• CHAPTER IV •

GRIEVING IN THE EARLY CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

The purpose of this chapter is to carry out a *theological* interpretation of the resurrection of the righteous, seen through the lens of kairological temporality, starting from the Christian experience of the death of Jesus of Nazareth, narrated by his messianic community. The intention of this retrospective look at the grieving of the Jesuanic community consists of being able to interpret, through the lens of the Christian faith that emerged two thousand years ago, the reality of suffering and hope of victims in the twenty-first century described in the preceding chapters.

Firstly, we shall dwell on re-reading the narratives of the burial of Jesus and the appearances of the *Crucified One Who Awakened*[1] since they are the founding hermeneutic dyad of the Christian faith in the resurrection of the dead. In effect, through these narratives, the Gospels describe the *original* grieving experienced by the gestating Christian community that gradually discovered, over the years, the *messianic* and *kairological* meaning of the experience of the death of Jesus Christ Our Righteousness and the righteous in history.

We should acknowledge that we shall walk this path of interpretation of biblical testimonies as a *contextual* reflection, as it happens with any interpretation, however objective it may attempt to be. Our interpretation is marked by an intentionality to recognize ourselves as *survivors* in times of necropower's global violence. Our focus is thus on the *world of life* experienced by reading communities living in late-modern times, who seek to open a horizon of meaning amid the horror, with the mandate of keeping the memory alive of those annihilated by systemic violence.

It is thus not a question of studying the biblical texts in detail, particularly the narratives about the death and appearances of Jesus, which give an account of the faith in the resurrection of Jesus characterizing primitive Christianity through accounts of the empty tomb and various appearances

of the *Crucified One Who Awakened* to some women first, and later to some disciples and apostles.

We are interested in addressing these narratives by *reversing* the order of interpretation. In other words, our point of departure is our current *world of life*. We shall seek to re-read these founding texts of faith in the resurrection. The goal is not to exclusively read the biblical texts with modern tools of literary analysis and the history of traditions as an apparently "objective" exercise—as done by the specialized biblical exegesis that we are quoting here—but rather to interpret the grieving and hope of the family members of those disappeared and murdered by necropower in our postmodern context, in the light of a *full life expectancy* contained, like a small seed, in the life of the Christian communities of the past that created those testimonies and the communities of today that receive these testimonies, adjusting them to their contexts.

Hence, we shall approach these biblical testimonies through the lens of the unfinished *grieving process* in order to thus keep alive the memory of those who were murdered, demanding justice with truth and dignity and open to a tenuous hope of finding them alive. Perhaps only then shall we be able to understand the horizon of *messianic* hope from which it may be possible to postulate forgiveness and reconciliation as an ethical, political, and spiritual possibility of reconstructing commonly shared life, as an (im) possible task of the postmodern polis, which is being dismembered by the global violence of our days.

We thus aim to interpret some signs of God's passage through humankind's fragmented history but from a messianic and kairological perspective. In other words, we shall seek signs of eschatological anticipation of the Kingdom of God in the testimonies of grieving among the early Christian community, understood as *sparks* and *anticipations* of that plenitude offered by divine Wisdom as a free, asymmetrical, and non-reciprocal gift of God's love for all the peoples of the Earth.

Our horizon of interpretation thus envisions the resurrection as the source of the *divine an-archy* formulated by Reiner Schürmann in a post-Heideggerian political philosophical context and meditated by mystics of nothingness like Master Eckhart, both currents of thought that we have already mentioned in the first two chapters of this book.

It will thus be possible *to understand with hope* the redemption embedded in history "like a splinter of messianic time"—using Walter Benjamin's expression but retrieving its Hebrew *theologal* meaning—in the midst of humankind's collapsed history, as a paradoxical heralding of *new* life.

In the following pages, we shall trace the results of the research about the "historical Jesus" that emerged at the end of the seventeenth century, based on Baruch Spinoza's proposal,[2] and later developed by the Enlightenment. In particular, we shall dwell on the "Third Quest,"[3] proposed during the second half of the twentieth century,[4] regarding the narratives about the empty tomb and the appearances of the crucified and risen Jesus. This contemporary current sought to reconstruct, through the rigorous study of documentary sources, the personages of Galilee in the first century of the Common Era, i.e., Jesus of Nazareth and his "Jesuanic" community. We shall also include some elements of the *Fourth Quest* that represent a post-enlightenment exegesis, characteristic of our postmodern times in which reason's objectifying prejudices are being overcome.

For this reason, it will not suffice to approach textual sources from the perspective of critical historiography—in order to address the resurrection as John Meier has noted[5]—but it will also be necessary to look for signs of interpretation in the history of the Christian tradition, which is pulsing in ancient Christianity's liturgical hymns and ritual celebrations. This other narrative, with its high symbolic, mystical, and *poietic* charge, will be a valuable criterion to reconstruct the way in which the Jesuanic community and the early Christian communities experienced "grieving."

Subsequently, we shall focus on the historical and Christological landscape following Jesus' death on the cross, which can only be reconstructed as a hypothesis that historical rationality might find plausible. We shall briefly reconstruct how his community of survivors narrated his burial, the empty tomb, and the role of the nascent Christian community. A community in "forced mobility" due to the persecution to which it was subjected by the Temple's religion and imperial ideology. This diaspora community experienced the need to recover memories regarding Jesus' words and actions. However, they used Jerusalem, rather than Galilee, as a point of departure. This remembrance process led the Messianic community to the threshold of faith in the resurrection.

In fact, the Jesuanic community first made meaning of the death of their rabbi in an interpretation of the empty tomb and the appearances of the *Crucified One Who Awakened* as signs of the *vindictive justice* coming from God in favor of his slain messiah. After a process of re-reading the Hebrew Scriptures, that community found the master key to interpret the fulfillment of the messianic promises made during Jesus' life as the son of man and eschatological messiah.

At the end of this journey through the New Testament, we hope to be able to show sufficient evidence of the prototypical grieving of that early

Christian community of women and men from Galilee, who were initially in hiding in Jerusalem out of fear but then returned to Galilee with glimmers of hope to follow in the footsteps of their slain *rabbi*. This is how the beginning of a messianic community in resistance was narrated: as an experience of *new* life, seen through the lens of the fulfillment of God's promises through the power of divine *Ruah* that springs from the wounds of crucified Jesus, who in some way is present in the midst of the community that remembers him.

We hope to discover—together with those who may read these pages, based on their own experience as survivors—how it may be possible today to experience faith in the resurrection, both in writing and in practice. However, we are called upon to experience this hope-infused grieving in the midst of another collapse, this time on a global scale, recognizing a horizon of ethical, political, and spiritual responsibility modeled by the resilient victims of today, who herald a new world, received and constructed by means of memory, history and, perhaps, (un)certain forgiveness.

For all these reasons, we think that this original Christian grieving could be a fertile reference to the meaning, dignity, and hope to live the (im)possible grieving of today's survivors.

Upon completing this biblical journey, we shall be ready to move on to the last chapter of this book. In these pages, we shall seek to weave the diverse voices that we have evoked along this journey: social movements of resistance, critical thinking, the various disciplines that accompany working through grieving and subjectivation, and, finally, the testimony of the original messianic community.

All this *knowledge* about grieving experienced with dignity and hope will be interwoven with decolonial thinking and the wisdom of the original peoples. With their unique rationality—which could be considered pre-modern, modern, or even postmodern—the indigenous peoples never lost the sense of creating a collective memory open to the mystery of Otherness that reveals itself even in times of contradiction, suffering, and death. For the spiritual forms of knowledge of the native peoples of the Americas, the deceased who have departed are present in *another way*, as *ancestors* living in communion with the living.

However, the survivors face an urgent mandate, as an inevitable part of their personal and collective memory: to seek truth and justice in order to let the deceased "rest in peace." This is how the original peoples commemorate the life of their ancestors as *companions of the living*.

Finally, to conclude this book, we shall attempt to raise elements constituting a fundamental theological reflection on the resurrection as an *up-*

rising—to use Leonardo Boff's expression. Here, we shall understand it as an experience of resistance lived as *messianic anticipation*—with features of divine *an-archy* that encourage the victims' resilience, memory, history, justice, and hope—of those who assume the words and new life of the *Crucified One Who Awakened* as the source of a *new* reality that is approaching in the midst of darkness.

Such an experience of remembrance will be the lantern with which the survivors of all times make their way in the middle of the night, as was poetically described almost two thousand years ago on the island of Patmos by John, the Evangelist, to close the book of Revelation and the whole Bible: "and the Lamb is its lamp" (καὶ ὁ λύχνος αὐτῆς τὸ Ἀρνίον) (Rev 21:23).

Approaching the Galilean Based on Research into the Historical Jesus

At the end of this chapter, we shall use a postmodern perspective to propose a theology of Jesus of Nazareth's resurrection that is faithful—to the extent possible—to the testimonies of the early Christian community.

To achieve this, we must first dwell on narrating the critical elements that modern enlightened biblical exegesis implemented to understand Jesus of Nazareth's life and message. This modern methodological approach highlighted the context of Galilee as a marginal province of the Roman Empire that was in conflict with the religion of the Second Temple of Jerusalem, where Jesus carried out his preaching, moving from the formation of an incipient *messianic* community to reaching the final crisis leading to his death by crucifixion.

The historical-critical method now commonly used in theology came from the Age of Enlightenment at the end of the eighteenth century. It was an expression of reason's viewing the "naïve" sources of religious experience with suspicion. To understand the framing of this approach it was necessary to assume the principle of "doubt everything," as part of the Cartesian heritage. The tools of historical text analysis and archaeological vestiges were used to scrutinize the monuments of antiquity, thus enabling this methodical doubt to evolve.

This historical-critical method was first applied to reconstruct the life of Jesus the Nazarene. However, it later focused on inquiring into the crucial moment of his life, narrated by the Evangelists: his death and resurrection. The textual sources refer more precisely to an "empty tomb" and offer an account of testimonies of the "appearances" of the crucified Jesus to some

women, disciples, and apostles. In both narratives—detailed by the four Gospels, as well as by other contemporary and apocryphal texts, such as the Gospel of Saint Peter—the same version is maintained with variations: that the corpse of Jesus was buried in a tomb near Golgotha in 30 C.E. and that, after the *Shabbat* that coincided that year with the Jewish Passover, some women and disciples went to the borrowed tomb which, to their great surprise, they found empty.

Theissen and Merz—two authors acknowledged as forming part of the Third Quest—synthesized the most likely historical knowledge we have today about the narratives of the empty tomb, as it has been reconstructed by a century of study of documentary sources:

> … the empty tomb cannot be either demonstrated or refuted with historical-critical methods. We must reckon with two possibilities. The resurrection faith called forth by Easter appearances led to a search for the tomb of Jesus. An unused tomb near Golgotha was interpreted at a secondary stage as the tomb of Jesus - no one knew where Jesus had really been buried. The New Testament tradition about the empty tomb then attached itself to this tomb. However, possibly people did know about Jesus' tomb. Joseph of Arimathea had buried him in an unused tomb (perhaps his own). The women found this tomb empty on Easter morning. They kept quiet, because they did not want to be accused of grave robbery. The account of Easter appearances first gave the enigmatic 'empty tomb' an interpretation. This interpretation was then put on the lips of the 'angel' by the tomb.[6]

Despite the relevance of studying textual sources, biblical theology requires other analytical tools. The "enlightened" hypotheses of the historical Jesus are epistemologically insufficient, an insufficiency that lies in their lack of knowledge about other ways of knowing an event that goes beyond the space-time framework as an eschatological insertion of messianic temporality. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is a novel event of this sort.

