



GTU

Berkeley Journal of
Religion and Theology

Berkeley Journal of Religion and Theology

Volume 7, Issue 1

ISSN 2380-7458

Distinguished Faculty Lecture 2020

Haciendo Memoria: Revisiting Our Blessings at the GTU

Author(s): Eduardo C. Fernández, S.J.

Source: *Berkeley Journal of Religion and Theology* 7, no. 1 (2021): 9-19.

Published by: Graduate Theological Union © 2021

Online article published on: December 30, 2021

Copyright Notice:

This file and its contents are copyright of the Graduate Theological Union © 2021. All rights reserved. Your use of the Archives of the *Berkeley Journal of Religion and Theology (BJRT)* indicates your acceptance of the BJRT's policy regarding the use of its resources, as discussed below:

Any redistribution or reproduction of part or all of the contents in any form is prohibited with the following exceptions:

- You may download and print to a local hard disk this entire article for your personal and non-commercial use only.
- You may quote short sections of this article in other publications with the proper citations and attributions.
- Permission has been obtained from the Journal's management for exceptions to redistribution or reproduction. A written and signed letter from the Journal must be secured expressing this permission.

To obtain permissions for exceptions, or to contact the Journal regarding any questions pertaining to further use of this article, please email the Managing Editor at bjrt@ses.gtu.edu.

The *Berkeley Journal of Religion and Theology* aims to offer its scholarly contributions free to the community in furtherance of the Graduate Theological Union's mission.

Haciendo Memoria:

Revisiting Our Blessings at the GTU

Eduardo C. Fernández, S.J.

Graduate Theological Union

Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University

Berkeley, California, U.S.A.

The 45th Distinguished Faculty Lecture, 2020 Graduate Theological Union

Every November since 1976, the GTU's consorial faculty nominates one of its own to be the distinguished faculty lecturer. The laureate embodies the scholarly and teaching excellence, as well as the ecumenical spirit, that characterizes the GTU. The 2020 lecturer is Dr. Eduardo Fernández, SJ, who is Professor of Pastoral Theology and Ministry at the Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University and a core doctoral faculty member of the GTU. Fr. Fernández specializes in Latino theology, Mexican and Southwestern history, social justice and enculturation and the celebration of the sacraments in multicultural contexts. In addition to teaching, he is part of the Wabash Center Colloquy on Race Critical Consciousness.

Berkeley Journal of Religion and Theology, Vol. 7, No. 1

© 2021 by the Graduate Theological Union

"Haciendo Memoria": Theologies and Ideologies

I have entitled tonight's lecture "Haciendo Memoria: Revisiting Our Blessings as the GTU" because I would like to revisit our past. "Haciendo memoria," which in Spanish literally translates as "doing memory," goes beyond making a simple list of past events towards a deeper, richer contemplation of how we have been blessed to be connected with the vision that inspired those who went before us here—those who dared to dream that seekers, Hindus, Buddhists, Jewish people, Christians, Muslims, and people of good will who profess no religious affiliation could *all* study

under one blessed canopy, respectfully listening to one another's experiences of the Sacred, while at the same time working towards renewing the face of the planet, our common home, especially significant now given our current climate crisis, racial tensions, and pandemic.

I hope that tonight's "haciendo memoria" will allow us to celebrate our deep history and legacy of blessings while also allowing us to inquire about where we stand today and where we wish to go tomorrow. First, I will briefly describe what might be called a theology of "haciendo memoria;" then, I will wax nostalgic down Graduate Theological Union Memory Lane, sharing some cherished memories of our community past and present; and finally, we conclude our time travel together tonight with reflections on our diversity, unity, and commitment to service as blessings of our legacy as well as spaces for growth that now invite us to forge a stronger, even more blessed future together.

