THE MEANING OF THE RESURRECTION

A Path toward Jewish-Christian Dialogue

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All biblical quotations in this study are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

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If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.
1 Corinthians 15:17

Introduction

The resurrection of Christ is the heart of the Christian proclamation and the central tenet of Christian faith. It has given strength and inspiration to many, and continues to do so. At one time it had a secure place within the belief structure of Western society. Today it is different. Our modern world view does not easily assimilate the idea of resurrection. The spirit of our scientific age drives us to question: What really was the resurrection, and what, if anything, does it still mean for us? No other article of traditional faith has been questioned more, challenged more, and more steeped in controversy.

Paul preached the resurrection of Christ. He felt so certain of it that he could not comprehend the skepticism of his fellow Jews. He said that their minds were hardened, that they hear the words of scripture with a veil over their minds. “Indeed, to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant, that same veil is still there, since only in Christ is it set aside” (2 Corinthians 3:14). Such sentiments have inflamed relations between Jews and Christians to this day.

But today it is not only Jews who are skeptics. Modern biblical scholarship presents a definite challenge to traditional faith. Such scholarship has brought us a new awareness of the differences between modern thought and first-century thought. The idea that nature is governed by inviolable laws that only science can explain did not exist in the ancient world. Thus we have difficulty accepting ideas with which people in antiquity felt quite comfortable, and which often find expression in accounts of events that seem to us to suspend the laws of nature. We describe such ideas as “myths.” Properly understood, a myth is a symbolic representation of a profound truth; but today we often think of “myth” as synonymous with

"fiction." Thus first-century ideas are nearly as incomprehensible to people living now as our own ideas would have been to people living then.

Many miraculous events reported in the Gospels have lost the aura of uniqueness they may once have had. We can find ancient parallels to many reported aspects of the life of Jesus. Stories of supernatural beings were common in the Greek and Roman world. The "mythology" (and in this context the word should not be understood pejoratively) of these cultures was rich and complex, including stories of heavenly beings who would descend to earth, sometimes for the benefit of human beings. This is a vast area of study way beyond our present scope, but it might be useful to mention just one example from ancient Greek culture. The hero Heracles (Hercules) was the son of a god and of a mortal woman. He performed miraculous feats during his life on earth. He died an excruciatingly painful death as the result of a corrosive poison administered through the plotting of an enemy. A bolt of lightning shot from the heavens and consumed his funeral pyre. Those who came to gather his bones could not find a single bone anywhere. Heracles' mortal part was fully consumed; he then appeared to his companions in all the majesty of a god. Accompanied by roaring thunder, he ascended to heaven.[1]

Although every aspect of the story just mentioned has a parallel in traditions reported about Jesus, it does not necessarily follow that Greek mythology directly influenced those traditions. Rather, there were ways of thinking in the cultural heritage of the time that could have assimilated such traditions without too much difficulty, and that may even have encouraged their emergence. Thus it is understandable that the Greeks to whom Paul preached could far more easily have accepted Jesus's literal resurrection from the dead than could Paul's own coreligionists: the exaltation of a human being to a high status approaching divinity was more compatible with their cultural heritage. It is true that the idea of resurrection did exist in first-century Judaism, but this was a general resurrection expected at the end of time, when all (or at least the righteous) would be redeemed. Resurrection was not believed to be a unique characteristic of the Messiah himself, setting him above mortal humanity.

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[1] Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*, 2 vols. (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1955), 2:193,201-4; David R. Cartlidge and David L. Dungan, *Documents for the Study of the Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 201-2.

Our present knowledge of the cultures and mythology of antiquity, far more extensive than it has ever been, places the traditions about Jesus as recorded in the Gospels within a wider context. In addition, our modern scientific worldview makes many of us more skeptical toward claims of supernatural experiences. Thus while Jews have always resisted the preaching of the literal resurrection of Christ, many committed Christians today may also be experiencing doubt. What can we say to members of both groups? Surely there is some merit in Paul's warning that, if there is no truth in the resurrection, then his preaching is futile and the faith of his hearers is futile. While (as Jesus so strongly admonished Peter) it is sinful to deny the cross, if the story of Jesus ends at the cross then Christian faith is indeed empty and Easter is merely a celebration of the grave. But what about Jewish faith? If Jews cannot see the cross of Christ as the site of redemption, then do they find it elsewhere, or is their faith also empty? Faith in Jewish peoplehood, in the State of Israel, is not redemptive faith. These are human creations, subject to the forces and fates of this world. Thus the same question that today so challenges the faith of many Christians is, in a different form, just as vital for Jews as well.

Is it possible to accept fully the challenge of modern biblical scholarship, and still preserve the resurrection as a symbol of living faith? What exactly is it that Easter celebrates?

The resurrection of Christ is an idea that for centuries has separated Christians and Jews. Often the. separation has turned violent. But as strong as feelings have been on both sides, it may be time now to consider whether this separation can be bridged, if not actually eliminated. Perhaps there is much that Jewish and Christian traditions have to say about *each other* that can illuminate the meaning of the resurrection. It may even be that the deeper levels of its meaning are obscured precisely because the two traditions have been kept so separate, first through mutual misunderstanding, then through mutual mistrust and even hostility. It is therefore important to trace the history of the idea of the resurrection, since by shedding light on what it originally meant we can more clearly see what it might mean for us today.

Resurrection and the Hebrew Bible

The idea of the resurrection did not emerge suddenly after Jesus's death. Its roots lie deep within the Hebrew Bible (although, it must be

emphatically stated, *not* in the sense of scanning the Hebrew Bible for proof-texts confirming an already assumed concept of the resurrection). Examining the roots of the resurrection idea within the Hebrew Bible may lead us to some surprising conclusions.

At the core of the theology of the Hebrew Bible is the idea that God is intimately involved in the lives of human beings. This involvement is captured in the symbol of the "covenant." A covenant is an agreement based upon mutual trust; it is a *promise* between two parties to be faithful to each other regarding certain matters of importance. We first find the word used in reference to God's promise to Noah never again to destroy the earth by a flood: "I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood" (Genesis 9:11). Later on God makes a more specific promise to Abraham in response to Abraham's faithfulness:

> Then the Lord said to Abram, "Know this for certain, that your offspring shall be aliens in a land that is not theirs, and shall be slaves there, and they shall be oppressed for four hundred years; but I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions…."
>
> …On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I give this land….
>
> "…And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous." (Genesis 15:13-14, 15:18, 17:2)

The promise of God to humanity takes a specific form. It is the assurance of restoration or renewal after suffering and destruction. This original promise has inspired the Hebrew people during the darkest moments of their journey through history. It was a light for them in times of greatest despair. Since the people did experience many dark moments throughout their history, the original promise became an ever-present symbol of revival, of redemption from suffering, of the transition from grief to joy.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the Passover story, and it is no accident that Easter draws much of its inspiration from the Passover symbolism. God's promise to Abraham kept the people alive in the desert, even when all hope seemed lost.

> Then he brought Israel out with silver and gold, and there was no one among their tribes who stumbled.
> Egypt was glad when they departed, for dread of them had fallen upon it.
> He spread a cloud for a covering,
> and fire to give light by night.

They asked, and he brought quails,
and gave them food from heaven in abundance.
He opened the rock, and water gushed out;
it flowed through the desert like a river.

For he remembered his holy promise,
and Abraham, his servant.

(Psalm 105:37-42)

The Exodus from Egypt is the first of the great “resurrection” stories in the Bible. God led a people half-dead from slavery and oppression to freedom, according to the original promise. This “resurrection” was not without its “passion”: the people suffered terrible trials in the wilderness, and often felt tempted to give up. But in spite of their hardships, they never left the range of God’s watchful care. Their continued sense of God’s presence kept them alive.

This “resurrection” theme, the transition from despair to hope, from grief to joy, from destruction to fulfillment, occurs throughout the Hebrew Bible. It is the basic optimistic message of faith. As the Psalmist states,

Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning....
You have turned my mourning into dancing;
you have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, so that my soul may praise you and not be silent.
0 Lord my God, I will give thanks to you forever.

(Psalm 30:5,31-32)

One of the greatest resurrection stories of all is the story of Job, a man who suffered all kinds of grief, from the loss of loved ones to the loss of his health. Yet in the end his faith and his struggle were fulfilled: “And the Lord restored the fortunes of Job when he had prayed for his friends, and the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before” (Job 42:10). To some this may seem a gratuitous happy ending, but the author of Job may well have wished to make at least a symbolic statement about faith and the certainty of a divine response to the searching heart even in the midst of great tragedy.

“Resurrection” literally means “rising again” (from *resurge*). The word in Greek is *ἀνάστασις*, and note how it is used in Luke 2:34: “[Behold!] This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel (ἰδοὺ οὗτος

κεῖται εἰς πτῶσιν καὶ ἀνάστασιν πολλῶν ἐν τῷ Ἰσραὴλ).” *Anastasis* is a rise after a fall. The idea describes Passover as well as Easter, and appears throughout the prophetic sections of the Bible.

The great prophets of Israel all speak of the possibility of renewal in the midst of tragedy. Isaiah of Babylon (“Second Isaiah”) addresses *a* fallen people in their exile with words of hope:

> Comfort, 0 comfort my people, says your God.
> Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her
> that she has served her term,
> that her penalty is paid,
> that she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins.
>
> A voice cries out:
> “In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
> Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low;
> the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.
> Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”
>
> (Isaiah 40:1-5)

The suffering of the people has reached a peak, but the faithful can expect a complete revival of body and spirit:

> Have you not known? Have you not heard?
> The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.
> He does not faint or grow weary;
> his understanding is unsearchable.
> He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless.
> Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted;
> but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength,
> they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
> they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.
>
> (Isaiah 40:29-31)

Any revival, or “rising again, “ is character! zed especial ly by a sense of newness:

> But now thus says the Lord,
> he who created you, 0 Jacob,
> he who formed you, 0 Israel:
> Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;

I have called you by name, you are mine. . . .
I am about to do a new thing;
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

(Isaiah 43:1,19)

The prophet Jeremiah held out a similar promise of renewal to the suffering exiles:

For I will restore health to you,
and your wounds I will heal,
says the Lord,
because they have called you an outcast:
"It is Zion; no one cares for her!"
Thus says the Lord:
I am going to restore the fortunes of the tents of Jacob, and have compassion on his dwellings;
the city shall be rebuilt upon its mound, and the citadel set on its rightful site.
Out of them shall come thanksgiving, and the sound of merrymakers.
I will make them many, and they shall not be few;
I will make them honored, and they shall not be disdained.

(Jeremiah 30:17-19)

Life is not yet over; there is still room for the new:

Thus says the Lord:
A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping.
Rachel is weeping for her children, because they are no more.
Thus says the Lord:
Keep your voice from weeping,
and your eyes from tears;
for there is a reward for your work, says the Lord: they shall come back from the land of the enemy;
there is hope for your future, says the Lord:
your children shall come back to their own country.

(Jeremiah 31:15-17)

Jeremiah even points to the renewal of the covenant, which seemed to have been broken:

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt--a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel

> after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. (Jeremiah 31:31-33)

The third great prophet, Ezekiel, uses remarkably similar language to describe his own vision of renewal:

> I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances. Then you shall live in the land that I gave to your ancestors; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God. (Ezekiel 26:25-28)

The most striking vision of resurrection occurs in the next chapter, in Ezekiel's vision of the Valley of Dry Bones, which is traditionally associated with the Passover holiday. Here we find a very explicit language of resurrection used to represent the theme of restoration so central to Hebrew prophecy. In this vision the people are likened to a collection of old, dry bones, which God is nevertheless able to revive, putting flesh on them and breathing life into them.

> Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, 0 my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, 0 my people. And I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act, says the Lord. (Ezekiel 37:12-14)

A survey of the prophetic writings thus shows how God's original promise to the Hebrew people came to be interpreted increasingly through the symbol and language of resurrection, applying particularly to the revival and restoration of the Israelite nation. There are, however, two especially noteworthy passages in the Hebrew Bible in which the language of resurrection passes beyond the realm of symbol and seems to describe an emerging belief.

Chapters 24 through 27 of Isaiah are a collection of eschatological prophecies (prophecies about the ultimate future) that have much in common with *apocalyptic* writing, a later style of writing we will consider in more detail below. Thus these chapters are generally assigned a late date, after the

Babylonian exile but certainly before the period when apocalyptic writing was in full flower. They offer us a glimpse of the transition from prophecy to apocalyptic. Apocalyptic themes include the imminent destruction of the temporal world, the triumphant manifestation of the Lord and victory over forces of evil on heaven as well as on earth, and the resurrection of the dead. Of the resurrection we read:

> He will swallow up death forever:
> Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth,
> for the Lord has spoken. . . .
>
> Your dead shall live, their corpses shall rise.
> 0 dwellers in the dust, awake and sing for joy!
> For your dew is a radiant dew, and the earth will give birth to those long dead.
> (Isaiah 25:8, 26:19)

Paul quoted Isaiah 25:8 in his triumphant cry “Death has been swallowed up in victory” (1 Corinthians 15:54), which concludes his discourse on the resurrection in 1 Corinthians. (The Hebrew לָנֶ֫צַח may in fact be translated either “forever” or “in victory.”) Clearly he was making a connection between this eschatological resurrection and the resurrection of Christ.

Although its dramatic setting is at the end of the Babylonian captivity and the transition to Persian rule, the book of Daniel is given a later date, considered to have been written during the Maccabean period and to contain many symbolic references to the political events of its day. It is also generally thought to be the first of the truly “apocalyptic” writings. The Greek *apokalypsis* literally means “revelation,” and the word itself is the title of the New Testament book of Revelation which, like the second half of Daniel, is a good example of apocalyptic style found in the Bible itself. Apocalyptic writing purported to “reveal” what would happen at the end of history, which was often seen to be fast approaching. It flowered during the period just before and during the lifetime of Jesus, and is thus crucial for understanding the development of thought between the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament.

Apocalyptic writing in general exhibits a number of specific themes, including a dualism between the present age and the age to come, between the forces of light and the forces of darkness, between God and Satan,

between the evil ones and the righteous faithful. The coming of the end often appears clothed in elaborate symbolism, with visions of fantastic creatures and upheavals in the natural order, descriptions of angels and demons, heaven and hell. The overriding theme is a judgment that must take place before this temporal world can come to an end and the Kingdom of God finally prevail. Apocalyptic works have had some influence on New Testament thought, and one such work, the book of Enoch, is actually quoted in the New Testament (Jude 14-15). These works are also particularly important for understanding the development of the belief in resurrection.

The first half of the book of Daniel consists of narratives about Daniel and his friends and the challenges they faced during the hard times in exile. The second half of the book is quite different in character, consisting of visions Daniel received about future events. It is perhaps significant that in the second half of the book, the apocalyptic section, Daniel speaks in first person. One common characteristic of apocalyptic writings is that they are presented as having been written by a great figure from the past; thus they are often called *pseudepigrapha*, literally "false writings," meaning writings under an assumed name. These latter chapters of Daniel typify the apocalyptic style, and in particular we find references to a belief in resurrection.

The statements about resurrection here are much more explicit than the one in Isaiah. They also appear as part of an emerging general pattern: a time of great destruction will arrive, representing God's final judgment, after which the righteous will be restored to life.

> At that time Michael, the great prince, the protector of your people, shall arise. There shall be a time of anguish, such as has never occurred since nations first came into existence. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book. Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt....
>
> ...Happy are those who persevere and attain the thousand three hundred thirty-five days. But you, go your way, and rest; you shall rise for your reward at the end of the days. (Daniel 12:1-2,12-13)

The New Jerome Biblical Commentary finds this passage quite noteworthy, calling it "the earliest clear enunciation of belief in the

resurrection of the dead."[2] As mentioned earlier, it dates from the Maccabean period in the second century CE. The time was marked by an intense conflict between the *Hellenizers*, those Jews who wanted to adopt the predominant Greek way of life (see 1 Maccabees 1:11-15), and the Jews who wanted to remain faithful to the purity of their ancestral traditions. The latter suffered great persecution, which gave rise to the Maccabean revolt. The later chapters of Daniel make many references to this conflict with the ruling Greeks and their desire to impose their culture; for example, the profanation of the Temple with "the abomination that makes desolate" (Daniel 11:31; cf. Mark 13:14, Matthew 24:15) refers to the Greeks' placing in the Temple a statue of Zeus and converting the Temple to Zeus worship. The resurrection passage in Daniel expresses the hope that the faithful may survive their persecutions through redemption from the grave, while their Hellenizing enemies would suffer an ignominious fate.

Resurrection and the Apocrypha

Passing from the Hebrew Bible, we now turn to the set of books known as the *Apocrypha*, a term from the Greek meaning "that which is hidden or concealed." They are "hidden" in the sense that, according to their proponents, they contain a special secret knowledge accessible only to those with proper understanding. To their detractors, these books are not inspired and are perhaps even dangerous or heretical, and should be "hidden away." In this sense some of these books are perhaps tamer examples of a much larger corpus of literature that flourished during the so-called "intertestamental" period and during the time of the early church, and which consisted largely of mystical or apocalyptic elaborations of biblical themes. We will consider a few of these works below. The particular works included in the Apocrypha, however, are found in Roman Catholic and some Protestant Bibles, although Judaism and mainstream Protestantism have never recognized them as canonical.

The Second Book of Maccabees is an account of events that took place during the Greek oppression and Maccabean revolt of 165 BCE. In it we find the story of a mother and her seven sons who were martyred by King Antiochus IV for refusing to forsake their religion. In this narrative we find

[2] Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy, eds., *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1990), 419.

explicit references to a belief in physical resurrection. Just before he is to die, the fourth son exclaims:

> One cannot but choose to die at the hands of mortals and to cherish the hope God gives of being raised again by him. But for you there will be no resurrection to life! (2 Maccabees 7:14)

We also find this belief expressed in the words that the mother addresses to her sons:

> I do not know how you came into being in my womb. It was not I who gave you life and breath, nor I who set in order the elements within each of you. Therefore the Creator of the world, who shaped the beginning of humankind and devised the origin of all things, will in his mercy give life and breath back to you again, since you now forget yourselves for the sake of his laws. (2 Maccabees 7:22-23)

Expressions of this belief are not uncommon in the literature of this period: that at a certain time, or at the end of time, the righteous dead will again be raised, while the wicked shall perish. These are more specific elaborations of the ideas presented in Daniel 12.

Another book in the Apocrypha that makes explicit reference to resurrection is 2 Esdras, which is most clearly an apocalyptic work. “Esdras” is the Greek form of the Hebrew “Ezra,” and 2 Esdras (whose central section is often called 4 Ezra) describes a number of visions attributed to the Ezra who appears in the Hebrew Bible, scribe and leader of his people at the end of the Babylonian and Persian exile. The history of 2 Esdras is rather complicated. Most scholars consider the central portion (4 Ezra, which contains the resurrection reference) to have been written before the end of the first century CE. by a Jewish author, while later Christian writers added the opening and closing chapters.

