

SOBRINO, THE RESURRECTION, AND DISCIPLESHIP IN THE PHILIPPINE CONTEXT *

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INTRODUCTION

Christians are believers and followers of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, and hence also His disciples. Jesus of Nazareth is the man whose deeds, words and life bespeak of a loving and merciful God whom all can call "Abba" - Father.¹ Jesus' life of complete obedience to the Father leads to His passion, crucifixion and death. The Father, well-pleased by the Son's life lived for others, raises Jesus from the dead. In raising Jesus from the dead, the Father affirms the kind of life Jesus lives in history.² Jesus is then given the fullness of life and becomes our way to salvation which means a life of union with God. Jesus is now the Christian-Messiah, the Son of God, who shows humanity, the way to God our Father. Jesus of Nazareth is His resurrection. Paul expresses explicitly the centrality and utter importance of the resurrection for Christian faith: "And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is void of content and your faith is empty too" (1 Cor. 15:14). Discipleship is the following of Jesus Christ. It is the vocation of every Christian to continue Jesus' mission, to be life-giving. This is the essence of Christianity and the flesh and blood of Christian

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¹Some exegetes reasonably postulate a powerful religious experience of intimacy with God that expressed itself in Jesus' term of address to God, "Abba." It is an intimacy expressed in Jesus' proclamation of a God who forgives and in Jesus' life and words depicted a God who is totally for human life and its fulfillment; a God whose law and will are really one: Love of God and love of fellow human beings.

This kind of relationship of the Son with the Father, which must be ours too, is well explored in Leonardo Boff's commentary on the prayer Our Father that Jesus Himself has taught us: *The Lord's Prayer*, trans. Theodore Morrow (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 1983), pp. 28-31.

²See Roger Haight, *An Alternative Vision, An Interpretation of Liberation Theology* (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 1985), Chapter Seven. The author profoundly deals with the reinterpretation of the significance of the resurrection for Christian life today.

discipleship. In Jesus risen from the dead Christians are endowed with the capacity to continue this mission. The Spirit of the risen Jesus dwells in and among Christians. Jesus, through the Spirit, gives the power to denounce and work against evil - that which opposes love and life.³ Empowered with the Spirit. Christians are to transform the world into human relationships of sharing, justice and peace, compassion and reconciliation. Thus the world may know Christians by what they have and are: LOVE (cf. John 13:35; 1 John 4:7-20).

However, what one experiences in daily life is contrary to what is known and expected from the resurrection of Jesus. What are overwhelming now are greed and selfishness. Our global society is obsessed with hatred and violence in the struggle for power and dominance.⁴ This seeming contradiction puts many Christians in a dilemma. Is Christianity a fantasy? Is faith in the risen Jesus Christ a product of hallucination or brainwashing? If the answers are negative, then, why the seeming failure of Christianity or Christians?

When the above questions surface in the faith of the people, it could be misunderstood as a deviation not only from the Church's faith but also from God Himself. In most cases the said doubts and suspicions could mean an awakening to a deeper and more meaningful faith. The search for a new interpretation and meaning could be the outcome of a widening gap separating one's concrete human experiences from the understanding of the resurrection of Jesus which one used to uphold but finds no longer adequate. When the feeling of irrelevance creeps into existing interpretations and understandings of a faith content, this may be a sign that such interpretations need a thorough and reflective study for re-evaluation and re-interpretation - for new meaning, more faithful to the Judaeo-Christian Tradition and to human experience.

Therefore, doubt and suspicion can serve as stimulus to the birth of a growing and maturing faith in Jesus Christ. It is here that contemporary theology can help in the midwifery of the emerging renewal of Christian faith. It calls for a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of social and natural sciences, special skills and creativity along with a discerning heart faithful to the leadings of the Spirit within the people of God.

It is the task of contemporary theology to allow an open and participative ongoing theological reflection on the resurrection of Jesus in relation to present human realities and experiences. Such discus-

³Leonardo Boff, *The Lord's Prayer*, pp. 112-120.

⁴Ibid., p. 60

sions can facilitate the birth of new perspectives in Christian discipleship. Many sincere Christians are now experiencing a meaningless worship of the glorified and exalted Jesus and are disturbed and challenged by a chaotic and miserable world. There is a hunger for a meaningful response, one that is faithful to the Gospels and the Church but also concrete, active and relevant to the signs of the times. There must be emerging alternative visions to the birth and growth of which every believer is a contributor, as all continue to live their faith in history.

The primary purpose of this study was to deepen the understanding of the significance of Jesus' resurrection for Christian discipleship in the Philippine context in particular, using the theology of Jon Sobrino, S.J., as found in his book *Christology at the Crossroads*.⁵ Inspired by Jose de Mesa's and Lode Wostyn's view⁶ that Christian theology has to be rooted in two important poles, namely, contemporary human experience and the historically based Judaeo-Christian Tradition⁷ the writer has chosen Jon Sobrino's theology as a beacon light in an attempt to explicate a new perspective in Christian discipleship in the Philippine context.

Christology at the Crossroads is the fruit of the reflection of a man of faith in a Third World setting (El Salvador), where the socio-political, economic and religious milieu is similar to that of the Philippines.⁸ In this book, Sobrino is addressing a particular people of faith whose human realities and experiences of the poverty, oppression, deprivation of the majority of the population run parallel to the present Philippine situation. It is for this reason that the writer finds Sobrino's theology enriching and relevant to the growth and development of a theological perspective on Jesus' resurrection for Christian discipleship in the Philippine context.

Before analyzing Sobrino's contribution, it would be appropriate to explore the New Testament data on the Resurrection.

⁵Jon Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*, (New York: Orbis Books, 1978). In this work, Sobrino treats the resurrection of Jesus extensively in the light of his emphasis of the historical Jesus of Nazareth as the starting point of his historical Christology.

⁶Jose de Mesa and Lode Wostyn, *Doing Theology*, (Quezon City, Philippines: MST, 1982). This book is highly recommended for beginners in theology who seek for new meaning of their faith and for a method in doing theology. Generally, this book is also a good guide for those who are searching for relevancy in what they believe and profess in relation to human realities/experience.

⁷*Ibid.*, see Chapters One and Two where the two poles for doing theology are thoroughly discussed.

⁸Jon Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*, p. xii

THE NEW TESTAMENT

The starting point and center of the early Christian community's faith in Jesus, as the Christ and Lord of history, is the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. From the very beginning of the apostolic period, Jesus' resurrection is the primary object of the apostles' proclamation about Jesus. However, it must be noted that the New Testament does not speak about or describe the resurrection itself. What are recorded in the Scriptures are the empty tomb and the Easter appearances of the risen Jesus.

The New Testament, with the resurrection as the starting point, presents Jesus as the risen One, and therefore the Christ. In the light of Jesus' resurrection, the New Testament interprets what Jesus said and did in His ministry. Using the resurrection as the starting point the New Testament, authors work forward and backward from Jesus' resurrection, with every thing else falling into place and beginning to make sense, especially Jesus' public life and ministry, baptism, birth and conception. In the light of the resurrection, Jesus' special relationship with the Father, Jesus' fulfillment of the hope of Israel, the preaching of the Kingdom, the crucifixion and death, and the empty tomb are understood in their proper perspective. Finally, because of the resurrection, the disciples recover their courage and proclaim and live what Jesus taught them. Their faith in the resurrection leads the disciples to risk their lives; they experience persecutions (cf. Acts 4:1-3; 5:17ff), and even face death because of the good news they proclaim (cf. Acts 6:8-7:60). Their faith in the risen Jesus enables them to live as a community of believers, sharing their goods and becoming one in fellowship, work and prayer (cf. Acts 2:42-47).

Any attempt to expound on what the early Christians claimed about Jesus' resurrection must start with St. Paul. In Paul's letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 15), the primacy of the resurrection proclamation becomes evident. Considered the earliest literary witness to the resurrection of Jesus, the passage tells of individuals and groups who were witnesses to the risen Jesus. Paul establishes the foundation of his readers' faith in the resurrection of Jesus, a faith which rests upon the testimony of witnesses including himself - a persecutor of Christians turned zealous disciple of Jesus Christ.

Taken as a whole, Paul's literary works are considered the oldest writings of the New Testament canon. They were written in an early period and bear undoubted witness to a period close to the time of Jesus' crucifixion - death - resurrection. Within this short span of time, it is believed that little or no evolution in the essential faith in

the resurrection could have taken place. His first letter to the Corinthians was apparently written in AD 54 or 55, about ten years before the writing of Mark's gospel and less than thirty years after the crucifixion - death - resurrection of Jesus.