As anyone who has ever taken a class with me can attest, I, like my father, love stories. I love their deep texture, how they draw us in, how they engage a methodology that is more inductive than deductive, their appeal to metaphor and to mystery—all especially appropriate as we here at "Holy Hill" do theology. Or, as the Dominican Gustavo Gutierrez reminds us: "God-talk." Stories, by their very nature, do not come out of a vacuum. Quite the contrary: they are connected with communities and have a way of bringing people and communities together, for one story elicits another.

Take, for example, the visual story in the image painted by El Paso artist Magda García and her nephew Alex Rodríguez (fig. 1). Magda designed this work for the 100th anniversary celebration of Sacred Heart Church in El Paso which is only two blocks from the US-Mexico border, titling it, "Año del Barrio" ("year of the neighborhood"). As she told me the story of its composition, especially how they sought to bring heaven and earth together into one person reaching out to us, I marveled at how, if they can say a picture is worth a thousand words, art can often convey what mere words cannot. I love this image, not just because it is the cover of my first book, but also because it represents a coming together of two very different worlds in a concrete, embodied community wrapped in light despite the darkness of forces which threaten to divide it.

I wouldn't be surprised if, for example, during this pandemic, we all have found ourselves more reflective, trying to take in both the day-to-day details we can no longer take for granted and yet also surveying—lovingly I hope—the *big* picture. As Alex Garcia-Rivera, a GTU professor of happy memory, would say: “The little stories which make up part of the big story.” Today we speak of the need to do theology contextually . . . in context. What exactly does this mean? This is where tradition—or, looking back so as to understand where we have been, where we are, and where we might be going—is indispensable.

With this in mind, I propose that we engage stories tonight to do this type of contextual theology that privileges thick, provocative, high-context, metaphorical description, which is quite circular in logic—as opposed to more abstract, analytical, linear thinking which is more deductive than inductive.

Hacer memoria means that you work hard at remembering—and not just remembering mentally, but, as Uruguayan historian Eduardo Galeano reminds us, remembering “through the heart,” recalling both the good times and the bad. Not exactly the stuff of cute valentines or emojis! *Wholeheartedly* through the heart!

“Through the heart” means that we should not put aside passionate feelings and holy desires as we reflect theologically on this centuries-old walk of faith—a faith which sustained our ancestors, as unrecognizable as it might seem sometimes. The African American theologian Dwight N. Hopkins, who identifies a Black theology of liberation in Toni Morrison's novels filled with examples of poor Black women's spirituality, writes the following in his book, *Shoes That Fit Our Feet*:

Like a natural spring in the rich soul of the Black Belt South, theology in African American folk culture gushes forth in all directions. Waters of self-identity and self-affirmation spew out and blanket the black earth. Poetry, plays, work songs, folk tales, blues, short stories, autobiographies, sermons, toasts, ballads, personal narratives, and protest literature . . . blossom. Here, showered with “a wealth of colorful, distinctive material,” a poor people name and claim

themselves with the flowers of new definitions and positive assertions.¹

***“Haciendo Memoria”*: Memories**

I will now share a little bit about what I took away from these past months of revisiting what happens here at the GTU, why we do what we do, and more so why it is that we *can* do what we do.

And where did my heart, *mi corazoncito*, go when I tried to “make memory”? Our campuses, with their classrooms, open spaces, libraries, and places of worship, soon flooded my imagination. I had plenty to recall given my 27-yearlong (and counting!) affiliation with this place we call home, three years at JSTB as an M.Div. student, and now in my 24th year as faculty.

This past year, our own Jesuit School of Theology marked its 50th anniversary of accepting the invitation to join this unique consortium. Having moved from a rural, more monastic setting to this urban center, two blocks from one of the most prestigious universities in the world—the University of California at Berkeley—we were blessed in 2009 to become part of Santa Clara University, a partnership which has created many new possibilities. Every now and then, especially when I am officiating in some capacity as a Roman Catholic priest and theologian, someone expresses surprise that I teach in Berkeley: “Berkeley? *Bezerkeley*? That radical place? You Jesuits really have a school of theology *there*?” But as our founder Ignatius of Loyola gradually discovered, an important spiritual work is to find God in all things and all things in God—schools and universities often being unique places for this quest. Indeed, with its diversity of religious traditions, what better place to engage in the blessed pursuit than here at the GTU?