The book as a whole is concerned with the problem of evil as it relates to the experiences of the Hebrew people under foreign domination. Why, Ezra asks, did they suffer so at the hands of other nations? The angel Uriel responds by granting an answer in the form of a sequence of complicated visions. A central theme in these visions is that the present, corrupt world order is passing away, and at the time of judgment the righteous will be saved. There will be a time of great destruction:

> Now concerning the signs: lo, the days are coming when those who inhabit the earth shall be seized with great terror, and the way of truth shall be hidden, and the land shall be barren of faith. Unrighteousness shall be increased beyond what you yourself see, and beyond what you heard of formerly. And the land that you now see ruling shall be a trackless waste, and people shall see it desolate. (2 Esdras 5:1-3)

This time of destruction will be associated with the final judgment of God, and with the resurrection of the dead:

> For indeed the time will come, when the signs that I have foretold to you will come to pass, that the city that now is not seen shall appear, and the land that now is hidden shall be disclosed. Everyone who has been delivered from the evils that I have foretold shall see my wonders. For my son the Messiah shall be revealed with those who are with him, and those who remain shall rejoice four hundred years. After those years my son the Messiah shall die, and all who draw human breath. Then the world shall be turned back to primeval silence for seven days, as it was at the first beginnings, so that no one shall be left. After seven days the world that is not yet awake shall be roused, and that which is corruptible shall perish. The earth shall give up those who are asleep in it, and the dust those who rest there in silence; and the chambers shall give up the souls that have been committed to them. The Most High shall be revealed on the seat of judgment, and compassion shall pass away, and patience shall be withdrawn. Only judgment shall remain, truth shall stand, and faithfulness shall grow strong. (2 Esdras 7:26-34)

Resurrection and "Intertestamental" Literature

This pattern of related themes—a great destruction, God's final judgment, the resurrection of the dead--appears in a number of works of the intertestamental period that are not included in the Bible or the Apocrypha and which are known collectively as the *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, since most of them are written under the names of famous personages from the Hebrew Bible. We will consider just four of these works: 1 Enoch, 2 Baruch, the Sibylline Oracles, and the Apocryphon of Ezekiel.

In the form in which it comes down to us, 1 Enoch appears to be a composite of different fragments by different writers at different times. The central section, containing chapters 37-71, is known as the "Similitudes" or "Parables." It probably dates from the first century BCE; a view placing it

much later is no longer given much credence.[3] 1 Enoch is an apocalyptic work, predicting God's final judgment of the world and the triumph of the righteous. One of the events associated with the divine judgment is the resurrection of the dead:

> In those days Sheol [Hebrew: the grave] will return all the deposits which she had received and hell will give back all that which it owes. And he shall choose the righteous and the holy ones from among (the risen) dead, for the day when they shall be selected and saved has arrived. (1 Enoch 51:1-2)

Here once again we see associated with the divine judgment the theme of a great destruction:

> So I saw all the angels of plague co-operating and preparing all the chains of Satan. And I asked the angel of peace, who was going with me, "For whom are they preparing these chains?" And he answered me, saying, "They are preparing these for the kings and the. potentates of this earth in order that they may be destroyed thereby." (1 Enoch 53:3-5)

> In the year five hundred, in the seventh month, on the fourteenth day of the month in the life of Enoch; in the same parable (I saw) that the heaven of heavens was quaking and trembling with a mighty tremulous agitation, and the forces of the Most High and the angels, ten thousand times a million and ten million times ten million, were agitated with great agitation.... Then Michael said unto me, "What have you seen that has so disturbed you? This day of mercy has lasted until today; and he has been merciful and long-suffering toward those that dwell upon the earth. And when this day arrives—and the power, the punishment, and the judgment, which the Lord of the Spirits has prepared for those who do not worship the righteous judgment, for those who deny the righteous judgment, and for those who take his name in vain—it will become a day of covenant for the elect and inquisition for the sinners." (1 Enoch 60:1,5-6)

Here we see the day of the Lord, including the final resurrection, explicitly associated with a renewal of the covenant.

2 Baruch bears some similarity to 2 Esdras, which it may have used as a source. It was written sometime after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. Like 2 Esdras, it is concerned with the question of why Israel unjustly suffers at the hands of the nations. Baruch, in the Hebrew Bible Jeremiah's assistant, is presented here as a great prophet in his own right. He enters

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[3] James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseud epigrapha*, vol. 1: *Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1983), 7. All subsequent quotations from works of the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha are taken from this source.

into a dialogue with God on the matter of divine justice, and God assures him that Israel's fortunes will be reversed and the nations will be judged and punished (chapter 13). There will be a time of tremendous destruction, violence, and slaughter (chapter 27). A Messiah or "anointed one" will finally be revealed, who will save the righteous (chapter 29). There is still hope for those who have already died, for they will be raised:

> And it will happen after these things when the time of the appearance of the Anointed One has been fulfilled and he returns with glory, that then all who sleep in hope of him will rise. And it will happen at that time that those treasuries will be opened in which the number of the souls of the righteous were kept, and they will go out and the multitudes of the souls will appear together, in one assemblage, of one mind. And the first ones will enjoy themselves and the last ones will not be sad. (2 Baruch 30:1-2)
>
> For corruption will take away those who belong to it, and life those who belong to it. And dust will be called, and told, "Give back that which does not belong to you and raise up all that you have kept until its own time." (2 Baruch 42:7-8)

Baruch later asks for some specific details concerning this resurrection:

> But further I ask you, O Mighty One; and I shall ask grace from him who created all things. In which shape will the living live in your day? Or how will remain their splendor which will be after that? Will they, perhaps, take again this present form, and will they put on the chained members which are in evil and by which evils are accomplished? Or will you perhaps change these things which have been in the world, as also the world itself? (2 Baruch 49:1-3)

This passage is noteworthy particularly in comparison to 1 Corinthians 15:35, where Paul considers the identical question. As we shall see, Paul's answer is very different from that given in Baruch. The answer in Baruch expresses the belief in a literal bodily resurrection:

> And he answered and said to me:
>
> Listen, Baruch, to this word and write down in the memory of your heart all that you shall learn. For the earth will surely give back the dead at that time; it receives them now in order to keep them, not changing anything in their form. But as it has received them so it will give them back. And as I have delivered them to it so it will raise them. For then it will be necessary to show those who live that the dead are living again, and that those who went away have come back. (2 Baruch 50:1-3)

The resurrection body is the physical body that has died, in the form it had when it was alive. Thus resurrection means a *restoration* of the former order of things, in the context of the triumph of good over evil.

The Sibylline Oracles are examples of a genre long known in ancient Greek poetry. A “sibyl” was an aged prophetess whose predictions were usually gloomy. Some of the intertestamental Sibylline Oracles are Jewish and some are Christian, and they date from the mid-second century BCE to the seventh century CE. The use of the “sibyl” as a mouthpiece for Jewish and Christian teachings was intended to make these teachings accessible to a pagan Greek audience.

Book 2 of the Sibylline Oracles is a Christian redaction of a Jewish original, and expresses the themes we have already seen: destruction, judgment, and the resurrection of the dead:

> But whenever this sign appears throughout the world,
> children born with gray temples from birth,
> afflictions of men, famines, pestilence, and wars,
> change of times, lamentations, many tears;
> alas, how many people’s children in the countries will feed
> on their parents, with piteous lamentations....
>
> Alas, for as many as are found bearing in the womb on that day, for as many suckle infant children, for as many as dwell upon the. wave; alas, for as many as will see that day.
> For a dark mist will cover the boundless world
> east and west and south and north....
>
> Then the imperishable angels of immortal God,
> Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, and Uriel,
> who know what evils anyone did previously,
> lead all the souls of men from the murky dark
> to judgment, to the tribunal of the great immortal God.
> For one alone is imperishable, the universal ruler, himself,
> who will be judge of mortals.
>
> Then the heavenly one will give souls and breath and voice to the dead and bones fastened with all kinds of joinings... flesh and sinews and veins and skin about the flesh, and the former hairs. Bodies of humans, made solid in heavenly manner,
> breathing and set in motion, will be raised on a single day.
>
> (Sibylline Oracles 2:154-59,190-95,214-226)

Book 4 of the Sibylline Oracles is a Jewish redaction of a Greek original and dates from the first century CE, after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple. We find once again the themes of judgment, destruction, resurrection:

> For the entire race of men is slow of faith. But when the judgment of the world and of mortals has already come, which God himself will perform, judging impious and pious at once, then he will also send the impious down into the gloom in fire, and then they will realize what impiety they committed....
>
> An evil storm of war will also come upon Jerusalem from Italy, and it will sack the great Temple of God,
> whenever they put their trust in folly and cast off piety and commit repulsive murders in front of the Temple....
>
> But when a firebrand, turned away from a cleft in the earth
> in the land of Italy, reaches to broad heaven,
> it will burn many cities and destroy men.
> Much smoking ashes will fill the great sky,
> and showers will fall from heaven like red earth....
>
> But if you do not obey me, evil-minded ones, but love impiety, and receive all these things with evil ears, there will be fire throughout the whole world, and a very great sign with sword and trumpet at the rising of the sun.
> The whole world will hear a bellowing noise and mighty sound.
> He will burn the whole earth, and will destroy the whole race of men
> and all cities and rivers at once, and the sea.
> He will destroy everything by fire, and it will be smoking dust.
>
> But when everything is already dusty ashes,
> and God puts to sleep the unspeakable fire, even as he kindled it,
> God himself will again fashion the bones and ashes of men
> and he will raise up mortals again as they were before.
> And then there will be a judgment over which God himself will preside,
> judging the world again. As many as sinned by impiety,
> these will a mound of earth cover,
> and broad Tartarus and the repulsive recesses of Gehenna.
> But as many as are pious, they will live on earth again
> when God gives spirit and life and favor to these pious ones. Then they will all see themselves beholding the delightful and pleasant light of the sun.
> Oh most blessed, whatever man will live to that time.
>
> (Sibylline Oracles 4:40-44,115-18,130-34,171-192)

The Apocryphon (“secret book”) of Ezekiel comes down to us only in fragments. Although we know of it primarily from Christian sources, its origin is Jewish. It dates from not later than the middle of the first century CE, and

possibly as early as the middle of the first century BCE. The fourth-century Christian writer Epiphanius mentions it specifically in regard to the doctrine of resurrection. It tells the story of a lame man and a blind man who enter a certain king's garden to damage or steal from it. The blind man carries the lame man on his shoulders, thus supplying him with legs, while the lame man acts as the blind man's eyes. When later the king accuses them, each defends himself by saying that because of his disability he could not have been the one who damaged the garden. The king is not fooled, and placing the lame man atop the blind man, he orders that they be whipped. The parable's message is that, just like these two complementary individuals, the body and soul are one, and will be resurrected as one:

> What then does the just judge do? Realizing in what manner both had been joined, he places the lame man on the blind man and examines both under the lash. And they are unable to deny; they each convict the other. The lame man on the one hand saying to the blind man, "Did you not carry me and lead me away?" And the blind man to the lame, "Did you yourself not become my eyes?" In the same way the body is connected to the soul and the soul to the body, to convict (them) of (their) common deeds. And the judgment becomes final for both body and soul, for the works they have done whether good or evil. (Apocryphon of Ezekiel 2:6-11)

Note that the reunion of body and soul is mentioned in connection with God's "final judgment."

Resurrection in the Talmud and Midrash

This same parable is found in a number of Jewish sources, from the Talmud and midrash. In a version in the Midrash on Leviticus, the lame man and the blind man are keepers whom the king appoints to guard his garden, and who use their strategy to steal some figs. Each denies his role in the theft, but the king figures it out. The moral of the story is that body and soul cannot be separated:

> So, in the world to come, God says to the soul, "Wherefore have you sinned before me?" The soul replies, " I have not sinned; the body has sinned; since I have come out of the body, I have flown about like an innocent bird in the air; what is my sin?" Then God says to the body, "Why have you sinned before me?" The body replies, "I have not sinned; it is the soul which has sinned; from the hour that the soul went out of me, I lie prone like a stone cast upon the ground.

How can I have sinned against thee?" What does God do? He brings the soul and casts it into the body, and judges the two together.[4]

There are in fact numerous references to resurrection in rabbinic literature. Here are but a few:

From the midrash on Psalms:

"0 love the Lord all his saints" (Psalm 31:23). These are the righteous in Israel; "The Lord preserves the faithful": these are the proselytes. Or, the words may also be rendered, "The Lord keeps faith": this refers to the transgressors in Israel, for they answer "Amen," against their will, in faithfulness, and say, "Blessed is He who quickens the dead." Or, "The Lord preserves the faithful": these are the Israelites who say, "Blessed is He who quickens the dead," and in faith they answer "Amen," for with all their strength they have faith in God that He will quicken the dead, even though the resurrection of the dead has not yet come, and they say, "Blessed is He who redeems Israel," though they are not yet redeemed, and they say, "Blessed is He who rebuilds Jerusalem," though it is not yet rebuilt.''[5]

From the Talmud, *Ta'anit* 7a:

R. Abbahu said: The day of rain is more important than the day of resurrection, for the day of resurrection is for the righteous only and not for the wicked, while the day of rain is for the righteous and for the wicked.[6]

From the Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 91b:

R. Meir said: Whence is the Resurrection derived from the Torah? As it is said, "Then will Moses and the children of Israel sing this song unto the Lord" (Exodus 15:1). It is not said "sang," but "will sing"; hence the Resurrection is deducible from the Torah. Again, R. Joshua b. Levi asked: Whence is the Resurrection derived from the Torah? As it is said, "Blessed are they that dwell in thy house, they will be still praising thee" (Psalm 84:4). It is not stated, "They will have praised thee," but "will be still praising thee" [in the Hereafter]; hence the Resurrection is deducible from the Torah.[7]

From the Mishnah, *Sanhedrin* 10:1:

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4 C. G. Montefiore and H. Loewe, *A Rabbinic Anthology* (New York: Schocken, 1974), 313.

5 Ibid., 334-35.

6 Ibid., 368.

7 Ibid., 599.

> All Israel will have a share in the world to come. The biblical proof is Isaiah 60:21, "They shall all be righteous." The following have no share in the world to come. He who says the Resurrection of the dead is not indicated in the Law [Torah], he who says the Law is not from heaven [i.e. divine], and the Epikouros [the disrespectful skeptic or heretic].[8]

This last statement most likely refers to the dispute between the Pharisees and Sadducees concerning the resurrection, the Mishnah preserving the Pharisaic view. The belief in resurrection was prevalent in first-century Judaism. Even though he doubts the authenticity of the Gospel reports of the resurrection debate, E.P. Sanders still grants the following:

> I see no way of coming to a hard decision about the authenticity of a debate on the resurrection (Mark 12:18-27 and parr.), but we should accept that Jesus "believed in" resurrection. It is often emphasized that the Pharisees did so, but we should probably turn the phrasing around: everyone did, except the Sadducees.[9]

The dispute between the Pharisees and Sadducees was certainly well enough known that Luke portrays Paul as using it to confuse the Sanhedrin in a particularly dramatic moment as its members convene to judge him (Acts 23:6-10). We have primary evidence from Josephus of the Pharisaic belief in the soul's physical revival, although his statements seem to be describing reincarnation:

> Of the two schools named first, the Pharisees are held to be the most authoritative exponents of the Law and count as the leading sect. They ascribe everything to Fate or to God: the decision whether or not to do right rests mainly with men, but in every action Fate takes some part. Every soul is imperishable, but only the souls of good men pass into other bodies, the souls of bad men being subjected to eternal punishment. The Sadducees, the second order, deny Fate altogether and hold that God is incapable of either committing sin or seeing it; they say that men are free to choose between good and evil, and each individual must decide which he will follow. The permanence of the soul, punishments in Hades, and rewards they deny utterly.[10]

Rabbinic Judaism, the forerunner of modern Orthodox Judaism, was itself the successor of Pharisaic Judaism, the Sadducees having fallen into

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8 Montefiore and Loewe, *Rabbinic Anthology,* 604.

9 E.P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 237.

10 Flavius Josephus, *The Jewish War,* trans. G. A. Williamson, rev. ed. (New York: Dorset, 1985), 137-38.

decline after the destruction of the Temple. Even today one can find references to resurrection in the Orthodox Jewish prayer book:

> My God, the soul with which Thou hast endowed me is pure. Thou hast created it. Thou hast formed it. Thou hast breathed it into me. Thou dost preserve it within me, and Thou wilt hereafter reclaim it and restore it to me in the life to come. So long as there is soul within me, I avow before Thee, Lord my God and God of my fathers, that Thou art the Sovereign of all creation, the Ruler of all living, the Lord of all souls. Lord who dost restore the soul to the dead, blessed art Thou.[11]

It is worth noting that the literal translation of the last phrase is "Lord, who returns souls to dead corpses." The prayer itself is recited on the occasion of awakening from the night's sleep, but the resurrection belief has found its way in as an analogy.

Another resurrection reference occurs in the central prayer known as the "Eighteen Benedictions" or '*Amidah*:

> Lord who art mighty unto eternity, Thou givest life to the dead. Thou art mighty in saving the living, in love sustaining them. . . .
>
> Thou upholdest the falling, Thou healest the sick, Thou loosenest the bound. In Thy great love Thou givest life to the dead, keeping faith with them who sleep in the dust. Who is like unto Thee, Lord of power, who resembles Thee, King who sends death and in the flowering of Thy saving power gives life? Faithful art Thou to give life to the dead. Lord, blessed art Thou who givest life to the dead.[12]

Originally, this blessing spoke only of God's might as manifest in the sustenance He grants to all living things and in such beneficial phenomena of nature as the coming of dew, wind and rain in their proper season. The reference to the revival of the dead was probably added during the second century before the Common Era, when resurrection became a fundamental issue in the conflict between the Sadducees (who did not believe in it) and the Pharisees.[13]

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[11] David de Sola Pool, ed. and trans., *Book of Prayer According to the Custom of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews,* 2d ed. (New York: Union of Sephardic Congregations, 1960), 1.

[12] Ibid., 60-61.

[13] Solomon Gaon, *Minhath Shelomo: A Commentary on the Book of Prayer' of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews* (New York: Union of Sephardic Congregations, 1990).

Resurrection and the New Testament

We now have an idea of how the belief in resurrection gradually evolved from its roots in the covenantal relationship between God and humanity, the conviction that this bond is unbreakable. The specific belief in resurrection was thus well established by New Testament times, and along with the apocalyptic background it influenced the thoughts and beliefs of the New Testament writers.

Nowhere in the New Testament is the influence of apocalyptic more clearly evident than in the book of Revelation, although as we shall see, this is not the only significant example. This book, whose title is literally the "Apocalypse of John," was most likely written toward the end of the first century CE. It has all the characteristics of apocalyptic writing: rich symbolism and imagery in visions describing a cataclysmic struggle between good and evil, with the good triumphing after a period of hard tribulation. We find extensive elaboration of the typical themes: judgment, destruction, resurrection, establishment of a new order. In addition, as is also characteristic of much apocalyptic writing since Daniel, there are veiled references to the political conditions of the times, predictions couched in symbolic language of the destruction of Rome, described as the new Babylon or as the mythical Beast.

