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RESURRECTION FAITH TODAY

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In 1964, W. Marxsen published a short essay which triggered an intense discussion among German Protestants concerning the understanding of the Resurrection faith.[1] Marxsen's essay soon influenced Catholic theology, and the discussion spread to German Catholic circles.[2] In these circumstances, the German bishops wrote a letter "to all who are commissioned by the Church to preach the faith," dated September 22, 1967. The letter rejected an extreme interpretation of the Resurrection and stated: "The confession of the Resurrection of Jesus as a real event (*wirkliches Ereignis*) necessarily belongs to the Christian faith and cannot be understood as a time-conditioned interpretation of an inner-historical, inner-worldly or inner-human

[1]Willi Marxsen, *Die Auferstehung Jesu als historisches und als theologisches Problem* (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1964); translated in *The Significance of the Message of the Resurrection for Faith in Jesus Christ*, ed. Charles F. D. Moule (London: SCM Press, 1968).

[2]Heinz R. Schlette, *Epiphanie als Geschichte* (Munich: Kösel, 1966), 67-75 (all translations from this source are the author's own); Anton Vögtle, "Epiphanie als Geschichte (Kritik an H. R. Schlette)," *Oberrheinisches Pastoralblatt* 68 (1967), 9-14; Jacob Kremer, *Das älteste Zeugnis von der Auferstehung Christi* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1966), all translations from this source are the author's own.

experience, which can at other times be expressed differently."[3] The letter of the bishops did not mention any theologian by name. It did not even say that any theologian expressly taught what it rejected. Rather, in a time of confusion, the letter set a limit beyond which the discussion of German Catholics could not go. It did not seek to end all discussion of the meaning of the Resurrection faith. What then have the theologians been saying?

SURVEY OF THEOLOGICAL OPINIONS

BULTMANN

The present discussion concerning the ideas of Marxsen must be seen against the background of R. Bultmann's treatment of the Resurrection. The latter presupposes a world view in which the universe is a closed system of natural causality which excludes the possibility of supernatural influences or direct interventions of God. A miraculous action of God in the world is impossible. Therefore any biblical statement implying such an action (e.g. the resurrection of a dead man) is a mythical statement. Myth is "the use of imagery to express the otherworldly in terms of this world, and the divine in terms of human life; the other side in terms of this side."[4]

The New Testament presents the event of Christ as a mythical event in mythical language. Here the historical and mythical are intermingled. The historical person of Jesus of Nazareth is said to be at the same time a pre-existent divine being, and the historical event of the cross is linked to the message of the Resurrection and exaltation to heaven and the legend of the empty tomb.

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[3]"Jesus ist auferstanden," *Hochland* 60 (1968), 303 (author's own translation).

[4]Rudolf Bultmann, "Nouveau Testament et mythologie," in Rudolf Bultmann, *L'Interpretation du Nouveau Testament* (Paris: Aubier, 1955), 148 (all translations from this source are the author's own).

Bultmann distinguishes various forms of this Resurrection message. In the beginning, the apostles preached only faith in the risen one. This faith was based on visions which the disciples interpreted as the work of God. Later the tradition acquired the legends of the empty tomb and of the graphic appearances. These explain the event mythically, as if it were a return to the life of this world.

The content of these objectifying representations must be abandoned. The mythical language must be demythologized by asking what is the understanding of existence it expresses. This is the meaning which the New Testament intends to express in its mythical affirmations. The mythical language used to present the event of Christ simply intends to express the importance of the historical figure of Jesus, more precisely His importance as a figure of salvation and as event of salvation.[5] Ultimately everything revolves around the question of the interpretation of the cross and the Resurrection.

The objectifying representations of the New Testament present the cross of Christ as a mythical event: the pre-existing, incarnate Son of God who is without sin has been crucified. He constitutes the sacrifice whose blood expiates our sins, etc. What is meant by this mythical language? When the New Testament exalts the historical event of the cross to cosmic dimensions, it is simply expressing the significance of the cross as a historical event, i.e., that the believer has been delivered by the cross of Christ from the domination of sin; that by allowing Jesus to be crucified, God has erected the cross for us, so that we can receive the cross of Christ as our own cross and allow ourselves to be crucified with Christ. Thus the saving event is an act of God, which is not an event of the past, but the eschatological event in time and beyond time; for, understood in its significance (i.e., understood in faith), it is continually present, is an ever-present reality which establishes the basis of human life.