On November 16, 1989, soon after the ruthless assassination of six Jesuits—Elba, the cook, and Celina, her sixteen-year-old daughter, at the University of Central America in El Salvador—the great Robert McAfee Brown, who taught here at the Pacific School of Religion and served as a Protestant Observer at Vatican Two, spoke words of consolation and

¹ Dwight N. Hopkins, *Shoes That Fit Our Feet: Sources for a Constructive Black Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 84.

challenge to us at an evening prayer we had at one of our Jesuit residences. Joined by other good GTU friends during a time when we felt so powerless—not to mention complicit, as we knew the U.S. Government was supporting the army that carried out this atrocity and many, many others as we were learning from the Salvadoran refugees—we were also able to feel *consolados*, consoled, comforted, strengthened, empowered to continue to fight the good fight. We didn't feel alone that night because, in our pain, we were being held in the arms of our loving, compassionate, interfaith, and prophetic GTU community.

This year's anniversary, just a few days away, will be particularly poignant as recently—after 31 years—a Spanish court finally convicted the perpetrators of this heinous crime, sending a clear global message in defense of human rights and social justice.

An important part of my preparation for this lecture came about serendipitously. When you start having multiple copies of the same book on your shelves, you realize that it is time to clean out your office! Okay, I haven't exactly done that, but by the grace of God I have made some progress during this pandemic. In going through hard copies of theses and dissertations in which I served as either director or reader, I pondered these memories of our shared work in my heart.

As I looked at the spreadsheet of theses and dissertations that I populated, I discovered close to 150 works that covered a wide variety of topics by students from 34 countries—*34 countries!*—every continent except Antarctica! How was this possible? As students from different countries began to discover their voice and become more cognizant that the communities from which they came were already, in their own way, doing theology, they helped us assemble savvy dissertation committees—among these, a significant number of international scholars, each of us bringing our own passion and expertise to these projects. It quickly became clear to me that if I were to direct or be part of a dissertation committee, I could only do so by learning from this type of interdisciplinary and, at times, interreligious wisdom.

The composition of our student body also brought its surprises. While as a Latino theologian, before coming here to teach I imagined that most of the projects in which I would participate would either be about

Latinx persons in the United States or Latin Americans, I was amazed to discover that a far greater number actually have been related to Asian and African countries. This international diversity still amazes me because, as a junior scholar here at the GTU, I was also blessed with excellent mentors who showed me the power of intercultural interdisciplinarity. Among them, for example, has been our dear Judith Berling, an expert on Chinese religions who gently recruited me to our Interdisciplinary Studies doctoral area at a local Japanese restaurant—having read my C.V. more carefully than I had compiled it—as well as Bill O’Neill, an ethicist who had spent part of his youth teaching in Tanzania and is now working with refugees in Kenya. As my spiritual advisor, Bill reminded me again and again that no matter what happened, God would bless me.

Our monthly faculty colloquia at the Jesuit School similarly provided me with a safe space to develop as a scholar, teacher, and practitioner. A colleague there—Mia Mochizuki, an art historian—helped me to realize that I was actually already engaging the arts to teach my course, Latino Religious Expressions. She and I are still in touch with several of the students who took our Art and Inculturation class. One of them just published her first book based on her dissertation!

All throughout this time and work, Arthur Holder’s input and collegueship have remained a constant grace. Having served the GTU as Dean and Vice President of Academic Affairs for 14 years of distinguished service, he is still going strong despite being officially retired—keeping the dream alive and generously continuing to work with us faculty and students.