Of particular interest for our present study, the book uses a theme common in the Jewish apocalypses: the resurrection of the righteous as a sign of the coming of the new age:

> Then I saw thrones, and those seated on them were given authority to judge. I also saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. Over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him a thousand years....
>
> Then I saw a great white throne and the one who sat on it; the earth and the heaven fled from his presence, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, the book of life. And the dead were judged according to their works, as recorded in the books. And the sea gave up the dead that were

> in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and all were judged according to what they had done. (Revelation 20:4-6,11-13)

In this and what follows (21:4) we can observe noticeable similarities to the apocalyptic passages in Isaiah (25:8 and 26:19). In fact, throughout Revelation we can find numerous allusions to apocalyptic passages in the Hebrew Bible.

Thus Christian as well as Jewish apocalyptic writers used the theme of resurrection, and did not always apply it to the resurrection of Jesus. To understand the meaning of this more specific resurrection we must turn to the Gospels, and also to those writings which preceded them, the letters of Paul.

Resurrection and the Letters of Paul

Paul's letters are particularly significant for our discussion since they are the only direct testimony we have of someone who has actually claimed to have seen the risen Jesus. We do have Luke's account of Paul's meeting the risen Jesus in Acts 9. We cannot, however, rely too strongly on this account. Luke's accuracy as a historian has been questioned on many details, both in his Gospel and in Acts, and Acts 9 and Galatians 1 blatantly contradict each other on a number of particulars. Thus the whole account of Paul's conversion in Acts 9 might be called into question. In any case, Luke does not even say that Paul "saw" the risen Jesus; he "heard a voice" (Acts 9:4, 22:7, 26:14). What he did see was a light from heaven, and afterwards he became blind.

How does Paul himself describe the encounter? We might wish for more detail, but here is what Paul does say:

> Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? (1 Corinthians 9:1)

> For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.

> Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. (1 Corinthians 15:3-8)
>
> You have heard, no doubt, of my earlier life in Judaism. I was violently persecuting the church of God and was trying to destroy it. I advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people of the same age, for I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors. But when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with any human being, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were already apostles before me, but I went away at once into Arabia, and afterwards I returned to Damascus. (Galatians 1:13-17)

Paul says that he has "seen" Jesus, or that Jesus "appeared" to him. He says nothing, however, about encountering a physical body. We find in Paul none of the descriptions of the resurrected Jesus's physical nature that we find among the Gospel reports, such as seeing Jesus eat, or touching his wounds. In fact, Paul takes great pains to say that the resurrected Jesus he encountered was not a physical body.

If Paul had intended to witness to a physically resurrected Jesus, his own doctrine of resurrection would have emphasized the physical body. As we have seen, this would have been quite consistent with Jewish belief at the time. But Paul could not teach a doctrine of the resurrection that contradicted his own experience of it. The resurrection he did preach was indeed a real resurrection, but if not clearly of a spiritual nature, at least not of a physical nature that would be familiar to us:

> But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words. (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)

This passage is important for two reasons. First, it shows that Paul expected the *parousia*, Jesus's second coming, to occur soon, quite possibly in his own lifetime: "we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the

Lord." Second, it shows how Paul's concept of the resurrection is essentially spiritual: those who are resurrected "will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air." The resurrection body is thus not a kind of physical entity we would be familiar with, but spiritual, existing in the "air." (*Pneuma*, "spirit," also means "breath," and is thus connected to the air.)

Paul, a Hellenistic Jew, was influenced by both Jewish and Greek ideas. His teaching on the resurrection may have been influenced not only by his own personal experience, but also by the Greeks' negative attitude toward the body. To the Greeks, the body was a prison shackling the spirit to a limited world. The Greeks were puzzled by the Jewish idea of resurrection, as Paul found when he confronted the Corinthians, a congregation of Hellenistic Christians a number of whom denied the general resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:12). Paul himself appears to have a negative or at least ambivalent attitude toward the physical body, seeming to view the body in largely Greek terms. He speaks often of the dualism of "spirit" and "flesh," and while "flesh" means more than just the physical body, referring to the limitations of human existence, it includes the physical as part of that limitation. Thus Paul opposes body and spirit: "So we are always confident; even though we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord ... we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:6,8). He laments, "Who will rescue me from this body of death?" (Romans 7:24). So Paul is understandably not attached to a literal, physical resurrection, although, as we shall see, the idea of resurrection plays an important role in his theology. Resurrection for Paul is a *liberation* from the limitations of physical existence, to share in the glorious freedom of Christ:

> Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself. (Philippians 3:17-21)

Note the contrasts: "their god is the belly," "their minds are set on earthly things," "body of humiliation," versus "our citizenship is in heaven,"

“the body of his glory.” It would indeed be difficult to imagine Paul’s resurrected Jesus showing him his wounds or eating fish in his presence to prove his physical reality.

Paul delivered his most detailed statement about the resurrection to the church in Corinth. The Christians there denied the doctrine of a general resurrection, and Paul wished to correct them while still insisting on its spiritual nature:

> Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ--whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. (1 Corinthians 15:12-16)

For Paul there is an absolutely necessary connection between the resurrection of Christ and the general resurrection of the dead, a connection that some contemporary Christians might find difficult to understand. We are used to thinking of the resurrection of Christ as a unique event, but Paul saw it in the context of the general apocalyptic expectation, and outside this context it would have been unthinkable. The resurrection of Christ is proof for Paul that the general resurrection, and therefore the apocalyptic fulfillment of history, is at hand. Thus the resurrection of Christ is the “first fruits” of the general resurrection to come.

> If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have died in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.
>
> But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. (1 Corinthians 15:17-20)

Paul sees the resurrection of Christ not as a singular event but as one step in a redemptive process culminating with the apocalyptic fulfillment, as he describes in language that is unmistakably apocalyptic:

> For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power.

> For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. (1 Corinthians 15:21-26)

Paul next turns his attention to the specific characteristics of the resurrection body. He does so in a striking series of contrasts, opposing the spiritual nature of the resurrection body to the physical nature of the earthly one:

> But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?” Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. Not all flesh is alike, but there is one flesh for human beings, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. There are both heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one thing, and that of the earthly is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; indeed, star differs from star in glory.
>
> So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, “The first man, Adam, became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the physical, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have born the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven. (1 Corinthians 15:35-49)

Note the antitheses that Paul draws: glory of the earthly/glory of the heavenly, perishable/imperishable, dishonor/glory, weakness/power, physical body/spiritual body, of dust/of heaven. Paul emphasizes the freedom and limitlessness of the resurrected “spiritual body” in contrast to the bondage and limitation of the earthly physical body. They are of two different realms. The physical comes first, and then the spiritual. The first man, man of dust, is from the earth; the second man is from heaven. The first Adam became a “living being”; the last Adam became a “life-giving spirit.” We have born the image of the “man of dust” in our fleshly, limited human existence, but we will bear the image of the “man of heaven” once our transformation takes place.

Endless discourses have been written concerning what Paul meant or did not mean by what he just said, and there is no dearth of disagreement. But Paul could hardly have taken greater pains to contrast the “physical body” of our earthly existence to the “spiritual body” of the resurrection. The emphasis is not on their similarity in being both called “body,” but on the vast, unbridgeable difference between the physical and the spiritual. As if this were not sufficiently clear, Paul’s next statement is an explicit denial of any physical characteristic to the resurrection body:

> What I am saying, brothers and sisters, is this: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. (1 Corinthians 15:50)

Once again, Paul’s language of contrasts is striking. Whatever he may have meant by “spiritual body,” and this has certainly been much disputed, one thing is clear: it is not a physical body. Paul may have been thinking of some kind of self-contained spiritual entity, as opposed to a body of flesh and blood. The contrast becomes even more striking when we compare Paul’s statement to the passage from 2 Baruch, written perhaps some thirty years later. There we read “the earth will surely give back the dead at that time; it receives them now in order to keep them, not changing anything in their form. But as it has received them so it will give them back.” There the emphasis is on the identity of the body pre- and post-resurrection, while Paul, influenced as he was by Greek thought, so carefully emphasizes the differences between the two states. In effect Paul distances himself both from the Jewish view of a literal resurrection ushering in the kingdom, and from the view of the Corinthian Christians denying the general resurrection altogether.

Paul continues by saying that the end is indeed imminent, and that many in his audience will in this very lifetime witness the ultimate transformation of their nature from mortality to spirituality:

> Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled:
>
> “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

"Where, 0 death, is your victory?
Where, 0 death, is your sting?"

(1 Corinthians 15:51-55)

The resurrection of Christ is a prelude to a general resurrection that will finally conquer even the power of death. Thus again we see that for Paul the resurrection of Christ cannot be separated from its apocalyptic context; to do so would deprive it of all meaning. *Paul works with the resurrection of Christ within his understanding of Jewish apocalyptic,* bringing it to a triumphant and glorious conclusion.

One scholar who has described with extraordinary clarity the unbreakable connection of Paul's theology to Jewish apocalypticism is J. Christiaan Beker. In *Paul the Apostle* he states:

> Resurrection language is end-time language and unintelligible apart from the apocalyptic thought world to which resurrection language belongs. Resurrection language properly belongs to the domain of the new age to come and is an inherent part of the transformation and the recreation of all reality in the apocalyptic age. Thus the resurrection of Christ, the coming reign of God, and the future resurrection of the dead belong together.[14]

Beker goes on to say that since resurrection is an apocalyptic category, Christ's resurrection can be understood *only* as the first sign of the general resurrection belonging to the new age. If we split off the resurrection of Christ from the age to come, we necessarily distort its meaning, for then instead of being an *inaugural* event of the general redemption, it becomes a *closure* event marking the end of Jesus's ministry on earth. The resurrection may then glorify Christ, but loses its significance for the transformation of the human order. Resurrection was not understood that way in the first century.

Paul's teaching of the resurrection can be properly understood only in relation to his expectation that the kingdom would arrive soon, most likely within his own lifetime. But Paul lived and taught shortly after Jesus's death, and so could have hope for Jesus's imminent return. The more time passed, the more difficult it became to sustain this hope. This was the problem that the Gospel writers had to face.

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[14] J. Christiaan Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 152.

Resurrection and the Gospels

The resurrection accounts in the Gospels present some special problems. They exhibit a huge amount of variation; even in the "synoptic" Gospels these accounts are completely different from each other. The discrepancies between them are irreconcilable: for example, in Matthew the resurrection appearances occur exclusively in Galilee, in Luke they occur exclusively in Jerusalem, and Mark reports no resurrection appearances at all. There are many other discrepancies. These differences between the Gospels have been discussed in great detail in many places, and there is no need to reproduce those discussions here. For the present we will focus on the specifically apocalyptic context of the Gospel reports.

One of the most puzzling aspects of the Gospel of Mark, the earliest of the Gospels, is its abrupt ending. When the three women come to visit the body of Jesus they are told that the body is not there since Jesus has been raised. They are not to linger in Jerusalem but to go up to Galilee. They respond not with joy but with fear: "So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid" (Mark 16:8). This ending has perplexed many for a long time, and so we find a "longer ending" to Mark describing some resurrection appearances (Mark 16:9-20), but the best scholarship today, supported by textual criticism, holds these verses to be a late addition. The original ending of Mark does make sense, however, when seen within its apocalyptic framework.

One can detect an undercurrent of apocalypticism throughout the Gospel of Mark, and this is most apparent in the so-called "synoptic apocalypse," Mark 13 (and its parallels in Matthew 24 and Luke 21). In this chapter we see many classic apocalyptic themes: nations warring against each other, famines, earthquakes, persecution and death, the sun and moon darkening, stars falling from heaven, the appearance of the redeeming Son of Man. All these motifs are well represented in the intertestamental literature we have discussed earlier. Also present is a sense that the kingdom is imminent:

> Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power. (Mark 9:1)

> And if the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would be saved; but for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he has cut short those days. (Mark 13:20)
>
> Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. (Mark 13:30)
>
> "You will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power," and "coming with the clouds of heaven." (Mark 14:62)

All these apocalyptic prophecies are connected with the destruction of the Temple:

> Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down. (Mark 13:2)

Mark wrote his Gospel in or close to the year 70, the year that the Romans under Titus captured Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple, putting an end to four years of Jewish revolt. This was an event of incalculable significance for the Jewish religion, with its worship centered in the Temple, and for Jewish nationalistic aspirations, an important part of that religion. Mark and the Christian community for which he wrote saw the Temple's destruction, which they had freshly witnessed, as a sign of the imminent arrival of the end-time. They took this as reason to identify themselves with Jesus's generation in expecting the ultimate transformation to occur shortly.

There is one other important apocalyptic motif present here: *the event of resurrection*, only this time it is the resurrection of the Messiah himself, the Son of Man who will come to redeem the world. This resurrection has just occurred as Mark's Gospel closes. Mark places his readers with the women at the tomb, waiting for Jesus's final appearance, the true resurrection appearance continuing the story Mark has come to tell. There can be no other resurrection appearances in Mark, for they would kill the dramatic sense of apocalyptic expectation by presenting Jesus's return as an event that has already passed. Nothing must interfere with the sense that the kingdom's arrival is actually at hand, and Mark's original ending beautifully portrays the tension of that expectation. For Mark the resurrection *is* the *parousia*, the triumphant return of Jesus to redeem the world.[15] Mark ends

[15] Norman Perrin, *The Resurrection According to Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 33; Paula Fredriksen, *From Jesus to Christ* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 52.

his Gospel in precisely the right place, anticipating the conclusion of the story within his own lifetime.

The Gospel of Matthew was written perhaps fifteen to twenty years later than Mark. By that time the Temple's destruction could no longer be seen as a sign of Jesus's imminent return. Matthew thus had to adapt Mark's narrative to meet the needs of his own community. He does use Mark's apocalyptic imagery but modifies it so that it no longer describes a cosmic transformation about to occur, but pushes that transformation ahead towards an indefinite future. While for Mark the present is the setting for the apocalyptic conclusion of history, for Matthew the present is an interim period, a time of anticipation between Jesus's first appearance and his second, decisive one. The term *parousia*, which literally means "presence" or "advent" and is now used to refer to the second coming of Christ, is used exclusively by Matthew to refer to the coming of the Son of Man in his glory at the close of the age (Matthew 24:3,27,37,39).

Let us look at exactly how Matthew modifies the material in Mark. Matthew implies that the events signaling the end will follow a longer time course than Mark appears to suggest. In Mark, the events in the apocalyptic section have a sense of being present or about to happen, while in Matthew, they have more a sense of being in the future:

1. Matthew places Mark 13:9-13, which refers to the conflict between synagogue and church that was in his day already a reality, earlier in his Gospel (Matthew 10:17-22). There it becomes a warning of Jesus to his disciples about the dangers they may expect to face if they are faithful to him, rather than a specific sign of the apocalyptic fulfillment. In the apocalyptic section Matthew replaces these verses with a more general prediction of future strife signaling the end (Matthew 24:9-13). Matthew is also more explicit than Mark that the gospel must first be proclaimed to the Gentiles worldwide, *"and then* the end will corne" (Matthew 24:14).

2. Where Mark says that the Lord "has cut short those days" (Mark. 13:20), Matthew says "those days *will be* cut short" (Matthew 24:22).

3. While Mark mentions the coming of the end as possible at any moment *within* the day, Matthew stretches the metaphor and mentions the event as possible at any day within an indefinite span of time:

> Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. . . . Therefore, keep awake--for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn. (Mark. 13 :33,35)
>
> Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. . . . Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour. (Matthew 24:42,25:13)

Mark uses the word *kairos* for "time," the critical transforming moment (rather than *chronos*, which refers to the continuous span of time). Mark speaks of moments; Matthew speaks of days. Both are metaphorical, but the implications are different.

4. After the apocalyptic section and before describing the last events of Jesus's life, Matthew inserts a series of parables all concerned with preparing for the kingdom in spite of its delay. The faithful slave is the one "whom his master will find at work when he arrives," while the wicked slave says "My master is delayed" and takes advantage of the situation (Matthew 24:46,48). The ten virgins become drowsy and sleep "as the bridegroom was delayed" (Matthew 25:5). In the parable of the talents the master goes away on a journey and returns "after a long time" to see if his servants are ready (Matthew 25:19). Similarly, at the last judgment, "When the Son of Man comes in his glory," he will examine the nations to see how they have comported themselves in his absence (Matthew 25:31). The message of these parables is: Be neither discouraged nor complacent because the savior's coming is delayed; though the time may be in doubt, the return is certain. In this way Matthew handles a theological problem which for Mark did not exist.

Matthew's modifications of Mark's material to address the theological needs of his own community do not end with the close of the apocalyptic section, but continue through his description of Jesus's crucifixion and resurrection. Describing Jesus's death, Mark once more alludes to the destruction of the Temple: "And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom" (Mark 15:38). Matthew takes this passage and actually *adds* further apocalyptic imagery:

> At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many. (Matthew 27:51-53)

Here Matthew, through his use of apocalyptic imagery, supernaturalizes the events of Jesus's death. Events in Mark that seem grounded in time become in Matthew symbolic and ultimately prophetic. Jesus's resurrection is here already associated with the general resurrection of the righteous, which we have seen to be a traditional apocalyptic sign of the close of the age. It is accompanied by other signs, such as earthquakes and the splitting of rocks. Thus we have an ambiguity concerning time: events understood to be happening in the present are permeated with signs of the eschatological future. We are no longer strictly within earthly time.[16] The resurrection of Jesus fulfills earthly time and inaugurates an *interim* time that has some of the quality of human time but that simultaneously prophesies the end.

There is a profound paradox in Matthew's description of the resurrection. On the one hand, Matthew is concerned with preserving the historicity of the resurrection, and so he inserts the apologetic legend of the guards at the tomb (Matthew 27: 62-66). On the other hand, as we shall see, the scene Matthew describes cannot adequately be understood within historical time.

The story of the guards at the tomb occurs only in Matthew, and most modern scholars see it as apologetic in intent rather than historical. Taken literally it is rather curious, since it implies that Jesus's enemies knew something that was hidden even from his friends: that the tomb would be found empty. Matthew seems to be saying that the scribes and Pharisees knew there would be a resurrection (or at least an attempt to stage one), while to the women and to the disciples it came as a total surprise. Thus Matthew awkwardly attempts to counter a criticism leveled against Christians in his day: that if the tomb was indeed empty, it was because the disciples had stolen the body.

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[16] Cf. Norman Perrin and Dennis C. Duling, *The New Testament: An Introduction*, 2d ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982), 289.

In continuing to see how Matthew adds a supernatural dimension to Mark's account, we may note that the "young man, dressed in a white robe" (Mark 16:5) who greets the women at the tomb becomes in Matthew "an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven" whose "appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow" (Matthew 28:2,3). Furthermore, in Mark the women arrive to find that the stone has already been rolled back from the mouth of the tomb. In Matthew, the angel, accompanied by the apocalyptic sign of an earthquake, comes and rolls the stone back, revealing the empty tomb to the women. In Mark it appears that the resurrected Jesus left the tomb after the stone was moved to allow him passage, while in Matthew he did not need this physical passageway in order to exit the tomb. Thus in Mark Jesus is resurrected as a physical body (which is more consistent with the traditional Jewish idea) while in Matthew Jesus is resurrected as a spirit that can pass through physical barriers (which seems more consistent with Paul's idea). Matthew spiritualizes Mark's account, adding to the impression that we are not quite dealing here with time in the usual human sense.