The cross of Christ, as an event of salvation, has its origin in the fact

[5]Bultmann, "Nouveau Testament et mythologie," 173.

of the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth. But in its historical (*geschichtliche*) significance it is "the judgment of divine grace pronounced over the whole world affecting every human being, liberating man from himself as a being belonging to the world, and setting him free to be a being belonging to God. The myth has no other function than to translate this meaning of the event related by history."[6]

The Resurrection narratives and every other mention of the Resurrection are nothing more than an attempt to convey the meaning of the cross. The content of the message is not an event which can be proven historically and which occurred the morning of Easter in Jerusalem. Rather, the content of the message is the faith of the disciples—worked by God—in the unique value of the death of Christ for us. To believe in the Resurrection is not to believe in an incredible miracle, the revivification of a dead man. It is to believe that the cross of Christ places us in a new situation. The assertion of the Resurrection is a reflective judgment which expresses the fact "that His death is not just an ordinary human death, but the judgment and salvation of the world, depriving death of its power. This is the truth contained in the affirmation that the crucified did not remain in death but has risen."[7]

Faith in the Resurrection is really the same thing as faith in the saving efficacy of the cross—in the cross as event of salvation. So far as one can speak, in the sense of Bultmann, of an Easter event alongside the cross, historically one can only grasp the arising of the Easter faith in the disciples.

But for us, the cross as saving event, and therefore the Resurrection, is only present in the word of preaching. Christ, the crucified and risen one, encounters us in the word of preaching and nowhere else. It would be an error to wish to legitimate and justify the content of preaching by a study of its historical origin. All questions concerning the historicity of the Easter event are superfluous and can be harmful by objectivizing

[6]Bultmann, "Nouveau Testament et mythologie," 174-176.

[7]Bultmann, "Nouveau Testament et mythologie," 177.

the event and destroying its true existential meaning. True Easter faith is the comprehending faith in the word of the kerygma.[8]

Bultmann, therefore, accepts the proposition that Jesus has risen in the kerygma. Properly understood, it is perfectly correct.

> It presupposes that the kerygma itself is an eschatological event, and it expresses the fact that Jesus is really present in the kerygma, that it is *His* word which involves the hearer in the kerygma. If that is the case, then all speculations concerning the modes of being of the risen Jesus, all the narratives of the empty tomb and all the Easter legends, whatever elements of historical fact they may contain, and as true as they may be in their symbolic form, are of no consequence. To believe in the Christ present in the kerygma is the meaning of the Easter faith.[9]

Marxsen

Unlike Bultmann, and like many disciples of Bultmann, Marxsen does not consider the question whether the Resurrection is a positive event to be superfluous. "Does it mean anything to say that Jesus is risen, if at the same time to declare the resurrection of Jesus as an actual event is unimportant?"[10]

Marxsen finds that the primary datum beyond which historical analysis cannot continue its inquiry consists in the claim of the apostles to have seen Jesus who was crucified. On the basis of this vision they then by a process of reflective interpretation, and utilizing for this purpose the concept of the resurrection of the dead from the apocalyptic tradition, arrived at the statement: Jesus has been raised by God; He is risen. At that time they naturally also believed that they were

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[8]Bultmann, "Nouveau Testament et mythologie," 180.

[9]Rudolf Bultmann, *Das Verhältnis der urchristlichen Botschaft zum historischen Jesus* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag, 1960), 27 (author's own translation).

[10]Willi Marxsen, "The Resurrection of Jesus As an Historical and Theological Problem," in Moule, *The Significance of the Message of the Resurrection for Faith in Jesus Christ*, 19.

speaking of an event which had really taken place, i.e., the Resurrection. But today we can *no longer* speak so directly of the Resurrection as an *event.* We must simply say: we are concerned with an interpretative statement made use of by those who reflected on what had happened to them (at that time). If today we ask in *historical* terms whether Jesus is risen, we can only reply: that cannot be established.[11]

Are we bound to this interpretation today? Marxsen emphatically answers *No!,* for he finds that right from the beginning the experience of the appearance of Jesus (not of the risen one—this designation is only the result of reflection[12]) was also interpreted in a different way. The experience of the appearance was pondered, at first mainly, later almost exclusively, with the help of the interpretative derivation "resurrection." But this interpretative derivation was not the only possible one. It is not so closely connected with the experience that it cannot be separated from it.[13]

In fact, when Paul spoke of what happened to him (Gal. 1:15; 1 Cor. 9:1), he did not use the established Resurrection terminology. He spoke of his Damascus experience as a revealing, a seeing, or an appearing of the Son of God, Jesus, our Lord, or else Christ—but never of the risen one.[14] Furthermore, it is clear that "on the basis of the appearances there existed both the community (more than five-hundred brethren) and its oversight by Peter, the 'office' of the Twelve and the office (not to be identified with it!) of the apostles, as

[11]Marxsen, "The Resurrection of Jesus As an Historical and Theological Problem," 30-31.