Regarding the task that "post-enlightenment" historiography claims it is necessary to carry out in order to understand this type of event, N. T. Wright comments:

> In particular, any who insist on being post-Enlightenment historians must look in the mirror and ask some bard methodological questions. The underlying rationale of the Enlightenment was, after all, that the grandiose dogmatic claims of the church [...] needed to be challenged by

> the fearless, unfettered examination of historical evidence. [...] The larger dreams of the Enlightenment have, in recent years, been challenged on all kinds of levels. In some cases (colonialism, the global triumph of Western capitalism, and so on) they have been shown to be politically, economically and culturally self-serving on a massive scale. What if the moratorium on speaking of Jesus' bodily resurrection, which has been kept in place until recently more by the critics' tone of voice than by sustained historical argument [...] turn out to be part of that intellectual and cultural hegemony against which much of the world is now doing its best to react? [...] Indeed, the holding apart of the mental and spiritual on the one hand from the social, cultural and political on the other, one of the most important planks in the Enlightenment platform, is itself challenged by the question of Jesus' resurrection. To address the final historical question is to face, within the worldview model, not only questions of belief but also of praxis, story and symbol.[7]

The relevance of the model of the historical Jesus—seen after a century of important research to identify the context in which Jesus lived and the Jesuanic community unfolded—is, therefore, of *epistemological* nature. The textual sources analyzed are a reference for modern historiography, but the writing of history inevitably goes well beyond. The interpretation of these multiple narratives, with symbols and beliefs, seeks to understand other dimensions of the real. We shall return to this point in the final chapter.

In the meantime, let us dwell upon the reconstruction of the personage of Jesus of Nazareth as a historical figure in order to attain a clearer understanding of the meaning of his preaching, his conflict with the religion of Jerusalem and the Roman authorities, which led to his death and provides sustenance to faith in the resurrection.

In the aforementioned post-Enlightenment context, let us keep in mind that it will be necessary to transition from "historical Jesus" to "Jesus in history." In other words, we need to distinguish between a modern heuristic model and the real personage within a context that we can hardly fully grasp.

Given these methodological constraints, we chose to follow a *retrospective* method in order to understand the meaning of the death of an itinerant preacher in Galilee during the first century C.E. Our point of departure will be a re-reading of the sources regarding "the words and deeds" that marked his preaching in Galilee, but as they were *received* by the early Christian community through their creeds, celebrations, and communal practices.

On the Identity of Jesus in History: The Messiah or the Son of Man?

Let us first refer to the version of the historical Jesus, according to the model that was reconstructed through a typically modern lens. For this enlightened perspective, the Christological titles developed by the kerygmatic Christology of the second half of the first century C.E. impeded knowing the Galilean preacher who confronted the dominant religion of his times in Judea, with its corresponding ramifications in Galilee. Titles such as "Son of God," "Lamb," and "Alpha and Omega," among many others, denoted later interpretations made by a diversity of Christian communities as part of an early expansion of Christianity in Palestine, Syria, and Asia Minor.

For this methodological approach, these titles held a clear kerygmatic value. However, in order to assess their theological depth, it was necessary first to reconstruct, as much as possible, the process experienced by Jesus and his community of disciples and apostles within their context as a marginal Galilean group. It would also be necessary to distinguish the various stages of his public ministry: first in Galilee with a more proactive nature, centered on the heralding of the arrival of the Kingdom of God. Later, particularly during the crisis in Jerusalem that led to Jesus' death, it was possible to note a significant change in tone and message. The preaching was no longer centered on the Kingdom of God but rather on Jesus' announcement of his imminent death.

The pertinent and reasonable synthesis proposed by Theissen and Merz regarding the reconstruction set forth by research into the historical Jesus, illustrates his ministry as an eschatological preacher:

> Who was Jesus? The first answer is that he was a Jewish charismatic who independently of any messianic expectations had a power to attract and provoke far beyond the normal. His charisma showed itself in the way in which he implicitly attributed to himself a special nearness to God. He endorsed his words by putting an 'amen' in front of them as though he had received them from God. His antitheses deliberately transcended the Torah without contradicting it. He reactivated the traditional metaphor of father in a way which indicated a special relationship to God. He promised that forgiveness of sins which as a rule was hoped for from God himself. And he was active in the awareness that God was doing miracles through him. Though he did not develop a doctrine about himself, he spoke clearly about John the Baptist, whom he set above all other human beings. But he knew himself to be the 'coming one' who was announced by John the Baptist, except that he was quite different

> from the one whom John had announced. He transcended the prophet who in his eyes was more than all other prophets. His sense of himself can hardly be underestimated.[8]

This was the way in which, according to the Third Quest, the Nazarene assumed his Jewish tradition from a charismatic perspective as the son of man. Theissen and Merz thus refer to a charismatic character who retrieved the figure of the messiah with eschatological creativity in an unprecedented way, proposing himself to his listeners from the perspective of "human Christology."

The paschal faith of the Jesuanic community represented a remembrance of the 'son of man,' inviting his listeners to participate in the messianic news. Jesus, however, did this in a non-protagonistic way. Today, the proposal is to translate this attitude with the controversial expression of an invitation from Jesus to his community to become 'one in human form':

> Through his human Christology he bestowed messianic dignity on human beings themselves. The Easter faith led to belief in a transformed 'human being' who does not cease to be God's creature even beyond the frontier of death. These new perspectives released a utopian power, so that by the assimilation of all men and women to this 'new human being' traditional differences between peoples, classes and sexes could be overcome: differences between Jews and Greeks, slaves and free, men and women (Gal. 3:28). Reflection on Jesus today may see him as a kind of metamorphosis of the human. Daniel's vision was already applied to Jesus in primitive Christianity: the kingdom of God brought in by the 'one like a man' is to replace the bestial kingdoms. In a great vision, human history is interpreted as a transition from beasts to 'one in human form' who has not yet appeared. Jesus was cast in the role of the 'one in human form.' And time and again the question is whether there are people who allow themselves to be grasped by the transformation embodied by Jesus, and despite the failure of all hopes through death and violence, trust in the midst of an unredeemed world that a humane life is possible in covenant with God.[9]

Therefore, the proposed re-reading of the title 'Son of Man' was crucial to understanding how Jesus and his community interpreted their own identity and mission as part of the narrative regarding the redemption of the disinherited of the earth through the God of Israel.

The Ministry's Paradoxical Character According to the Reconstruction of the Historical Jesus

Following this exegetical model, modern theology, including Liberation Theology,[10] underlined the *prophetic* novelty represented by Jesus of Nazareth, whose preaching centered on heralding the arrival of the Kingdom of God particularly addressed to the poor and excluded of his time.

We shall now show what this specific content of Jesus' messianism means to the modern Christological model, emphasizing the ethical, political, and spiritual repercussions with which his preaching was analyzed, as it was traced through the exegesis of the historical Jesus.

Within a postmodern and decolonial perspective, we must keep in mind that Jesus' message and praxis can only be understood within the context of the Jesuanic community that followed him after his death. Following the trauma of his execution, this community took charge of writing about his life. In this written version of history, the grieving community understood that its task was to continue his work once the grieving and assimilation of his absence-presence following the crucifixion was completed.

We shall thus move towards understanding the prophetic and messianic context in which Jesus of Nazareth lived, using contributions from both modern and postmodern exegesis. Given the relevance of prophetism in twentieth-century Latin American theology, it will be important for us first to elucidate Jesus' messiahship, following research into the historical Jesus. However, it will then be necessary to consider the praxis of the Jesuanic community in order to be able better to understand the praxis and theology of the messianic community. We shall thus be able to accompany today's communities of survivors in confronting the systemic violence that afflicts us in these times of necropower.

"Jesus' death was the outcome of his prophetic life choices," Carlos Bravo[11] wrote with historical and biblical lucidity a few decades ago in Mexico, commenting on the Gospel of Saint Mark. While it is possible to qualify the praxis of Jesus in Galilee as true *prophetic preaching*—as Bravo noted within the context of Liberation Theology, using typically modern methods of exegesis—remembering the importance of the sui generis *messianic* sense of his ministry, retrieved by postmodern exegesis.

We shall proceed to reconstruct the Jewish landscape in which the Galilean unfolded.[12] At the beginning of Jesus' preaching in Nazareth, his preaching of the arrival of the Kingdom of God was marked by an *eschatological* hue, akin to that of the prophet Elijah, walking the villages of that marginal Roman province that was the Galilee of the Gentiles. Jesus' words,

however, later acquired more *apocalyptic* characteristics as he came closer to Jerusalem due to his confrontation with the Sadducees and the Sanhedrin, who represented the religion of the Temple.

Let us recall how modern exegesis in the North Atlantic world focused its research on the prophetic nature of Jesus' ministry, inspired by John the Baptist. In his words and deeds, Jesus at times emphasized an *apocalyptic* sense, while, at other times, emphasized an *eschatological* hue, as noted by Allison:

> The Last Judgment, the resurrection of the dead, the restoration of Israel, and the Great Tribulation hardly any new ideas. Rather, they were part of Jesus' Jewish heritage, as pieces of an eschatological scenario as a persuasive archetype, parts of the 'little tradition' that came down to him through the institutions of life in his hometown.
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> The final judgment, the resurrection of the dead, the restoration of Israel, and the great tribulation were scarcely new ideas. They were rather part of Jesus' Jewish heritage, part of an archetypically compelling eschatological scenario, part of the 'little tradition' that came to him through the institutions of his village life. What he did with them was twofold. First, like others before and after him, he made them overwhelmingly relevant to his own time and place through the notion of imminence. Nearness was designed to make people attend to the one thing needful. Second, his association of eschatological expectations with events and persons around him gave traditional myths a fresh and inventive application.[13]

Another key factor in reconstructing Jesus' messiahship noted by the Third Quest was Jesus' awareness of his own identity and mission. The texts on this subject oscillate between two poles: the messiah or the son of man. Modern exegesis, however, was unable to go any further.

The most that can be said after a century of textual and hermeneutical debates, is that rather than appropriating the title of messiah, Jesus "activated the messianic hopes" of his community and listeners:

> This awareness of authority transcended the role-expectations with which he was confronted – above all the messianic expectation which was alive in many variants among the people, alongside other eschatological expectations. It was by no means clear in what sense anyone understood Jesus' messiahship if they saw him as the 'Messiah.' Therefore Jesus could reject a confession of himself as Messiah without generally

> repudiating the title Messiah: what he repudiated was the conviction expressed in a specific messianic expectation (cf. Mark 8.29 along with 8.33). Probably Jesus had a messianic self-understanding in the broadest sense. But he wanted to exercise the role of Messiah not exclusively, but along with his disciples, whom he saw as a messianic collective to rule Israel. He activated their messianic hopes, but this very activation of messianic expectations was fateful for him: he was crucified by the Romans because of the messiahship attributed to him by the people. They were not so concerned to strike at him and his teaching: they wanted to 'crucify' the messianic expectations of the people in him.[14]

We must not forget, moreover, how Jesus refused to be called the messiah, as noted by the famous "messianic secret" that runs through the entire Gospel of Saint Mark. This is, to a large extent, explained because the messianism in vogue at the time of Jesus' preaching was a particularly relevant phenomenon in Judea in its Davidic or apocalyptic version.

Postmodern exegesis notes the Galilean's marginality in a different sense from that underlined by John Meier a couple of decades ago to refer to Jesus' marginality as a prophetic option. This enables me to emphasize the interculturality of the "pagan" Galilee in order to explain the difference regarding the *messianism of the son of man* that Jesus proposes, rather than as a prophet.

We shall now take a more detailed look at this problem.