The resurrection appearances that Matthew supplies also give the sense of an interim time between history and eschatology. Here Jesus is with his disciples, but their work is not yet complete; they are to go "and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). Except for an oblique reference in 28:9 that the disciples "took hold of his feet" there is no hint in these appearances that the resurrected Jesus possesses physical characteristics. Also, Jesus never ascends. The Gospel concludes with Jesus saying "I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28: 20). This ending concisely summarizes the paradox: Jesus's presence will never be interrupted, but the age has not yet come to a close. We are in an interim time: not quite historical, not quite eschatological. It is a time of preparation for the kingdom, as the wise virgins prepared for it; it is the time of the work of the church.

In conclusion, we might say that in Mark the event of resurrection preserves its original meaning as a sign of the apocalyptic fulfillment. The resurrection itself is transferred from resurrection of the righteous remnant, as it was understood in Jewish apocalypticism, to resurrection of the Son of Man who represents all the nations of the world. In Matthew, the event of resurrection is detached from the ultimate end, and becomes instead a sign closing Jesus's earthly ministry and inaugurating an interim period marked

by the formation of the church, which will bring about the true close through evangelizing all the world's nations.

Like Matthew, Luke had to confront the delay of the *parousia* and incorporate it into his theology. He does this by shifting the emphasis away from the apocalyptic conclusion of history toward the here-and-now, and like Matthew by projecting the apocalyptic fulfillment toward an indefinite future. One obvious distinguishing feature of Luke's Gospel is that it is the first volume of a two-volume work. The second volume, the book of Acts, is the first history of the early church. Simply by the fact of writing the latter, Luke downplays the apocalyptic theme of the imminent conclusion of history. Luke definitely did expect a second coming (Acts 1:11), but he did not expect it soon:

> So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority." (Acts 1:6-7)

We thus have a complete break from Mark, for whom the resurrection is the expected inauguration of the new age.

In Luke, Jesus's preaching about the kingdom does not have the apocalyptic edge that it has in Mark. In Mark we see Jesus beginning his ministry by continuing to preach the message of John the Baptist about the arrival of the kingdom:

> Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." (Mark 1:14-15)

Luke's description of the beginning of Jesus's ministry replaces this apocalyptic statement with something much less direct:

> Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone. (Luke 4:14-15)

Luke appears to discourage waiting for the kingdom of God to arrive as the event that will transform the world and bring history to a close. He presents a view of the kingdom neither cosmic nor political but spiritual: it is

not some external thing that can be observed, but is in fact already realized in the community of believers:

> Once Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, and he answered, “The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There it is!’ For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you.” (Luke 17:20-21)

Luke has his own versions of the parables in Matthew that deal with living through the kingdom’s delay. He is even more explicit than Matthew in warning against expecting any imminent transformation. He begins his Parable of the Pounds (parallel to Matthew’s Parable of the Talents) with a caution not to rely on such expectations:

> As they were listening to this, he went on to tell a parable, because he was near Jerusalem, and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately. (Luke 19:11)

Luke also has his versions of Matthew’s parables of the faithful slave and the virgins and their lamps, the other parables that deal with living through the kingdom’s delay. In Luke it is not virgins but watchful slaves who have their lamps lit, “waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet” (Luke 12:36). The parable of the faithful and wicked slaves is very similar to Matthew’s version; here too the wicked one tries to take advantage of the fact that “My master is delayed in coming” (Luke 12:45). While the kingdom’s arrival may not be as soon as expected, one nevertheless dare not be unprepared for it.

Luke does preserve many of the apocalyptic references in Mark, but with changes that detract significantly from the sense that the kingdom will arrive at any foreseeable moment. Where Mark has Jesus warn his disciples:

> Beware that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name and say, “I am he!” and they will lead many astray. (Mark 13:6)

Luke makes a telling addition:

> Beware that you are not led astray; for many will come in my name and say, “I am he!” and, “The time is near!” Do not go after them. (Luke 21:8)

In the very next verse Luke changes Mark's version "but the end is still to come" (Mark 13:7: ἀλλ᾽ οὔπω τὸ τέλος, "but not *yet* the end") to "but the end will not follow immediately" (Luke 21:9: ἀλλ᾽ οὐκ εὐθέως τὸ τέλος, "but not *immediately* the end"). Luke transforms Mark's statement of temporal *sequence* into a statement about *duration*. Luke preserves the apocalyptic symbols of the wars between the nations, the earthquakes and famines (Mark 13:8), but while Mark calls these "the beginning of the birthpangs" *and then* describes the conflict between the Christians and the synagogue, Luke displaces these apocalyptic signs to an indefinite future by implying that the conflict with the synagogue must play itself out first: "But *before* all this occurs, they will arrest you and persecute you…" (Luke 21:12). After describing these persecutions Mark's version continues: "But the one who endures to the end will be saved" (Mark 13:13). Luke, for whom these persecutions are not a sign of the end, has "By your endurance you will gain your souls" (Luke 21:19).

We have already seen how Matthew modified the statement in Mark that the Lord "has cut short those days" (Mark 13:20). Luke does not even modify it; he eliminates it and has instead a statement that these things must happen "until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (Luke 21:24), indicating another postponement because of the period of time that the Gentiles will dominate Jerusalem. Then, where Mark says "But *in those days*, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven" (Mark 13:24-25), Luke has "There *will be* signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars" (Luke 21:25), again shifting the emphasis toward the future. This is to be contrasted with the earlier statement in Luke's version, "When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that *its desolation has come near*": what is near for Luke is not the *parousia* but the destruction of Jerusalem, and Luke, unlike Mark, does not link the two.

Luke includes a number of resurrection appearances, portrayed with his own special artistry, totally different from Matthew's but also indicating a significant period of time before the end. In Luke's account there is a definite moment in which Jesus ascends, leaving his disciples to continue his work and begin the history of the church. The focus never shifts away entirely from the present world.

In these resurrection narratives Luke places much emphasis on the passion. The passion predictions are in fact recalled three times (Luke 24:6-7,25-26,44-46), reassuring those who might be tempted to lose faith after Jesus's death. One of the travelers to Emmaus even says, "But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel" (Luke 2.4:21), alluding to the traditional Jewish messianic expectation, and no mention is made of the fulfillment of this hope. Thus the Messiah has indeed come even though Israel may still be awaiting its redemption. The resurrection is not a sign of the end as in traditional Jewish eschatology; it is the bridge between Jesus's earthly ministry and the work of the church.

One might at first receive the impression that the resurrected Jesus is not a physical body: he suddenly disappears as soon as the Emmaus travelers recognize him (Luke 24:31). However, Luke also shows the opposite: Jesus invites his startled disciples to touch his body and see that he is real, and says that indeed he does have flesh and bones. To demonstrate, he eats a piece of broiled fish in front of them (Luke 24:36-43). Such a picture of Jesus resurrected would be inconceivable in either Paul or Mark. It may be significant that Luke's audience consisted primarily of non-Jewish Greek Christians.[17] Perrin[18] maintains that this episode is an apologetic legend, intended to counter the tendency among non-Jewish Hellenistic Christians to believe that the resurrected Jesus was just one more spirit like the others in their pantheon, in contrast to Matthew's apologetic purpose to defend the gospel from attacks by Jewish skeptics.

Thus in Luke we have a resurrection virtually stripped of apocalyptic significance. The resurrected Jesus is himself very much a part of the world. He does not represent the fulfillment of Israel's apocalyptic hope. He is real, he is physical, he reassures his disciples, and he gives them their final instructions before leaving them entirely. These instructions become more explicit in the first chapter of Acts. After Jesus's ascension, the two white-robed men tell his followers, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven?" (Acts 1:11). It is time now to focus on the present world, until the undisclosed moment when Jesus will return. Eschatology has its place, but the emphasis is now on history.

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[17] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, The Gospel According to Luke *I-I*X (New York: Doubleday, 1981), p. 58.

[18] Perrin, *Resurrection*, 66.

We noted earlier that Luke's resurrection appearances all occur in Jerusalem, while Matthew's occur only in Galilee. Matthew was writing for a Jewish audience, who could relate to a Jewish Messiah in Galilee, a Jewish area. Luke wished to appeal to a Gentile audience, so places his appearances in cosmopolitan Jerusalem. Thus the following discrepancy between Luke and Mark:

> But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you." (Mark 16:6-7)

But Luke writes:

> After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. (Acts 1:3-4)

According to Luke the disciples don't make it back to Galilee at all. They remain in Jerusalem to prepare for a greater ministry:

> So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:6-8)

We see once again the postponement of the *parousia* to an indefinite future. Meanwhile, in Jerusalem the disciples must ready themselves to reach out to the Gentile world.

In the Gospel of John we find a much different approach from that of the synoptics. In John, in an important sense the eschatological fulfillment has already been realized. "In many ways John is the best example in the NT of realized eschatology."[19] Jesus's coming to earth is already a cosmic event. Immediately in the prologue Jesus is referred to as the "light": "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it" (John 1:5); John the Baptist came "to testify to the light. The true light, which

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[19] Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), p. cxvii.

enlightens everyone, was coming into the world" (John 1:8-9). "Light" and "darkness" are traditional apocalyptic categories. The so-called "War Scroll" of the Dead Sea Scrolls describes in detail the coming war between the "sons of light" and the "sons of darkness."[20] Jesus's coming brings the victory of the light to those who receive him: "To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God" (John 1:13) .

Another way in which the Gospel of John describes a realized eschatology is that in this Gospel Jesus does not suffer. There is no portrayal of Jesus's agony in Gethsemane as there is in the synoptics. Jesus does not cry out on the cross that God has abandoned him. Indeed, Jesus refers to his crucifixion by saying that he must be "lifted up" (John 3:14, 8:28, 12:32), a play on words suggesting that the crucifixion is also an exaltation. The hour of Jesus's death is treated as the hour of apocalyptic fulfillment. There is first a sense of anticipation: we are twice told that his hour has "not yet come" (John 2:4, 8:20). Then, finally, it does arrive: "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified" (John 12:23).

The sense of realized eschatology we receive in this Gospel is not unambiguous. There is a tension between realized and final eschatology, reflecting the original apocalyptic tradition from which John draws his imagery. We have a sense, first, that the hour has indeed arrived:

> Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life. Very truly, I tell you, the hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. (John 5:24-25)

This is immediately followed by a projection of the final resurrection into the future:

> Do not be astonished at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and will come out—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation. (John 5:28-29)

John further uses the image of resurrection in its apocalyptic sense:

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[20] Geza Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English,* 2d ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), 124; Theodor H. Gaster, *The Dead Sea Scriptures,* 3d ed. (Garden City: Doubleday/Anchor, 1976), 399.

> This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day. (John 6:40)
>
> No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day. (John 6:44)
>
> Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day. (John 6:54)

This apocalyptic "last day" is here, as elsewhere, associated with the final judgment:

> The one who rejects me and does not receive my word has a judge; on the last day the word that I have spoken will serve as judge. (John 12:48)

But this judgment, reserved for the "last day," is also occurring now:

> I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just, because I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me. (John 5:30)

Despite (or perhaps more accurately, because of) this Gospel's emphasis on realized eschatology, the community to whom it was important still had to deal with the delay of the complete eschatological fulfillment. We find this problem addressed in chapter 21, which is a later addition to the Gospel. Apparently the members of the Johannine community, for whom the Beloved Disciple was a central figure, expected Jesus's return within this disciple's lifetime. Thus the death of the Beloved Disciple must have come as a terrible shock. And so we find the author of the final chapter attempting to harmonize this death with Jesus's promise:

> Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them; he was the one who had reclined next to Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?" When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about him?" Jesus said to him, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!" So the rumor spread in the community that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?" (John 21:22-23)

Thus the death of the Beloved Disciple (and the delay of the end) need not be considered a threat to faith if Jesus phrased his promise conditionally: "*If* it is my will that he remain until I come."

The resurrected Jesus in John is once again the foremost example of the apocalyptic resurrection in Jewish belief. Although in John the apocalyptic signs have all but vanished, they are not totally absent. Even this Gospel, as we have seen, contains references to the general resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus is attended by angels (John 20:12), suggesting to Mary that she no longer has cause to weep. In John, Jesus's resurrection body has a physical aspect. Jesus demonstrates his physicality to the doubting Thomas (John 20:24-29), and joins his disciples for a breakfast of fish (John 21:9-13). In John the physical resurrection of Jesus is the final proof that the hour of salvation has indeed arrived.

Conclusion: The Meaning of the Resurrection

From the foregoing summary one thing is clear: the resurrection of Christ was not a singular event in time that occurred independent of any historical or theological context. The idea of resurrection developed gradually over a long period of time, emerging from the transformation of Hebrew prophecy to apocalyptic eschatology, and was firmly established in the minds of many Jews well before the events of that first Easter Sunday. The idea of resurrection is still powerful today, evoking deep responses not only in religious Christians but in many who appreciate the rich heritage of Christian culture. How can we adequately understand the meaning for us today of what is essentially a category of first-century theological thought?

This question is crucial particularly since, as mentioned in the introduction, the legacy of the resurrection has had its dark side, becoming a focal point of separation and often violent conflict between Christians and Jews. It would seem that the claims of the two religions are completely incompatible. It would therefore be worthwhile to explore whether we can understand the meaning of the resurrection in such a way as to build a bridge between these two traditions. Perhaps if we penetrate deeply enough to the core of this powerful symbol, we may find a meaning equally rooted in Jewish and Christian tradition that transcends them both, revealing to Christians and Jews alike new possibilities of a healing faith.

We are prepared today as never before to undertake such an exploration. Because of advances in biblical scholarship as well as key archeological findings, we know much more today about the historical, sociological, and religious context of Jesus's time. We know more about the

Judaism of Jesus's day, which gives us a better idea of his place within it. We also have a greater awareness of the process by which religious writings are formed, how they are carefully put together and edited from oral and written sources. To be sure, we do not yet have answers to all of our questions. After decades of investigation the "historical Jesus" is still an elusive figure, but the possibilities for research are not yet exhausted. And so we cannot afford to neglect biblical scholarship as a valuable tool in our search for answers to theological questions that take shape through the symbols and narratives of the Bible.

Unfortunately, theology and biblical scholarship have largely become two separate camps. Bible scholars, whose desire to preserve their objectivity is understandable, hesitate to do theology. And ministers who interpret the holy word to their congregations may become so heavily involved in their pastoral responsibilities that little time is left for the latest in Bible scholarship. This often results in sermons relying on biblical interpretations that are centuries out of date. Theology and its practical application in the preaching of the word cannot afford to ignore the results of biblical scholarship, and it is time for a greater working relationship between these disciplines.

What Really Happened?

How does biblical scholarship help us address the meaning of the resurrection? This inevitably brings us to the most basic question, What really happened on that first Easter? This is both a historical question and a question of faith. A faith that makes historical claims needs the courage to ask historical questions.

The question is clearly not a simple one. To answer it, let us look once again at the evidence we have gathered from the Bible and related literature. As we have noted, Paul is the only one who claims to have witnessed the resurrected Christ whose direct testimony we actually possess. Luke's account of Paul's conversion in Acts is not eyewitness testimony, and so it is difficult to rely too heavily on that. As for Paul's letters, they do not tell us enough to know with certainty what his experience actually was. We can, however, still draw a number of conclusions.

Paul does not claim to have witnessed a physically resurrected body. He never had any contact with a physical Jesus. All the descriptions Paul gives of the resurrection suggest that for him, the resurrected form is some type of spiritual entity. He knows of no tradition of an empty tomb, and he describes the resurrected state primarily in spiritual terms, or at the very least, in terms different from the physicality we know from earthly existence. His accounts of his own experience, taken together with his general comments on the resurrection, are not inconsistent with other accounts of visions and revelations reported by mystics throughout the ages. St. Bernadette's vision of the Virgin Mary at Lourdes, or the similar vision of the three young children in Fatima, Portugal, could be described in terms not unlike those Paul uses.

Paul's experience of the resurrected Christ appears to be what we usually describe as a religious vision. It occurred well after Jesus's career was over, including the time of the first resurrection appearances and Jesus's ascension. Even Luke describes Paul's conversion experience as if it were a vision (and not even a literal vision but an auditory experience!) rather than an encounter with the physically resurrected Jesus. We do not usually think of Paul's experience in the same terms as the disciples' experiences with the resurrected Christ. Yet Paul himself equates his own experience with that of the other apostles:

> For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptutes, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. (1 Corinthians 15:3-8)

This passage, which we encountered earlier, is believed to quote an early creed concerning the resurrection, which Paul is transmitting and reporting as the background of his own encounter with the risen Christ. *What Paul experienced and what the disciples experienced are of exactly the same nature.* And it may very well be that before the Gospels were written, *this is how the resurrection was experienced and understood.* Some skeptics have called this a "hallucination." That modern psychiatric term is inappropriate to describe such an experience. It has been objected that hallucinations cannot be shared, and that if Jesus did indeed appear to five hundred "at one time"

they could not have been hallucinating. This is not really relevant, however: we are not dealing here with a clinical phenomenon but with a religious experience, and it is quite conceivable that religious experiences may be shared by people with similar assumptions and beliefs and who are susceptible to each other's influence. The prophetic ecstasy of Eldad, Medad, and the rest of the seventy elders (Numbers 11:25-26) may have been such a shared religious experience, as were the shared visions of the Virgin Mary at Fatima and at Medjugorje.

We do not usually describe religious visions in terms of resurrection experiences. If Paul's experience, and by his own equation the experiences of the apostles, were visions similar to those of saints and mystics throughout the ages, why describe them in terms of "resurrection"? And how then do we understand the Gospel accounts, which unequivocally do use the language of resurrection?

We can find an answer in the theological context in which Paul lived and wrote. Resurrection was a key idea in the theology that most influenced him: Jewish apocalypticism. For Paul, the resurrection of Christ is significant not because it is the ultimate nature miracle, but because it heralds the dawning of the new age, the awaited kingdom of God. We will all be resurrected with Christ, but he is the "first fruits" of the general resurrection and redemption and is therefore the sign of our hope.

> But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. (1 Corinthians 15:20-24)
>
> We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. (Romans 8:22-23)

Taken in isolation, these passages are almost unfathomable. Understood within the context of Jewish apocalypticism, they make perfect sense. All the basic apocalyptic themes are present: the coming day of the Lord, God's judgment and destruction of the powers of evil, the redemption

of the righteous and their resurrection. The resurrection of Christ is the “first fruits” of this redemption, indicating the magnitude of the transformation to come. *This is why Paul insists that the resurrection of Christ means nothing apart from the general resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:13-14):* without the general resurrection to follow, there is no new age and no redemption, and therefore Christ’s resurrection is meaningless.