[12]Marxsen, "The Resurrection of Jesus As an Historical and Theological Problem," 34.

[13]Marxsen, "The Resurrection of Jesus As an Historical and Theological Problem," 32.

[14]Marxsen, "The Resurrection of Jesus As an Historical and Theological Problem," 23.

well as—later—the oversight by James."[15] Marxsen concludes that the formulas show that both the setting up of the community as well as the reasons given for functioning within it were traced back to a vision of Jesus after His crucifixion. This means that what supplies the real basis of the community and the functions within it is the fact not of the Resurrection itself, but of Jesus' appearances. But if the appearances of Jesus on the one hand led to setting up the community and on the other hand also brought into being a function within it, then these are likewise interpretative derivations, for they were originally connected with the appearances and seemed to derive from them (cf. 1 Cor. 9:1; Gal. 1:15f.; Mt. 28:16ff.; Jn. 20:19-23; Acts 10:40-42).[16]

Thus the experience of the appearances came to be spoken of in two ways with the aid of two interpretative derivations. One looked back in time (reflective) and furnished a statement about a person: He is risen. The other looked forward to the consequences of the experience (anticipatory) and brought to expression a function brought into being by the experience. The content of the function springing from the vision is that the purpose of Jesus is continued; Jesus' kerygma continues to be preached; He still comes today.[17]

In this way, Marxsen has arrived by another route to Bultmann's "Jesus rose into the kerygma," even though he does not agree with the terminology. Rather, it should be expressed: "Jesus is present in the kerygma of His witnesses."[18]

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[15]Marxsen, "The Resurrection of Jesus As an Historical and Theological Problem," 33.

[16]Marxsen, "The Resurrection of Jesus As an Historical and Theological Problem," 34-35.

[17]Marxsen, "The Resurrection of Jesus As an Historical and Theological Problem," 38-39.

[18]Marxsen, "The Resurrection of Jesus As an Historical and Theological Problem," 37-38.

These two interpretative derivations, in the opinion of Marxsen, once existed relatively independent of one another, side by side. Later they were combined, permeated one another, and formed one sequence: Resurrection (appearance)-mission. But from the beginning the experience of the appearance is found in two explanatory contexts, each of which points in a different direction. Marxsen holds that the retrospective interpretative derivation (He is risen) is essentially secondary and only gives us information concerning the belief of those who carried out this process of reflection, not information about matters of fact.[19] This belief, summed up in the statement "Jesus was raised from the dead by God," can only become relevant to others when it is deciphered and re-expressed in the plain language of function: His "purpose" did not come to an end with His death, but still holds good today. That means that for us the statement "He is the risen one" is uninteresting unless we say at the same time He is the risen one "because he (identical with the earthly one) still *comes* today with the same (old) claim." But this means that we no longer need to accept the concept of "the risen one" unreservedly, but must rather speak of the "living one."[20]

Thus the raising of Jesus is not the fundamental datum of Christianity. Jesus was the "datum": His words and deeds. Jesus was experienced in His earthly ministry as an anticipation of the *eschaton*, as a divine event, as the one who brought the distant God near. But He was crucified, and this divine event, bound up with Him, was finished. But then He had been seen—and the divine event bound up with Him was brought into being once again.[21]

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[19]Marxsen, "The Resurrection of Jesus As an Historical and Theological Problem," 39.

[20]Marxsen, "The Resurrection of Jesus As an Historical and Theological Problem," 40.

[21]Marxsen, "The Resurrection of Jesus As an Historical and Theological Problem," 47; cf. 48.