About the "Messianic Secret"

According to the Third Quest, compiled by liberal European theology and Latin American Liberation Theology a few decades ago, Jesus' prophetism was characterized by his refusal to be called the Messiah. Half a century later, the post-Enlightenment exegesis called into question the primacy of the messianic secret.

However, the exegetes continue to question why the Gospel according to Saint Mark expressed reservations regarding Jesus' messiahship and the non-existence of narratives related to the appearances of the risen Christ in the short and original version of the second gospel (that of Mark), which is the oldest text written among the four canonical gospels.

In order to address the question of Jesus' identity in the Gospel of Saint Mark, it is important to turn to the passage of his flight to Caesarea Philippi (8:27-35). This pericope is in tune with the abrupt end of the gospel, which

portrays the women's astonishment upon facing the empty tomb, with only a mention of going to Galilee to look for him. This we shall analyze later.

The "messianic secret" in the Gospel of Saint Mark evokes a sensitive moment in Jesus' life. The prohibition against calling him a messiah arose when Jesus began to be persecuted by the Pharisees and Torah teachers—groups that controlled religious power—and when he was rejected by his own family. The dialogue between Jesus and his disciples and apostles (Mk 8:27-35; Mt 16:13-23; Lk 9:22-27)—that took place in the ancient sanctuary of the Greek god Pan, on the slopes of Mount Hermon, at the border with Lebanon and Syria—actually revolves around the identity of Jesus: "Who do the people say I am? And who do you say I am?"

Peter's confession of Jesus' messianic identity: "You are the Messiah" (Mk 8:29) was followed by an immediate prohibition to communicate it to others: "Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him" (Mk 8:30). Then Mark the Evangelist added: "He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again" (Mk 8:31). The passage regarding Caesarea Philippi is also important because it reveals the question that Jesus openly posed about his identity.

Furthermore, some *apocalyptic* elements—such as Jesus' imprecations before the Holy City, the debates with the Sadducees about the resurrection and healing during *Shabbat*, or the expulsion of merchants from the Temple—were present at critical moments in Jesus' life. They were ostensible signs of his confrontation with the representatives of the religion of the Temple. But they failed to eliminate the *eschatological* meaning of his relationship with the prophet Elijah, according to testimonies of several accounts of healings that took place in Galilee.

Elijah's prophetism seemed to have been found as the source of the original inspiration for Jesus' blissful heralding of the Kingdom of Heaven that Jesus announced in the villages of Galilee. Narratives regarding the Beatitudes, the multiplication of loaves, the healing of foreigners, and the forgiveness of sinners describe the fulfillment of promises and the beginning of the new *aeon*, which had been promised to the people of Israel ever since Elijah's ascension in the *Merkavah* or chariot of fire.

From then on, Elijah had been awaited as the end-time messenger. He was also awaited by Jesus and his messianic community.

New Research by Post-Enlightenment Exegesis into the Identity of Jesus and the Reasons for His Death

Jesus as the Son of Man

In contrast to the modern Third Quest, the post-Enlightenment exegesis of the first decades of the twenty-first century has focused its attention on another Christological title different from that of the apocalyptic messiah and prophet, akin to Elijah. Messianism and prophetism were themes privileged by modern exegesis as a lens through which to approach the historical personage of Galilee in the first century C.E.

However, in the postmodern context of the historical failure of twentieth-century utopias, the title "Son of Man" is being reinterpreted by post-Enlightenment exegesis in order to more fully understand what three decades ago Christian Duquoc[15] called "the anti-messianism" of Jesus.

In the context of Jesus' marginality as a Galilean, it is highly likely that Jesus used the expression "son of man" rather than messiah—because of its intense Davidic and apocalyptic charge—to refer to himself and his mission at various moments during his brief public life. Throughout his preaching in Galilee, the expression "son of man" denoted the fulfillment of the promises of the Kingdom of God. Later, during his stay in Jerusalem, Jesus radicalized his position with a marked apocalyptic accent in his preaching, using the expression "the son of man," largely because of the conflict with the Sadducees and the Temple authorities. He thus associated "the death of the son of man" with the fulfillment of the promises God had made to Israel.

However, for the post-Enlightenment exegesis, it was of key importance that Jesus referred to himself as "the son of man" (*ben Adam*) when he told his disciples about the fate awaiting him in Jerusalem:

> "We are going up to Jerusalem," he said, "and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise."
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> καὶ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου παραδοθήσεται τοῖς ἀρχιερεῦσιν καὶτοῖς γραμματεῦσιν καὶ κατακρινοῦσιν αὐτὸν θανάτῳ καὶ παραδώσουσιν αὐτὸν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν καὶ ἐμπαίξουσιναὐτῷ καὶ ἐμπτύσουσιν αὐτῷ καὶμαστιγώσουσιν αὐτὸν καὶἀποκτενοῦσιν, καὶ μετὰ τρεῖς ἡμέρας ἀναστήσεται (Mk 10:33-34).

The expression "the son of man" is a rhetorical figure marked by a strong apocalyptic accent. Jesus' lamentations in front of the Holy City had the same tone, announcing its destruction while evoking the symbolism of its reconstruction in three days.

In a few words, the title "son of man" thus allows us to grasp with greater depth the way in which Jesus perceived his own mission aimed at restoring the people of Israel based on the prophetism of the book of Daniel. This vision was first present in John the Baptist's preaching in the Judean wilderness. Jesus joined this expectation, contributing his own genius, in order to recognize the presence of the Kingdom of God in the "here and now" of the signs that he himself performed "with eschatological authority." Pointing in this direction that would later be developed by post-Enlightenment exegesis, Theissen and Merz commented:

> …there is a consensus [among exegetes] that Jesus had a sense of eschatological authority. He saw the dawn of a new world in his actions. Here he goes beyond the Jewish charismatics and prophets known to us before him. There is a dispute over whether Jesus expressed his consciousness of authority implicitly without using Christological titles, whether his consciousness of authority aroused ('evoked') expectations which were attached to him by contemporaries and his disciples in the form of traditional honorific titles, or whether he explicitly applied one or more titles to himself. So in what follows we shall distinguish between implicit, evoked and explicit Christology. The question of the Christological titles and their basis in the historical Jesus probably does not have the theological importance that is sometimes attached to it. The whole story of Jesus (the historical Jesus and the Christ believed to have risen) is the foundation of the Christian faith; the titles are summary abbreviations of the claim contained in this story. The claim is decisive. It sets all the individual stories in a new light. [...]. The titles are abbreviations for the claim to authority which indicates the pre-understanding in which the individual parts of the story of Jesus are perceived."[16]

We can therefore state that Jesus experienced prophetism in a novel way, while going beyond the traditional Judaism of his time. Allison highlights the "millenary" hue that Jesus left as an inheritance for his messianic community, referring to it as a principle of openness to eschatological imagination:

> he went beyond tradition when he associated the coming of the kingdom with John the Baptist (Q 16:16; Mk 9:11-13) and linked the judgement with response to himself and his itinerants (Q 10:13-15; 12:8-9). The eschatology was the creation of a new religious identity based on a novel interpretation of the world in the light of Jewish tradition. […] Jesus' millenarian eschatology was, then, revised religious story that became the context of his follower's experience. That story, with its belief in the impossible and its hope in a transcendent reality, freed imaginations to pass creatively beyond the mundane so that those who believed could, despite difficult times and 'little faith', find the meaning of their existence."[17]

In a few words, in order to understand the scope of Jesus' *sui generis* anti-messianism, it is necessary to describe his profile as an *itinerant preacher* according to post-Enlightenment exegesis. Here, Jesus appears to be closer to the title "son of man" than to that of "the messiah":

> The only term which he explicitly applied to himself was the expression '*son of man*' - and this was not a title but an everyday expression which was first given messianic connotations by him – however, Jesus linked it with visions of a heavenly being who was like a son of man. It is not a modern anachronism to note that Jesus made the term 'man' the decisive honorific title. He gave human beings themselves a dignity which transcended all other honorific titles: Messiah, Son of God and *Kyrios*. He put forward a human Christology. […] When Jesus preached the kingdom of God in Galilee and went up to Jerusalem, he hoped that the kingdom of God would soon break in. But he was executed. The kingdom of God did not come. God's final intervention to lead Israel and the world to salvation did not take place. God intervened in another way: according to the faith of the disciples he raised the crucified Jesus from death. The 'Son of Man' had attained his lofty position only through suffering and death. All that Jesus had said previously about himself implicitly and explicitly, all that others had hoped or feared from him, had to be reformulated in the light of the cross and Easter.[18]

Following the guiding thread of Jesus as "son of man," we can characterize the development of Jesus' ministry in a new light. From being an itinerant Galilean preacher, popular among the common people of the villages surrounding Lake Tiberias, the Nazarene became a miracle worker who proved annoying to the religion of the Temple of Jerusalem for his direct

confrontation with the sacrificial Judaism of his time. Thus, Jesus gradually became a "son of man," marginalized by Sadducee-controlled religion and the *Torah* study preached by the Pharisees in the Holy City.

To make matters worse, Jesus also came into conflict with the Roman authorities, in view of his criticism about the domination exercised by the Empire over the people with the complicity of the ruling Jews. One of his most forceful expressions about power is that passage about the child placed in the midst of the disciples:

> Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "Anyone who wants to be first, must be the very last, and the servant of all." *He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, "Whoever welcomes one of these children in my name welcomes me*; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.
>
> καὶ καθίσας ἐφώνησεν τοὺς δώδεκα καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς· εἴ τις θέλει πρῶτος εἶναι, ἔσται πάντων ἔσχατος καὶ πάντων διάκονος. καὶ λαβὼν παιδίον ἔστησεν αὐτὸ ἐν μέσῳ αὐτῶν καὶ ἐναγκαλισάμενος αὐτὸ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· ὃς ἂν ἓν τῶν τοιούτων παιδίων δέξηται ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματί μου, ἐμὲ δέχεται· καὶ ὃς ἂν ἐμὲ δέχηται, οὐκ ἐμὲ δέχεται ἀλλὰ τὸν ἀποστείλαντά με (Mk 9:35-37).

While the disciples were arguing who would be first in the Kingdom, Jesus placed a child in the center as a counterexample to criticize the powerful and call on his messianic community to exercise power as service. In its historical context,[19] this narrative directly criticizes Herod the Tetrarch who dominated the local population on the shores of Lake Tiberias, comprised of artisans, fishermen, and peasants from the lands north of Judea, close to Lebanon and Syria.

Regarding Jesus' growing conflict against the rich and powerful, there is a common testimony of the four Evangelists about the severe criticism that Jesus made in Galilee against the rich merchants on the shore of Lake Tiberias. Jesus also denounced the corruption of the Jewish tax collectors in the service of Roman taxation. He thus updated the word of the prophets of northern Israel in times of idolatry, which earned him the enmity of influential local figures and the region's religious, economic, and political power.

Furthermore, the magnanimous freedom with which Jesus spoke of the God of Israel as his *Abba*—accompanied by messianic gestures of conviviality[20] "with tax collectors and sinners," the healing of the sick, and his closeness to the *little ones* as privileged members of the Kingdom of Heaven—earned

him the recognition of many, but also the suspicion and disqualification by others.