Paul had a profound religious experience and used resurrection language to describe it, since that language best expressed his beliefs and best enabled him to grasp what had happened to him. And so it also is with the Gospels. Each Gospel in its own unique way uses resurrection language to represent an experience that otherwise would have been impossible to verbalize. The language is common but the experiences of each community are unique, and so the Gospel accounts differ dramatically, each one expressing the needs and experiences of its own community. Because they are incompatible when only the plain meanings of their words are considered, *the Gospel accounts of the resurrection were not intended to be, nor should they be, taken literally.* They are written in a first-century Jewish idiom that we may call *midrash,* which may be defined as *the use of legend to reveal spiritual truth.* Such expression is extremely common in Jewish writing of the period, and we must remember that the Gospel authors were Jewish.

Once these writings achieved more Gentile than Jewish circulation they came to be read literally, leading to endless arguments about the “historicity” of Mark’s, Luke’s or John’s account, controversies which survive to this day even in the world of biblical scholarship. To a midrashist it would make absolutely no sense to worry about whether there was an empty tomb, were guards placed in front of it, was Jesus crucified on Passover Eve or the day after, and the like. And yet we can get passionately caught up in such controversies. It would be far more helpful to ask what meaning the evangelist intended to convey by a particular symbol used, than to debate its historicity.

We cannot say precisely what the first disciples experienced after Jesus’s death. Even the earliest account of it, Paul’s statement of the resurrection tradition, is one step removed: “For I handed down to you... what I in turn had received.” If the Gospel accounts of the disciples’ reactions have any historical basis at all, then the disciples experienced something profound that changed them significantly, bringing them hope and a deep sense of

conviction. More than this we cannot say with any degree of certainty. We have noted that taking the resurrection accounts literally leads to irreconcilable contradictions. We can also see how each community interpreted the experience to address its particular needs: how, for example, Matthew is concerned to answer Jewish skeptics, while Luke responded to the interests of his non-Jewish audience. It seems far more than likely that what we have before us in these widely varying accounts of the resurrection is, as in the case of Paul, *the use of resurrection language to represent an experience that could not have been adequately described any other way*.

In a way, the resurrection is like a black hole. Its nature is a mystery. It is powerful, it is infinitely deep, and it is invisible. We cannot observe it directly, but we can see what it draws into its orbit. What we do know about the resurrection is that whatever it was, it inspired Jesus's followers to continue his movement right after they witnessed his murder, when by all rights their faith should have been shattered. The great music and art it inspired through the centuries witness to its power. Something definitely happened.

The life and ministry of Jesus made such a deep impact on his followers that they were convinced something in it survived even his death. We cannot exactly pinpoint their experience. It may have been a vision similar to Paul's, experienced by each in his or her unique way. It may perhaps have been a visitation of the spirit: many people report having experienced the presence of a newly departed loved one, and there is no truly objective way to judge such experiences. To try to describe it too precisely is perhaps inevitably to distort it, so we ought not carry our speculations too far. At this point we have reached the boundary line between Bible scholarship and theology, and it is up to the theologian to take it further. Most certainly, however, what the first disciples experienced was inspired by Jesus's own spirituality and message of non-self-interested love, and we will need to pay close attention to this.

Today, we might use the language of psychology, or of mystical experience, or of theology to describe whatever it was that happened. These languages are available to us; they were not available to the first disciples and to the evangelists. They had the language of apocalyptic and resurrection, which reflected their understanding of the world. As we have already seen, this language was well developed by the time Jesus became active. It was thus only natural for Jesus's followers to use this language to

represent such a profound and critical experience of spiritual renewal; it was the best means of expression available to them. They described their deepest beliefs in this language *and projected this description onto their experience of Jesus's life, work, message, and death*, to help themselves understand, assimilate, and learn from these events. And who is to say that any more modern language we might use today would do a better job of capturing their experience?

This is really not a radical hypothesis. Raymond Brown, himself a Catholic priest, has described a similar process in the development of the "higher Christology" of John's Gospel. According to Brown's reconstruction of the history of the Johannine community, its original members were "Jews of relatively standard expectations," who accepted Jesus as the Davidic Messiah. However, a second group, consisting of Jews of an "anti-Temple bias" and Samaritan converts, joined the community, and this group became a "catalyst" toward the development of a higher Christology. Brown gives the following definition of "low Christology," the beliefs of the original members of the community about Jesus:

> In scholarly jargon "low" christology involves the application to Jesus of titles derived from OT or intertestamental expectations (e.g., Messiah, prophet, servant, Lord, Son of God)--titles that do not in themselves imply divinity. ("Son of God," meaning divine representative, was a designation of the king; see II Sam 7:14; "lord" need mean no more than "master.")[21]

Brown follows this with a definition of "high Christology," the understanding of Jesus that evolved through the influence of the second group:

> "High" christology involves an appreciation of Jesus that moves him into the sphere of divinity, as expressed, for instance, in a more exalted us of Lord and Son of God, as well as the designation "God."

Brown describes the Samaritan theology that influenced this second group, and concludes:

> ...the term *catalyst* applied to the newcomers into the Johannine community implies that they brought with them categories for interpreting Jesus that launched the Johannine community toward a theology of descent from above and pre-existence.

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[21] Raymond E. Brown, The Community of the Beloved Disciple (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 25n.

> In any case, it is a uniquely high christology that appears in the pages of the Fourth Gospel, reflecting the type of belief in Jesus that came to be accepted in Johannine Christianity. The Word that existed in God's presence before creation has become flesh in Jesus (1:1,14); coming into the world like a light (1:9-10; 8:12; 9:5), he can reveal God because he is the only one who has come down from heaven and has seen God's face and heard His voice (3:13; 5:37); he is one with the Father (10:30), so that to see him is to see the Father (14:9); indeed, he can speak as the divine I AM. Johannine christology is very familiar to traditional Christians because it became the dominant christology of the church, and so it is startling to realize that such a portrayal of Jesus is quite foreign to the Synoptic Gospels.[22]

These statements are quite remarkable in a book that the Catholic church itself has designated as "free of doctrinal error." They imply that Jesus made no claims for his own divinity, and that the "high Christology" with which we are familiar today was unknown to him and his immediate disciples. Rather, it gradually evolved as more and more Gentiles, whose background and theology were very different from Jesus's original followers, were incorporated into the new community. These new Gentiles and Jews with similar beliefs "brought with them categories for interpreting Jesus": these categories did not exist originally with Jesus but were projected onto him by the new believers, who drew upon what they felt they knew. For example, Brown describes how one very important idea in Samaritan theology was the expectation of a teacher who had spoken to God and who would return to reveal all things. Moses was a very central figure in Samaritan theology, and this teacher was most often considered a "Moses-returned figure."[23] Brown then describes how Johannine preaching would naturally have drawn from these traditions about Moses and applied them to Jesus. In order to understand Jesus, the members of the community placed him in a framework that was familiar to them and that helped them to appreciate his significance.

So too with the resurrection. To understand Jesus's significance and to make sense of their own experience, Jesus's earliest followers placed him in a framework with which they were familiar, the apocalyptic framework with its focus on resurrection. We need to be able to speak openly of this today without having to fear that it in any way diminishes the importance of that event. The evangelists used terms of utmost importance to describe an experience of utmost importance. They were not reporting history, nor were

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[22] Brown, *Beloved Disciple,* 45.

[23] Ibid., 44.

they consciously inventing falsehoods to protect what they wished to believe. They were trying as best they could to understand the impact of the life, teaching, ministry, and impact of an individual whose deep spirituality profoundly affected them. They felt that what he offered them had saving power. And so they expressed this conviction in the terms they knew that best described God's saving role in their lives.

Those who were inspired by Jesus's life and work tried to capture and preserve their experience in what today we would call a "myth," specifically the myth of resurrection, indicating the deathlessness of his message. "Myth" is an idea that is very frequently misunderstood, because our modern sensibility unfortunately too often insists on sharply distinguishing "fact" from "fiction" while recognizing nothing in between. Thus we often think of "myth" as synonymous with "fiction." This reductionistic view of myth greatly impoverishes our spiritual life. A "myth" is *not* properly understood as "something that didn't really happen." "Myth" is actually a category somewhere in between fact and fiction that at the same time transcends both. We might define a "myth" as *a symbolic representation of a profound existential truth*. The truth that myths try to capture in symbolic form is too deep, complex, and multi-layered for our usual conceptual language to encompass. Therefore we need myths as a means of communicating the depth of our spiritual experiences, and it does not demean the significance of those experiences to call the ways we describe them "myths." If we fail to acknowledge the transcendence of "myth" over "fable" or "fiction," then we lose the truth captured by the myth in one of two ways: by dismissing the myth and thus also its spiritual content, or by taking the myth literally and reducing its spiritual content to a superficial representation that is often rigidly defended. In either case, we fail to do justice to the significance of the myth. We need today to reclaim the great myths in our religious heritage as myths, so that we might renew our appreciation of their spiritual significance.

Rudolf Bultmann was the pioneer in setting forth a program to interpret the truth behind the myth. He is known for having introduced the term "demythologizing" into New Testament research. He considers the mythical picture of the world portrayed in the New Testament to be "a thing of the past," something we can no longer acknowledge as true because now "all of our thinking is irrevocably formed by science."[24] His definition of myth is quite different from the one offered above. Bultmann defines "myth" as "the

[24] Rudolf Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology and Other Basic Writings,* ed. and trans. Schubert

report of an occurrence or an event in which supernatural, superhuman forces or persons are at work" and states that "mythical thinking is the opposite of scientific thinking."[25] The real intention of myth is "to talk about a transcendent power to which both we and the world are subject," but mythological thinking defeats its own intention because the concrete character of its symbols makes them too limited to describe transcendence.[26] Therefore a process of *demythologizing* is necessary:

> Demythologizing seeks to bring out the real intention of myth, namely, its intention to talk about human existence as grounded in and limited by a transcendent, unworldly power, which is not visible to objectifying thinking.[27]

The demythologizing program seeks to replace mythical language with "existentialist interpretation," a direct expression of what the ideas contained in the myth have to say about our existence in the world. This in effect enables us to dispense with mythical thinking: we have "outgrown" it, and "It is precisely the mythical form of thinking that we get rid of by existentialist interpretation."[28] Mythical language is necessary only "provisionally," until we can develop a language adequate to express the truths that myths intend.[29]

In terms of our present discussion, Bultmann provides certain safeguards against the danger of losing the meaning of the myth by taking it literally. He is, however, still in danger of losing the meaning of the myth by dismissing it too easily. The problem is that myths are often rich and multi-layered, and one particular "existentialist interpretation" cannot capture the substance of all the relevant layers. This is similar to the problem of Bible translation. Any given word in the source language has a range of meanings, which do not exactly correspond to the range of meanings of any word in the target language. Translators are faced constantly with the task of choosing which meaning in a word's semantic range they will emphasize when selecting the corresponding word in the target language. Therefore no translation of the Bible is exact, and every translation loses some of the spirit and meaning of the original. But not all translations are alike in this regard.

M. Ogden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 3.

25 Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology,* 95.

26 Ibid., 10,98,161.

27 Ibid., 99.

28 Ibid., 97, 126n.

29 Ibid., 100.

Generally speaking, those translations that stray furthest from the text and rely more heavily on paraphrase tend to lose more of the original symbolism than do translations that are more faithful to the source text. The freer translations go farther in replacing the original symbolism with the specific interpretations of the translator, making the reader more dependent on what the translator thinks the text means. This cannot be avoided entirely, but translations do vary widely in the extent to which this occurs. A more paraphrastic translation may present an appearance of greater clarity, but at the expense of impoverishing the text and constricting its meaning, removing the reader one step further from the spirit of the original.

The program of demythologization runs a similar risk. Let us take for example Bultmann's interpretation of the resurrection. Bultmann is known for saying that the resurrection's meaning is that Christ was "raised into the *kerygma*," the proclaimed message of the church:

> How do we come to believe in the cross as the salvation occurrence?
>
> Here there seems to me to be only one answer: because it is proclaimed as such, because it is proclaimed together with the resurrection. Christ the crucified and risen one encounters us in the word of proclamation, and nowhere else. And faith in this word is the true faith of Easter.
>
> Such understanding faith in the word of proclamation is the genuine faith of Easter; it is faith that the word being proclaimed is the legitimated word of God. The event of Easter, insofar as it can be referred to as a historical event alongside of the cross, is nothing other than the emergence of faith in the risen one in which the proclamation has its origin....
>
> The Easter faith of the first disciples, then, is not a fact on the ground of which we believe insofar as it could relieve us of the risk of such faith but itself belongs to the eschatological occurrence that is the object of faith.[30]

This interpretation of the meaning of Easter faith is not only very limiting, it is also dangerously circular. The cross is an instrument of salvation because it is proclaimed to be so. The risen Christ meets us only in the proclaimed word. The resurrection, the "event of Easter," is nothing other than the emergence of faith in the risen Christ. Easter faith is in essence its own object. Christ is risen because he is believed to be risen. It is difficult to see how faith in the proclamation of faith is not ultimately void of any real content.

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[30] Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology,* 39.40.

Bultmann calls the *kerygma* or "proclamation" "the message of God's decisive act in Christ," which is proclaimed as a "salvation event."[31] This decisive, salvific act cannot be understood apart from the resurrection. The *kerygma* proclaims Christ already risen; it therefore cannot be the source of faith in his resurrection. Central to the proclamation is the mythical and very powerful statement that Christ is risen and has overcome the power of death. Bultmann's program fails even to come close to capturing what this means.

To conclude this section, what exactly can we say about the resurrection event, if we wish to avoid both an anachronistic literalism and missing its significance altogether?

In response to the question, "What really happened?" we can only say the following. The actual event that Christians call the resurrection of Christ is historically unrecoverable. But it was something so extraordinary and profound that it inspired a group of followers, whose spirits should have been crushed by the terrifying spectacle of the brutal murder of their teacher and who should have given up all hope, to continue their lives in faith and gratitude and praises to God. That would be difficult to explain if the resurrection were a complete fabrication.

But neither does it follow that the language of resurrection, borrowed from a strand of Jewish theology that developed over hundreds of years but whose influence has greatly faded, can serve as a literal description of what happened. Attempts to use that language in that way have repeatedly foundered. Originally that theology predicted a general resurrection at the time of the coming of the Messiah. Then when only Christ was resurrected, he was called the "first fruits" of the general resurrection soon expected. But the general resurrection did not arrive. And so the Gospel writers after Mark projected it into an indefinite future. Christianity began to give less emphasis to the general resurrection and more to the second coming of Christ. Eventually the resurrection of Christ became a singular event bearing little resemblance to the original resurrection theology that first provided a way of understanding it. Christianity had to keep altering resurrection theology to fit current realities. The inevitable conclusion is that the original resurrection theology was not a precise fit from the very beginning.

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[31] Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology,* 12,14.

If we want to say more about what the resurrection actually was, we will have to go beyond Bible scholarship and enter the realm of theology. The challenge will be to find a theology that is both true to the actual experience and that captures the mystery of the event. The reader can find my own attempt in an article entitled "Jesus and the Christ Angel."[32]

What Does It Mean?

Bultmann would like to preserve the truth behind the myth, and he is right in pointing out the dangers of leaving the myths uninterpreted, but his program sacrifices too much. Faith needs its symbols in order to be revealed and expressed, for only symbolic language can come close to capturing the mystery and many-layered complexity of the content of faith. But this by itself is not enough: if we fail to recognize that the symbols are symbols, that the myth *is* a myth, then we will inevitably lose the content of faith and we will worship instead its externalized expression. And so Paul Tillich speaks of preserving the myth, but necessarily as a "broken myth":

> A myth which is understood as a myth, *but not removed or replaced,* can be called a "broken myth." Christianity denies by its very nature any unbroken myth, because its presupposition is the first commandment: the affirmation of the ultimate as ultimate and the rejection of any kind of idolatry. All mythological elements in the Bible, and doctrine and liturgy should be recognized as mythological, *but they should be maintained in their symbolic form and not be replaced by scientific substitutes*. *For there is no substitute for the use of symbols and myths: they are the language of faith.*[33]

The words I have emphasized show the difference between a "demythologized" myth and a "broken" myth. *A broken myth is not discarded as a myth;* its original language and mystery are preserved, and in fact respected, by not taking the language literally. To "break" a myth is to make its symbolic character conscious. There is an understandable fear of doing so, since it means leaving the safety and certainty of an unbroken mytho-logical world. This fear creates a resistance to breaking the myth that often results in an insistence on the literal meaning of its words. One fears that breaking the myth will rob it of its meaning and power, but in fact the opposite is true:

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32 http://www.judeochristianity.org/jesus_and_the_christ_angel.htm.

33 Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), 50-51 (emphasis added).

> The resistance against demythologization expresses itself in "literalism." The symbols and myths are understood in their immediate meaning. The material, taken from nature and history, is used in its proper sense. The character of the symbol to point beyond itself to something else is disregarded. Creation is taken as a magic act which happened once upon a time. The fall of Adam is localized on a special geographical point and attributed to a human individual. The virgin birth of the Messiah is understood in biological terms, resurrection and ascension as physical events, the second coming of the Christ as a telluric, or cosmic, catastrophe.... Faith, if it takes its symbols literally, becomes idolatrous! It calls something ultimate which is less than ultimate. Faith, conscious of the symbolic character, of its symbols, gives God the honor which is due him.[34]

We cannot afford to dispense with the language of myth, and in this sense the earliest disciples were justified in applying the language of resurrection to their experience of the impact that Jesus's life and message had on them. However, to do justice to this experience we need to preserve the myth as a broken myth. Tillich's claim that "Christianity denies by its very nature any unbroken myth" is very debatable since Christianity has in the past often insisted upon literal interpretations of its myths, but while we cannot afford to lose the myth, neither can we afford to leave it unbroken. The stakes are just too high.

Just how high? In the worst case – which has happened often in history – the fear of breaking a myth produces a compulsion to defend its surface meaning even to the point of violence. Heretics and Jews have born the brunt of this insecurity. The irony is that such single-minded devotion to the literal expression of a religious symbol loses the deeper meaning toward which the symbol points. The mystery and mission behind the original inspiration disappear, replaced by a hard, inflexible, and ultimately lifeless shell. This is the danger into which fundamentalist forms of religion may fall. Once again, it is important to keep in mind that the word "myth" in this context is not pejorative. It represents a profound spiritual truth whose many layers cannot be adequately expressed in discursive language.

It is tragic that a truth so pregnant with power and life has become, through the failure to distinguish it from its symbolic container, a focal point of often violent confrontation between Christians and Jews. If there is any truth behind the myth of the resurrection then that truth is universal, with a healing message for both Christians and Jews. If there is no truth behind it,

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[34] Tillich, *Dynamics,* 51-52.

then it speaks neither to Christians nor to Jews. Christian and Jew, together with the rest of humanity, are one in their relationship to the existential truth contained in the symbol of the resurrection, if not in their relationship to the symbol itself. Although conceptual language cannot completely capture the meaning of the symbol, we do need, as Bultmann has recognized, at least to try to approach the meaning of the symbol apart from the symbol itself.

At this point we venture to cross the delicate bridge between biblical criticism and theology. Our main summary, in which we have traced the roots of the idea of the resurrection through the Hebrew Bible and beyond, gives us a hint as to the resurrection's existential meaning. Resurrection is a central aspect of Jewish apocalyptic eschatology, which descended from Hebrew prophecy, which itself was based on the restoration of the covenant relationship between God and God's people. Hebrew prophecy spoke of restoration and occasionally used resurrection as a metaphor to describe it. Resurrection thus has its roots in the idea of covenant between God and humanity. At the time in which Jesus lived, it was a way of expressing the original covenant and promise of God to save and keep God's people.