To make the raising from the dead fundamental is to turn into history what was the result of an interpretation. Marxsen holds that this was no doubt intelligible, perhaps even necessary, at that time. But it is forbidden to us in the present day.[22]

Therefore the question of the Resurrection is not that of an event which occurred after Good Friday, but that of the earthly Jesus and the question inseparably linked with it, of how His purpose later became a reality of experience which can still be experienced today in preaching. Here I encounter Jesus' offer, and when it really touches me I know that He is alive.[23]

Pannenberg and Wilckens

Wolfhart Pannenberg and Ulrich Wilckens are the present-day proponents of a position opposed to that of Marxsen. They emphasize with Marxsen the importance of concrete events which took place when the disciples were in the company of Jesus during His ministry: His words and actions, His preaching, and His unique claim that the final action of God in the last days was to be found in His own acts.[24] But contrary to the view of Marxsen, they insist that the entire ministry of Jesus is related to the question concerning the future ratification of Jesus' claim by God. Precisely this claim was called into question by the death of Jesus. The authentication of Jesus' claim and person

[22]Marxsen, "The Resurrection of Jesus As an Historical and Theological Problem," 48.

[23]Marxsen, "The Resurrection of Jesus As an Historical and Theological Problem," 50.

[24]Ulrich Wilckens, "The Tradition-History of the Resurrection of Jesus," in Moule, *The Significance of the Message of the Resurrection for Faith in Jesus Christ*, 62f.; Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Grundzüge der Christologie* (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1966), 47ff. (all translations from this source are the author's own).

was only given through the Resurrection appearances.[25] On the basis of the appearances the disciples were able to say that Jesus had been raised, and they were only able to say this because they assumed the tradition of the Jewish hope of the resurrection witnessed to in the Apocalypse of Isaiah, the Book of Daniel, the Apocalypse of Baruch, and Ezra. Thus with Marxsen they can say that the statement "Jesus is risen" is an interpretative statement.[26]

But contrary to Marxsen they insist that

> the knowledge of this event is the purpose of the appearances of Jesus; for it provided for them the basis of the knowledge that Jesus' preaching had therefore by this act of God already received its authentication. As a consequence, they themselves had the right to go on preaching His gospel, and at the same time, in the context of the same appearances, had explicitly received their own commission. But the essential significance of the raising of Jesus was that it was the eschatological confirmation of the authority or truth of the preaching of Jesus.[27]

In direct opposition to Marxsen, Wilckens affirms that the dominant concern of the earliest preaching of the Resurrection was not that Jesus who had died had come to life, but that Jesus who had died had now had His preaching eschatologically authenticated by His resurrection.[28] Wilckens concludes: "Consequently I must affirm, against Marxsen, the thesis that what is at issue is the event of the resurrection of Jesus itself, and what according to Marxsen is the direct and true sense of the primitive Christian proclamation of the resurrection, the

[25]Pannenberg, *Grundzüge der Christologie*, 60-61; Wilckens, "The Tradition-History of the Resurrection of Jesus," 64-65.

[26]Wilckens, "The Tradition-History of the Resurrection of Jesus," 65-66; Pannenberg, *Grundzüge der Christologie*, 89ff.

[27]Wilckens, "The Tradition-History of the Resurrection of Jesus," 66; cf. Pannenberg, *Grundzüge der Christologie*, 62.

[28]Wilckens, "The Tradition-History of the Resurrection of Jesus," 67.

continuation of Jesus' 'purpose', must be regarded as the effect of the resurrection."[29] Nor does he agree that it can be said that "Jesus rose into the kerygma." Rather, it must be said that "Jesus rose into the final judgment of God." This event is the whole basis of all early preaching.[30]

Consequently, in the position of Pannenberg and Wilckens, this apocalyptic interpretation of the appearances is not, as for Marxsen, an interpretative derivation which could or even must be replaced by another, but is an irreplaceable interpretation even for us today.[31] One can not only speak of the visions of the disciples, but also of the appearances of the risen Jesus. Pannenberg grants that language concerning the resurrection of the dead is metaphorical and symbolic, since the intended reality is withdrawn from the experience of man who lives on this side of the grave. The true nature of the event is still hidden from us.[32] Yet, Pannenberg affirms that whether or not Jesus was raised from the dead is a historical question insofar as it is an inquiry into what did or did not happen at a certain time from a certain place. The temporal location of the event is given in the relative exactness of the traditional formula "after three days." He accepts the essential historicity of the empty tomb, and thus the relationship to space is already given. Pannenberg concedes that the Resurrection-reality is not material and thus nonspatial. But the event of the Resurrection, in contrast to the reality which results from this event, has to do with the transition from our earthly reality to the Resurrection reality, which is no longer locatable in space. Thus, at least its initial point must be sought in the historical Jesus, which was located in space, and thus

[29]Wilckens, "The Tradition-History of the Resurrection of Jesus," 70.