Finally, we shall briefly address the title that some Third Quest exegetes attributed to the historical Jesus: "the suffering messiah." Although the passion narratives regarding the Servant of YHWH serve as the backdrop to the narrative of the cross, they are not identified with the Messiah until the later Pauline theology: "But we preach the Messiah crucified" (1 Cor 1:23). In Jesus' time, there was still an awareness that all the people of Israel awaiting the fulfillment of the promises, were the Servant of YHWH, as Scardelai remarks:

> Jewish exegesis does not apply the image of the 'servant of Isaiah' to messianic personal qualifiers, except when the figure of collective Israel, the 'servant of God' par excellence is present. It is thus assumed that only Israel, the nation chosen by Yahweh can collectively be considered a 'servant of the Lord,' rather than a single person as a messiah. The interpretation of the 'servant' of Isaiah, made in the light of Jesus' suffering on the cross, acquired messianic attributions hitherto unknown from normative Judaism, crystallizing as a new criterion of redemption, beyond being constructed as a division between the waters of the Jewish and Christian traditions, accentuating the vicarious suffering of Christ.[21]

However, the reconstruction of the historical Jesus—whether that proposed by the Third Quest in the twentieth century or that proposed today by post-Enlightenment exegesis—cannot remain limited to the discussion about Christological titles.

It is necessary to read between the lines regarding the *eschatological* profile that runs through Jesus' preaching.

The Centrality of the Kingdom of God According to Elijah

We shall now turn to the beginning of Jesus' ministry in Galilee in order to carefully consider his first announcement, inspired by the prophet Elijah, which focused on the arrival of the Kingdom of God.

The Kingdom of God is at the heart of Jesus' programmatic discourse in Nazareth (Luke 4:16-21) with its messianic triad: the good news to the poor, the deliverance of the captives, the blind, and the oppressed, and the Lord's year of grace.

The first phase of the narrative regarding Jesus' preaching in the synagogue of Nazareth (Luke 4:24-30) was endorsed by word and deed (*uerba et facta Iesu*), until it came to assert that the promise had already been fulfilled. Jesus's audacity increased during his preaching. This led the religious authorities to condemn him for blasphemy and to the subsequent conspiracy with the Romans to have him slain for having disavowed the power of Caesar. It also earned him the contempt of his own family, who considered him insane.

The liberating and blissful proclamation of the Kingdom of God preached by Jesus in Nazareth imprinted his ministry in Galilee with that messianic creativity that may elsewhere be called the *poietics* of the Galilean.[22] The first ones to be received by the Kingdom of God were the *nepioi*, the little ones of the Kingdom of Heaven,[23] as Saint Luke the Evangelist referred to them. They evoked the *anawim* of Israel, i.e., those who are blessed beyond measure despite their failures and weaknesses. Modern exegesis of the narrative regarding Jesus' preaching and healing as a miracle worker underscored Jesus' preference for the sick, the poor, and the helpless as a sign of God's preference for his suffering people since "the times in which they were enslaved in Egypt."

Consequently, the *discipleship*[24] that Jesus proposed to his messianic community would be characterized by simple living and service to the dispossessed, as an irrefutable sign of Abba's merciful love for his people.

Hence, the actions of restoring sight to the blind and freeing the captives—which resonates with the God of the exodus—represent the actualizing of Elijah's *eschatological* messianism,[25] but in the manner of Jesus of Nazareth, who distanced himself from other titles such as King Messiah and Judge Messiah.

As a knot that ties loose ends, the Lord's Year of Grace thus came to synthesize the whole theology of captivity and liberation with ancient Hebrew roots, underlining the reality of redemption in the lives of those who bore witness to the Galilean's words and deeds: for "Today as you listen, this Scripture has been fulfilled" (Lk 4:21).

Such an atmosphere of messianic expectation, ratified by the itinerant preacher's messianic words and gestures, increasingly reached those privileged in the Kingdom of God: children, the sick, women, and sinners, i.e., those invisibilized by the Roman and Jewish systems of those times.

As a result of this brief but intense activity of the itinerant preacher on the shores of the Lake of Galilee, with the center of activity in Tiberias, a *sui generis* community of disciples emerged. It was neither a Pharisaic school nor a Cynic academy, as accustomed by the Romans, like the one in the

neighboring city of Sepphoris, which, by the way, is never mentioned in the Gospels. It was a community that followed a rabbi called Jesus: the *Jesuanic* community.[26]

In a few words, it is very likely that, at the beginning of his preaching in Galilee, Jesus gradually recognized himself as an "Elijah-like" prophet—reading the Hebrew Scriptures in the company of his followers. This experience of discovering a vocation of *eschatological* prophetism was accompanied by increasing awareness of the urgent mission of heralding the arrival of the Kingdom of God for the children and for those who received the fire of divine *Ruah* through the conversion of the heart and actions aimed at creating a new life.

The Jerusalem Crisis

The messianic expectation[27] in the villages of Galilee grew more and more and eventually reached Jerusalem. As the center of the Jewish world and the capital city of Roman domination in Palestine, the Holy City was also a center for Jesus' final preaching. His presence there was marked by some experiences of healing the sick, and his denunciation of idolatry was represented by both worship in the Temple, which used sacrifices, and the Roman occupation that promoted the emperor's supplantation of God.
In the vicinity of Jerusalem, some of Jesus's friends—like Martha, Mary, and Lazarus in Bethany—formed part of the itinerant Jesuanic community as followers of the 'Son of Man.'

However, the latent conflict was increasingly coming out into the open. It should be kept in mind that the clamor of a handful of followers at Jesus' entry into the Holy City was accompanied by his expelling the merchants from the Temple. These events were two sides of the same coin that would mark the fatal destiny of the Nazarene.

Before his arrest, torture, and execution as a criminal accused of disavowing Caesar, Jesus held a *farewell meal*[28] with his preaching companions, who had been accompanying him throughout the journey from Galilee to Jerusalem. The confusion of some disciples, like Judas who was expecting a political messiah, led to the Jesuanic conviviality of the 'son of man' that since then marked the living memory kept alive by his friends and companions along the messianic path.

The crucifixion implied a turning point that rather than representing the end of Jesus' earthly life, became the lens through which his whole life

was interpreted in retrospect as a powerful sign of God's passage through the innocent victim. Baena expresses this event thusly:

> The brief account of the crucifixion appearing in Mark 15:21-41 is a starting point in reverse of the whole composition regarding the history of the pre-Markian passion and also of the whole composition of the Gospel of Saint Mark. At the end of this brief account that became part of the tradition, it is most likely that the Evangelist himself placed—as a grand summary and culminating point of his theology of the cross—the centurion's confession of faith. "And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how he died, he said, 'Surely this man was the Son of God!'" […] The suffering and oppressed poor, victims of oppression, according to the perspective revealed by Saint Mark in the centurion's confession of faith, which was absolutely strange and rationally unforeseeable, *are saviors of their own victimizers*. This would be a *sign of the times* that should be significant for such a densely and in so many ways hidden homicidal humankind that was, representing the Word of God that cried out, not simply to save the suffering, since their pain is already testimony of their faith in God and their closeness to him, who is on their side and who are therefore already saved, i.e., released from their suffering. They are therefore the Word of God or a *sign of the times,* and their heartbreaking cry will have to question the victimizers and oppressors as a way of *offering them hope for their own salvation*.[29]

Despite such a modern re-reading regarding Jesus' cross as submitting the corrupt world to a trial, after the harsh test that Jesus was subjected to through his arrest, torture, and murder—resulting from the collusion between the Jewish and Roman authorities, that took place in a few hours—his community experienced his execution as a traumatic event, leading most of his followers to flee. Some of the group's women remained close to the executed Nazarene, as witnesses of his ordeal on a Roman cross, having been executed alongside two thieves who were also crucified.

The account of Jesus' crucifixion reveals, in addition to the death of the righteous, the trauma experienced by the Jesuanic community who lived the bloodiest "sign of contradiction" for the messianic expectation that Jesus had passionately shared as 'son of man.' The moments prior to Jesus' death were re-created by the modern exegesis of the historical Jesus as follows:

> at the last meal that they shared he instituted a new rite: a simple meal which he shared with them one day before the beginning of the Pass-

> over in expectation of a dramatic escalation of the conflict with the Jerusalem aristocracy. Probably (as is expressed in his prayer in Gethsemane, in a scene composed in poetic fashion) he hovered between expecting death and the hope that God would intervene before his own death and usher in his rule. Judas, a member of the most intimate circle of disciples, betrayed the place where Jesus was staying so that he could be arrested inconspicuously by night. The aristocracy which arrested him took steps against him because of his criticism of the temple, but accused him before Pilate of a political crime, of having sought power as a royal pretender. In fact many among the people and his followers expected that he would become the royal Messiah who would lead Israel to new power. Jesus did not dissociate himself from this expectation before Pilate. He could not. For he was convinced that this God would bring about the great turning-point in favour of Israel and the world. He was condemned as a political troublemaker and crucified with two bandits (very probably on April 30 CE). His disciples had fled. However, some women disciples were braver, and witnessed the crucifixion from afar.[30]

Apparently, everything had failed. The messianic promises, neither under the figure of Elijah nor the presence of the Son of man, made sense to a community traumatized by the ignominious death of its teacher.[31]

The modern exegesis of the Third Quest had also underlined the traumatic character of Jesus' crucifixion:

> Jesus had died. To die on a cross was the most dishonorable death of all. Rejected by the religious leaders of the 'nation,' delivered to the occupying authorities that the Jews closest to tradition detested, executed by order of the Roman governor who thus humiliated the national pride by crucifying him with the title of 'king of the Jews'... For those who had followed him and, above all, for those who had joined him as disciples, it was truly the end of the expectation they had nurtured for two or three years: the expectation of the conversion of the Jewish masses to a new school of life centered on the heralding of the Kingdom of God, with its most radical demands; but also the hope of the joy that would accompany the fulfillment of prophetic promises. After the horrible epilogue of this drama, the closest disciples, that is, the group of the Twelve without Judas, had been caught by fear and had fled. Fearing that they would be arrested, they hid in a house in Jerusalem, perhaps where Jesus had convened them for his farewell meal.[32]

However, for the post-Enlightenment exegesis,[33] it is even more important to remain in the bewilderment of a community rather than stepping into an untimely celebration of the resurrection. It is necessary to dwell on the grieving of Rabbi Jesus' 'failure' in order to be able to understand his community's 'dispersal', which was the initial reflection of their bewilderment, guilt, and discouragement.

The *resistance* of a small handful of women would soon appear with deep significance. In some disciples, the resistance took the form of a rebellion that enabled a resignification of the life of Jesus. This remembrance would later accompany his grieving and diasporic community in Galilee:

> Some women had shown greater courage: having served Jesus and his closest group of disciples from Galilee and throughout his mission, they followed the soldiers who led Jesus to the cross in order to bear witness to his agony and death from a distance. This was followed by the initiative taken by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus who brought his body down from the cross and hastily placed it in a nearby tomb. They carefully note where the tomb was located because they had to prepare their teacher's funeral rite, anointing his corpse with essential oils. [...] What the woman did not know was that the Temple authorities, pressured by circumstance, violated the prescriptions ruling the Sabbath and the Passover feast, approaching the governor: they wished to obtain his permission for the tomb to be protected. They then took it upon themselves to approach the tomb of Jesus (Mt 27:62-66). The Sabbath, which coincided with Passover, was thus kept in silence. All those who were close to Jesus were deeply anguished. That was the second day of grieving. However, on the morning of the third day...[34]

Against all messianic expectations, the God of Israel spoke His final words in the most paradoxical way that the Jewish people could expect: through a 'crucified messiah.'

The Narratives Regarding the Empty Tomb

In the semantic convergence of the narratives regarding the empty tomb and the appearances of the *Crucified One Who Awakened*, the post-enlightenment exegesis finds the decisive turning point for a new historiographic and theological approach to the sources regarding Jesus of Nazareth.