Paul's literary works and those of other New Testament authors point to the fact that Jesus' resurrection has taken place. The individual and group witness to the resurrection, the Easter appearances and the empty tomb traditions imply the early Christians' faith that Jesus has been raised from the dead. There can be observed substantial disagreement in the narratives but this could be explained by the fact that each gospel has its own features. In some instances the variations are due not only to the flexibility of the oral tradition but to theological interpretation, and interpretations and connections differ from Christian community to Christian community. The Gospels are the products of different Christian communities with distinctive theological perspectives: Palestinian, Jewish-Hellenistic and Hellenistic-Gentile.

In the New Testament, particularly for Paul, redemption is achieved by Jesus' death and resurrection together. Paul acknowledges that redemption is the work of the Father; hence in Christ's resurrection that action was uniquely that of the Father. Paul's overall stress in his theology of resurrection lies in God's intervention. It is the Father who raises Jesus from the dead. Jesus' new life comes from the Father who is the source of all life. God has raised Him and exalted Him above all creatures, and He is the first-born of those who rise. Hence, Paul believes that the resurrection of Jesus is not an isolated privilege for one individual person but has implications for other people's salvation and future destiny as well. Thus he sees the resurrection of believers as the final and necessary consequence of God's act in raising Jesus. Believing in Jesus' resurrection is also hoping for the resurrection of all men. It is a hope for final happiness, complete success and ultimate freedom. It is a hope for definitive wholeness through Christ's resurrection. Faith in Jesus' resurrection is a belief in a truly meaningful future for oneself and for others.

Furthermore, through the resurrection, Jesus communicates a new life to those who believe in Him. Baptism is burial with Christ in death from which believers are raised to a new life like His - a life of freedom from sin. The Christian is dead to sin and lives to God (Rom. 6:4-14). Jesus Christ was raised from the dead in order that Christians might bear fruit to God (Rom. 7:14). Christ died but all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves for Him (2 Cor. 5:15). The

new life is no longer the life of the individual Christian but Christ lives in him (Gal. 2:20), and the life of Jesus is visible in a Christian's body (2 Cor. 4:10). The one who is united to the risen Christ is a new being (2 Cor. 5:17-21). Finally, the Christian is born anew to a life of hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 1:3-4).

Another important element in Paul's doctrine concerns the resurrected body. Paul, in using "body" (*soma*), refers to the whole person, the bodily person in his/her entirety. What he means by it is the whole physical human being with his/her possibilities of life. *Soma* means "personal identity," "human self-hood." So when Paul speaks of the risen body, he speaks of transformation and continuity. Continuity means the risen person is identical with the earthly person. He/she remains the same person. In resurrection God makes the old creation new (Rom. 8:11). He does not substitute a new creation for the old creation. It is the mortal body which must experience the transforming power of the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:53). There will be personal "somatic" continuity between the present and the future situation; the same person who was in "misery" will be in glory.

Hence, the New Testament does not understand resurrection to be a reanimation of a corpse but a profound transformation of the whole person. There can be no resurrection without a radical transformation of a person's reality. What was subject to decay and death, what was weak and dishonorable becomes immune to decay and death, becomes glorious, powerful and "spiritual" (1 Cor. 15:43). Spiritual for Paul means bodily existence dominated by the Spirit of the risen Jesus Christ, instead of by all those negative death-dealing forces which now affect human life. Here Paul does not offer any explanation or description of the process of how bodily existence becomes so dominated by the Spirit of the risen Jesus Christ. He talks only of the outcome or fruits of such a domination by Christ's Spirit.

Also implied in Paul's notion of *soma* in expressing the meaning of bodily resurrection is a 'new freedom for the whole person. It means that the risen person finds himself permanently liberated from all perverse, death-dealing forces, be they death itself, suffering, or oppression of various kinds. Paul is referring to a new existence where one ceases to be an object of this world of temporal and spatial limits. Thus, the risen Christ initiates a variety of encounters with his disciples, freely choosing where and to whom He wishes to appear. Yet this fully liberated person remains identical with the old earthly person. The self is enhanced and survives to provide continuity. So in resurrection the risen Jesus continues to be fully Himself even while becoming different.

Lastly, in the New Testament it was in the new way of living in fellowship and sharing in community that the first disciples and the early community of believers were perceived as Christians (cf. Acts 11:19-27). In the way they lived and loved one another Jesus Christ was made present to others. More converts joined them, and they increased in number (Acts 11:21). The good news spread that Jesus of Nazareth, who lived in love for others and in obedience to the Father died by crucifixion is now risen. This good news was effecting a profound transformation of human lives. This Easter kerygma was proclaimed by the early Christians not merely by words but more effectively by the life-witnessing of those who accepted the faith in the risen Christ.

JON SOBRINO'S THEOLOGY OF THE RESURRECTION IN THE PHILIPPINE CONTEXT

The focus of discussion in this chapter is the theology of resurrection of Jon Sobrino, S.J. and its significance to the Philippine contemporary experience. Sobrino is a Third World (Latin American) theologian, living and doing theology in a milieu of poverty and deprivation, of oppression and exploitation. It is a situation where the concern of theology is how to proclaim to the poor and the rich, both reduced to non-persons, that God is love and that this love makes us brothers and sisters.⁹ What is to be presented and discussed is Sobrino's theology taken solely from his book *Christology at the Crossroads* where he treated Jesus' resurrection extensively.

The Three Aspects of the Resurrection

For Jon Sobrino, S.J., the resurrection of Jesus has three basic aspects: historical, theological, and hermeneutic. He considers all of them necessary for understanding the resurrection of Jesus.

Historical. The resurrection as an advent is the focus of the historical aspect. There are two basic elements in the Church's Easter tradition that deal with the historicity of Jesus' resurrection: the Easter appearances and the empty tomb. The Church's traditions dealing with the Easter appearances are more important and decisive than the empty tomb tradition. In dealing with the resurrection of Jesus as an event, Sobrino observes the danger of overemphasizing the empty tomb, which might incorrectly lead people to envision the Christ-event as merely the reanimation of a corpse.

⁹Gustavo Gutierrez, *On Job*, (Quezon City: ... 1987). See Introduction ...

Sobrino considers the Easter appearances as privileged experiences of the disciples. In verifying the historicity of Jesus' resurrection, Sobrino considers the impact of the resurrection of Jesus on the disciples' life and behavior more important than their oral and written testimonies. The crucifixion and death of Jesus was the end of the disciples' faith in Him. Surprisingly, after the resurrection, the disciples were courageously and committedly preaching Jesus as the Christ. They risked their lives and even died for their new faith in Him.

Theological. According to Sobrino, the resurrection of Jesus affirms the Old Testament's effort to define God in historical terms rather than in abstract attributes. The Old Testament God is a God of history - revealing Himself to and known by His people in connection with His actions in history. The resurrection then reveals God who raised Jesus from the dead. In the New Testament the resurrection is the most fundamental action of God. In raising Jesus from the dead, God is now understood as the God who restores the dead to life and all men have their being and life in the same God (cf. Rm. 4:17). Faith in God who raised Jesus is faith in resurrection in Him (cf. Rom. 4:24).

In Jesus' resurrection God not only raised Jesus from the dead but also revealed the mystery of His love for His people. It is a love that is involved intimately with the Cross. On the cross God immerses Himself in the human reality of death due to injustice and evil. In immersing Himself in this human reality of death, God overpowers death and sin by His self-giving and transforming love. So God exercises power over death and sin by immersing Himself in them in history, in concrete human situations. In the resurrection of Jesus, God overcomes death by the power of His self-giving and transforming love concretely manifested on the cross. In Jesus risen from the dead, God is now understood and experienced in His liberating love in history concretized in Jesus of Nazareth, whose life in history led to the cross.

The resurrection is God's salvific action in behalf of and pardon to man. The Easter appearances are signs of God's mercy and of His reconciling love for all the people who denied, betrayed and abandoned Him. Sobrino maintains that reconciliation with God must be understood in an entirely new way on the basis of the cross.

The cross was a sign of god's reconciling love for His people that entails suffering and death. Therefore, in the cross, reconciliation, the cost of which is "blood beyond price", is lived and offered to humanity to take part and participate. Sobrino says that God's love for us makes it possible for us to love others. A true love relationship

includes being loved and loving others. When Sobrino speaks of love he means active love. Active love can lead to human transformation. It is creative and participative in transforming others.

