

Editorial

“The Lamb Who Was Slain”

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Published in *Global Missiology*, www.globalmissiology.org, April 2024

“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain,
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might
and honor and glory and blessing!”

So rang out “the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice,” the Apostle John described (Revelation 5:11-12). As demonstrated by the living creatures, elders, angels, and “every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them” (5:13) listed in that heavenly scene, the crucified and risen Jesus Christ eminently deserves immeasurable praise and accolades beyond our imagination.

Christians rightly celebrate the risen Jesus’s *victory* over death and the devil. The promised seed of the woman has indeed bruised the head of Satan (Genesis 3:15), he came “to destroy the works of the devil” (I Jn 3:8), and Jesus’s followers are thus assured that “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet” (Romans 16:20). Paul also wrote, “Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (I Corinthians 15:57), prompting some Christian traditions to emphasize the *victorious* side of Christian living.

At the same time, “Worthy is the Lamb *who was slain*,” John recorded (emphasis added). John also reported how the risen Jesus directed incredulous Thomas to examine his *scars* rather than more glamorous aspects of his miraculous glorified body: “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side” (John 20:27). Among the best-known messianic prophecies is the depiction in Isaiah, “He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:3). Jesus was made “perfect through suffering” and thus became our “merciful and faithful high priest ... able to help those who are being tempted” (Hebrews 2:10, 17-18).

Of course, Christ’s, as well as his followers’, suffering and victory are not mutually exclusive, either-or realities. Jesus did not *only* suffer and die, nor did he somehow *only* victoriously rise from the dead. Christians both humbly reflect on Christ’s suffering and joyously celebrate his resurrection. Lent and Passion Week are complete only with Easter Sunday, and vice versa.

The fact of the matter is, however, that we Christians, both as individuals and as traditions, can tend to emphasize either suffering or victory, either sobriety or joy, at the expense of the other. Our Christological sensibilities are related: either Jesus’s painful suffering and crucifixion or his glorious resurrection and reign get more attention than the other. Surely such a costly over-emphasis, one way or the other, is due to our experience, history, and context. To generalize, those Christians whose lives have been relatively comfortable, whose heritages have been in socio-economic-political ascendancy, and whose current context is relatively privileged tend to focus on Jesus’s honor, glory, and omnipotent reign. In contrast, Christians who have experienced an inordinate amount of suffering, whose ancestries have been marked by socio-economic-political subordination, and whose current context has them facing systemic barriers gravitate toward Jesus’s suffering, humility, and empathy. While the latter type also emphasize Jesus’s victory and

power in order to overcome adversity, the former can all too easily neglect his suffering, pain, and weakness due to their own inexperience of such realities.

Such generalizations are difficult to substantiate apart from extensive research, but everyone can at least self-examine—both individually and regarding one’s church tradition—based on their own experience, history, and context. Speaking personally, both my church heritage and I generally fall (with some notable exceptions in previous generations) in the former category described just above: comfortable, ascendant, and privileged. Christologically speaking, our focus has been more on the glorious, reigning Jesus—who suffered and died, to be sure, but who currently rules the world in majesty and controls all aspects of life. Hymns and worship songs have been in major keys, with lyrics largely directed toward divine omnipotence and majesty. To be sure, sobering hymns such as “O Sacred Head” have made an occasional appearance, and the mostly minor key “What Child Is This” has sometimes come up during Advent. More prominent, however, have been such stirring and inspirational selections as “Great Is Thy Faithfulness,” “Praise to the Lord, the Almighty,” “Jesus Shall Reign Where’er the Sun,” and “Joy to the World.” (I will leave it to you to consider musical characteristics of more contemporary and other genre of Christian songs.)

My heritage and I, and others like us, need to be reminded that the Jesus whom we worship and follow is “the Lamb *who was slain*,” as John’s account in Revelation 5 clearly depicts him. Somehow the crucified and risen Jesus still bears, and apparently will forever bear, the scars from the horrific wounds inflicted on him when he was crucified. He is a “merciful and faithful high priest ... able to help those who are being tempted” because he, too, has lived in human weakness and been exposed to temptation. Jesus Christ, glorified and reigning as he is, also knows all about minority status, socio-economic-political subordination, and systemic barriers and prejudices.

The articles in this issue of *Global Missiology* help point to Christ as both crucified and risen, as the one who knows suffering and who reigns in majesty. Jim Harries’ article, on what missionaries can learn from anthropologists’ approach to understanding people, includes analyses of underlying abuses of power and communication in cross-cultural relationships; all these realities hint towards Christ’s gracious work through weakness and pain, frustratingly unredeemed as those struggles still are. Renee Rheinbolt-Urbe examines a Colombian community of Christ that was catalyzed by a North American mission agency’s work—despite all sorts of misaligned priorities and cultural misunderstandings about human relations, gender, and selfhood. The “1619, 1919, and Today” article compares difficult historical and contemporary episodes, within which the crucified and risen Christ was, and is, somehow present and at work. This issue’s two book reviews also open up studies of how the crucified and risen Jesus guides his people in living out the gospel in concrete socio-religious and political contexts.

Having been born into poverty, carried into exile, tempted in every manner, and shaped by unimaginable suffering, Jesus Christ is risen and reigning—scars and all.