Considering the limitations of the Enlightenment that marked modern exegesis, there is today a need for a post-enlightenment exegesis. In this regard, John Milbank commented almost three decades ago:

> For this reason, 'orthodox' [post-Enlightenment] theology does not seek to suppress the aporetic core of discourse (except when it is contaminated by a form of metaphysics that did not change its interpretation perspective). However, it remains in the impossible need to determine the indeterminable relationship between near and far, but it does not purport to 'know' this relationship through the power of an isolated representational understanding. On the contrary, it is interpreted according to its own logos of love as the priority of disturbing desire and not as self-denial. Confirmation does not spring here from 'looking' but from surrendering and praxis.[35]

Sustained in postmodern times by an epistemology that conjoins the *historical* event with its *eschatological* dimension, we shall be able to attain a clearer understanding of the "real" Jesus. In other words, it makes it possible to more adequately approach that charismatic personage who radicalized human history with unprecedented *eschatological imagination*. With a marked rationalist perspective, the *Third Quest* was able to reconstruct the historical Jesus throughout the twentieth century in his secular features, bypassing his eschatological condition.

For those of us who subscribe to postmodern decolonial rationality, it will therefore be necessary to re-read the narratives of the empty tomb and the appearances of Jesus as the two inseparable elements that open up an unprecedented semantic field that pertains to theologal faith since they are pointing to the emergence of messianic temporality in the midst of humankind's violent history. It is a "shortening or contraction of time," i.e., a "messianic splinter," but as hope for the victims of all times, as well as for their survivors and, if the perpetrators were to allow themselves to engage in recognizing their crimes, they might become entitled to receive redemption.

Specifically, the paradox, the oxymoron, and the poetic figure—as praxis-oriented and linguistic mediations conveyed by the narratives of the empty tomb and the appearances—will be the linguistic and performative resources that enable us to enter this *eschatological* dimension of history.

The Jesuanic community constructed these linguistic and performative mediations in order to express the horizon of new life that the *Crucified One Who Awakened* offered as a gift.

Redemption—as the source of counter-history operating within the context of a violent history—is a source experience that was later adopted by the emerging Christian communities, not only within a Jewish cultural context but also later within a Greek and Roman context, as fulfillment of the history of redemption materialized in the crucified and risen Jesus.

The survivors of systemic violence of all times may be considered to undergo an analogous experience.

To approach this performative horizon that re-signifies the death of Jesus as *paschal* messianic temporality, our point of departure will be the narrative about the empty tomb contained in the Gospel according to Saint Mark. It is the oldest text of the four canonical Gospels, which describes the initial trauma that the symbolism of an empty tomb imprinted on the grieving Jesuanic community.

It is not an isolated text but rather is linked to a chain of interpretations. It will thus be necessary to understand it in light of another text that precedes it in the chronology of written interpretation. It is found in Pauline literature, outside the Gospel accounts, addressing the appearances of the *Crucified One Who Awakened* Peter, the Eleven, and other witnesses. It gives an account of an experience of Jesus' absence-presence as "the living one" in the midst of his community who were withdrawing. We refer to the account in 1 Cor 15, written by Saint Paul around the years 50-52 C.E. for the community of Corinth which, in a Hellenistic context, believed they belonged to the *aeon* inaugurated by Jesus of Nazareth, considered as the Messiah and Son of God by the Pauline communities that had received the breeze of divine Ruah.

This "proto-Pauline creed"[36] will be the other indispensable element with which to interpret the empty tomb, which is also evoked in the other Gospels. The accounts of Jesus' appearances will also be articulated with this narrative.

The stance held by several exegetes of the Third Quest highlighted the impossibility of verifying what actually happened to the body of Jesus. The exegetes, therefore, were of the opinion that it was necessary to refer it only to the *theological* meaning given by the New Testament narratives that refer to the sign of a new life.

However, today, as part of what some already consider the Fourth Quest, the analysis of other extra-canonical sources, such as Jewish sources, is used in order to deconstruct the idea of the historical Jesus. In this regard, Sanders comments on a book by Geza Vermes, a historian of ancient Judaism that forms part of these new inquiries that underline the charismatic aspect of Paul of Tarsus's "mysticism" beyond the model of historical Jesus:

> Paul, Vermes writes, relied primarily on "heavenly communications and visions" and "deliberately turned his back on the historical figure, the Jesus according to the flesh." Vermes quite correctly emphasizes the importance of the death of Christ for Paul, who concentrated not on the historical figure, or even on "the risen and glorified Lord, but the Jesus who expired on the cross." As in the case of John, Vermes recognizes Paul's distinctive form of mysticism. In his analysis, Christ's death, though he sometimes described as an atoning sacrifice, more importantly provides the opportunity for the believer to participate mystically in that death and thus to leave behind the old sinful life. This mystical death and new life provide the believer "with as it were a ticket for participation in the final real resurrection," which lay in the very near future.[37]

In a close, but nonetheless typically modern sense, Alberto Casalegno, a professor at the Jesuit Graduate School of Philosophy and Theology (FAJE by its acronym in Portuguese) in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, thus highlights the *novelty* of the body of the risen Jesus:

> It is also necessary to emphasize that the assertion that the body of Jesus was not found in the tomb should not lead us to think that his cells will form part of his resurrected body. This body, renewed by the Holy Spirit, does not come from the tomb, but from God, who transforms the physical person of Jesus of Nazareth. It is not possible to state, therefore, that Jesus' body was taken to heaven in the same form in which it was buried. Claiming that on Easter morning the body of Jesus was not found in the tomb, the Gospels say nothing about the fate of Jesus' corpse. Discussing its contribution is an idle matter; its absence represents simple 'signs' of transformation that take place in the person of Jesus, without any possibility of providing greater detail. Therefore, suffice it to say that the empty tomb constitutes a sign 'open' to various interpretations guiding faith in the resurrection, as the exclusive work of God who is faithful to his Covenant.[38]

However, Casalegno's position is insufficient because it leaves out the 'realism' typical of Hebrew anthropology that provides the body (*basar*) with an identity that is crucial to understanding the person. The book of Job, for instance, states: "… yet in my flesh shall I see God" (Job 19: 26b), demonstrating an understanding that the person is always linked to their "corpo-

reality" as being-in-relationship with their neighbor, the cosmos, and their creator, without being reduced to their constitution as a cellular organism.

A revealing sample of this "other" anthropology of the body—an ancient Hebrew sample rather than a modern one—can be seen in the surprising description by the contemporary Jewish thinker Raphael Draï:

> In the biblical account, man and woman are not led to unite spontaneously. This union will occur after the departure from Eden with the shock of consciousness that it produced (Gen 4:1). From this first mating—it is not yet possible to speak of union—two beings will emerge, designated—but not named—by the successive terms: Cain and Abel. These two beings will not be able to co-exist, nor will their bodies be able to stand each other. Cain will kill Abel. It will be only with the birth of a third offspring—their first true child—that Adam and Eve will have recovered from the original union of having formed a single confused and protoplasmic flesh, "one flesh—One unified and unifying flesh *(basar eh'ad)* —giving birth to another being that received the original characteristics of *hadaam* when it was created by divine choice: *tselem* and *demuth.* This is what happens with the birth of Chet [Seth], expressly called *ben*, i.e., son, with a proper name, a *chem* (Gn, 4:25 and 5:3). It will be only at that moment that human orientation is modified: going from a terrestrial or telluric gravitation *(erets* and then *adamah*) to a celestial tropism, *chamaym*.[39]

In a sense that differs from this Hebrew anthropology, Western exegesis had centered the resurrection theology on an idea of the body as a biological organism. Following this bias, when discussing the resurrection of Jesus, the Third Quest was only able to verify the historiographical data limited to the literal nature of the text about the empty tomb, without being able to go beyond an understanding of the *meaning* of the text:

> We are left with the secure historical conclusion: the tomb was empty, and various 'meetings' took place not only between Jesus and his followers (including at least one initial sceptic) but also in at least one case (that of Paul; possibly, too, that of James also), between Jesus and people who had not been among his followers. I regard this conclusion as coming in the same sort of category, of historical probability so high as to be virtually certain, as the death of Augustus in AD 14 or the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70.[40]

In the next section of this chapter, we shall see the counterpoint of the accounts of the empty tomb, i.e., the narratives of the appearances of the Crucified-Risen One. In the meantime, we shall follow Saint Mark the Evangelist in reconstructing what took place—from our phenomenological perspective—after the women's initial shock upon finding an empty tomb.

Given that the Gospel of Saint Mark was the first to be written, perhaps after AD 70, it is a valuable text to trace the beginning of the *grieving* of the community that was orphaned after the crucifixion of the Galilean.

The "abrupt ending"[41] of the short version of the Gospel of Saint Mark has been one of the most widely discussed themes of twentieth-century exegesis of the historical Jesus. At stake in that discussion was the search for a "verifiable" substratum of the resurrection—in an eminently empirical sense—or the denial of all historical sustenance.

The state of the matter was presented by Rafael Aguirre Monasterio, a renowned Spanish exegete, highlighting the textual arguments in the open-ended Gospel of Saint Mark:

> There is no consensus on the reason for the ending in 16:8 or on the value and origin of the other endings [...] Actually, the authenticity of the ending in 16:8 is supported by the authority of the manuscripts that testify to it and by the fact that it is *lectio difficilior*, which explains the appearance of the other endings, since, when the copyists did not understand the meaning of the end in 16:8, they would add a short or long text one or both in order to provide the end of the story with a more logical meaning [...] The most likely explanation is that the work has an open ending, like Acts of the Apostles, in order to invite the reader to "go to Galilee and see" the Risen One there (see R. Pesch).[42]

If, from the point of view of modern textual criticism, researchers reach a consensus regarding the abrupt ending of the Gospel of Saint Mark, with the scene of the women's *shock*, that does not prevent pursuing the *theological* question about the meaning of that ending that leaves the reader in a state of suspense.

The post-Enlightenment exegetical studies are precisely in line with identifying the text's *performative* force. In other words, the end of the Gospel of Saint Mark has a practical function that consists of awakening in both

the believers and the believing community a praxis of following the words and deeds of Jesus, as expressed in Galilee:

> Mark has an abrupt end. The women, astonished, depart and flee. The text reports us that they said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid. That seems to have been a temporary silence, considering the parallel [accounts]. What Mark is emphasizing is the astonished and overwhelming reaction to the resurrection. At first, there is an almost paralyzing fear. In Mark, there is a theme regarding the presence of faith, leading to an opportunity for faith (Mk 4:41; 5:15; 33:36; 6:50; 10:32-34). This is the theme that the ending evokes, leading the reader to make a choice about the heralding of the resurrection.[43]

Furthermore, thanks to semiotic studies, we know that the "open work"—typical of the abrupt ending of the Gospel of Saint Mark—is a rhetorical strategy that characterizes ancient literature, which can also be traced in other biblical accounts. In addition, as Paulette Skiba recalls, this abrupt ending has a narrative function: "The 'shocking' ending serves a purpose: it calls the reader to further reflect on the story and on the meaning of discipleship."[44]

Let's keep in mind that the *performative* purpose of the Gospel of Saint Mark will remain linked to other elements of the gestating community—such as the neophytes' catechumenate, the initiation rites for converts, and the celebration of the sacraments for the fledgling community—that will provide primitive Christianity with a profile of its own, once it splits from Judaism[45] as a new religious practice.

With this chronological reconstruction of the foundational accounts of faith in the resurrection of Jesus, we can confirm that there is an initial source that refers to the empty tomb, but that was later incorporated into late accounts by the Evangelists already imprinted by paschal faith. Very soon the interpretation that believes in the resurrection of Jesus appeared through the accounts of the appearances, which became an inseparable correlate for the gestating Christian tradition of the narratives regarding the empty tomb.