The Three Blessings and Growth Edges for the Future of the GTU

Despite the very challenging times in which we find ourselves, survivors remind us of the importance of looking back, taking in the big picture, and counting our blessings as together we envision a new tomorrow—even though, to be honest, I do not always feel it. In my heart of hearts I am convinced that—as our faith traditions will affirm, despite the seemingly chaotic times in which we find ourselves—we must not lose sight of significant dawning opportunities before us as times to not only savor the values of diversity, unity, and service, but also to continue to work hard to

make them a reality. “Haciendo memoria” and envisioning tomorrow in this way honors the religious traditions of our ancestors—this cloud of witnesses, some of whom sing today, “We’ve walked this far by faith” By immersing ourselves in the sacred texts, spiritual practices, and liberative movements of our communities, we open ourselves to conversion—not in the sense of trying to convince ourselves that others are wrong and we are right, but in the Lonerganian notion of conversion as the expansion of horizons, deeper engagement, more inclusive encounters.

Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta, the founders of the United Farm Workers, epitomized this “can do” notion in justice’s famous battle cry: “*Sí, se puede!*” Or, as President Barack Obama adapted it: “Yes, we can!” Isn’t this what we are hearing from our hard-working “dreamers,” undocumented youth who already are serving this great country? A daughter of Mexican immigrants who teaches second grade recently asked her mother how she was able to survive the hardships associated with coming to this country at a young age. Her mother’s answer went right to the point: “Because our dreams for our children were greater than our fears.” We are who we are because of our ancestors’ sacrifice.

I would like to bring to conclusion my presentation by showing how the three values named above—diversity, unity, and service—can continue to not only be blessings for us here at the GTU community and other theological centers, but also pose challenges for a new era.

Diversity

First: DIVERSITY. A review of these 150 or so theses and dissertations in which I was blessed to participate demonstrates an embrace of this ideal. At the GTU, diversity itself assumes a panoply of forms; for example, doing contextual theology from international perspectives, engaging interdisciplinarity, interculturality, interreligious dialogue, and now interreligious theology, which maintains that people of other faiths can help deepen my own. Diversity at the GTU has broadened our horizons beyond our wildest imagination.

At the same time, we must not just pat ourselves on the back and rest on our laurels. A good question for all of us here at the GTU to contemplate as we prepare our students to teach and minister in the not-

too-distant future is: To what extent does our faculty, or even our student body, reflect the diversity found in our faith communities?

The ticket for President and Vice President that is perhaps the most diverse to run for the offices has just received the most votes of any ticket in U.S. history. The oldest person to occupy the office of President and the first woman, first black woman, first woman of South Asian descent, and first woman of immigrant parents have just been elected our rising President and Vice President. Despite the challenges of 2020, let us give thanks and celebrate the fact that this indeed has never been a better time to unite and embrace our diversity.

Unity

Second: UNITY. So many of us have been horrified to witness the lack of unity in our countries as serious chasms fomented by political, economic, racial, ethnic, and religious divisions boil at the surface. In our country, the so-called “culture wars” continue to haunt us as we find ourselves often unable to speak to family or friends who beg to differ from our own stances on these life issues. A real grace for me being here at the GTU is to struggle with trying to remain open to the faith convictions of others, especially if I have not first made the effort to get to know what those convictions are—from their words, not simply from what people say about them.

Considering the attention we give to studying sacred texts, imagine for example what a Christian student can learn from a Jewish professor about the psalms—which Jesus himself, a Jew, fervently prayed. At the core of our name, the Graduate Theological *Union*, we *unite*.