The resurrection of Jesus also reveals something about humanity and history. There will be a new kind of life based on hope and love. Humanity is now pointed toward fulfillment and history toward transformation. Inaugurated in Jesus' resurrection is humanity's liberative future, and therefore, the Christ-event cannot be turned into nothing more than a past event. The Christ-event reveals to humanity the future of human history, and humanity, with the world, awaits and participates in bringing this future into its fullness by making that future a reality in the here and now.

The resurrection is also the confirmation of the life of Jesus of Nazareth. It is the kind of life that Christians are called to live. In the risen Jesus, Christ now offers the possibility of living as His followers in history. Through Jesus' resurrection Christians already live as new risen human beings here and now. Implied in this new life which the risen Lord has been imparting to Christian men and women is loving service to others in self-surrender to God the Father. Like Jesus of Nazareth, to be faithful to this kind of life will eventually lead to the cross. For following Jesus of Nazareth as a consequence of one's faith in His resurrection is to put oneself in the midst of human realities and suffering and to oppose the evil and injustice that usually cause them.

The resurrection also shows that God did not abandon Jesus on the cross after all, but confirmed His concrete way of living, His preaching, His deeds, His passion and death on the cross. In Jesus' resurrection, which is the act of the Father, Jesus now stands in distinctive relationship with God. It is no longer possible to think about God without thinking of Jesus also. Henceforth, no one can contemplate the action of God without taking into account Jesus' activities.

The New Testament normally does not talk about Jesus' absolute divinity. It discusses it in terms of Jesus' relation to the Father. The nature and content of Jesus' divinity can be understood only in terms of His concrete relationship to the Father. Basically, this means that Jesus has active and passive relationship to the Father. Active, insofar as the historical Jesus embodies total trust, and self-surrender to the will of the Father, and passive because of the fact the Father raised Jesus from the dead.

Hermeneutic. Sobrino's hermeneutic of the resurrection maintains fidelity to the New Testament and considers the contemporary situation, thus making the resurrection relevant today.

Three important characteristics define this hermeneutic: a radical hope in the future, a historical consciousness that sees history both as a promise and a mission, and a specific praxis that is following Jesus of Nazareth or discipleship.

According to Sobrino it is possible to grasp the resurrection of Jesus in hope for all and for the world, a hope that is permeated with Christian faith in the resurrection. Sobrino speaks of a hope that looks forward to God's revelation at the finale of history. Faith in the resurrection cannot be separated from hope in the future of humanity and creation. Furthermore, this kind of hope is more than radical openness to the future, for it is a hope that needs to be concretized in the horizon of Jesus' cross, which means in humanity's concrete realities. Sobrino calls for a radical hope which calls forth the total transformation of the person and history. It is a hope that overcomes all the negative elements of the world, a hope against death and injustice in the world.

Understanding the meaning and witnessing to the risen Jesus presupposes an understanding of history both as a promise and a mission. In this concept of history Sobrino explains that if reality is to be grasped as history then the future must be viewed as a promise. The resurrection is still an unfinished reality, but in it is the definitive promise of God. Salvation is an ongoing historical process. The saving work of Christ still goes on in our midst. It was not accomplished once and for all in the past. Hence, the resurrection is an event primarily belonging to the future, but for its fullness, faith demands to be lived in history.

Inherent in the promise of the resurrection of Jesus is a mission to be actively responded to. It is a mission of proclaiming the risen Christ and actively witnessing to the life of Jesus Christ. It is a mission directed to the building up of history and, trusting in the promise of Jesus' resurrection, works towards the creation of a better and more humane society. For Jesus preached the Kingdom of God, a Kingdom of peace, justice, reconciliation, and sharing. It is this Kingdom which enhances the growth of people as human beings created in the image and likeness of God. Society, therefore, in order to be true to the promise of the resurrection, must be enlivened by a spirit of active service that promotes the values of the Kingdom. Commitment to the Kingdom of God calls for a life of loving service that proclaims and witnesses to realities and values which Jesus Christ Himself proclaimed and witnessed to in His life.

The resurrection itself, therefore, cannot be understood apart from service to the mission given. Mission is part of the reality of the

resurrection. All accounts of Jesus' appearances stress a mission. In the life of the early Church, resurrection was proclaimed in a missionary way. The encounter of Paul with the risen Christ immediately sent him off to a mission. As a result of his own transformation, he reached out to others, witnessing in his own lifestyle, words, actions and visions the life of Jesus Christ.

In short, the resurrection calls all believers to a mission. For Sobrino, this call actually summons them to a praxis that can be described as service to the proclamation of the risen Jesus, now the Christ, and witnessing to the message and promise that Jesus' resurrection embodies for humanity and the world. Sobrino speaks of a praxis which is the following of the historical Jesus. It is a praxis "inspired by love that concretizes Christian hope as a hoping against hope." It is therefore a praxis of hope and love.

Finally, Sobrino affirms that knowing the resurrection of Jesus is not a one-time experience, something given once and for all. The horizon of understanding the resurrection must be constantly fashioned anew. Hope and praxis of love must be kept alive and operational at every moment. Only in that way can Jesus' resurrection be grasped not only as something that happened to Him alone, but as the resurrection of the first born to be shared in by others and as promise that history will find fulfillment in its power.

The challenge of the resurrection for Christians is to live as resurrected beings in history and as disciples of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ. The resurrection calls them to immerse themselves in this world in service out of love, and to bring about the best of this world by opposing and overcoming evil in their midst.

Subsequently, a life of service and discipleship can be celebrated in liturgical acts and thanksgiving. By virtue of their faith in Jesus Christ's resurrection, Christians necessarily have a relationship with Him in the present. They experience His presence here and now and they acclaim Him as Lord. Faith, love and thanksgiving, embodied in praxis, are given expression in the liturgy. It is in liturgy that one hears the Word of God, acknowledges that salvation comes through Jesus Christ, and chooses to follow Him by promoting the same ideals in one's own history as He lived out in His.

Jon Sobrino's *Theology and Its Relevance to Contemporary Filipino Experience*

As mentioned earlier, Jon Sobrino's *Christology at the Crossroads* is a book written in a Third World context.

Latin American experience of injustice, oppression, exploitation and deprivation. The book is the work of a man of faith who is sensitive to a people's pain and sorrow. The author himself admits that his book is "addressed to a specific group of Christians, to those who have seriously committed themselves to the process of liberation... to the cause of the majority of Latin Americans."¹⁰

Secondly, Sobrino writes in a context where Christianity is already a part of the people's lives. Latin Americans are born into a Christian milieu, where the air they breathe is already permeated with Christian faith. Sobrino presupposes this Christian faith in his readers when he addresses them with his treatise. In the midst of this Christian faith, Sobrino and other Latin American theologians begin by reflecting on the "inoperativeness of traditional Christologies."¹¹ What has been taught for centuries to Latin Americans originated in a European context and experience and was hence intended for European theological students. As a result, these classic texts have become more and more irrelevant for Christian praxis in the third World and are "actually impeding the workings of a faith truly involved in the history of our people."¹²

The Latin American experience has made Sobrino and other Latin American theologians question and be suspicious of the kind of God they were taught to believe in and profess. This must also become the question and suspicion of any Christian Filipino seriously committed to a life of discipleship in the Philippine situation. The Latin Americans' plight as a people is familiar to the Filipinos. The majority of the Filipinos are like the peoples of Latin America: marginalized, poor, exploited, and oppressed and are victims of the power play of the rich and the powerful.

The Latin American faith context is also similar to that of the Filipinos. Once a colony of Spain, the Philippines stands as the only Christian country in Southeast Asia. A Filipino is born to a Christian family, is brought up a Christian, dies and is buried a Christian. Like Latin Americans, Filipinos have also been introduced to foreign works of theology, written mostly in the light of the First World experience and ways of thinking. So there is a call for all Filipinos to re-study, reflect, to evaluate and, re-interpret their Christian faith in order to formulate a Christian praxis relevant and responsive to the contemporary Philippine socio-political and economic situation.

¹⁰Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*, p. XXVI

¹¹Ibid., p. xi

¹²Ibid.

Sobrinó's experience of his people's suffering in Latin America in a very Christian milieu, leads to his emphasis on Christian praxis as a person of faith's response to a dehumanizing situation as such. There is a tone of urgency in his treatment of this Christian praxis. There is no other way for him to authentic Christianity, given his people's present situation. The need is real, if Latin Americans are serious about participation in Jesus' redemptive life and work in history.