As we have already said, it should be kept in mind that the proto-Pauline account of the appearances chronologically precedes the history of writing the account of the empty tomb. Indeed, the oldest known text of the resurrection is 1 Cor 15, which contains a pre-Pauline creed of accounts of Jesus' appearances, the original form and date of writing of which are unknown. We only know that Saint Paul's letter was written around the year 53 A.D., just a couple of decades after Jesus' crucifixion, twenty years before the Mar-

kan account of the empty tomb, which gives it chronological and semantic precedence of central importance to reconstructing the semiotics of faith in the resurrection.

The Accounts of the Appearances of the Crucified One Who Awakened as Symbolic of Messianic Time

How can we read the *novum* of the original experience that brings with it the event of Jesus' Easter? Is it possible for the late-modern rationality of today to gain access to the meaning of the messianic temporality inaugurated by the *Crucified One Who Awakened*, according to the theologal faith of the nascent Christian Church?

If the Third Quest only went halfway in its claim to objectively know—through strictly documentary analysis of historiographical sources—the historical and eschatological meaning of the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, it was due to the fact that the importance of other narratives that reflected a different epistemology from the modern one was ignored. How can we then find an interpretation that accounts for the performative character of Christianity's founding narratives? How can we reconstruct the meaning of the narratives regarding the empty tomb and the appearances in such a way as to allow us to "live as survivors" with an eschatological hope analogous to that of the grieving Christian community?

Wolfhart Pannenberg was one of the systematic theologians of the twentieth century who, in our opinion, best translated the *anticipatory novelty* of Jesuanic eschatology, linking it to the early Christian tradition. He wrote:

> While, in the situation in which Jesus announced his message, the imminence of God's eschatological future was the reason for the urgency of the call to convert to him, after Easter the motive of the message of reconciliation and redemption brought about by the death and resurrection of Jesus prevailed in its place. Subsequently, the foundation of salvation would be further receded, linking itself to the incarnation of the redeemer. This development must be seen in line with the anticipated presence of the salvific future that already characterizes the message and action of Jesus. [...] Both motives converge in the idea of the Incarnation, which is the prolectic revelation of salvation in the midst of the not yet consummated history of the world as an expression of the

> manifestation of the eternal Son of God in the earthly history of Jesus, perceptible in the light of the Easter event.[46]

Indeed, Pannenberg's master idea about Jesuanic eschatology is the *prolepsis* or *messianic anticipation* that Jesus of Nazareth experienced with his messianic community, which the nascent Church later received as the nucleus of his primordial announcement. Theissen and Merz also comment:

> W. Pannenberg's concern is to show the probability of the New Testament message of the resurrection of Jesus as a historical event [*Systematische Theologie* II, 385-405]. To achieve this he formulates three postulates which modify the modern picture of the world in such a way that it becomes compatible with belief in the resurrection. The postulate of universal history: history as a purposive process can be understood only as a totality. But the whole can only be surveyed in the light of the end. The key to universal history would therefore be an event in which the end is anticipated (prolepsis). If the modern understanding of history becomes aware of its implicit presuppositions, it is open to proleptic end-events – though their ultimate verification is still to come. [...] These three postulates are combined with a historical analysis of the sources in which the Easter event is attested historically by 'visions,' which Pannenberg attempts to demonstrate as probably having a trans-subjective content, and by the 'empty tomb,' which provides confirmation independently of that. Easter faith verifies a general apocalyptic horizon of expectation (relating to universal history). In it what universal history is about becomes clear.[47]

This *proleptic* perspective of history noted by Pannenberg corresponds to what Giorgio Agamben described—in postmodern times, when he comments on Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans—as *messianic time* in terms of redemptive anticipation. It also refers to that "kairological temporality" that Heidegger thought of as being-for-death. However, in History, it is expressed as "the time that remains is very short" (ὁ καιρὸ ς συνεσταλμένος ἐστίν /*ho kairós synestálmenos estín*), according to Saint Paul's key expression in 1 Cor 7:29, quoted above.

The Easter *novum* thus denotes access to a new experience of temporality, seen through a messianic lens of the *intensification of redemption* based on the lives surrendered by the righteous in history. It, therefore, seems that Theissen and Merz's argument to refer to the reality of the Easter event is not deep enough when they state:

> The basic question is: should the Easter event be interpreted with analogies from our world of experience – or as an unparalleled breakthrough of something 'wholly other' should it widen that world? This alternative would be less sharp if there were a reason for leaving the world of our analogies from experience in particular when confronted with the Easter faith. There is one such reason: Easter is a grappling with death. In the resurrection of Jesus an enigmatic power manifests itself which overcomes death. Now we have no experience of death, but only of life to the point of death. Our understanding of analogies from the world of experience is a priori limited to phenomena from this world of experience. Where, as in death, we leave it and enter realms beyond the world of our experience, we are inevitably left stranded by analogies to our experience. Just as we cannot penetrate death with analogies from experiences of our world, so we cannot understand the power of the Easter event to overcome death by means of them. This power either breaks into our life without analogy - or it is not what it seems to be. In so far as it towers into life, it is meaningful to seek analogous visions and extranormal information beyond death. But in so far as it towers into our world from beyond the frontier of death, our analogies must necessarily fail.[48]

Precisely because our world is not only empirical but also unfolds in *other* registers of temporality, it is necessary to retrieve the notion of *messianic time,* that master idea of Hebrew revelation that was secularized by the modern political philosophy of Walter Benjamin and his Latin-American readers. In addition, if the resurrection only denoted "the wholly other," without being based on historical experience, it would have no relevant meaning for the lives of the survivors of all times.

It is therefore a question of envisioning history's *theologal* ground, certainly seen from its reverse as negativity, but where God's redemption is at work. A ground of *glory* in the midst of mundane power, which Giorgio Agamben has retrieved in his postmodern political thinking through his theological archaeology of politics:

> Philosophy and the science of politics have omitted to pose the questions that appear decisive in every way, whenever the techniques and strategies of government and power are analyzed, from a genealogical and functional perspective: Where does our culture draw the criterion of politicality-mythologically and in fact? What is the substance—or the procedure, or threshold—that allows one to confer on something

> a properly political character? The answer that our investigation suggests is: glory, in its dual aspect, divine and human, ontological and economic, of the Father and the Son, of the people-substance and the people-communication. The people—whether real or communicational—to which in some sense the *government by consent* and the *oikonomia* of contemporary democracies must hark back, is, in essence, acclamation and *doxa*.[49]

In this regard, Pannenberg's argument about *prolepsis* as messianic anticipation of the plenitude of God's Kingdom seems more radical. It is a promise of redemption that acts effectively in history through the proleptic or 'anticipatory' actions of the community of believers.

In addition, and no less relevant, Theissen and Merz's argument is lacking a core actor: the communities that grieve and resist. They are the counterparts of those who have departed: the Jesuanic community and the communities of survivors of global violence. This empirical fact will be the foundational analogy that we shall return to in the next section of this chapter for a *messianic* understanding of the resurrection of the righteous and Our Righteousness, which affects our lives, giving rise to a *performative* dimension of resistance, dignity, and hope.

The Grieving of Women: On Silence, Tears, and the Announcement of What is to Come

The biblical exegesis derived from the Third Quest used to validate the *messianic* nature of women's grieving, as described in the original Markan narrative, as a textual trace of a Markan community persecuted due to its conflict with the Roman and Jewish authorities in Galilee.[50] In this context, the accounts of the appearances in the Gospel of Saint Mark would be texts added later by a second editor.

Furthermore, what the author of the short version of the empty tomb states in the second Gospel is the currency of the 'messianic secret'—present throughout his work—particularly at peak moments such as Peter's confession of faith in Caesarea Philippi and, as a culminating point, at the moment of the denouement of the burial of Jesus.

According to modern rhetorical analysis, Mark the Evangelist would keep the messianic secret in this narrative in suspense through the triple attitude of the grieving women: shock, silence, and disobedience. We shall briefly explore this.

The narrative plot of Saint Mark the Evangelist about the resurrection is *perplexity* as faith's point of departure: first, the disciples abandon their teacher; then, the women actively seek to embalm the corpse; and, finally, shock arises from the failure of these two testimonies (that of the disciples and the women). All this moves the reading community to a follow-up praxis, marked by a 'search-find' dyad:

> The group of women leads to a significant development throughout the narrative of Mk 16:1-8. It is first described as an active narrative figure, with clear intentionality [to buy the oils with which to embalm Jesus' body]. Then, a passive, even reactive dimension is imposed on the narrative [...] Such frustration is linked to a central dynamic of the narrative that consists of *searching and finding* [...] Even the message of the resurrection (vv. 6-7) –and not simply the discovery of the empty tomb– does not possess the power to elicit an attitude of faith, because they are paralyzed by silence and fear. The plot of the second Gospel might be summarized as a series of misunderstandings.[51]

Although, as we have already noted, the plot of the Gospel of Saint Mark sheds light on the performative nature of the actions aimed to achieve adherence, we need to focus on another dimension that is intimately related to the grieving process of a community that has lost its teacher. Therefore, it is necessary to resort to other elements of analysis as we shall see below.

On the Trembling and Fearful Women

The women's 'fearfulness' is a translation of the Greek term *ekstasis* which refers to a state of mind of 'being outside of oneself,' due to a physical or psychic trauma. This term is also used in the Hellenistic literature of the first century C.E. to describe moments of loss, grieving, and trauma, as well as states of disruption of ordinary consciousness due to experiencing the sublime.[52]

The *Anchor Bible's* commentary on Mk 16:8, "trembling and fearful," emphasizes the affective state of the women's reaction to a theophany or angelophany, with its biblical parallels in the First Testament:

> *Trembling and astonishment had taken hold of them*. Gk *eichen gar autas tromos kai ekstasis*. On fear as a typical biblical reaction to a theophany or angelophany [...] For trembling (*tromos*) and the cognate verb in par-

> ticular, see Exod 15:15-16; 1 Ezra 4:36; Ps 104:32; Dan 4:37; 6:26; 10:11; 2 Macc 15:23; 4 Macc 4:10. For astonishment (*ekstasis*) see Gen 15:12; 1 Sam 14:15; 2 Chron 14:14; 15:5; Zech 14:13. The latter word often has a negative connotation –the evil are shocked by God's punishment– but sometimes nuance of godly fear, as in Ps 30:1 and 31:22, and Dan 7:28. In Gen 15:12, moreover, as Wilfand points out, Abraham responds to a covenant-inaugurating theophany with *ekstasis* ("astonishment") and *phobos* ("fear", see Mk 16:8), and in Dan 7:28 Daniel's visions cause *ekstasis* but are not revealed to outsiders. See also Dan 10:7 Theod., in which *ekstasis* falls on the men present at Daniel's vision, who flee in fear (*kai ephygon en phobo*).[53]

In a second moment, the quoted biblical commentary offers an exegetical interpretation that underscores the importance of the historical context regarding the Roman persecution reflected in the text, written precisely by an author who forms part of a persecuted community. This can be useful in order to understand the context of adversity, but not necessarily to grasp the original sense of experience in the text itself. We shall again look at the already cited biblical commentary:

> A Markan ending at 16:8, moreover, would correspond to characteristic Markan concerns about faith, fear and silence. Fear, and specifically anxiety about the persecution that may result from proclamation of the Christian message, seem to be a concern for the Markan community, whose emotional state is probably mirrored by the picture in 4:35-41 of storm-tossed disciples, surrounded by darkness and rising waves, and afraid that they are about to perish. An ending at 16:7-8 which dispenses with describing resurrection appearances, simultaneously reflects this fear, affirms Jesus' resurrection, and leaves room for doubt, thereby corresponding to the situation of a Christian community that believes in the Easter kerygma but has not seen the risen Jesus with its own eyes (see John 20:29).[54]

This description of the Markan narrative represents an initial terminological approach to the narrative, which is undoubtedly useful but insufficient because we need to understand the *anthropological* meaning—using a *messianic* lens—of such a grieving state to find its *theologal* ground, capable of touching the lives of other grieving communities.