Covenant itself is a religious response to the question: Is there anything to our existence beyond the inevitable accidents, tragedies, conflicts, and decay that we suffer as human beings? Is our existence just random, or is there an ultimate order and direction behind the seemingly accidental character of our lives that can give us meaning and hope? This is the basic question of religion. It is also the question to which our existence as self-conscious beings inevitably drives us. What we see, simply by being conscious of ourselves and our surroundings, is the certainty of old age, sickness, and death. From the moment we are born, we progress toward physical and perhaps intellectual and psychological dissolution. Most of the time we deny it; we keep ourselves from being aware of it, because it is unthinkable. But our defenses do not succeed forever. Sooner or later we encounter an existential crisis: the loss of a livelihood or of a relationship, the death of a loved one, our reaction to signs of sickness and aging in ourselves or in those we love. These experiences arouse our fear, and we may turn to psychotherapy for help, but psychotherapy cannot help us with these fears because they belong to life itself and are not pathological phenomena to be cured. Psychotherapy can displace the object of our fear, from a neurotically

distorted reality to the fearful aspects of reality itself, but it cannot heal or eliminate fear.[35]

And so we may turn to religion, but if religion has become an outer shell that has lost the content of its symbols, then it too cannot heal, and becomes instead one more instrument of our denial of the fearful aspects of reality. It is this type of religion that Freud attacked, and whose criticisms we sometimes do not take seriously enough. A religion that we use to deny our fears becomes tyrannical: our fear demands that we require and even force others to conform to our beliefs in order to protect us from our insecurity and defend us from our doubts. The intolerance that characterizes fundamentalist forms of religion is a defense mechanism against these fears.

Covenant affirms that God is immanently involved in human life. Ultimately, we are not alone, although we may have many experiences of aloneness. As Paul has said, not even death can separate us from the love of God, and this affirmation is linked inseparably to his affirmation of the resurrection: "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile." In theological terms, *resurrection is the most radical affirmation that our link to God, to ultimate meaning, order, and the power of salvation, endures eternally and cannot be broken even by suffering and death.*

Are we honestly able to make this affirmation today? Today a deep crisis of faith affects both Judaism and Christianity. Secularism and the advance of scientific knowledge have undermined many traditional religious beliefs. If science is now able to explain matters about which religion previously offered only speculations, the authority of many religious ideas is naturally called into question. This is not to imply an intrinsic incompatibility between religion and science, but historically the two have competed with each other in attempting to explain the world's mysteries. In Jesus's day people took "miraculous" healings for granted; today we are more likely to question and doubt anything that demands belief in the "supernatural," especially when we no longer need such beliefs in order to make sense of the world. This questioning applies particularly to religious symbols that have often been interpreted supernaturally, such as the resurrection.

There is still a deeper reason for the present crisis of faith. This is the apparent failure of religion to live up to its promise of salvation. In Judaism

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[35] Cf. Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952).

this crisis is particularly acute. The Holocaust has destroyed the faith of many Jews; indeed, some Jews have come to feel that if God does have a special relationship with the Jewish people, it is far from a loving one. (As Tevye in *Fiddler on the Roof* famously said, “I know, I know. We are Your chosen people. But, once in a while, can't You choose someone else?”) Thus while strict orthodoxy tries to maintain its links with the past, much of Judaism has become humanistic in its theological orientation. God is revealed in the noble actions of human beings in supporting each other through a crisis, or in the human capacity for perseverance, or in the imperative to build an ethical society. God has left creation unfinished; it is now time for men and women to complete it. For many Jews the State of Israel occupies a place of centrality within Judaism once reserved for God alone. Theodicies that emphasize the *limitations* of God’s power, sometimes incorporating kabbalistic notions of the withdrawal of God’s presence from the world to explain the evil in it, have become popular (“If God cannot save us, at least God cries with us”). All of these trends emphasize the *absence* of a transcendent God from the world who might have a saving word for humanity beyond the words that human beings speak to themselves.

While perhaps not always as obvious, this crisis of faith exists also in contemporary Christianity. The events that have shaken Jews have shaken the rest of the world as well. Contemporary theology and preaching often reflect doubt in any divine source of guidance beyond the sphere of human activity. There seems to be a split between fundamentalist religion, which rigidly holds onto categories of the past, and a more liberal, humanistic religion, which seems to have lost as its center a God who actively affects and directs people’s lives and which instead places ultimate hope in the social and political actions of human beings. What both forms of religion lack is a faith in a transcendent God that can confront the complexities of modern experience. Many have lost the sense of a God who is above human affairs yet still actively involved in them, a spiritual presence that responds to our deepest concerns, a sense of our connection to an ultimate order that takes into account the desperate questions our experience raises. That the need for such a spiritual center is real can be seen in how deeply the need is felt: the question of theodicy, of what kind of faith is available to us in a world where evil and tragedy predominate, is asked as frequently in Christianity today as it is in Judaism.

The contemporary crisis of faith evokes a yearning to encounter the biblical message. But the biblical message is cast in a language of symbols

originating in times and places that are remote to us. To recover the message in a form that can revitalize faith today requires a struggle. In this struggle theology can, and in fact must, use biblical criticism as a tool, as long as theology does not try to bend the results of biblical criticism to serve a predetermined agenda. What we now know of the historical context within which Jesus lived and taught greatly illuminates the significance of what he taught, as well as its continuity with the biblical message as a whole.

The following brief passage from Mark encapsulates the heart of Jesus's message. It has the ring of authenticity simply because its spirit is so different from that of much of the literature of the period:

> One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?" Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, 0 Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." Then the scribe said to him, "You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that 'he is one, and besides him there is no other'; and 'to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength,' and 'to love one's neighbor as oneself,'--this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." (Mark 12 :28-34)

This passage is noteworthy in that Jesus interprets the apocalyptic symbol "kingdom of God" in terms of love, both for God and for one's neighbor. This is totally unlike anything we find in the mainstream of apocalyptic literature, which enables us even more to appreciate Jesus's originality. In apocalyptic literature the kingdom of God is not associated with love, but with judgment and condemnation of sinners and pain and destruction for those currently in power (see e.g. 1 Enoch 62). Throughout apocalyptic literature we find a tone of vindictiveness, expressed in calling God's vengeance down on the oppressor and in predictions of cataclysmic disasters that will upset the world order. This was certainly an understandable reaction for a desperate people responding to a national calamity. Jesus, however, preached even love for one's enemies, a thoroughly radical departure from the spirit of apocalypticism. This is something that scholars who believe Jesus to be no more than a Jewish apocalyptic prophet cannot adequately explain.

As we have seen, apocalypticism developed from Hebrew prophecy. It uses many of the same images and shares many of the same concerns, such as the end of Israel's suffering and the restoration of Israel to its former glory. Nevertheless, there are significant differences. There is a certain desperation in apocalypticism, born of the failure of many of the prophetic ideals to become realized. Instead of being restored to its independence, Israel found itself occupied by a foreign power for a protracted period. This was not the expected resolution of the period of exile. Thus much of Hebrew prophecy began to lose its power to inspire and instill hope in a despairing people.

Above all, Hebrew prophecy emphasized an inward transformation of both the individual and society, while apocalypticism shifted the emphasis away from the transformation of the heart toward the transformation of the political situation. We have seen Isaiah's vision of hope and how those who trust in the Lord will renew their strength, Jeremiah's vision of God reclaiming Israel and writing the law on the people's hearts, Ezekiel's vision of inner cleansing and spiritual renewal. The prophets describe God in intimate terms, as father (Jeremiah 31:9), as mother (Isaiah 66:13), and as husband (Isaiah 54:5). This is a far different image of God from the apocalyptic God who expresses concern for the righteous mainly by defeating their enemies. The God of apocalypticism does indeed show love for the people, but this is a God of strict judgment, not a God with whom people have an intimate relationship.

Jesus proclaims a God with whom people can have an intimate relationship. He reminds his followers that the greatest commandment of all is to love God with all one's heart and strength. This commandment is inseparably linked with the commandment to love one's fellow human beings. Jesus himself has an intimate relationship with God; this is most directly expressed in the Gospel of John, where Jesus repeatedly proclaims his oneness with the Father, but even in the synoptics Jesus is God's "beloved son," in whom God is well pleased. Jesus's life and preaching recall the all-but-forgotten spirit of Hebrew prophecy. This is particularly evident in the idea that the commandment of love "is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices"--a deliberate recollection of the words of the prophets (cf. Isaiah 1:11, Hosea 6:6, Micah 6:8).

Jesus's appeal to his followers is thus not difficult to grasp. In an era of spiritual starvation he held out to them the one thing they were thirsting

for: *assurance of the original promise of God's immanent love*. This promise was rooted deeply in their past, but they had lost contact with it. The reassertion of this promise was the core of Jesus's preaching, and also the context in which his healings must be understood. It is not for nothing that John's Gospel repeatedly warns against relying on the healings themselves as the basis for belief. What separated Jesus from other healers, charismatics, and magicians in a time when many such people were active is that Jesus understood and presented his healings as evidence of God's redemptive love.

Since Jesus's message so deeply addressed the spiritual needs of many who followed him, they understandably projected their messianic hopes onto him. People began to see him as the one who had come to save them. The attraction of such a following would have made Jesus seem threatening to Rome, since the idea of a Messiah, with all its apocalyptic elaborations, had definite political implications. Rome responded to what it perceived as a potential threat to the social order, and executed Jesus as they would have any political insurrectionist. John's report of the reason many Jews feared and distrusted Jesus (John 11:47-50), that they were afraid of Rome's reaction to the attention his followers were attracting, speaks a historical truth.

In short, Jesus preached a revitalizing and reforming message, with roots in the prophetic tradition reaching back to the covenant itself. The message, or "good news," is that the connection between God and the human spirit is still alive and is unbreakable. God does in fact make a difference in our lives, and the action of the divine in our lives demands also a response from us. Jesus's message became entangled in the thought-web of apocalypticism and messianism, and unfortunately was misunderstood by his friends and enemies alike. Is it possible for us to reclaim this message today, and to find in it a response to the deepest questions of our own faith?

The possibility of reclaiming the message lies in recognizing the challenge that it presents. At the heart of Jesus's message is the commandment of love. It is often asked, How can love be commanded? We might view the language of commandment as expressing the challenge in the particular type of love that Jesus preached.

Jesus did not preach a sentimental love, nor a love that comes easily and naturally to us. "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to

you? For even sinners love those who love them" (Luke 6:32). We love most easily those who are like ourselves: the members of our family, our race, our ethnic group, or our class. Jesus challenged us to expand our love beyond these natural boundaries. Thus while Jesus could tell his disciples, "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 10:5-6), he also reversed himself to defend and minister to the Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:21-28). And while Jesus blessed the poor and warned against neglecting them (Luke 6 :20, 16: 19-26), he also reached out to the rich, calling the tax collectors Levi (Luke 5:27-29) and Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10) and eating with them in their homes.

For Jesus, love must break the bonds of our self-identification and self-interest and extend to those whom we might not naturally think of loving. Thus love needs to be presented in the language of commandment: it requires an effort, perhaps even a profound inner struggle, for us to become genuinely loving in ways we might not ordinarily choose. The love Jesus preached is *non-self-interested*, and this is the only type of love that can make us aware of our unbreakable connection to God's influence and guidance in our lives.

This is perhaps the most easily forgotten aspect of Jesus's message. Throughout history people have wanted to create Jesus in their own image, as Albert Schweitzer pointed out in his famous critique of historical Jesus research. Many groups have wanted to claim Jesus as their own. Christian factions have used him in their attacks upon each other; men have used him against women; the rich have used him against the poor; whites have used him against nonwhites. Throughout history the rich have pointed to their wealth as evidence of heavenly favor, a special claim to God's love. And today, while liberation theology makes a valid and vital claim that Jesus did champion the poor against abuses by the rich, it too runs a risk of making Jesus the exclusive property of the poor. Jesus did, after all, invite rich and poor alike to join his table, putting a challenge to them both.

We sometimes would like Jesus to comfort us and to make *others* feel uncomfortable, but the greatness of Jesus is that he is not claimable by anyone, no matter how justifiable the claim. Jews cannot use his Jewishness to claim him from Christians, and Christians must not use their acknowledgment of him as the Christ to keep him from Jews. Today, when we so cherish our ethnic identifications and the things that distinguish us

from each other, Jesus's message is as radical as ever. There is nothing wrong with celebrating our distinguishing characteristics, as long as our attachment to them does not prevent us from loving one another. Jesus's message, however, stands as a reminder that this danger is always present, and as a call to transcend our particular identifications and to recognize and love each other as individuals. This aspect of his message is encapsulated in the Parable of the Good Samaritan which, although originally addressed to Jews, has universal significance.

Jesus, then, revitalizes the covenantal relationship between God and humanity and bases it on self-transcending love. In this sense he belongs to the tradition of the Hebrew prophets and fulfills their message. He echoes their insistence that love is more important than sacrifices, and he even associates the commandment of love with the kingdom of God, as we have already seen (Matthew 12:28-34). One approaches the kingdom by striving to fulfill the commandment of love, and this brings one a sense of God's presence and responsiveness: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life.... But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Matthew 6 : 25,33).

So far we find in Jesus's message an affirmation that God is intimately connected with human life. But resurrection is a radical symbol; it refers not only to life but also to death. Implicit in Jesus's message is the affirmation that love overcomes even the power of death. It is no accident that Paul found in Jesus an occasion to revive Isaiah's prophecy that "he will swallow up death forever" (Isaiah 25:7; cf. 1 Corinthians 15:54); Paul strongly felt Jesus's message of non-self-interested love, as his own hymn to love in 1 Corinthians 13 eloquently demonstrates. But how does love overcome the power of death?

Love overcomes the power of death by revealing the indestructibility of the soul. The essence of non-self-interested love is the awareness and recognition of an individual in his or her own right, separate from any identity we wish to project onto that individual. Jesus expressed this by preaching a love that transcends ethnic, class, and familial boundaries. The deepest levels of this awareness involve seeing a person's individuality as God has given it, the soul in its purity as it is connected to God before it becomes connected to any other human being. We each discover this in our own way. Very little more can be said about this in the abstract; I can only attempt to clarify it by taking the liberty of relating a personal experience.

In the late 80s I began working at a hospice in New York City. I was using music with patients, many in comas, whose illnesses progressed past the point where they were capable of any verbal response. At that time the instrument I was using was the recorder, a type of wooden flute. All these patients were diagnosed as having less than six months to live. My experience working with them taught me more about the indestructibility of the soul than any course in theology I could possibly have taken.

I have been repeatedly amazed by the capacity of the soul to respond to music, sometimes even after a person's closest relatives have given up trying to communicate. One patient I visited, Norman, was a young man dying of AIDS. He was close to death and needed oxygen to breathe. Yet his response to music was very powerful. He commented on the beauty of the music, and said that it took him out of his hospital environment into a totally different world. He made me promise to bring him some music of Bach the next time I visited. He died before I could visit him again.

It is hard to describe what I learned from Norman. I was impressed by how peaceful he was in spite of his discomfort. Norman said it is a blessing to be able to die without fear. I believe him; I felt no fear in his presence. I only wish I had known him longer; it would have been a privilege to have shared more of his journey with him.

With some patients I have very much had the experience of sharing a journey. Roberta, a woman in her early fifties, was in the final stages of ovarian and breast cancer that had spread to the brain. The doctor's notes in her chart described her as "clearly sustaining a very poor and nearly vegetative life," and "does not talk at all at present; no purposeful movements." This is not what I found in my contact with her. When I played at her bedside, I could sense her breathing becoming noticeably deeper, her eyes more relaxed. Several times she would reach her hand out towards me; she would touch the music on the music stand, and sometimes she would bring her hand close to me and stroke my face – these gestures coming from someone not thought to have any meaningful conscious life. I visited Roberta many times before she died, and felt her travel through a series of stages through fear, deep grief, then finally resolution and peace. The nurses felt she was hanging on to life until the moment she became ready to let go.

Another patient, Bertha, was similar. Bertha was eighty-nine years old and dying of lung cancer. On my first visit I sensed a great amount of fear coming from her; even to the point of terror. Her eyes were widely dilated, in a frozen, fearful expression. I have often seen this expression in comatose patients, and have come to believe that it frequently results from a fear of abandonment. In this case, Bertha seemed terrified of the prospect of death, of finally releasing her grip. The way she would grasp my hand communicated much of that feeling to me.

During one visit she withdrew her hand from mine and began to hold her head. She seemed in great pain, but the pain was not physical. It was something inside her that seemed to want resolution. I learned from her nurse and social worker that her relationship with her daughter had been troubled for many years. Perhaps this was what she was trying to resolve, as I saw her over a period of a few weeks go through a phase of agitation and restlessness. In the meantime her daughter was in therapy with the social worker, trying to resolve her own ambivalence toward her mother. As time progressed I felt Bertha's feelings of grief come closer to the surface, and the pain gradually begin to subside. Bertha communicated most of this to me through the way she held my hand. Just before her death, I felt her starting to become noticeably more relaxed and peaceful. She too was preparing herself for the moment when she would feel ready to let go.

David was a six-year-old boy whom I just began to visit. He suffered from a seizure disorder possibly of chromosomal origin. During most of his waking moments he experienced what his chart described as "intractable seizures." One of his nurses described him as "decerebrate," meaning that he has lost all cognitive function.

When I entered David's room, I found him in the midst of a seizure. He was, however, very attentive to the music I played for him. He made eye contact with me, which he sustained, and at one point he even began to vocalize, as if trying to sing along. The way he looked at me showed me beyond doubt that he was connected to the music and to my presence. During the music his mother was nearby, soothing and stroking him. He gradually became quieter, and his seizure movements came to a stop. At the last song, he fell asleep.

What is significant about these patients is not simply the fact that they can respond to music, or to the touch of a hand. These patients all have a

certain quality that is difficult to describe. When the conscious, intellectual, controlling and grasping side of the personality falls away because the body is too ill and no longer has the energy to sustain it, something else seems often to come to the surface, an entirely different quality, softer, somehow purer, more directly present. The remarkable thing is that this other side of the personality seems not to deteriorate with the body; one can have a strong sense of its presence even up to the moment of death. It is almost as though this aspect of the self were independent of the body.

I saw the contrast between these two sides of the personality perhaps most dramatically in one woman, Judith, who when conscious had the reputation of being very unpleasant and even abusive to the staff. I never got to know her then because she always refused my visits. When her illness reached its final phase, however, and she could no longer relate consciously, I went into her room and played for her for about half an hour. At first she had been quite agitated and was moaning a lot, but the music began to soothe her, and she became more quiet. When I finished playing I came to her bedside and, on an impulse, held my hand out to her. She took my hand and held it for fifteen more minutes. She was much quieter when I left.