In order to have a clearer grasp of Sobrinó's idea of Christian praxis, a reflection by this writer on the nature of discipleship in the Gospel of Mark in the light of Jesus' resurrection may help in this task. Mark's ideals of discipleship will help shed light in interpreting and understanding Sobrinó's challenge to Christian praxis. In Mark's Gospel, the disciples, through some women, were given instructions to go back to Galilee where the newly risen Jesus was to meet them (Mk. 16:7). It must be recalled that in Mark 1:7, the evangelist writes of an earlier call in Galilee for the disciples to follow Jesus and to become "fishers of men". Galilee is thus presented by Mark as the place of the "beginning of the gospel" where Jesus' very first act was to form a group of disciples. The meaning and purpose of the second call to Galilee is to bring together again the scattered, discouraged group of disciples back to Jesus, the risen Christ, hence bringing the Gospel to completion.¹³

Galilee, in Mark's Gospel, is a symbol as much as a place.¹⁴ It serves as a reference to the Gentile mission of the early Church. It is the symbol of the breakdown of the barrier between Jews and Gentiles. Galilee is the locale of the Gentile mission of the disciples.¹⁵

For Mark, the resurrection of Jesus is not the end, for Jesus is not yet fully revealed, and hence life must go on in the darkness of faith. Galilee symbolizes this. Discipleship for Mark is "going back to Galilee" and means walking in the darkness of faith. Thus, this kind of discipleship entails journeying in the shadow of the cross, waiting for the fullness of life with God in Jesus Christ. Discipleship in the light of Jesus' resurrection entails a new way of life, a new meaning and vision expressed in living out one's faith in Jesus, the risen Christ.¹⁶

Mark's references to Galilee, briefly analyzed here, may be taken to say that Jesus is leading His disciples into the Gentile world, and thus

¹³See Herman Hendricks, *Resurrection Narratives*, (Manila, Philippines: EAPL, 1978), p. 12.
¹⁴See Wilfred Harrington, *Mark*, (Manila, Philippines: DSP, 1979), p. 246.
¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 246.
¹⁶For further reflection, see Herman Hendricks *One Jesus - Four Gospels* (Manila, Philippines: AC Printing, 1982) pp. 15-20.

it is there that they first meet the risen Jesus Christ. It is in Galilee that they first meet the Jesus of Nazareth; now the second call to the same place is meeting the Jesus Christ of faith, and this time, in connection with the Gentiles. The Gentiles represent those who do not "belong," the "others," the "outcasts" in Jesus of Nazareth's ministry from Galilee to Jerusalem. What is implied in the second call to Galilee is the "continuity" of Jesus of Nazareth with the Jesus Christ of faith and hence, the unity or wholeness of the disciples' experience of Jesus Christ.¹⁷ One cannot follow the historical Jesus without faith in His resurrection. Subsequently, one cannot claim faith in the risen Jesus Christ without following the Jesus of Nazareth in history. Obviously, Mark's idea of the disciples' going back to Galilee and there meeting the risen Jesus suggests the truth that one can only have a grasp of the meaning and experience the depth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ in one's faithfulness to the historical Jesus and to the mission He entrusted to Christian community which concerns others in history.¹⁸ For Mark, faith in the risen Jesus involves "embracing" those who do not belong personified in the Gentiles. Practically, it means caring for and reaching out to others, especially those who are "gentiles"¹⁹ in these times. This is the Christian mission today.

Based on this reflection on Mark's reference to Galilee in his resurrection narrative, a conclusion could be made that Sobrinó's Christian praxis, which specifically means the following of the historical Jesus, only reiterates Mark's "going back to Galilee" approach. Thus, Sobrinó's Christian praxis refers to following the man named Jesus from Nazareth whose life of love and compassion is concretized for and experienced by many people in His public ministry from Galilee to death in Jerusalem. Mark's Galilee, then, as a symbol, unveils the historical Jesus whose praxis of love should be the praxis of all Christians, the truth that Sobrinó's idea of discipleship is faithful to. Hereafter, when talking of Sobrinó's historical Jesus, this writer has also in mind the reference made to Mark's Jesus in Galilee. Mark's symbolic Galilee can provide a focus for looking at the life of the

¹⁷See Leonardo Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, trans. Patrick Hughes (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1978) Chapter eight.
¹⁸Jon Sobrinó, *Christology at the Crossroads*, p. 380

¹⁹The "gentiles" here is a term used to refer to the social outcasts, the marginalized and poor people in our modern times in any society. They may be the tribal minorities whose communal life and culture is subtly destroyed by what we call "modernization and civilization." The modern world's "gentiles" are our thousands of street children, the poor and "uneducated" slum dwellers, etc. These are sectors in our society whose very existence poses questions upon us, on our faith in God, and whose suffering challenges our understanding and images of a living and loving God in history.

historical Jesus and offer more insights into His life, teachings and deeds. Galilee would thus mean the place where God's action in Jesus is concrete. For it is in Galilee where that Jesus experiences doubts and temptations, fear and rejection. It is also in Galilee that Jesus calls strangers and friends, heals and forgives, teaches and learns, eats and drinks. In the midst of all of these, Galilee pictures a loving, caring and faithful Jesus. In Galilee, Jesus is concrete and real - never an abstraction, never superhuman and extraordinary. So, in following the historical Jesus, one follows a human person as He lives out the fullest His human capacity to love the Father by loving others in history. Referring to Galilee is looking at Jesus of Nazareth's way of living, loving, relating and interacting with those He meets and encounters.

The next point of this discussion-reflection is to move further to the significance of Galilee as symbol of God's concrete action in Jesus for contemporary discipleship. Galilee could mean the contemporary Christians' respective "marketplaces"²⁰ where the following of Jesus is actualized. Jesus' disciples in today's world are called to witness to the life of Jesus: His love in their loving others, His forgiveness in their forgiving others, His generosity in their mutual sharing of goods, His prayers and deeds in their search and works for a better and more humane world to live in, His intimacy with the Father in their longing for union and faithfulness to God, who is also their Father. It is also in their "marketplaces" that disciples experience His sufferings in their own sufferings, His death in their own experiences of death. It is also in the same "marketplaces" that His resurrection is manifested in their hope for the fullness of life and for their history-making in the perspective of their faith in the risen Jesus Christ.

Thus far Mark's symbolic Galilee has already provided the necessary details to have a better grasp of Sobrino's approach to following the historical Jesus as specific Christian praxis. Using this understanding as background, the next matter worth delving into is considering Sobrino's specific Christian praxis as guide in critiquing

²⁰Marketplace (especially in the Philippines) is where all kinds of people meet coming from all walks of life. It is where people look for their means of living, and a place where people find supply for their basic needs. It is a busy, noisy and messy place and yet the dynamics of daily living is there. So Christian "marketplaces" here refer to our actual living, our actual places of work, our actual places of dealing and relating with other people. It refers to all those actual situations in life where and when we are supposed to witness to the values of the Kingdom of God. In everything and in anything we do, wherever we are, as Christians we are missioned to permeate the world with the values of the Gospel. Thomas Green defines the "marketplace" of our lives as "where we live and love and where, to a large extent, we discover God." See his *Darkness in the Marketplace*, (Makati, Philippines: St. Paul Publications, 1981) p. 7. See also *Documents of Vatican II*, "Decree of the Apostolate of the Laity," p. 11.

and challenging the present spirituality of the "good, loving and powerful Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior." The reason for this task is the fact that this said spirituality is so widespread and so well-accepted by many well-meaning Filipinos.

The "good and loving Jesus" spirituality is often characterized by worship and devotion to Jesus Christ, the Lord. It dwells much on the beautiful and wonderful feelings brought about by invoking the Spirit of the risen Christ. The movement is assuming varied names and forms both in the Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches. This phenomenon is happening in these difficult times when people are suffering; where there is conflict and confusion in society. Could it be a sign of escapism? Is clinging to Jesus Christ the Lord, the unconscious refusal to actively take part in making society a better home for all?

The attractiveness of such a spirituality can possibly be attributed to the way a believer was introduced into the Christian faith through the community in his/her early years of life. To cite an example, in a Christian Filipino family, when a child is born, he/she is already born into the Christian faith. This faith's belief and practices are automatically part of his/her growing. Usually the focus is the sweet, good and loving Jesus who is the powerful Son of God, etc. All these references to Jesus usually point strongly to His being God, a divine entity. Most of the abstractions attributed to Jesus Christ dwell on His being a divine son of God, risen from the dead. So, as the believer grows into adulthood, such a relationship with Jesus Christ greatly influences the person's interpreting and translating into action his/her Christian faith. It is here that true discipleship of following the historical Jesus loses its solid grounds, and Jesus of Nazareth in his ministry loses its influence and relevance in the daily realities of life. Jesus Christ is confined in the tabernacle, to fellowships and praise meetings, to Sunday liturgy and/or other days of one's needs and convenience. The over-all manifestation of this kind of spirituality is a dichotomy of the spiritual and temporal spheres of human living.