Secondly, as part of the Gospel's narrative structure, it should be noted that the women's 'silence' contrasts with the messenger's loquaciousness. He

is the one who leads the conversation with the women, as a sign of the *novelty* of the event that he is communicating. Today's exegetes insist that this is a rhetorical resource used by the messenger: "Don't be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him" (Mk 16:6). According to rhetorical analysis, as we have already noted, this phrase is characteristic of the argumentative style of that time, to elicit a response from the listeners.

To us, however, what seems most important to retrieve, precisely in this part of the narrative, is the *performative* function of the young man's dialogue: "But go, tell His disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see Him, as He told you.' This message is in contrast with the women's passivity, silence, and bewilderment, who do not know how to verbalize what is taking place: "So the women left the tomb and ran away, trembling and bewildered. And in their fear they did not say a word to anyone..." (v. 8).

The women's 'disobedience' has already been highlighted by feminist Third Quest authors such as Joan L. Mitchell.[55] According to this interpretation, the women of Jesus' group did not comply with the messenger's order, request, or, in any case, instruction to go and inform the disciples and Peter for a specific reason: revealing the role women played in the Jesuanic community in Jerusalem, in which Mary of Magdala[56] occupied a relevant position, diverging from the communities under Peter's influence.

This hypothesis about the power struggles between James's community and Peter's community—or even those initiated by Paul and Luke in Asia Minor—is certainly important to understand how patriarchy was instituted in early Christianity. However, it distracts us from our focus, which lies precisely in retrieving the anthropological and *messianic* meaning of the women's testimony in the narratives regarding the empty tomb and the appearances of the *Crucified One Who Awakened*. The importance of this retrieval lies in the fact that we are searching for a meaning that may be germane to other grieving communities that also face the annihilation of the innocent.

So far, the information of the Third Quest has allowed us to reconstruct what took place at the empty tomb according to the Markan narrative, using the available documentary sources and contextual information.

The most significant aspect of our ongoing inquiry goes beyond the bewilderment the women felt upon facing the empty tomb on Easter morning because the 'stupor' intimates something more. The narrative does not stop there but rather opens up to suspense: the Gospel of Saint Mark concludes with the women's silence before a mission with which they had been entrusted. This will have to be interpreted and re-signified.

A New Perspective: Women's Grieving as Part of the Easter Kerygma

The research carried out by Carmen Bernabé Ubieta and other feminist exegetes and theologians regarding women's role in the proclamation of the Easter kerygma is a crucial contribution. Bernabé Ubieta summarizes her hypothesis as follows:

> [...] If we focus on the effectual plausibility that has left an imprint on traditions, as well as the contextual plausibility, we shall perceive the undeniable existence of a historical core: several women disciples (or maybe only Mary Magdalene) go to the tomb to mourn and have a revealing experience through which they learn that crucified Jesus was not there, that he had risen. An in-depth exploration of the grieving rites and, above all, the wailing that forms part of these rites, can help us to delve more deeply into the theme in order to understand more clearly how these women were at the origin of the kerygmatic tradition.[57]

In the first place, it should be noted that only 'a trace' of the grieving rites practiced by the women in Jesus' group appear in the New Testament narratives. This is probably due to the divergences between Mary of Magdala's and Peter's leadership in the Jerusalemite community, which was later resolved in favor of Peter as can be seen in the Gospel of Saint Luke and the Book of Acts and even reaches Saint Paul.

Secondly, it is worth highlighting the importance of *oral* tradition as revealed in the accounts of the appearances. This tradition has the necessary elements that make women's grieving a constitutional aspect of the historical memory of the Jesuanic community that experienced the process of configuring the faith in the resurrection as a *revelation* experience.

Finally, another valuable element was the archaeological research carried out in recent decades, which has enabled us to witness the existence of grief rituals—led by women—in the tombs of the first century C.E., particularly in regions where the burial of Jesus was worshipped since the beginning.

In addition, the historiographical reconstruction of the role women played in the Jesuanic community became consolidated with social anthropology analyses about the role grieving played in the remembrance of the deceased in the Hebrew and Greek culture of those times.

All these elements allow us to state with full plausibility the decisive role that women played in Jesus' community—through grief rituals, tears, memory, and oral tradition—in the configuration of the faith in the resurrection condensed in the Easter kerygma: "the Crucified One Who Awakened."

We shall only briefly evoke here what happened to the Jesuanic community after the experience of the empty tomb faced by the women and some disciples as a correlation of the messianic community's grieving experience. This will be the subject of future inquiries.

In the meantime, we should keep in mind that the four Evangelists contain accounts of the appearances, although in different and sometimes even contradictory versions. In fact, these experiences of encounter with the *Crucified One Who Awakened* are the beginning of a new faith that we know as faith in the resurrection of the dead, and that emerged as a reinterpretation of Messianic Judaism.

This is how Theissen and Merz summarize the birth of "Messianic Judaism":

> After his death Jesus appeared first either to Peter or to Mary Magdalene, then to several disciples together. They became convinced that he was alive. Their expectation that God would finally intervene to bring about salvation had been fulfilled differently from the way for which they had hoped. They had to reinterpret Jesus' whole fate and his person. They recognized that he was the Messiah, but he was a suffering Messiah, and that they had not reckoned with a Crucified Messiah. They remembered that Jesus had spoken of himself as 'the man' – specifically when he was confronted with excessively high hopes in himself. He had given the general term 'man' a messianic dignity and hoped that he would grow into the role of this 'man' and would fulfil it in the near future. Now they saw that he was 'the man' to whom according to a prophecy in Dan. 7 God would give all power in heaven and on earth. For them Jesus took a place alongside God. Christian faith had been born as a variant of Judaism: a messianic Judaism which only gradually separated from its mother religion in the course of the first century.[58]

While the Third Quest's interpretation of the emergence of faith in the resurrection as an expression of messianic Judaism is very valuable, we now need to go further to retrieve the *original* meaning of this form of messianism. Textual analysis is not enough to achieve this. It is necessary to resort to other rationalities present in the world of the Bible.

In fact, the question regarding the *theological* meaning of the resurrection remained open after more than a century of prolific research about the historical Jesus. Indeed, modern theologians, who depended excessively on

this enlightened rationality, came to a dead end, unable to account for the eschatological *novum* inaugurated by Jesus' Easter:

> The resurrection of Jesus who had been executed on the cross, which is unanimously asserted by the New Testament, runs counter to the modern picture of the world. Measured by Troeltsch's axioms of historical method, the resurrection of Jesus cannot be a historical event: it is by definition without analogy in history; it has no cause within history (and therefore contradicts the principle of correlation), and, as believers understand it, it may not be measured by the criteria of probability, because this would include the recognition that it is possibly not historical. So in translating Easter faith for our time, in principle there are two possibilities: either the Easter event is interpreted in such a way that it can be integrated into the world of modern convictions, or modern premises are modified in the light of the Easter faith. The rationalistic explanations of the empty tomb at the time of the Enlightenment (theft of the body by the disciples, only an apparent death, reburial) and their modern variants (see above, p. 476); the subjective vision theory in liberal theology and the present (see above, pp. 477f., 48If.); and the thoroughgoing view of the resurrection as an interpretation with which we can dispense today (W. Marxsen, H. Braun, D. Solle, et al.), belong to the interpretations of the Easter event within modern premises. The objective vision theory, which assumes that the Easter appearances were brought about by God and reveal an objective state of affairs, and the objective appearance theory, which reckons with real appearances from another world, belong to the interpretations of the Easter event which modify modern premises until they correspond with the Easter faith. We can also put here the approaches by R. Bultmann, K. Barth and W. Pannenberg, which will be discussed as important contributions to the hermeneutics of Easter in the twentieth century.[59]

Due to its 'objectifying' bias of the world, modern exegesis subordinated the Bible's symbolism to the primacy of the text that provides it with narrative and thematic consistency. However, for post-Enlightenment exegesis —such as that expounded by Carmen Bernabé and contemporary feminist exegesis—it is a question of rediscovering a process of revelation that was understood by ancient and medieval theology, drawing on other sources such as liturgy and early Christian sacred art. Because it is important to remember that Scripture's narrative traditions are not only those that are explicitly indicated in the textual words of biblical narratives but rather we

must know how to "read between the lines"—that ancient sense of the Latin *inte-legere* held by people in the Middle Ages, as a cross-cutting and thematic reading of the Bible—Hebrew symbolism that crosses it from the beginning to the end.

Following the intentionality of our own reading of Saint Mark's narrative, the process of *belief-infused grieving* that the women of Jesus' group experienced in a major way—who rushed to the tomb to embalm their *rabbi*'s body, "the Righteous One who has been annihilated"—appears as a backdrop in Saint Mark's narrative of the empty tomb.

The first thing we retrieve from historical-critical and narrative exegesis is that the most relevant announcement of the entire history of Jesus of Nazareth—his death and Easter—is of such *novelty* that it requires a new language. Neither the women nor the other disciples and apostles were able to articulate in words what had happened to them.

It was necessary to experience communally—amid tensions and conflicts of interpretation—the process of assimilating the absence-presence of the slain Jesus in order to understand what had happened to the *rabbi*. From this point of departure, this group of grieving Galileans was also able to begin to understand what they were going through as a Jesuanic community in disarray.

Following the testimony of the appearances narrated by the four Evangelists and by the writer of the Acts of the Apostles, this grieving process took place during the flight to Galilee,[60] with a central lens through which the events were interpreted: re-reading the Scriptures and breaking bread in memory of their teacher Jesus. This is how Saint Luke masterfully narrated the story of the disciples of Emmaus:

> When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us? (24:30-32).[61]

To summarize, if we read the narratives of the empty tomb and the appearances as a grieving process experienced by the Jesuanic community, we shall more clearly understand the original experience of the messianic time that gave birth to the Church as an eschatological community due to the memory of the survivors of the Righteous One Who Was Annihilated. A memory that became a *midrashic* writing of the final arrival of the "Son of Man," paradoxically but effectively, in the life of Jesus of Nazareth, through

his execution on a cross and his Easter experienced as a retrieval and glorification fulfilled by his *Abba*.

In the light of that remembrance of the Galilean as the Righteous One, victimized by sacrificial violence but salvaged by his *Abbá*—a remembrance that was undertaken by the grieving Jesuanic community—the experience of absence-presence was translated into the followers' performative praxis. Paradoxically, that scattered community came together again, now as a *messianic* community seeking to experience eschatological time.

Finally, remembering Jesus' "words and deeds," the nascent Church was able to confess that "the Crucified One Awoke" was "the first-born from the dead," thus finding meaning in their grieving.

Corollary:
The Empty Tomb as a Christian Midrash of Jacob's Well

As a corollary to this chapter, we shall re-read the Markan account of the empty tomb through a different lens, as a postmodern *midrash*.

The Burial of Jesus

We shall first revisit the reconstruction of the death and resurrection of Jesus proposed by the Third Quest. His crucifixion and death happened on *Shabbat's* eve. This explains his rapid burial without undergoing the traditional washing, cleansing, and anointing of the body, which was probably placed in a common grave, thanks to the intervention of Joseph of Arimathea, "a righteous man" who was not part of Jesus' group, but who took pity on the innocent victim.