The arts, similarly, can continue to work their magic in bringing us together, as we simply open ourselves to a renewed conversion experience. As I wrote recently for our GTU Center for the Arts and Religion website:

Among the greatest contributions the GTU can continue to make to world communities is a deep appreciation of the ecumenical and interreligious as it relates to lived religion, whether that of today or centuries past. Material culture communicates in surprising ways how religion and spirituality cannot be understood if not communicated through the

senses, a type of bridge from the concrete to the abstract. As the Divine is often experienced through beauty, St. Augustine's "Oh, ancient Beauty, late have I loved you!", the long tradition of the arts at our consortium, has taught us that by experiencing and appreciating each other's art forms, blended together harmoniously, whether through the spoken word, visual art, music, dance, architecture, crafts, or cuisine, we allow ourselves to be invited into the Sacred in an embodied, holistic way. Divisions start to give way as we experience the Divine spark in each of us.²

I experienced this holiness when, thanks to our Professor of Islamic Studies, Munir Jiwa, I reflected on his explanation of the Muslim artist Salma Arastu's work being displayed in our library and found myself writing about it for a Sacred Scripture reflection blog the next day.

Service

Finally, the third and final vision: SERVICE. The term which most often comes to mind when I think of my past and present students is "scholar practitioner." Many of them come to us with a vast experience of having worked in ministerial settings—teaching, doing advocacy work, social workers, medical professionals, etc.—realizing that they need not only to renew and grow academically, but also to share these fonts of communal wisdom with theological forums. At the same time, these women and men remind me, again and again, that in our scholarship and teaching we have to be accountable not only to our professional academic guild, but also to the communities from where these theologies are emerging.

Several of our indigenous scholars over the years, for example, have challenged the notion that the Western way of thinking, heavy on the rational, is the only way to think. Hence my stress on the Spanish "hacer memoria" ("doing memory") and "recordar" or remembering with its nuances referring to heart, beauty, and community so as to "re-member," "keeping someone or something in mind."

² Doug Adams Gallery, "Art & Religion at the GTU: Faculty Spotlight with Dr. Eduardo Fernández," CARE Package (blog post), Center for the Arts & Religion (CARE), July 28, 2020, <https://carepackagegtu.wordpress.com/2020/07/28/eduardo-fernandez/>.

But we should not limit this embodiment of service to professors and students. Our staff persons and administrators are angels in human form. As Brother Manny in our El Paso Jesuit community once remarked, “My job, like a good mechanic, is to keep the planes flying.” I love walking over to the registrar with a student who has just defended her or his thesis or dissertation, for instance, to see the joy of administrators and staff as they personally congratulate those who have demonstrated by their hard work that “*Sí, se puede*”—“Yes, we can!” Not being a good fundraiser myself, I equally have great respect for those who beg on our behalf, helping donors practice good stewardship of the blessings they have received.

Could it be, then, that we can do what we do, as the previously quoted immigrant mother commented, “Because our dreams for a better world are greater than our fears?” Whether through feeding the folks at People’s Park on a Sunday morning, encountering the homeless face to face and discovering that they have much to teach us as we advocate for affordable housing, serving as chaplains in prisons, hospitals, congregations, shelters for migrants and refugees, and university campuses, or designing programs to teach religious literacy in community colleges—ours is a holy work, one which draws from the best of our religious traditions. Blessed by the harvest inherited from those who went before us, let us continue to unite in our diversity and serve others as we learn together.

After all, in the words of the 13th Century poet and mystic, Rumi: “We are all just walking each other home.”

Thank you! *¡Muchas gracias!*

Bibliography

- Doug Adams Gallery. “Art & Religion at the GTU: Faculty Spotlight with Dr. Eduardo Fernández,” CARE Package (blog post), Center for the Arts & Religion (CARE), July 28, 2020, <https://carepackagegtu.wordpress.com/2020/07/28/eduardo-fernandez/>.
- Fernández, Eduardo C. S.J. *La Cosecha: Harvesting Contemporary United States Hispanic Theology (1972-1998)*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2000.
- Hopkins, Dwight N. *Shoes That Fit Our Feet: Sources for a Constructive Black Theology*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993.