In such a faith atmosphere, where Jesus' divinity becomes the excessive focus on one's spirituality, thereby overshadowing His humanity, Jesus' resurrection is understood as predestined and expected. It is a part of the "drama" or "play" of salvation. Jesus is God, so He has to rise from the dead. In this understanding, Jesus' entire human existence and public ministry was a make-believe. Therefore, His suffering and death are part of that play. To demand discipleship by following a God is incomprehensible for human understanding. So Jesus of Nazareth, the historical Jesus is fake -

never a true human being. He remains a God, was never a human being, so what has He to do with human affairs?

It is here that Sobrino's approach to Christian praxis as discipleship to the historical Jesus serves as corrective to this kind of spirituality. Implied in Sobrino's approach is the faith that Jesus is the risen Christ and the Son of God because of His complete obedience to the Father in history.²¹ This makes following of the historical Jesus accessible to a believer - a follower knows, sees and experiences a human being from Nazareth who walks through Galilee to Jerusalem. In the historical Jesus is a human person who calls God "Abba" - Father, a sign of a deep trust in and love for the Father. What He does is the work of the Father. Jesus' caring and loving and His concern for the wellbeing and wholeness of every human person is the Father's action and concern too. Jesus is totally different from those who claimed access to God in His time and place. Jesus' life of loving and reaching out angers those in power. He becomes an outcast by choice and makes enemies of those in authority. The consequence of loving the Father and others is condemnation and crucifixion.

Jesus' condemnation and death on the cross is the fate of a man who freely chooses to take upon Himself the cause of society's outcasts. It is love decided on and acted upon freely, aware of its risks and demands. The God of Love is concretely manifested in Jesus of Nazareth - real and experienced in history - thus making Jesus of Nazareth God's concrete presence in history. Such a love relationship between the Son and the Father could not die. Confirmation of the value of that life lived in love for others is Jesus' resurrection from the dead. The Father raised Jesus from the dead as a sign of that.

The path the historical Jesus freely opts for is, for Sobrino, the path that all Christians are called to tread. It is a call instilled by the Spirit of the risen Jesus Christ. The risen Lord who inspires the "going back to Galilee" makes discipleship possible. In the light of His resurrection Jesus Christ makes discipleship already a participation in His risen life in history.

A Reflection

The resurrection of Jesus is the assurance that following Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem is the right course. Love and hope, which, for Sobrino, characterize this specific Christian praxis of following Jesus of Nazareth, are only made possible by the power of the risen

²¹Jon Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*, pp. 104-105.

Christ. It is the resurrection of Jesus that makes love victorious over death and evil. Death and evil are the opposite of life and hope. Jesus' death on the cross is the picture of humanity's selfishness, stubbornness and violence. Jesus is rejected, but He absorbs this refusal to love, this rejection, into Himself. When He chooses to forgive and embrace death, He puts an end to the power of evil underlying selfishness and obsession with power and prestige. Finally, risen from the dead by the Father, Jesus overpowers death and ultimately, love triumphs over evil in the world.

So what emerges from Jesus' act of loving by laying down His life for others is a new life. Love is life-giving. This new life is imparted to all believers by the Spirit of the risen Christ. Jesus' resurrection is the confirmation of a new life in loving and embracing people in their goodness and sinfulness. It is a life that opposes evil by doing good, by choosing to put an end to any form of violence, greed, oppression, injustice and all death-dealing factors in any society or system. Hence it is a new life of sharing, of forgiving, of justice, of freedom and creativity, of enhancing the realization of human giftedness for a better and more humane existence.

Knowing and understanding Christian faith in the risen Jesus Christ as "returning" to the historical Jesus, as "going back to Galilee," makes the call to discipleship sensible and attainable. It is not beyond anybody's capacity. Jesus of Nazareth shows that it is possible for all. Mature Christian faith will lead one to "go back" to where Jesus "started" and to follow His path. It is there that one will learn and understand the process of growing in wisdom and knowledge of God in living, teaching, decision-making, and in relating and interacting with others. The Christians' liberating loving presence in history is already made possible by Jesus Himself, with His Spirit present in, with and among all who believe in Him.

Sobrino's approach makes very clear the meaning of resurrection and its significance to Christian discipleship. It will always reinforce the truth that discipleship is not programmed and that God does not provide the disciple with blueprints. Graced and empowered by the Spirit of the risen Jesus, Christian disciples are enabled to actively and creatively participate in the transformation of the world. Christians and humankind, through the power of the resurrection, have the capacity to be life-giving in history-making.

Finally, Sobrino's rootedness in history, particularly expressed in his concern for human realities, and his rootedness in his Christian faith in interpreting people's human experience, make his approach to resurrection and discipleship relevant and challenging to contempo-

rary Philippine society. Situated in and experiencing for Himself a dehumanizing society where political, social, economic and even religious structures systematically reinforce such dehumanization, Sobrino speaks as a modern prophet to all Filipino Christians, particularly to the local Church. His is a voice that is disturbing, questioning peoples' values and priorities, their silence and passivity, their fears and insecurities that block their growth in loving service to others, their compromises with the values of the world of money, power and prestige over and against the poor, powerless and the anonymous in the Philippines. Like John the Baptist, Sobrino tells the Philippine Church to "Repent and live the Gospel" (cf. Mark 1:4-8).

PASTORAL IMPLICATIONS OF JON SOBRINO'S THEOLOGY OF THE RESURRECTION

As mentioned earlier and as developed and shown throughout the previous sections of this paper, the resurrection of Jesus is central to Christian faith. Integral to one's faith in the risen Jesus Christ is discipleship or the following of the historical Jesus of Nazareth. Sobrino calls this following of the historical Jesus the Christian praxis is a response of faith of a believer who is sensitive to the truth that loving God in Jesus Christ is manifested in and through loving one's fellow human beings in time and space.

Understanding Jesus' resurrection as the source of power of one's following of Jesus of Nazareth, and aware that discipleship is integral to one's faith in the resurrection, the final part of this paper is a reflection on the pastoral implications of these insights for the life of the Church in general and for the writer's present ministry in particular.

Pastoral Implications in the Life of the Church

The end for rootedness in history for deepening Christian faith and, hence, the urgency for a Christian praxis that is based on a following of the historical Jesus is real and crucial enough to keep the Church's feet on the ground in these times.

The Church is the People of God. The distinctive character of this People of God lies in the fact that it is God Himself who calls them, who chooses them and who relates to them in history as His own. In this manner, God gives His people their identity. God deals with His

people as a community; that is, if He deals with individuals it is always in the context of the community's life calling, choosing, and sending that particular person to the community, for the community and from the community respectively. God and His people enter into a covenant of love and life. He will be their own God, and they will be His own people. To accept God as God is to obey Him for to obey Him means life. To take His people as His own means to walk with them in history, taking unto Himself their concerns. In spite of His people's infidelities God remains faithful. God's fidelity reaches its peak in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Concretely in history God reveals Himself as merciful, loving and faithful in the life-death-resurrection of Jesus. In the Spirit of the risen Jesus Christ, God continues to dwell in and with His people as He journeys with them in history.

The Church as God's people implied a unity and equality in the Spirit of Jesus Christ. There is only one vocation for all, that is to follow Jesus to the Father. Therefore all are called to witness to the Kingdom of God and to proclaim His reign. To witness to and to proclaim the reign of God is to make manifest the values of the Kingdom by living what one proclaims. The Kingdom is central to the life of Jesus making it His main concern in His teachings and deeds. So what one experiences in the person of Jesus - compassion, openness, forgiveness, spontaneity, fidelity, joy, gentleness and His total commitment to the wellbeing of others - are actually His concrete living out of the Kingdom's values of love, justice and peace.