[30]Wilckens, "The Tradition-History of the Resurrection of Jesus," 70.

[31]Pannenberg, in *Theology As History*, eds. James M. Robinson and John B. Cobb (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 266.

[32]Pannenberg, *Grundzüge der Christologie*, 70, 73.

far at least it is related to space. "If it really took place, it took place in Palestine and not, for instance, in America."[33]

Schlette

The Catholic theologian Heinz Robert Schlette has written that he "hopes to have learned from" the writings of Marxsen. However, his position concerning the Resurrection is not exactly the same as Marxsen's. Schlette's ideas concerning the Resurrection must be seen against the background of his conception of "epiphany as history."

Epiphany is the element in an event which makes possible the interpretation of the event. It is the communication of a meaning through a historical event. Epiphany is an occurrence taking place purely in the dimension of the historical, but at the same time making possible and demanding an interpretation and mediating an insight which could not be seen empirically by everybody in the event in time and space, but only by faith.[34]

Schlette applies this concept of epiphany to the event of Jesus. The occurrence or event of Jesus of Nazareth is the exemplary instance or high point of epiphany. The whole life and claim of Jesus were such an epiphany. But the epiphany was not immediately comprehensible and interpreted. It could only be correctly interpreted in retrospect after His death.[35]

What occurred at Easter? Schlette confesses candidly: the exegetes do not know; nobody knows. "I am of the opinion that from methodical grounds it is completely impossible to make historically certain statements concerning what occurred after the death of Jesus and led to the Resurrection faith. I also think there is little prospect that this

[33]Pannenberg, *Theology As History*, 266; cf. 127-128; cf. idem, *Grundzüge der Christologie*, 95f.

[34]Heinz R. Schlette, *Epiphanie als Geschichte*, 38, 77.

[35]Schlette, *Epiphanie als Geschichte*, 67.

uncertainty will ever be eliminated."[36] He is convinced that the sources give us no definite information whether the faith in the Resurrection was initiated through definite happenings (appearances, visions, etc.) or whether such happenings could not have taken place. He feels that if we accept the principles of exegetical interpretation generally accepted today, we must conclude: "From the beginning the Christians did not say that the grave was empty and that they saw Jesus risen again before them. The Resurrection faith manifests itself to be an interpretative derivation, i.e., the interpretation of a definite experience."[37]

What was the nature of the experience which was interpreted as resurrection? Schlette says that this cannot be answered historically. He therefore proposes an interpretation which leaves undecided what is uncertain, and yet at the same time seeks to visualize what historical experiences legitimized: the interpretative speech concerning resurrection for those who already believed within the horizon of the life of Israel. He visualizes the events after Christ's death in this way.

After Jesus' death the path of the community of Jesus was not everywhere the same. Individuals and groups had a variety of experiences. Gradually, from conversations, in the thoughts of individuals, at the meals at which they again gathered, the followers of Jesus began to understand more and more what they had in Him, how significant and unique Jesus was, how new and unconditional were the attitudes which He had presented to them. They acquired the conviction that they had to take up the "purpose" of Jesus and remain true to it. "It appeared ever more unthinkable to them that this Jesus should be as dead and gone as Abraham, David, and Jeremiah. When they speak of Him, when they sit together and eat and drink, they believe He is with them. Yahweh who had sent Him allows Him even now to be living in their midst."[38]

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[36]Heinz R. Schlette, *Kirche Unterwegs* (Freiburg: Walter, 1966), 120 (author's own translation); cf. idem, *Epiphanie als Geschichte*, 67.

[37]Schlette, *Epiphanie als Geschichte*, 69.

[38]Schlette, *Epiphanie als Geschichte*, 70-71.