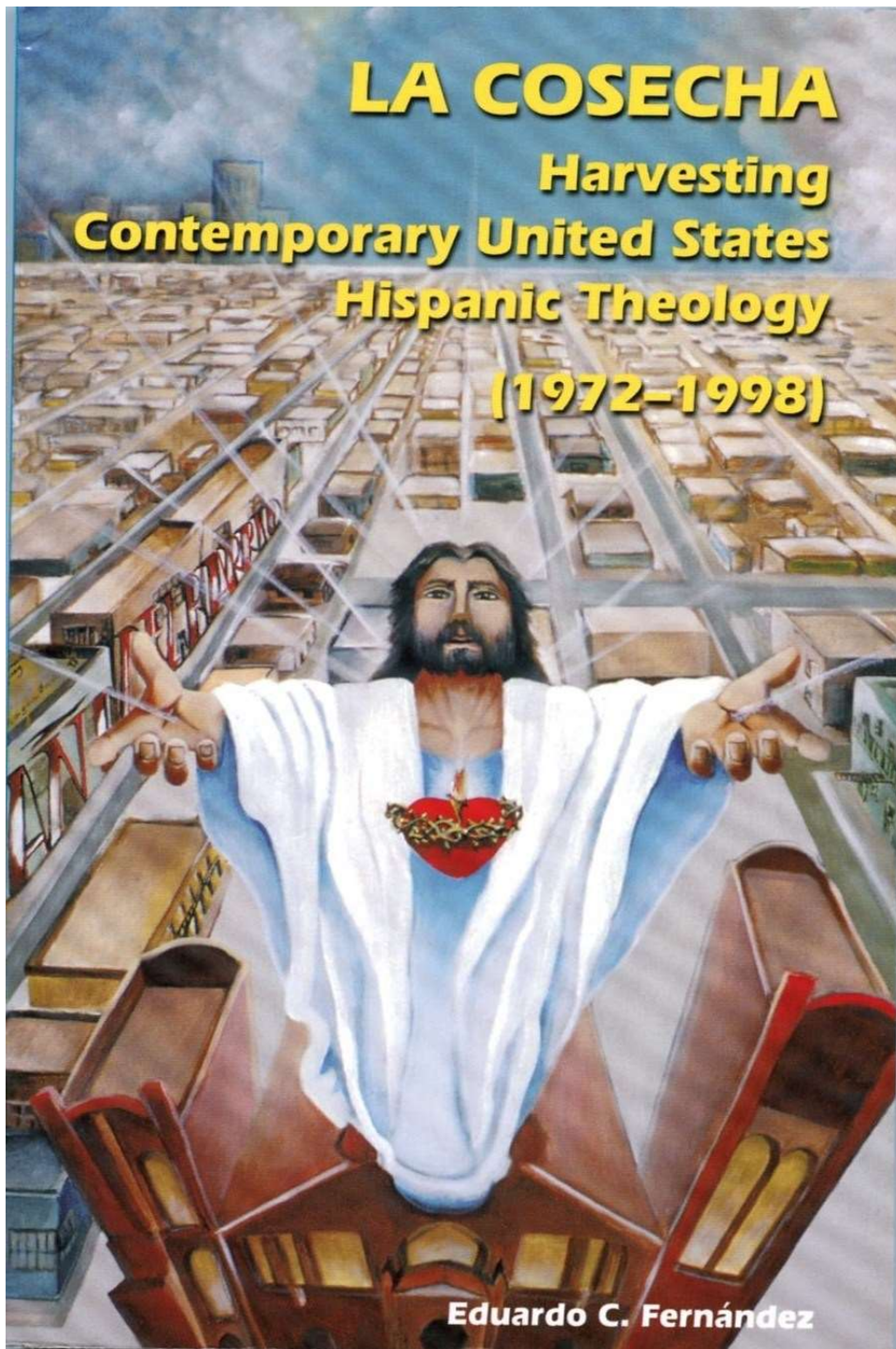


Figure 1. Book cover for Eduardo C. Fernández S.J., *La Cosecha: Harvesting Contemporary United States Hispanic Theology (1972-1998)* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2000). Book cover image is “Año del Barrio” by Magda García and Alex Rodríguez (Used with permission)