This is the historical Jesus of Nazareth that the Church has to follow. God reveals Himself in history. Jesus of Nazareth shows humanity the way to relate to God in history. As God's people, Christians can be Jesus' disciples because, in the Spirit of the risen Jesus, they are all enabled to live, to think, to feel and to act in love and with love as He did. Living in love is sharing in the life of God who is love.²²

So the position taken here is actually in full harmony with the true life of the Church, faithful to human situations and experiences and to Judaeo-Christian tradition. If the Church is faithful to this call to discipleship, by being at the service of the Kingdom, then the Church is destined to intensify her prophetic role in our contempo-

²²See Francis Xavier Durrwell *In the Redeeming Christ*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (London: Sheed and Ward Ltd., 1963), p. 228. For the author, the implication for the Church of proclaiming Jesus' death and resurrection in introducing "into time the new era in which to live means to love far more." This capacity to love far more is only possible with God and in God, who enables and give us His Spirit to love.

rary world. She has to remind the whole world of its infidelities to the Author of Life, to the Creator of all things. She has to remind and challenge the affluent and the powerful to be aware of and to respond to the existence and suffering of millions dying of hunger, deprived because of the Third World elite's and First World's limitless desires for comforts and luxuries in life. The Church has to call a spade a spade in dealing with the powerful, pointing out to them the death of the "little ones," victims of the powerful's struggle for dominance. The Church must speak the truth of God, who is Life and Love. The Church must take upon herself the cause of the voiceless and powerless in their search for a more humane existence. Nevertheless, the Church must also be the agent of reconciliation, where the poor and the rich, the weak and the strong, the oppressed and the oppressors can see eye to eye and work together for a better life and world to live in for all.

The effect and challenge of this approach is realistically and painfully felt at the grassroots level. It is at the level of the local Church's basic ecclesial communities that the real "battle" is fought. The natural outflow of discipleship, i.e. following the historical Jesus, is fearless fidelity to the truth of life and love in one's work for justice in opposition and resistance to oppression and exploitation in questioning and challenging existing dehumanizing systems, structures, and laws, etc. At this level, the risk of being misunderstood is real. Persecution and even death may well become a reality when one opts to work for justice, peace, reconciliation and love.

The basic question the Church has to face and reflect on honestly is: Is the contemporary Church really a Church for the poor and powerless in Philippine society today? This is a very comprehensive question that delves into the lifestyle of individuals and groups, the powerplay, the political-social-economic orientations and connections, the priorities in the ministry, the pastoral approaches, plannings, methodologies, etc., of the local Church. The same question can be asked about the commitment of contemporary Filipino Christians to prayer, community and service.

In all honesty, the general answers to this basic question reveal a wide spectrum of infidelities, inconsistencies and deviations from the true call. The local Church must bow its head in humility and admit that it has failed. Yet this community of Christian believers can still do something; they can still contribute and participate in some meaningful way in transforming this twisted world. They may not have all the solutions, but they know they call find some concrete things that they can do to improve the situation. So they can go on, giving their best in their giftedness as individuals and as a community

of faith in their own small way.

This is the wonder and mystery of the Christian faith concretized into Christian praxis. The deaths that come along the way do not discourage the authentic Christian. True Christians do not have the immediate answers to all the world's questions and problems, and yet they do not despair. Persecuted and knocked down they cannot be destroyed. With Paul they can claim to be carrying everywhere in their person Jesus' death so that Jesus' life may also be manifested in them. In Christian discipleship death is real and is at work in them; but it is a life-giving death undergone as commitment to others (cf. 2 Cor. 4:7-12).

Pastoral Implications for Building a GKK

The building of the *Gagmay nga Kristohanong Katilingban* (GKK), the basic ecclesial communities, is the main thrust of the pastoral program of the parish where this writer is ministering.²³ The three concerns of this pastoral program are formation, service and worship - three distinct elements which form one whole program of Christian living. Formation involves education and re-education in the faith. It involves learning and unlearning. This education in faith is geared toward Christian praxis; toward caring for one's neighbors and the earth in service. This lived Christian faith then becomes the experience which individuals and the faith community as a whole bring into meaningful celebration and worship. In their liturgical celebrations and worship individuals and groups may experience critique or affirmation and encouragement from the community as lived experiences are shared and reflected on together in the light of the Judaeo-Christian tradition or experiences recorded in the Scriptures. Such re-calling, re-living, and reflecting on experiences in worship and in prayer refreshes and sustains the lives of commitment to faith and service of each one as they go back to their respective places of living and working.

An important point for discussion here is the main concern in the building of Basic Christian communities (or GKK). Insofar as Christian praxis is the following of Jesus of Nazareth then central to the

²³St. Jude Thaddeus Parish (Davao City) at present has twenty one *Gagmay nga Kristohanong Katilingban* (GKK), all categorized as urban communities. The membership of the different GKK ranger from 50-250 families/GKK. The approximate total number of Catholic in this parish is thirty eight thousand with only two priests to minister to them.

formation of the GKK is the Kingdom of God since this was the mission of Jesus. It must be clearly understood that the mission of the universal Church and, therefore, of the GKK as its basic communities, is to witness to and proclaim the Kingdom. However, in doing this there are some focal issues that need to be clarified, especially at the grassroots level. A need for clarification is important because subtly hidden in these issues are misconceptions that distort or even hinder authentic following of the historical Jesus and are hence, adverse to witnessing to and proclaiming the Kingdom. These issues are related to each other.

The Main issues of Concern

First, it seems that in the mind of many Catholics the Church is so identified with the Kingdom of God that there is the tendency towards equating the Church to the Kingdom. Such a misconception tends to create or reinforce a false primacy of the Church over the Kingdom in practice. When this occurs the Church in its institutions, structures and practices tends to forget its primary reason for existence. It becomes complacent; self-serving; less critical of its own lifestyle, policies and practices and tends to build and protect its own self-image and interests. Consequently, discipleship in this kind of understanding of the Church is reduced to being at the service of the institutional Church. Spelled out in the ministry it may mean to some people some or probably all of the following: membership in mandated Church organizations and movements, fidelity to the Church's obligations and reception of the Sacraments, regular monetary support to the Church's projects and institutions, etc.

The second issue is concerned with the seeming resistance of some in the Church's hierarchy to really give room for the laity's meaningfully and unique participation in the life and mission of the Church. The laity thus play a passive role and occupy an insignificant position in the life of the Church. Subsequently, discipleship is limited to unquestioning obedience to what the hierarchy says or declares, which in most cases reinforces passivity among the faithful people or stifles creative, intelligent, responsible and active participation in the life and ministry of the Church.

Another issue is the resistance of many of the laity to actively participate in the exercise of leadership in the life of the Church, not because of the indifferent or hostile attitude of the hierarchy but because of an unfounded conviction that Church concerns belong exclusively to the bishops, priests and religious. Such a conviction

leads to two things: they (the laity) simply refuse to learn more about their faith and to get involved meaningfully in the life of the Church. Secondly, the bishops/priests/religious, who, according to this mentality, are exclusively responsible for spiritual affairs, believe or are told that they not interfere in the socio-political-economic affairs of the community in any way at all. This thus becomes the exclusive world of the laity, not meant for priests and religious men and women in the Church. Here discipleship is understood to pertain only to the saving of human souls. Discipleship means performing acts that are directly for the salvation of people's souls. It calls for a minimal, if any, involvement in the temporal dimension of the life of the people. To save souls becomes the fundamental mission of the Church which is closely identified with the hierarchy and religious. Hence, the Church's involvement in political, social and economic issues and problems of the people is abhorrent to some Christians espousing this type of mentality.

It is in connection with these issues that it can be seen that Christian praxis as following the historical Jesus is not yet deeply rooted in the faith of many Filipino Christians. To love Jesus of Nazareth and to engage with Him in promoting a Kingdom of justice, truth, peace and love by transforming the world and its structures, is too 'human,'²⁴ they would say, while to show love for the risen Jesus Christ in prayer and devotion is spiritual, and hence a more truly religious act.

However, those issues as part of the life of the growth of the GKK, make evident the inner dynamism of the people's faith. The building and formation of the GKK may have experienced trying and critical moments, but, the GKK's continuous existence and the unwavering efforts and commitment of the faith community and individuals involved in its growth and development are signs of the Spirit of the risen Christ actively present in them and among them. While faith in the risen Christ is there, the GKK will continue to search for concrete expressions of that faith. It is in this aspect of the GKK's search for relevant existence and Christian praxis that the institutional Church plays a vital role. In the life of the Philippine Church, much has been said, written and done by bishops, priests and countless religious men

²⁴The term "human" in this usage refers to the temporal/world/secular sphere of human life, which at times is wrongly identified with sinfulness or seen as directly opposed to the spiritual or sacred sphere which is holy and therefore divine or godly. The false dichotomy of the human and divine is clearly at work in this misconception.

and women and by the laity who have been part of that search.²⁵ Therefore, the future of the GKK still looks hopeful and promising.

