 1–63, at 43.

[82] Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator* 53.

This attitude of epistemological modesty and openness to grace is relevant particularly for a Christian spirituality of reconciliation, since all efforts toward reconciliation by their very nature are ambiguous and incomplete until the end of time. As stressed above, no human project can be identified with God's kingdom. Though our efforts are certainly important and made urgent by the suffering of history's victims, they remain anticipatory and hopeful signs of God's ultimate reconciliation. This means that our praxis must allow for the interruption of God's grace. Appropriating the power of the resurrection enables us to engage in a praxis of reconciliation that, because it is mindful of its limitations, opens itself up to the unexpected gifts of God's reconciling grace.

Celebrating Life as a Reconciling Risen Being

To live as risen beings means living as new creatures who are receptive to God's grace and thus committed to following Jesus and making God's reconciling promise a tangible reality in the world. This way of life is animated by a spirit of gratitude and trust in God, which infuses our following of Christ with a dimension of victory that, in turn, enables us to engage reality with a new freedom and joy.

This is a freedom, Sobrino tells us, that "expresses 'fullness' when it introduces us into history in order to 'love' and . . . expresses 'triumph' when 'nothing is an obstacle' to it."[83] As noted above, this type of freedom is most clearly manifested in Christian martyrs whose lives bore and absorbed the effects of a conflicted world. Paradoxically, lives that willingly bear the weight of sin usually express the extraordinary freedom of Christians who have appropriated the power of the resurrection and who thus live as risen beings today.

Christian joy is usually expressed and nurtured through those celebrations—especially the Eucharist—that recall our Christian identity and the triumph of the resurrection. These celebrations, with their rich symbolic rituals and the active participation of the community generate solidarity, strengthen Christian identity, and anticipate our eschatological communion. Deceased victims are honored and remembered anew against the legacy of hope that is nurtured by the liberating events and people through which God has manifested salvific love for us. These celebrations keep alive the memories of past challenges and sufferings endured by the community; they help us remember rightly and forgivingly.

At the same time, such celebrations provide the space to foster the necessary support for the victimized community to share its stories and grieve its losses. It is within the safe context of community life and celebrations infused by the community's faith, hope, and love that victims are often afforded the

[83] Sobrino, "Resurrection of One Crucified" 105–6.

possibility to begin reconstructing the shattered sense of meaning that usually ensues from violent and traumatic experiences of loss.[84]

In a world of pervasive conflict, these celebrations are fueled by the recognition—and the joy—that the reality of the resurrection has somehow reached us, and that our reconciling efforts are guided by the promise of a "more," by a hope and a grace that appear to carry us. Thus, they help us recognize what is good and positive in the present and keep our hope in God's promise for a reconciled future alive. While their main purpose is to express joy and gratitude to the living God, these celebrations help the community remain receptive to what is ultimate and true in reality—the gratuitousness of God's merciful love. In turn, they encourage us to respond with a gratitude that extends to others the same love and forgiveness that has been offered to us.

CONCLUSION

The spirituality of reconciliation put forth in these pages presumes an inherent correspondence between God's gift of reconciliation through Christ and the appropriation of such a gift through the creation of personal, social, and political relationships rooted in the values of God's kingdom. This work does not explicitly endorse any particular political program or elaborate specific public policies, but it does articulate a discipleship capable of individually renewing and collectively empowering Christians to respond properly to situations of socioeconomic conflict and to struggle for lasting peace therein. Although I present this spirituality as prescriptive, it is also versatile. It calls for a "creative" following of Jesus to underscore the individuality of all subjects and the specificity of their situations. Yet its insights carry a degree of universality and relevance to other contexts.

Building on Sobrino's Christology, I have argued that our following of Jesus, in order to appropriate his way of being within the context of our conflicted reality, must attend to the structure of his life and to the Holy Spirit who empowered him. As it has been for 2000 years, disciples of Jesus today must enter into the world of the victims to better grasp the truth of their situation and to establish relationships of solidarity between victims and nonvictims. The world of the victims more clearly reveals the consequences of injustice, helps us unmask its causes, and draws us into a process of conversion that places us alongside the victims and against their oppressors. Thus, solidarity characterizes the compassionate response that ensues from an honest appreciation of a conflicted reality.

[84] On the relationship between grief and the construction of meaning, see Melissa M. Kelley, *Grief: Contemporary Theory and the Practice of Ministry* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010).

Compassion also captures the fundamental manner in which God engages the world through Jesus' reconciling mission. It is what originates and informs his, and thus our, entire life and mission. As followers of Jesus, we are entrusted to pursue the fullest realization of God's reconciling kingdom as the alternative to our violent world. The kingdom provides the reconciling vision that inspires a Christian utopia that is best understood as a provisional but viable historical project—that is, one that is not beyond the gifts and resources currently available to us.

Christian disciples, in their struggles to transform our conflicted society into one that reflects the values of God's reign, make their compassion practical through the pursuit of justice and forgiveness. These actions embody a spirit of fidelity to God's revelation and provide an honest response to a suffering world. Sobrino's profound understanding of the character of divine compassion allows us to appreciate how justice and forgiveness converge and complement each other. They are distinct but interrelated moments in any process of reconciliation that express, respectively, the efficacy and gratuity of God's love. Because our expressions of justice and forgiveness are limited and imperfect, they ought to be understood as anticipatory signs whose fullness will be reached only through God and in God's future reign.

The spirit of honesty and faithfulness that enables the followers of Jesus to address the demands of their conflicted reality converges with a spirit of trust that empowers them to be carried by Christ's resurrected spirit and his grace also present in the dynamisms of reality. Each new situation challenges his disciples to remain available to this "more" of reality in order to discern both God's will and the most appropriate steps in light of the opportunities and constraints of a given situation. This sobering stance is accompanied by the conviction and hope that such provisional steps will be eventually surpassed—if not by us, then by those who come after us.

Entrenched poverty and injustice remain the daily reality for the majority of the Latin American population. In the midst of adversity, the strengthening of communities, the overcoming of unjust practices, the willingness to extend forgiveness, and the veneration of our martyrs are all sources of hope that are nurtured by and find their ultimate meaning in the memory of Jesus' life, cross, and resurrection. So, too, these sources of hope are credible reasons to gather and celebrate the God who continues to walk among us and to remember that the future belongs only to God. These celebrations strengthen our hope especially when perceived as sacramental and anticipatory signs of Christ's final victory over injustice.

As the lives of the Latin American martyrs evince with scandalous consistency, seeking to live as "risen" and reconciling beings within a situation

of conflict may be the shortest way to the cross. In the end, this journey toward reconciliation can be undertaken only because, like Jesus before us, we are grounded in, sustained, and transformed by "a 'more' that touches us and draws us despite ourselves."[85] This we do for no other reason than the merciful and gratuitous love that compels us to communion.

[85] Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator* 78.