There is a peaceful state that the soul can reach during the course of a protracted, terminal illness, that seems beyond the layers of fear many of us encounter when contemplating the prospect of death. It may require some inner work to reach that state, but something within the individual soul often seems to know how to undertake this work when the time comes. Those who are at this point can greatly benefit from the presence of understanding friends who do not give up the idea that the sick person is still aware and still, on some level, capable of relating. I have felt patients in this state reach out to me in far more direct ways than I believe they ever could have when fully conscious, when the usual controls and defenses are functioning. It has particularly impressed me to see how strong this sense of the person is even while the body is deteriorating, or when mental functioning is supposedly critically impaired. I can only understand it as a quality of the soul that becomes more visible as the individual is able to allow it, something in our nature to which we ourselves may not be consciously connected, but that governs our relationship to God nevertheless.[36]

[36] Years after I wrote these words I was blessed to witness this unfolding of the soul towards peace at the end of life in my mother, as she spent her last days in hospice (see my article “The Bond of Life,” http://www.judeochristianity.org/bond_of_life.htm).

To be sure, not everyone dies this way. I have seen people die while still very much in their conscious fears, not having been able, or not having had the opportunity, to reach their place of peace. Nevertheless, when I have seen the more peaceful side emerge, I have been struck by how different it can seem from what we think of as the conscious self. I can go no further in explaining the significance of this, nor can I offer any proof of my observations. I can only say that for me, it means that the link between God and the soul is preserved under even the worst circumstances, and can never be broken.

While Jesus knew this during his life and preached it, he must have discovered it on the cross in a more direct and radical way. At first he seemed to experience fear and abandonment; he cried out to God asking why God had forsaken him. But then something seemed to change. Luke tells us that Jesus died with an expression of trust: “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit” (Luke 23:46; cf. Psalm 31:5). John reports an expression of resolution: “It is finished” (John 19:30). A new side of Jesus emerged, overcoming whatever fears remained to him in his conscious life.

Those around him may very well have sensed this, for a curious incident occurred at the moment of his death that is represented in all the synoptics, but most plainly in the Gospel of Mark, in which Jesus dies only with “a loud cry” (Mark 15:37): “Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, ‘Truly this man was God’s Son!’“ (Mark 15:39). The historicity of this event has been questioned; some see its inclusion as reflecting the evangelists’ desire to minimize the culpability of the Romans in Jesus’s death and to emphasize the Gentile mission. Nevertheless, whether historical or not, this event is part of the “myth” in the deep sense of that word; it captures an aspect of Jesus’s followers’ experience of his death, and thus its significance goes beyond any apologetic purpose it may have had. Thus we can ask, How did the centurion know of Jesus’s special connection to God? There was something in the way Jesus died that deeply impressed him. The centurion witnessed Jesus’s sure knowledge that his connection to God remained unbroken, and it must have profoundly shaken him. Even on the cross the seeds of the resurrection are already present.

Perhaps in some small way we all participate in Jesus’s experience. After all, Paul did say that “if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his” (Romans

6:5). The patients in the hospice experienced a form of crucifixion, a protracted, painful death. At the end, one could witness the emergence of the soul. There is something deeply mysterious about the resurrection, a mystery that we lose if we take the symbols too literally.

The persistence of the soul even to the point of death may not be visible to detached observation, but it is visible to love, which sees to the heart of the individual. If love can overcome even death, then surely it can guide us through the accidents of our existence. This is perhaps what Jesus meant when he preached, “Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?” (Matthew 6:25). Jesus surely knew that sometimes people do not have enough to eat, or to wear; after all, he did say “For you always have the poor with you” (Matthew 26:11). But there is something in his message, particularly in striving to observe the commandment of love, that holds out a promise that on some level our deepest needs will be met.

Faith does not promise a life free of tragedy, but it does promise that even in tragedy our connection to God cannot be severed, and therefore that even the worst tragedy contains some redeeming aspect if we are willing to search for it and are open to receiving it. This aspect of redemption may not balance accounts to our satisfaction; it may not make things seem “fair”; nevertheless, if such faith has any meaning at all, it must mean that in even the worst tragedy some part of us will not be destroyed but changed, deepened, and brought a little closer to awareness of the ultimate order of things. *This is the faith that the resurrection expresses in its most radical form*. Faith is the conviction that there is an ultimate order beyond the apparent disorder of our experience. It is the assurance that the heart that meets God in genuine love will always draw a response.

Judaism and Christianity

If the preceding discussion sheds any light at all on the faith embodied in the symbol of the resurrection, then it must have implications also for the relationship between Judaism, the source of resurrection theology, and Christianity, its ultimate expression. The tortured relationship between the two is well documented and is not the subject of this study; we will offer only a few comments touching on the matters of faith and reconciliation.

Christianity began as an apocalyptic sect within Judaism. As it matured, it soon became apparent that the two could not coexist. We find evidence of tension between Judaism and early Christianity often in the Gospels (Matthew 10:17, Mark 13:9, Luke 12:11, 21:12, and throughout the Gospel of John; also the frequent clashes between Jesus and the Pharisees, esp. Matthew 23. Also note references to "synagogue of Satan" in Revelation 2). It would seem that Jews in some communities, believing that the Christian sectarians were following a false messiah or, even worse, blasphemously worshiping him as a God, excluded these Christians from synagogue worship. This would have exposed Christians to danger since, without the protection of Judaism's status as an officially sanctioned local religion, the new Christian sect was open to persecution by the Romans as a threat to civil order. And so the Gospels place in the mouth of Jesus prophecies connecting persecution with exclusion from the synagogue.

As is well known, the situation changed entirely once Christianity assumed the power of a state religion. Many excellent accounts of the subsequent development of Christian anti-Semitism are available (see e.g. Rosemary Ruether[1]s classic summary[37]). While it is debated whether the New Testament itself contains traces of this anti-Semitism, the anti-Judaism in parts of the New Testament undeniably provided a rationale for Christian anti-Semites. Perhaps most problematic is the Gospel of John, where the term "Jews" is used pejoratively, and where Jesus even calls his Jewish opponents children of the devil (John 8:44). We can see the beginning of this trend even in the synoptics which, in the context of their apocalyptic background, shed some light on the origins of Christian anti-Semitism.

The idea of resurrection did not arise in a vacuum. It was just one part of a theological matrix, belonging together with the themes of divine judgment and global destruction. The Christians who lived through the destruction of the Temple interpreted that event as a sign of the nearness of the end, as we have already seen. In time, they began to see it as proof of God's judgment against the Jews for having rejected Jesus. Thus, with bitter irony, the vindictiveness that we have seen to be part of Jewish apocalypticism became directed against the Jews themselves. The Jews were seen as the ones holding up the day of salvation by stubbornly refusing

[37] Rosemary Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Seabury, 1974).

to accept Jesus as the Christ and thus rejecting all of the goodness for which he stood. If they could so reject Jesus, who was purely good, then certainly they must be children of the devil, and they were demonized as such. Christian anti-Semitism fed on Jewish apocalypticism, turned it on its head, and used it against the very people who gave birth to it.

Even Paul, writing before the destruction of the Temple, had difficulty comprehending the Jews' refusal to accept the messiah for whom they themselves had been so fervently yearning. Paul says of the Jews that "a veil lies over their minds" (2 Corinthians 3:15). Paul outlines his solution to this problem in Romans 9-11. Many Christian writers have cited these chapters as evidence that the New Testament carves out a place for Israel and that Jews as well as Gentiles are included in God's plan of salvation.[38] Taking certain verses out of context can make these chapters seem supportive of Jews and Judaism, but their full impact can be understood only by considering them as a whole. It then does not remain difficult to understand why Jews cannot find Paul's words comforting.

We need to keep in mind that Paul saw Jesus as the fulfillment of Jewish apocalyptic expectations. Therefore the Jews' refusal of Jesus posed a real problem for him. How could Jesus truly be the Messiah if his own people, who so fervently yearned for the Messiah, did not recognize him in Jesus? Thus Paul speaks of "great sorrow and unceasing anguish" in his heart on account of the Jews' failure to accept Jesus (Romans 9:1). He then proceeds to work out a solution to this problem: the Jews' refusal of Jesus must be in some way a part of God's plan of salvation.

Paul begins by affirming God's promise: "It is not as though the word of God had failed" (Romans 9:6). God's promises stand, but they are based upon faith, not upon Israel's bloodline from Abraham: "not all of Abraham's children are his true descendants" (Romans 9:7). Thus if God wishes to include the Gentiles at the temporary expense of Israel, none may question it: "So then he has mercy on whomever he chooses, and he hardens the heart of whomever he chooses" (Romans 9:18).

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[38] See e.g. Krister Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 4; John G. Gager, *The Origins of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); John M. Oesterreicher, *The Unfinished Dialogue;* Martin Buber and the Christian Way (Secaucus: Citadel Press, 1987), 77.

One cannot question God's fairness: "Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one object for special use and another for ordinary use?" (Romans 9:21). God may thus accept or reject whomever God wishes. Paul then uses a troubling phrase: "What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience the objects of wrath that are made for destruction?" (Romans 9:22). So as long as the Jews do not accept Christ, they are "objects of God's wrath," destined for destruction.

Paul caps his argument by quoting from the Hebrew prophets:

From Hosea:

> Those who were not my people I will call "my people," and her who was not beloved I will call "beloved."
>
> And in the very place where it was said to them, "You are not my people,"
> there they shall be called children of the living God.
> (Romans 9:25-26; cf. Hosea 2:23(2:25], 1:10(2:1])

From Isaiah:

> Though the number of the children of Israel were like the sand of the sea, only a remnant will be saved; for the Lord will execute his sentence on the earth quickly and decisively. (Romans 9:27-28; cf. Isaiah 10:22,23)
>
> If the Lord of hosts had not left survivors to us, we would have fared like Sodom and been made like Gomorrah.
> (Romans 9:29; cf. Isaiah 1:9)

By using these quotations to suit his purposes, Paul changes their original meaning. Hosea's prophecy is addressed to Israel: they who felt rejected by God will be restored to God's favor. Paul uses it to suggest that "those who were not my people," i.e. the Gentiles, will become the chosen ones. Similarly, Isaiah's prophecies concern the punishment of Israel for its corruption and the escape of a remnant from extermination by the Assyrians. Paul makes these prophecies imply that only the few in Israel who accept Jesus as the Christ deserve to be or actually will be saved, and he compares the rest to the sinners of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Paul could scarcely have foreseen that by removing these prophecies from their original context and thus distorting their meaning he set the tone

for anti-Jewish polemic for centuries to come. This was certainly far from his intention; his sorrow for his people must have been heartfelt. Nevertheless, Christians throughout history have attacked Jews and Judaism by using this technique of quoting Hebrew prophecy against the Jews. The great achievement of the Hebrew prophets and the people who preserved their prophecies, namely the capacity for self-criticism, was turned against the Jews themselves, exploited as one group's means of condemning and dominating another. It is easy to see how Paul's use of these particular prophecies have been taken to support the supersessionist claim that the Christians are the "new Israel," and that Christianity therefore has nullified and replaced Judaism. While Paul does not state this explicitly, his arguments come very close to it, as we shall see.

Romans 10 begins with Paul's statement that the Jews "have not submitted to God's righteousness" since "Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes" (Romans 10:3,4). Paul unequivocally interprets Moses's admonishment of Israel to accept God's word to refer to the acceptance of Christ (Romans 10:6-9). It is true that Paul says "there is no distinction between Jew and Greek" (Romans 10:12), but this is precisely because Jews too are invited to accept Jesus Christ as Lord! "For, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved'" (Romans 10:13). By "Lord" it is clear that Paul means Jesus, since he continues, "But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed?" (Romans 10:14). Israel indeed had the opportunity to believe, since the Gospel has been preached to them.

Once again Paul quotes Hebrew prophecy against Israel:

> I have been found by those who did not seek me;
> I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me.
> All day long I have held out my hands
> to a disobedient and contrary people.
>
> (Romans 10:20,21; cf. Isaiah 65:1,2)

In the original context of Isaiah the same people are addressed in both verses, but Paul splits the reference, making the words imply once again that the Gentiles, who were not originally God's people, found their way to God, while Israel remained "disobedient and contrary." Once again Israel stands condemned.

Romans 11 begins with a verse often quoted by Paul's apologists: "I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin" (Romans 11:1). It would seem that in spite of his previous criticisms Paul does not believe that God has rejected Israel. But this statement too must be understood in its context. In what sense has God not rejected Israel? Clearly, according to Paul, in the sense that they too are invited to come to Christ. After all, Paul himself is an Israelite, and other Jews may follow his example and obtain divine acceptance by embracing Christ. These will become the "remnant chosen by grace" (Romans 11:5). If there is any doubt about Paul's meaning, his subsequent statements are more specific:

> So I ask, have they stumbled so as to fall? By no means! But through their stumbling salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. Now if their stumbling means riches for the world, and if their defeat means riches for Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean! (Romans 11:11-12)

Here Paul discloses God's plan of salvation. The Jews had to reject Christ so that the Gentiles could be included. But the purpose of the Gentiles' inclusion is, in turn, to make Israel jealous, so that Israel also will eventually embrace the new faith. God still holds out salvation to the Jews, but even for them salvation comes only through Christ: "Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I glorify my ministry in order to make my own people jealous, and thus save some of them" (Romans 11:13-14). Paul solves the problem he faced in the Jews' rejection of Jesus: The Jews were destined to reject Jesus, in fact their own prophets foretold it, so that the gospel could be taken to the Gentiles. But once the Gentile mission is accomplished, Jews too must be included. It is only in that sense that God has not finally rejected them.

Paul, in addressing the Gentiles, refers to the Jews as "branches" that were "broken off" (Romans 11:17); "they were broken off because of their unbelief" (Romans 11:20). Paul then speaks of God's "severity toward those who have fallen" (Romans 11:22). In his next statement Paul is unequivocally clear about the conditions under which God will accept Israel: "And even those of Israel, if they do not persist in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again" (Romans 11:23). It is a distortion of Paul's meaning to claim, as many have with the best of intentions, that in these chapters Paul keeps a place for Judaism as a legitimate path to God while offering faith in Christ only to the Gentiles as their own distinctive path to salvation.

Paul concludes his argument by stating that Israel's heart has been hardened *until* "the full number of the Gentiles has come in" (Romans 11:25). Then Paul uses a truly unfortunate phrase: regarding the gospel, the Jews are indeed "enemies [of God]" for the Gentiles' sake (Romans 11:28); still, "the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Romans 11:29) and therefore the Jews cannot be eternally rejected. So the Jews "have now been disobedient in order that, by the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy" (Romans 11:31). They will receive the same mercy as the Gentiles, that which comes through the acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord.

It is true that Paul considers God's rejection of the Jews to be temporary, but *as long as they continue to reject Christ*, they are "objects of wrath that are made for destruction," "a disobedient and contrary people," "branches broken off," "enemies [of God] for your sake." The Gentiles now have gained the favor that Jews once enjoyed, the privilege of acceptance as God's people. To become reconciled to God, Jews must come to believe as Paul does, that Jesus is the Christ, the awaited Messiah and Lord, and that he will return again soon to complete the process of salvation. As long as Jews persist in resisting this belief, God considers them disobedient, rebellious, and sinful.

Admittedly Paul did not expect this state of affairs to last long. He had hopes that the Gentile mission would soon be completed, and that Christ would soon return finally to redeem the world. But this was not to be, and in the meantime the church could and did seize upon Paul's ideas to support their claim that Christianity has superseded Judaism and that Christians have become the new Israel. We do not find explicit language to this effect until Justin Martyr, a century after Paul, but the seeds of the idea are already present in Paul's writings, especially when isolated from Paul's expectation that the messianic prophecies he recorded would soon be fulfilled.

Christians need to take these developments in Paul far more seriously than they have up till now. Paul could not have foreseen the political power Christianity was to assume after Constantine. He could not have foreseen the ghettos, the pogroms, and the concentration camps. Yet his idea of a Jewish people rejected by God until they come to Christ played a major part in the Christian anti-Semitism that came after him, and that culminated in the Holocaust. This does not mean that Paul's writings are irretrievable as theological resources. Paul was the first and perhaps the greatest Christian theologian. He was great, but he was also deeply flawed. Perhaps sensing

this, the earliest Jewish Christians (the Ebionites) did not consider his writings authoritative.

We have spent this much time with Romans 9-11 because these chapters have often been used in Jewish-Christian dialogue as a basis for Christianity's tolerance of Judaism. However, a superficial approach toward dialogue and mutual understanding clearly will not suffice. It does not do justice to Paul and it ignores the numerous expressions of anti-Judaism throughout the New Testament, which are too well known to enumerate here. The true message of Christ is present in the New Testament, but it is hidden behind the polemic between the early church and the synagogue. Thus for hundreds of years this message has been inaccessible to Jews, who have found in the pages of the New Testament only justifications for the anti-Semitism they or their ancestors have experienced. The New Testament has tragically stood as a barrier between Jews and Jesus. If this barrier is ever to dissolve, we must face this problem in its full complexity. As Catholic theologian Hans Küng writes:

> Jesus was a Jew and all anti-Judaism is a betrayal of Jesus himself. The Church has stood too often between Jesus and Israel. It prevented Israel from recognizing Jesus. It is high time for Christendom not merely to preach "conversion" to the Jews, but to be "converted" itself: to the encounter which has scarcely begun and to a not merely humanitarian but theological discussion with Jews, which might be an aid not merely to a "mission" or capitulation, but to understanding, mutual assistance and collaboration.[39]

If there were to be a theological dialogue between Judaism and Christianity in this spirit of understanding and mutual assistance, what would the two have to say to each other? Judaism would say to Christianity, "Be true to your message. Do not allow your tradition and its symbolism to divert you from the message of love that you preach to all people, including the Jews. Therefore, you must be willing to grapple with your own message and the form of its presentation, to take into account its historical and theological context, and by so doing to refine it in as pure a form as possible. Ask yourselves whether Jesus, himself a Jew, would recognize his loving message in what the church actually preaches." Judaism would also say to Christianity, "In your confidence that the Messiah has come, do not lose your grounding to the earth. Do not dispense too easily with 'law,' since the

[39] Hans Küng, *On Being a Christian* (New York: Doubleday, 1976), 170.

messianic time is not yet fulfilled, and while we may depend upon grace we also need a structure (or "pedagogue" as Paul would say) to guide us until grace is fully realized."

If this dialogue is to take place and if barriers of misunderstanding are to be overcome, then Christianity must be willing to hear the message of Judaism, but Christianity has a message for Judaism as well. Christianity would say to Judaism, "We have a message of faith that the world needs to hear, especially now. Your faith has been shaken, by tragedies we cannot fully understand, even though we bear a considerable share of responsibility for them. Our faith has been shaken too. The synagogue does not speak easily about faith, and sometimes one wonders if the synagogue is truly confident of its own message of covenant, which has taught so much to us Gentiles. When we say that Jesus is the Christ, we mean that he embodied ('incarnated') a message of faith, of God literally present among us ('Emmanuel'), that heals all of us, Christian and non-Christian alike. Let us work together to see if we can recover this message, appreciating both its Jewish roots as well as its Christian form of expression."