Pastoral Approach: Integral Evangelization

Sobrino's approach is undoubtedly relevant to the Philippine context. However, his perspective has to be translated into appropriate pastoral approaches according to the needs and level of awareness of the people at the GKK level.

Involved in the building and formation of the GKK in a parish in the past six years, this writer has observed that the most perceived need of the GKK is integral evangelization.²⁶ Evangelization is basic in the formation of these essential GKKs and hence this has been given importance and priority in pastoral programs and activities. In this writer's opinion, any attempt at evangelization, given the Philippine's social, political, economic situation, must be spelled out into more detailed programs and activities that have a strong bias for active participation of all Christians in the transformation of Philippine society. Evangelization must aim at a contextualized and concretized people's response to socio-political-economic situations and problems that directly affect their lives as a people and as a Church. This active participation must be understood as their faith-response to a living and loving God. To attain this goal, there are basic needs that call for immediate attention especially from the hierarchy who can initiate and exert more effort in tapping the Church's human and material resources to meet these basic needs.

The Basic and Immediate Needs

At the GKK level, the following must be given special attention and action: an ongoing critical study of a reflection on the Scriptures; an

²⁵A highly recommended reading for this matter is Pasquale T. Giordano's *Awakening to Mission, The Philippine Catholic Church, 1965-1981*. (Quezon City, Philippines: New Day Publishers, 1988). This book analyzes the contributions of groups and individuals to the ongoing transformative process in the Philippine Catholic Church.

²⁶See Pasquale Giordano's *Awakening to Mission*, Chapter Two. The author defines integral evangelization as "proclaiming the Word of God, bringing about an inner conversion which impels one towards involvement in the process of humanization of the temporal order, in the process of social transformation." p. 27

ongoing critical study of a reflection on the social teachings of the Church and the documents of the Second Vatican Council; an ongoing update and open and critical but responsible discussion and dialogue on current socio-political-economic, religious/theological issues and developments in the country and in the life of the Church. These are very important steps within an authentic integral evangelization approach. This writer is convinced that equipped with sufficient knowledge and understanding, along with a believing and compassionate heart on issues and varying opinions of people, faithful and mature Christians could formulate a well-informed, critical, balanced, and free response to situations affecting themselves as individuals and a communities within the universal Church.

Furthermore, in addressing these basic needs, the Church's hierarchy must eventually prepare and lead the laity to assume fuller participation in planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating pastoral programs - which actually directly concern them on all levels: be it at the GKK, parish, diocesan or archdiocesan level. It is for this role that the laity must be prepared as prayerful, faithful, knowledgeable, free and open, responsible and mature co-workers and collaborators of the hierarchy. Briefly, the laity could then assume their adult role in the life of the Philippine Church as mature Christians in the world.

So, in order to drive home the approach of Sobrino at the GKK level, integral evangelization that must start at the grassroots, must serve as its springboard and its continuous underlying pedagogy as human and world history moves forward towards its fulfilment in Jesus Christ. For integral evangelization as presented here with its immediate concerns in the GKK is aimed at that Christian praxis which Sobrino calls the following of the historical Jesus. It is a praxis that is deeply rooted in one's faith in the risen Christ and in human experience as one continues to live out this resurrection faith in history. In this way, faith becomes the primary dimension in the Christian's social concerns and actual involvement.

A Challenge: The GKK Toward a Communal Life in the Spirit

Building and forming GKK's are still a challenge for the local Church. There are many questions raised regarding the content and approach in implementing and carrying out the program. The search for relevancy goes on.

Clarified now with the truth that authentic Christian

resurrection faith demands following the historical Jesus, in the seriousness of this call, there is a need to reflect on its implications in the life of the GKK as a community of faith. In this manner, alternatives or insights for the formation of GKK could be discovered. The following sections are an attempt to explore this matter.

Following Jesus of Nazareth

Following the historical Jesus in contemporary times entails becoming an evangelizer.²⁷ The Church in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and the Puebla documents calls all Christians to become evangelizers.²⁸ Today, the main concern of the Church is evangelization.

What does this mean at the GKK level? First, the GKK members or GKKs must not only be subjects or recipients of evangelization. They must be evangelized to become evangelizers themselves. The content and approach of any evangelization program must form and prepare GKKs to become evangelizing communities. So GKKs must become communities of Christian evangelizers.

Second, the church must support with all its means and capacity, individuals or groups from the grassroots level found to have the potential for personalized and effective evangelization.

Answering the question regarding how to evangelize and the what of evangelization is a big challenge for all Christians, especially for Catholics. Oftentimes, in the search for effective methods and approaches, one forgets the truth that the historical Jesus of Nazareth is the first Evangelizer.²⁹ To follow Him in discipleship is to learn from him *how* to evangelize and *what* must be the content of one's evangelizing.³⁰ As an Evangelizer, Jesus focused His teachings and way of life on the Kingdom of God or the reign of God. If ever He talks about Himself, it is always in the context of the Kingdom and His relationship with the Father. For Jesus, only the Kingdom is absolute.³¹ This must then become the concern of anyone who is serious in following Jesus.

²⁷ A recommended reading for this subject is Segundo Galilee's *The Beatitudes: To Evangelize as Jesus Did*. Trans. Robert R. Barr (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 1985). See also Jon Sobrino's *Spirituality of Liberation*, Chapter Eight.

²⁸ See PUEBLA. *Evangelization at Present and the Future of Latin America*, (Washington D.C.: National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Secretariat, Committee for the Church in Latin America, 1979) official English edition, see no. 348.

²⁹ Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi: Apostolic Exhortation On Evangelization in the Modern World*, (Pasay City: St. Paul Publications, 1976), no. 7.

³⁰ Segundo Galilee, *The Beatitudes*.

³¹ *Evangelii Nuntiandi*.

This must be the primary concern of the GKKs' existence too.

To proclaim the Kingdom of God is also to proclaim and witness to Jesus Christ because He is the embodiment of the Kingdom. There is no other way to the Kingdom except by following the historical Jesus, now the Christ. In following the historical Jesus the historical Jesus, now the Christ. In following the historical Jesus All believers proclaim and witness to the values of the Kingdom. All Christians are called to do this. So in this perspective, the life of Jesus of Nazareth must also be the life of the GKK. The GKK must embody the Kingdom values of peace, love, justice, compassion and reconciliation, freedom, sharing, etc. Only in this way could a GKK be called a true Christian community. For if the GKK is a true community of followers of the historical Jesus, than it must be a community where true community transformation could take place. It must be a community where every human person's history, culture, aspirations and social organizations and taken into consideration. Briefly, an evangelizing GKK must be concerned with the whole reality of each and every person.

As a consequence of this holistic approach to human reality, an evangelizing GKK easily builds and enhances human relationships. It becomes a place for human growth and development of a person uniquely created and loved by God. Subsequently, the existence of such a GKK is a liberating presence that easily gets out of itself to reach out to others, especially to those who are in need. This kind of GKK ceases to be self-serving for it always looks out in loving concern for what it can do for others or for society.

Finally, a GKK that evangelizes always looks to Jesus the Evangelizer as the source of its vocation to discipleship as the source of its capacity to love and reach out to others, and as the source of its very existence. Any evangelizing community must have the mind, heart and will of Jesus of Nazareth as it walks in the here and now towards the fullness of the Kingdom. Once it deviates from its Source, then it ceases to be a Christian community. It finds its own idol and god in the values of the world it is called to evangelize.

Another profound charisma of a GKK that seriously follows the historical Jesus is its capacity to immerse itself in the human situations where it finds itself. In those human situations, a GKK is called to be authentically Christian. In immersing or putting itself in these human situations, a Christian community/GKK is confronted with contradictions and conflicts. To live as a community of faith in the Philippine context as a society of contradictions and conflicts is to engage in suffering if the GKK wants to be faithful to its vocation.

Suffering takes the form of uncertainty, abandonment, rejection, disappointment, humiliation, envy, worse, all of which are actually experiences of the cross and of death. What is remarkable in a community's fidelity to Jesus Christ is the willingness and the strength to endure suffering, to bear the cross and even die on it not for one's own sake but for others. Love for others makes suffering and death meaningful. The cross and death in Jesus' own life were the consequence of loving and living for others.³² Love for others is only real and life-giving when one immerses oneself in the realities and concerns of the beloved, even at the risk of suffering and death.