The impossibility of complying with the Jewish preparations to bury the dead, made the women wait for the ritual day of rest to pass in order to begin Jesus' funeral ritual, starting on the eve of the holy day: "When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body," (Mk 16:1) claims Saint Mark's account, the oldest source that refers to the tomb where Jesus's body lay. In the next verse he adds: "Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb" (v. 2).

As we saw earlier, it is here that the narratives describe an account of an astonishing experience told by the three women who went to the tomb: the tomb is empty, and the body is not there. The women who went to the tomb formed part of Jesus' group. They became speechless when they saw the empty tomb: "As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed" (v. 5). However, they did not respond to the young man's entreatment: "Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was cruci-

fied. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him." They continued bewildered in the face of the instructions they received. The narrative reads that the young man in front of the empty tomb instructed them: "But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you'" (v. 7).

All the exegetes[62] agree that the original version of Saint Mark's narrative ends abruptly: "Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid…" (v.8).

It is then that the history of how to interpret the shock of the death of an innocent man by a grieving community that had to learn "to re-read the scriptures and break bread" as gestures of the collective memory to understand what had happened to their slain *rabbi*.

A Midrash of the Empty Tomb

We shall recall that this testimony of the tomb of Jesus was also re-read by the other three Evangelists as part of an unceasing *midrashic* re-writing of the history of the Nazarene. However, they did this re-reading in the light of the narratives of the appearances of the Crucified-Risen One reported by some women, disciples, and apostles.

They all bore witness to something *new* and unexpected that had happened to them as a grieving community remembering Jesus, his words, and his deeds. It was part of the process to assimilate his painful absence and, in the midst of that pain, discover glimmers of a novel presence.

It should be kept in mind that *midrash* is a rabbinical technique of a prayerful and receptive reading of the Torah, practiced by the Jewish community since ancient times.[63] It is aimed at finding the latent meanings in the sacred text with the help of Torah teachers. This technique was used by the Jews as part of their training and initiation into the mystery of divine revelation by the Pharisees and was undoubtedly part of the customs of Jesus and his messianic community in the making.

We shall briefly look at a proposal for a midrashic re-reading of the empty tomb discovered by the women. It is about understanding the account of the tomb of Jesus as an extraordinary Christian *midrash* of Jacob's well and the messianic times inaugurated by his Easter.

This intuition was initially set forth a few decades ago by Annick de Souzenelle,[64] the controversial French author. She proposed to interpret the account of the "stone removed" from Jesus' tomb in the light of two signifi-

ers with a deep messianic meaning, i.e., the stone that Jacob removed from the well because of the love he had for Rachel; and the reference to "Galilee" as a place in which the disciples and apostles were to meet *the Crucified One Who Awakened*.

In Hebrew, the root of the verb "to remove" is לְגַלּוֹל (*lig'lol*) and its passive participle גָּלוּל (*galoul*) is related to both terms. In the first place, Jacob's well, which is a symbol of the *gifts* of redemption that, like thirst-quenching water, are offered to Mary of Magdala as the "new Rachel" by the risen Jesus as "the new Jacob." Secondly, Galilee is referred to as the place of full life revelation, corresponding to messianic times.

As the culmination of this whole process, we can recognize that the terminological resonances of the Markan story are convincing by referring to the stone removed from the tomb (from the Hebrew root word *galal*), forming a play on words with the instruction to go to Galilee: the tomb of Jesus is the "door" to enter Galilee as an emblematic place of the Nazarene's words and deeds as the son of man and messiah.

A Christian Midrash of Gen 1:1

There is a third element to consider regarding *midrashic* appropriation. An original event as relevant as the Easter of Jesus was described through other narratives, such as those used, for example, by primitive worship in the Christian liturgy. An ancient Christological title used to name the crucified Jesus present in the community is "the first born from among the dead" / πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν. This title is found in the Christological hymn composed by an anonymous author that Saint Paul includes in his letter to the community of Colossae (Col 1: 18):

> "First born out of the dead" can be interpreted as a parallel to these expressions, what is meant is He who has come out of the dead, that is, He who has risen. "Out of the dead," then, is the description of a special distinguishing attribute of the "first-born," and "first born" as in 1:15, is a designation of rank and thus a (Messianic) royal title.[65]

According to modern exegesis, this proto-Christian hymn from the Letter to the Colossians is also a Christian *midrash*, as Fréderic Manns comments:

> a Christian midrash of Gen 1:1 that was probably composed by a Judeo-Christian educated in the Jewish mentality, who in order to get the

> resurrection of Jesus admitted by his brothers, took up the midrash of Gen 1:1 in order to Christianize it.[66]

It is, thus, a trace of the disciples' grieving that in the pen of an unknown Judeo-Christian author, they are able to re-read the Hebrew scriptures—like the disciples of Emmaus as described in the Gospel of Saint Luke—in an exercise to retrieve the life of Jesus of Nazareth, linking it to the divine Wisdom that accompanies God in the act of creation as narrated in the book of Genesis.

Given that the incipient Christian theology of the first two Christian generations had another method and another epistemology—very different from modern 'objectifying' rationality—it is necessary to retrieve other elements of symbolic narrative to describe the life of Jesus.

The Tomb as a Well

We shall continue exploring the pathway opened by Annick de Souzenelle. Another twentieth-century woman exegete, Annie Jaubert, also commented on the relationship between Jesus' tomb and Jacob's well, seen through the hermeneutic lens of *living water* in Jesus' dialogue with the Samaritan woman, narrated in the fourth Gospel (John 4:14). In the context of the fourth Gospel, there is a scene characteristic of Jesus' confrontation with Jerusalemite Judaism that despised the Samaritans. In this regard, Jaubert comments:

> The water that Jesus would give was, on the contrary, definitive water, the water of messianic times that would never run out, the water that flowed until eternal life. As in the episode of the wedding at Cana where the water of Jewish purification was replaced by the excellent wine offered by Jesus, Jacob's living water would be replaced by the living water of Jesus, the old regime by the new, the spirit of holiness that inspired the Law by the Holy Spirit that Jesus would give when the hour had come.[67]

The *living water* that Jesus offers to the Samaritan woman is, in a few words, a new expression of the eschatological gifts that come from Jacob' well, but now springing "unto eternal life," as a sign of the arrival of messianic times.

The Women's Tears as a Principle of Knowledge

Finally, a fourth element of the *midrashic* reading of Jesus' tomb is the "tears" shed by the women, as part of the aforementioned grief ritual.

In both East and West, since ancient times, reference was made to a "theology of tears" as an eminent mode of knowledge of God and his plan for the cosmos. Mary of Magdala, the first witness of the resurrection, is the main example. For this reason, since ancient times tradition has called her "apostolorum apostola,"[68] i.e., "the apostle of the apostles," since she was in charge of preaching the announcement of the fulfillment of the promises on the morning of Jesus' Easter.

In this spirit, the Desert Fathers in Syria, in the fourth century, celebrated the mystagogic journey with a liturgical hymn—or the initiation into the divine-human mystery—that Jesus of Nazareth unveiled to Mary of Magdala in his resurrection. It was she who, through her tears, better than anyone else understood the *novum* of messianic times. The ancient Syrian hymn was sung as follows:

> On Sunday Mary hastens to the tomb of the Uniquely-Beloved Son.
> While weeping and shedding abundant tears
> Over the Firstborn killed by the wicked,
> She finds the tomb open and an angel sitting by the side.
> He opens his mouth of fire and says joyously to the blessed one,
> "The Son of the King has risen and is seated at the right hand."
> The angels and the spirits on high sing,
> 'Holy are You' to God who is risen from the cave (*Guha*)."[69]

The content of the hymn recreates the ancient Syrian melody, using a new metric in the modern English version. However, above all, the hymn's content provides an account of the *theological* meaning of the empty and, at the same time, open tomb: the signification movement that circulates between Mary of Magdala's tears, the words of the angel with his mouth of fire and the announcement of the glory that accompanies He who returns from *Sheol,* transforms the tomb into a well.

Notice that the hymn no longer calls Jesus' tomb a tomb, but refers to it as a *cave*, or *Guha* in Syrian. A powerful ancient Christian oxymoron to re-signify the path that Jesus followed to go *Sheol* where, on Holy Saturday, he went "to seek Adam and Eve, to bring them to new life." A symbol that the liturgy of Holy Saturday or the "good news" is still today celebrated by the Syro-Malankara liturgy, in southern India, to denote that *hollowness* that

has been transformed from being a place where the dead lie, to become a passage to the underworld, from which the *Crucified One Who Awakened* returns accompanied by the righteous in history.

This hymn has endured until our times, as a precious lens through which to interpret the empty tomb, sung before dawn on the first day of the week, in the middle of the night, by the monks of the Kurisumala Ashram, in Kerala.[70]

The Descent into Hell through the Guha

A final element of this *midrashic* reading of Jesus' tomb is the "descent into hell" on Holy Saturday, the day in which the ancient liturgy commemorates Jesus' burial.

It is no longer a narrative element of the Gospels, but rather of the *Symbolum Apostolorum*[71] which the Western Christian tradition attributed to the apostles. Its earliest version dates back to the Roman baptismal liturgy of around 200 C.E.: "*Passus sub Pontio Pilatus, crucifixus, murtuus, et sepultus, descendit ad inferos, tertia diem resurrexit a mortuis, ascendit ad caelos, sedet ad dexteram Patris omnipotens, inde venturus est iudicare vivos et mortuos*."

This primitive creed is not the result of doctrinal debates in contexts of heresies such as the versions of Nicaea and Constantinople, as Sarot and Van Wieringen[72] emphasize, but of sacramental practices, which gives it a unique character in creating the nucleus of the Christian faith.

The article *descendit ad inferos* of the *Symbol of the Apostles* denotes with crystal clarity the ultimate meaning of the empty tomb, which came to the West through the influence of the Eastern Church:[73] no longer only as Jacob's well of messianic times, but as a gateway to *Sheol* or the underworld where the righteous and the innocent who have been executed lie captive.

It is, therefore, the last link we have to unite ancient Christianity with the primitive stories of the empty tomb, in order to find the course of the logic of redemption that has been carried out by Jesus, from the radicality of his death on the cross, with the messianic "uprising" that his resurrection meant.

For this reason, Holy Saturday is a precious *interval* of the drama of redemption. A pause and an ineffable silence so as not to lose the thread of messianic temporality that takes place with Jesus' Easter. The empty tomb can then be re-signified as a cave (*Guha*), a passageway through which Jesus as the "son of man," enters to rescue all humankind, represented by our first parents, Adam and Eve.

The ancient theology of Christian symbols thus perceived the importance of this article from the *Apostles' Creed*:

> According to Jean Daniélou, 'the descent to Hell was a theme of crucial importance for Judaic Christianity' (1,233) and as Henry Chadwick observes, as mentioned in the Song of Solomon, written towards the end of the first century, 'the descent to Hell is a decisive moment of the redemption process" (1970, 268). It was in Sheol, Hades or Hell that the souls of the righteous and the pure, of the persecuted and martyred Jews, awaited the final liberation they had been promised. It was there that Jesus descended through burial, to free *those who slept*—as they were called—leading them in a triumphant resurrection and a joint ascension. However, as important as this episode was at one time, it can be stated that it was not even mentioned in the New Testament (Dalton 1965) and there are only signs of its presence in the brief statement of the apostolic creed that 'he descended into Hell'."[74]

In this way, the early Christian tradition thus kept alive and active the understanding of the work of redemption as a universal and *trans-historical* process: not only in terms of the future that was 'anticipated' with the first fruits of the Crucified-Risen One, but the past that had been redeemed from the contradiction of death by the Messiah as the son of man who descends into Hell.