If Christianity and Judaism could recognize the message of faith that underlies both traditions and that inevitably ties them together, their message might heal the world. But many old wounds will first have to be healed. For Jews the Holocaust is a painful wound that will not disappear. If Judaism is to preserve its own message for the world, it needs to find a way of dealing with this tragedy that will enable it to preserve a well-grounded faith in the covenantal relationship. It needs to recapture its spiritual core and develop a valid theology of its own, and not relegate theology as an enterprise only for other religions. Not only Christians but Jews as well need a basis for faith, and are asking their religious leaders and teachers to provide it. This is the immense task that confronts Judaism today.

There have been many recent Jewish attempts to deal with the question of theodicy,[40] but so far they have not been promising.[41] The

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[40] See e.g. Harold S. Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* (New York: Schocken, 1981); Harold M. Schulweis, *Evil and the Morality of God* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1984); David Birnbaum, *God and Evil: A Jewish Perspective* (Hoboken: Ktav, 1989).

[41] For critical reviews see Charles Gourgey, "Whither God? Compromises in an Age without Faith," *Judaica Book News* 15, no. 1 (Fall/Winter 1984) (Schulweis); "Has God Abandoned the World? The Struggle for Faith after the Holocaust," *Judaica Book News* 20, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 1990) (Birnbaum); "Theology in Crisis: Can We Believe in a Limited God?" *Judaica Book News* 22, no. 1 (Fall/Winter 1991) (Kushner).

question whether and how those who have suffered through the Holocaust can find a redemptive meaning in their experience cannot be answered. No outsider should attempt it, and even a Holocaust survivor can only offer an individual response. Those who have lived it can only try their best to come to terms with their own experience. At the same time, individual efforts to find meaning in it are not impossible. A man like Viktor Frankl, a psychiatrist who survived Auschwitz, can justifiably say that it is possible to find meaning in such an experience,[42] and he has had his share of critics. The question of confronting such an ordeal and discovering whatever meaning it may have must ultimately be left to the individual survivor.

There is, nevertheless, one way in which the tragedy of the Holocaust may be supplied with at least a small, and admittedly far from compensatory element of redemptive meaning. This would happen if it awakens the world to the loss of the message of faith based upon God's love for humanity. For this to happen the role of Christianity in preparing the soil for the Holocaust must be recognized, and many courageous and sensitive Christian writers are now making this recognition. As Hans Küng states:

> It must be absolutely clearly stated that Nazi anti-Judaism was the work of godless, anti-Christian criminals. But it would not have been possible without the almost two thousand years' pre-history of "Christian" anti-Judaism, which prevented Christians in Germany from organizing a convinced and energetic resistance on a broad front.[43]

The Nazis' destruction of European Jewry was possible only because centuries of Christian anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism created an environment friendly to it. The Nazis even took some of their ideas from Christian anti-Semites. The practice of forcing Jews to wear the yellow star has its precedent in the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, which passed a similar edict. Martin Luther's call for Jews' homes and synagogues to be burned and their property confiscated provided the Nazis with the perfect religious rationale for their program. Christian hostility toward Jews in Europe made it only too easy for the Nazis to single out Jews for deportation and extermination.

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[42] Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherap*y (original title: *From Death-Camp to Existentialism*), (New York: Washington Square Press, 1963).

[43] Küng, *On Being a Christian*, 169.

A devoted Catholic, Harry James Cargas, has recognized the Christian contribution to the Holocaust and has written a powerful response. He documents the Nazi atrocities with haunting, heartrending photographs acquired at the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial Museum in Jerusalem. He prefaces his commentary on these photographs with a brief history of Christian anti-Semitism, pointing out striking similarities between the speech of some of the most revered figures in the history of Christianity and Nazi anti-Jewish rhetoric. Calling himself a "post-Auschwitz Catholic" he writes:

> The Holocaust event requires my response precisely as a Christian. The Holocaust is, in my judgment, the greatest tragedy for Christians since the crucifixion. In the first instance, Jesus died; in the latter, Christianity may be said to have died. In the case of Christ, the Christian believes in a resurrection. Will there be, can there be, a resurrection for Christianity?[44]

To bring about this resurrection, Jews and Christians must help each other. If the shock of the Holocaust leads Christians to a radical reexamination of their own faith and a renewed search for the purity of Jesus's message, then the victims of the Holocaust will not have died for nothing. Israel, as in the past, is once again the true "suffering servant," whose stripes contribute to the healing of the world. It will have become the new Christ, who bears the sins of humanity and of misdirected Christianity for the sake of their salvation.

In response to such a movement within Christianity one may hope that Jews can begin to question their long-standing mistrust of Christianity and of Jesus. How tragic it is that for so long Jews could only think of Jesus with hostility, because they saw in him the symbol of their pain. Perhaps now is the first time since the days of Jesus himself when the wall between Judaism and Christianity can be breached, and Jews and Christians can help each other rediscover the roots of their common faith.

We have said that Jesus's greatness lies in the fact that he cannot be claimed by anyone. The faith he preached is not exclusively Jewish, nor is it exclusively Christian. It is universal. It is the message that in spite of the tragedy of our experience our connection to God is unbreakable, that the covenant is alive, and that the heart that seeks God in love will draw from God a response, even in the midst of much suffering. This is not an easy message to grasp, but no message encompassing such healing power could

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[44] Harry James Cargas, *A Christian Response to the Holocaus*t (Denver: Stonehenge, 1981), v.

ever be easy. It must not be grasped but sought, with the heart's full devotion, with all one's "heart, soul, mind, and might." Jesus was an apocalyptic preacher, but he also transformed apocalyptic language to point to God's Kingdom right here and right now. Jesus restored some important themes lost since the prophets: themes of inner transformation and spiritual renewal. He went even further, and preached an abiding faith in God's love not only for the nation, but for the individual: "And even the hairs of your head are all counted" (Matthew 10:30).

Jews can therefore rightly see Jesus as an heir of the prophetic tradition, and can begin to accept him as a teacher who brings to the surface the core of their own prophetic faith. And Christians can rightly regard Jesus as the Messiah, the one who comes with a healing message of salvation. There is a bridge between Christian and Jew upon which both can walk, respecting each other without losing their respective identities. The world's harmony requires the building of this bridge, because its implications go beyond the Jewish/Christian divide..

A Final Question

The resurrection originally belonged to an apocalyptic world view that expected the world's imminent end. As we have seen, the delay of the *parousia* forced the evangelists to reinterpret the meaning of the resurrection. Now, two thousand years later, we are still awaiting the fulfillment of history. We too need to understand the resurrection in a way that preserves it as a symbol of revelation and that is valid within our own historical context. This means that the resurrection must survive its original apocalyptic framework, which cannot mean today what it meant for first-century messianic Jews and Christians. For the resurrection to continue as a living symbol of faith, it must be consciously connected to its true existential and spiritual significance.

To recap briefly, at the time of Jesus, resurrection was understood as just part of a whole framework of apocalyptic eschatology. The close of the age was anticipated, featuring a cosmic battle between the forces of good and evil, with good finally victorious. Then a general resurrection was expected, when the righteous dead would be raised to live in the new Kingdom of God. This is what Jews around the time of Jesus, including Paul, expected would happen, and very soon. Jesus himself may have shared this

expectation (Mark 13:30, Matthew 24:34, Luke 21:32). It is important to note that when we read in the Gospels about how the Pharisees believed in the resurrection while the Sadducees did not, it is not about life after death as we tend to think of it. The Sadducees were simply not adherents of apocalyptic eschatology, and denied the entire theological framework popular among other sects.

Then an event occurred, about which no one has certain knowledge, and about which one can only speculate. The disciples experienced some indescribable occurrence after Jesus's death, which they understood in terms of the only theological language available to them: he was raised from the dead. Jesus, the Messiah, was raised in expectation of the fulfillment of the apocalyptic hope. This is why Paul called Jesus "the first fruits of those who have died" (I Corinthians 15:20); Jesus was the first and the actual beginning of the general resurrection about to take place. But the general resurrection did not happen, and we have already seen how the different Gospel writers dealt with that fact. They separated Jesus's resurrection from the general one, which was still expected, only not in the same instant. But now, over two millennia later, there still has been no general resurrection, and none on the horizon. So Jesus's resurrection stands by itself as a unique event, something never intended by the original theology of the resurrection, which the disciples relied upon for their understanding of what happened to Jesus. That original theology, from which Christian belief in resurrection arose, has been almost completely forgotten except within the limited circle of scholars.

So when we speak of resurrection today, we are actually employing the last surviving remnant of first-century Jewish apocalyptic eschatology. Will that do as a literal description of what actually happened on that first Easter? Responses to that question will vary. The only evidence we have is the Gospel accounts, and the letters of Paul.

Earlier we noted that the Gospel writers could not have intended their descriptions of the resurrection to be taken literally. The Gospels, especially Matthew, Mark, and Luke, correspond very closely *until* the resurrection. At that point they branch off in four separate directions, whose plain meanings cannot be reconciled. Clearly the evangelists were not reporting history. They were using symbolic language to point towards a spiritual truth. In Jewish literature (and the New Testament writers were indeed Jewish), this style of writing is called *midrash,* and we have defined midrash as *the use of*

legend to reveal spiritual truth. It would not have occurred to a first-century Jewish audience to take midrashic symbols literally. The content of the symbol, in this case the bodily resurrection of Jesus, is not the truth; it is the *pointer* to the truth.

If we cannot rely upon the Gospels for a literal description of the resurrection event, we are left with the letters of Paul. But here we fare no better. Paul gives us no details. He says only that "Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me" (1 Corinthians 15:8), and whatever this appearance was, he equates it with the appearances to Peter, James, and the other apostles. But this appearance to Paul would have occurred after Jesus had already ascended, and Paul reports no encounter with the physical Jesus. Also, no New Testament writer reports any presence of the physical Jesus on earth after he ascended. So it seems Paul also is not talking about a literal raising of a physical body. If we choose to take into account Luke's reports in Acts, the picture becomes even cloudier. In the three places where Paul's conversion is recorded (Acts 9:4, 22:7, 26:14) the text says that Paul "heard a voice." According to these accounts Paul never even saw the risen Jesus. Taking these observations into account, together with those we've made about the Gospels, it is actually difficult to make a case for a biblical insistence on a literal raising of a physical body. This would not seem at all strange to the first-century Jewish mind, which did not take religious symbolism literally as we do today.

We cannot know, and we certainly cannot tell from these accounts, exactly what Paul experienced. All we can say is that, while Paul never reports meeting a physical risen Jesus, he relies upon resurrection theology to interpret his experience. Resurrection theology had been current for many years before Paul, and provided him his best way of making sense of what he encountered.

The foregoing should *not* be taken as in any way arguing against or debunking the resurrection. Much to the contrary, understanding New Testament symbolism, and the way Jewish authors at the time thought, transports us to an awesome and inexpressible mystery we cannot capture in words. When we read the New Testament resurrection accounts understanding the various vignettes and symbols not as historical reportage, which they are not, but as clues revealing a hidden and surprising reality, we may be grasped by something deep and soul-shaking that is completely masked by an adherence to the plain sense of the words. That "something"

is an experience of true faith, *the awareness of the power of eternity*.[45] Understanding the symbol as symbol takes us beyond the surface meanings of the words towards a direct encounter with the eternal life to which the symbols point.

What lies beyond the biblical symbols of resurrection is eternal life itself. We cannot make direct statements about eternal life. We can only make symbolic statements or negative statements. Negative statements would include assertions like "This life is not the only reality," and "Death is not life's final verdict." Symbolic statements are what we read in the Gospel resurrection accounts. Such statements are also the material of theology. My previously referenced article "Jesus and the Christ Angel" makes statements about the resurrection and eternal life that are explanatory but not literal. That paper, unlike the present work, belongs not to scholarship but to theology. Theology can go where scholarship cannot follow, because much of its material is inaccessible to the methods of the scholar. But theological statements are symbolic, unlike scholarly statements, and should never be mistaken for the latter. To mix up the two that way compromises scholarly integrity and, by taking the symbols literally, robs theology of its power

These preliminary considerations bring us to our final question: What kind of resurrection faith is possible today? This is largely an individual matter. Many will continue to believe in a literal, bodily resurrection, and find in it a faith that sustains them. That is not for anyone to judge, *except in one instance,* to be discussed below. The form of faith I am proposing is one where we open ourselves to the unspoken mystery underneath the symbolic language, allowing it to take us over, knowing that the plain meaning of the words is inadequate to capture a reality so overpowering that it continued to inspire deep forms of spiritual expression long after the original followers should have given up all hope.

This kind of resurrection faith opens us to a reality beyond that of time and space. It is the reality of God's original creation (Genesis 1), which God called "very good." The resurrection symbol tells us that we are reborn into this new life, that the present life of flesh and blood and pain is not the whole of life. It helps us know, not only in our minds but in our souls, that our pain on this earth is fleeting, but eternal life, to which be belong, has no end. The

[45] Charles Gourgey, *Judeochristianity: The Meaning and Discovery of Faith* (Cleveland, TN: Parson's Porch Books), 183.

resurrection symbol, properly received, gives us a direct impact of this reality, in contrast to a historical account of something that happened to a man called Jesus two thousand years ago which, being divine, he could accomplish, but which leaves ordinary human beings far behind.

It is worth considering a Jewish account of resurrection faith, by the Orthodox Jewish theologian and scholar Pinchas Lapide. Lapide accepts the resurrection as historical fact, but without embracing its Christian interpretation that Jesus is divine or is the Messiah. He emphasizes that "the Easter event, in whatever way one wants to understand it, was primarily and chiefly a Jewish faith experience."[46] It was, moreover, a Jewish faith experience "whose radiating power... was meant for the world of nations."[47] The purpose of the resurrection in salvation history was to bring faith in the one true God to the Gentile world. "The experience of the resurrection as the foundation act of the church which has carried the faith in the God of Israel into the whole Western world must belong to God's plan of salvation."[48]

Nevertheless, the resurrection itself was an exclusively Jewish experience:

> The resurrection of Jesus on that Easter Sunday and his appearances in the following days were purely Jewish faith experiences. Not one Gentile saw him after good Friday. Everything that the Gentile church heard about the resurrection came only from Jewish sources because he appeared after Easter Sunday as the Risen One exclusively to Jews.[49]

While this experience did take place in history and can appropriately be called a resurrection, its precise nature is ambiguous and inaccessible:

> The manner in which the resurrection took place is today just as uncertain as it was in Hillel's time [i.e. the time of Jesus], when the controversy concerning the general resurrection of the dead occupied rabbis... but wisely was left open. In the word of the Jesuit Father F. Letzen-Deis: "At the present situation of research one can... not assert that the evangelists wanted to impose on us the supposition that the words and deeds of the Risen One took place exactly as it is printed there.... The whole *how* of the appearances remains closed to us.[50]

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46 *Pinchas Lapide, The Resurrection of Jesus: A Jewish Perspective,* trans. Wilhelm C. Linss (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1982), 45-46.

47 Ibid., 92.

48 Ibid., 142.

49 Ibid., 123.

50 Ibid., 127.

As noted earlier, the evangelists could not have intended their resurrection accounts to be taken literally. Jewish theological writers of the time, the evangelists among them, did not think that way. They freely employed symbols, metaphors, and literary elaborations to reveal shades of meaning beyond the denotations of words. To read them literally is to impose a foreign mindset on these writings and to misunderstand them completely.

As an example of this Jewish way of thinking, Lapide mentions the *targums,* Aramaic translations (often more like embellishments) of the biblical text:

> The Targums are translations of the biblical text into the Aramaic popular language which were made before the time of Jesus. They embellished this translation by paraphrastic statements, enlargements, and explanations. Another example is the midrash – that "investigation of the Scriptures" which frequently takes the biblical text only as the starting point for a plethora of moral teachings, homilies, legends, and tales, in order to deepen the Holy Scriptures and "to bring heaven closer to the community."
>
> Both targums and midrash employ artistic freedom as a method of teaching in order to make those distant faith experiences of the ancestors not only actual but present in a tangible way.[51]

Understanding the first-century Jewish mind is critical for correct interpretation of the Gospels. However, once these scriptures passed into Gentile hands, their symbolic way of thinking became lost, and these accounts began to be taken literally. Such became the dominant way of approaching scripture even in our time. Thus there have been endless debates on the veracity of the resurrection accounts, with claims of either proving or disproving them. The Gospel writers were either held up as infallible, unquestionable reporters of the facts, or denounced as fabricators and liars. All of this misses the point. We need to learn once again how to read for spiritual truth the way the first-century writers did and which was natural to them.

> To blame the rabbis or evangelists for deception or to accuse them of lying would have been as foreign to the Jews and Jewish Christians of that time as an accusation of "embellishment" against Van Gogh or of the corruption of history against Shakespeare's *Macbeth* would be to us.[52]

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[51] Lapide, *Resurrection*, 101.

[52] Ibid., 109.

The divergence of the four resurrection narratives should not be seen as a weakness of scripture or a problem to be solved. It is rather an invitation to enter into the contemplation of an eternal reality that surpasses this world and anything that can be expressed in it.

To return to our question, any faith in the resurrection is possible today that brings one closer to a consciousness of eternal life. For some this faith will take a traditional form. For others, the resurrection will be no less real but understood differently. An understanding of the relationship between Jewish thought and Jewish scripture (and the New Testament is indeed a very Jewish book!) can deepen our consciousness of eternity, as we take scripture as an invitation to venture into realms beyond words.

We spoke earlier of one form of resurrection faith that should not and cannot be considered tenable now. This is the belief in the resurrection as a criterion of salvation. This approach to resurrection is premised upon a literal understanding that we have seen does not reflect the spirit of the original texts. It also denies eternity by creating a split between those who believe and those who do not. If the Gospels teach us anything, it is that Jesus, verbalizing the will of God, bridged the chasm between opposing groups of people: the familiar and the stranger, the rich and the poor, slave and free, men and women, those inside the faith community (Jews) and those outside (Romans, Samaritans, Canaanites). Going underneath the surface meanings of the words to find direct contact with eternal life, which is the reality the resurrection symbolizes, gives us the power to heal these divisions. Hence the absurdity of predicating salvation upon belief. One might as well demand a belief in sunshine. The sun shines whether or not one believes it. Eternal life is present whether or not one believes it. Not to know this is unfortunate enough.

And so, dialogue on the resurrection is possible between Jews and Christians. It should not be polemical, as it has been since the days of Justin and Trypho. This issue is not dichotomous; there is a wide spectrum of belief. Christians can appreciate the Jewish roots of their resurrection faith, and Jews can appreciate how their tradition has inspired a life-transforming faith in Christians.

As our entire discussion hopefully has shown, the loss of the apocalyptic frame around the image of the resurrection may cause us to question certain traditional ways of understanding that image, but it in no way

invalidates resurrection faith. If Jesus's message is true, then resurrection is indeed a reality. As long as our conscious connection to God's love conquers even the power of death, then the Christian proclamation of the resurrection has meaning. And then Easter, which not uncoincidentally falls together with Passover, the Jewish festival of freedom and redemption, celebrates something real. And Jews will understand when Christians, to the traditional Easter greeting "He is risen," give the traditional response: "He is risen indeed."

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