If the GKK's gifts to evangelize and to suffer and carry the cross for others are penetrating and enduring, then such a GKK becomes a sign of hope and unity. The existence of this GKK also becomes life-giving to others. In Philippine society there is a need not only for individuals but for communities which can radiate hope and joy, which can facilitate reconciliation and peace, which can arouse sharing and generosity of goods and which can lead to new life those who are already despondent. In short, there is a need in a community of people to facilitate and to implement the transformation of the whole of Philippine society, starting at the grassroots level where the Church has still untapped reserves of energy and power.

The capacity to evangelize as Jesus did, to suffer and die for others, to be a sign of hope and unity already comprise an integral following of the historical Jesus. However, this kind of life is possible only because of the power of the Spirit of the risen Jesus Christ. Discipleship is God's invitation through the Holy Spirit. To transform a faith community into a true basic Christian community is God's work, not that of human beings alone.

Life in the Spirit

In the light of one's resurrection faith, one comes to know Jesus of Nazareth. Reflecting on the life of the historical Jesus one is moved to action by His Spirit. Through the inspiration of the same Spirit one comes to know the demands of following the historical Jesus. It is the Spirit of the risen One who inspires one to live a life of knowledge and understanding of the love and goodness of God, of openness to God's

³²See Philip Sheldrake, *Images of Holiness* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Ave Maria Press, 1988), p. 54. See also Jon Sobrino's *Christology at the Crossroads*, p. 412.

designs and plan, and of generosity and self-surrender to whatever these plans may be in history.

To be able to discern the movement and guidance of the Spirit in human life, both personal and communal, is an important part or element in following the historical Jesus. Jesus Himself, in order to discern God's will in all important events of His life, prayed and fasted. In Mark (1:12-20), Jesus prayed and fasted for forty days before actively starting His public ministry and calling His first disciples. In Matthew (26:36 ff), Jesus also prayed before He entered into His passion and death. Isn't this a reminder for any disciple to see and appreciate the importance of prayer in one's ministry or in one's life in general?

However, to discern the leading of the Spirit in one's life is not that simple.³³ In the modern world, one needs to discern more. In any given complex and ambiguous situation Christians need to distinguish - using their ability to perceive and judge - what is appropriate and relevant for a Christian response. To discern is not an easy task, for involved in this is a deep knowledge of God and of His will. It calls for a life that is always sensitive to the guidance of the Spirit.

So Christian discernment, both personal and communal, is vital to Christian life. The Spirit works in discernment but with man's cooperation and collaboration. Discernment, according to Thomas Green, S.J. is "the essential link between prayer and active Christian life, the meeting point of prayer and apostolic action."³⁴ Therefore, for Christians who understand that their faith implies concrete action in history with Jesus of Nazareth, discernment is essential to constantly let God be God in their lives as individuals and as community. In this way, faith (or prayer = relationship with God) becomes the foundational dimension in any Christian praxis.

The Communal Aspect

Given the Philippine situation, the unity of the Filipino is essential to effect social transformation, and communal discernment must be emphasized in the building and formation of the GKK. Of course this phase of the approach already presupposes prayerful and discerning members of the GKK.

³³It is here that St. Ignatius Loyola's classic *Discernment of Spirits* is very essential in Christian living. One practical guide for its application is Thomas Green's *Weeds Among the Wheat*, (Makati, Philippines: 1984, with special arrangement with Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, Indiana).

³⁴Thomas Green, *Weeds Among the Wheat*, p. 21.

This writer believes that this is not an easy endeavor, yet she is convinced that it must be initiated and followed at the communal level. Believers have to come together, think together, seek together and pray together for God's will for them, especially in important and crucial moments. They must also work together and support each other in doing that will. Despite all insecurities that lie ahead, the Church must brave all these and must initiate this move in the GKK. In this way:

1. Formation to service will not be reduced to mere idealism and social activism. Rather it will become a Christian praxis deeply rooted in Christian faith and love.

2. Formation to knowledge and understanding through ongoing critical study of the Scriptures and other related matters will not be reduced to mere intellectualism, but will become a more well-informed and relevant Christian action or praxis.

3. Formation to worship will not be reduced to mere cult-ism, but a celebration of life, of God's people whose bread of life is God's reign in their lives in history. It must be a celebration of God's goodness and love, of His friendship and presence in history. Reflecting on these realities, people will be inspired and strengthened to go on for further Christian praxis in loving service to others.

With a life led by God, a disciple or a GKK of the historical Jesus, now the Christ, can courageously move forward in Philippine society and confidently in the Spirit of the risen Christ proclaim:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me;
therefore He has anointed me.
He has sent me to bring glad
tidings to the poor,
to proclaim liberty to captives;
Recovery of sight to the blind
and release to prisoners,
To announce a year of favor
from the Lord'" (Luke 4:16-21)

CONCLUSION

Taking Sobrino's position as the basis for understanding Jesus' resurrection in its relation to and significance for Christian discipleship, this writer dares to stand with him at the crossroads. Christian faith must unceasingly seek and long for the resurrection

of the historical Jesus of Nazareth with the risen Jesus Christ of faith. This integral interpretation and understanding of the Christian believers' relationship with God in Jesus Christ provides the basis for a new direction in Christian living and ministries, particularly in the Philippine context. It is a new direction, chosen and born out of a richer understanding of one's faith and out of a desire for a more relevant and committed response to the signs of the times.

Faith in the resurrection of Jesus is essentially dynamic for inherent in it is an ongoing search for a meaningful living out of this faith in history, in a particular human and world situation. This has been the life of the Church in history. The resurrection of Jesus is almost two thousand years past. The Christ-event has undergone and is still undergoing all kinds of interpretations in the life of the Church in history. There have been periods of emphasis, overemphasis and/or neglect of one or more of its aspects and implications in many different theological treatises in the life of the Church, but the fact remains that the resurrection of Jesus is still central to the Christian faith.

Faith in the resurrection or in the risen Christ should make clear the truth that human beings are created and re-created in the image and likeness of God who is love, of God who is life. This is how one experiences God in history. Discipleship is a vocation to love with a love that is life-giving. Discipleship is a response to love, the love of God in Jesus Christ. It is His love that enables one to be loving and life-giving. To be loved is liberating and liberative. In love one goes out from one's prison of self-centeredness and reaches out to others. It is liberative and life-giving. For in loving others, one affirms and accepts their existence and thus gives them space for growth and creativity.

Discipleship, then, is an ongoing formation in history in the light of one's faith in the resurrection of Jesus. It is a formation toward the fullness of the Kingdom but rooted in the now-ness of life. History-making as Jesus Christ's disciple counts as humanity and the whole of creation is ushered towards the fullness of God's reign.

At this point of history, Jesus Christ's resurrection remains a mystery. Discipleship also remains a mystery. Christians are still faced with the question: Is following Jesus of Nazareth sheer foolishness, the result of brainwashing? This has been the same question asked from the beginning of Christianity. There has been a consistent attempt to answer this question with a resounding "no" as can be seen in the lives of faithful and serious disciples of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ still stirs the hearts of people to examine and evaluate their lives and look for a more meaningful way of living in selfless service to those who are

in need. Jesus Christ is still real in the lives of those who opt for peace and reconciliation in the midst of violence and hatred. Jesus Christ is still very much alive in those whose lifestyle remains simple in the midst of obsession with wealth and luxury for the sake of those who are poor and in need. Jesus Christ is still meaningful for those who choose to serve in humility in the midst of excessive desire for power and prestige. Finally, Jesus Christ is still all-in-all in the lives of those who prefer death rather than be silenced in their work for peace, justice, love and reconciliation. There are many humble and simple signs of kindness, sharing, and faith in the goodness of others in and among people who continue to enliven humanity, making life in the twentieth century's world community more meaningful, bearable and hopeful. Committed Christians have been making this kind of world not only possible but real because they have been walking in the light of their resurrection faith and dare "to go back to Galilee and follow Jesus Christ of Nazareth" in their daily life.

The lives of these people must challenge and inspire all Filipinos as a Christian nation. Every Filipino must open himself/herself to the power of the resurrection of Jesus and allow himself/herself to be led by the Spirit of the risen Lord. The task of living the faith, as a people, in the resurrection of Jesus Christ by following the historical Jesus of Nazareth seems overwhelming and too demanding. Present human realities demand much. Yet to live the Christian faith is possible. One need only "to go to the hill in Galilee," listen to whatever the risen Jesus says and believe that He will always be with us to the end of time (cf. Mt. 28:16-20).