Schlette leaves open the possibility that in this basic mood signs and occurrences took place which were interpreted as pointers from God, special unique and unrepeatable signs. But—and this is what he wanted to show—even without such signs it is comprehensible that an atmosphere arose in which the experience ripened: Jesus and His purpose are not finished; we must cling to His word and Himself, if we want to stand on the side of Yahweh.[39]

In some such way, the event "Jesus" was better and better understood. It appeared as the greatest epiphany from God and was now interpreted with the words and conceptions of the Israelite hope: He brought the new creation, the truth and glory of God; with Him began the eschatological time; He was the new Adam, the messianic Son of David, and now He is living and has been enthroned by Yahweh as Kyrios, etc. "And very early—closely intertwined with all this—appeared the most unheard-of and boldest interpretation of all: God raised Him; He is truly risen."[40]

Perhaps the weakest point of Schlette's construction is its foundation: the acceptance as a fact that critical exegesis has reached no certain conclusions concerning the content and origin of the Easter faith. According to most exegetes, even Marxsen, to whom Schlette appeals for his total conception of epiphany as history, at least it is historically demonstrable that the apostles were convinced that they had "seen" Jesus and that they concluded on the basis of this seeing that Jesus had risen.[41]

Furthermore, as we have seen, there exists a plurality of views among evangelical theologians concerning the interpretation of the New Testament records concerning the Resurrection. Why then is one exegete (Marxsen) taken so seriously as to maintain categorically

[39]Schlette, *Epiphanie als Geschichte*, 71.

[40]Schlette, *Epiphanie als Geschichte*, 72-73.

[41]Hans Ebert, "Die Krise des Osterglaubens," *Hochland* 60 (1968), 312 (all translations from this source are the author's own).

that "from the beginning the Christians did not speak of the empty grave and of having seen Jesus risen before them"?

Even what is proposed by exegetes is not pure exegesis. H. G. Geyer affirms that when Marxsen asserts that the content of the preaching which was begun by the appearances of Jesus after His crucifixion is neither the Resurrection experience, that is, "the 'experience of the appearance of Jesus' itself, nor a truth of which this was the very first manifestation," then he is obliged to advance theses which it seems very difficult to verify exegetically.[42] J. Kremer agrees:

> What Marxsen proposes are interesting speculations, but they have no sufficient foundation in the text. One can at the most take such speculations into consideration as hypotheses. But then they must also be characterized as such unproven hypotheses. Above all, they should not be used as foundations of exegetical and theological statements before they are confirmed by thorough investigation.[43]

Conclusion

This survey of opinions concerning the Easter faith confirms the observation of H. Ebert: "The apparently so simple statement 'Jesus has risen' is anything but simple."[44] Over a decade ago R. Marlé had commented: "We must concede that it is not easy to give an account of the fact, or better, of the mystery of the Resurrection which our faith confesses."[45] The question today in theology is not the question whether Jesus has risen or not, but rather what "risen" means for us today. In 1967, Geyer, at the evangelical *Kirchentag* at Hanover, gave

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[42]Hans-Georg Geyer, "The Resurrection of Jesus Christ: A Survey of the Debate in Present Day Theology," in Moule, *The Significance of the Message of the Resurrection for Faith in Jesus Christ*, 123-124.

[43]Kremer, *Das älteste Zeugnis von der Auferstehung Christi*, 121.

[44]Ebert, "Die Krise des Osterglaubens," 313.

[45]René Marlé, *Bultmann et l'interpretation du Nouveau Testament* (Paris: Aubier, 1956), 170 (author's own translation).

the assurance that in evangelical theology today there was no theologian who simply denied the traditional proposition of the Resurrection.[46] However, they are asking what the statement means for us in the light of today's understanding of man and the world.

In 1967, the German bishops expressed for German Catholics the limits of such a reinterpretation: "The confession of the resurrection of Jesus as a real event belongs ... necessarily to the Christian faith." However, this statement is rather general. It appears that it is left to theologians to clarify the question, what kind of "real event" the Resurrection was. This is the point at issue in the discussions among Catholic theologians. Did the real event of the Resurrection imply that the body of Jesus left the tomb, or is it sufficient to say that from the moment of His death on the cross Jesus became a new creation, clothed in a new heaven-made body which had no continuity with the one laid in the grave?

In the light of the diversity of opinion among theologians concerning the Easter faith, it seems reasonable to ask: Can we know anything definite concerning the content and basis of the Easter faith? What can we actually know concerning the Easter events?

INVESTIGATION OF THE EVIDENCE

1 Cor. 15:1-11

From the historico-critical point of view, Paul's testimony here has precedence over all the other testimonies of the New Testament, for in the literary sense it is the oldest.[47] The first letter to the Corinthians

[46]*Herder Correspondence* 4 (1967), 287.

[47]However, it would be well to keep in mind continually the warning of Wilckens against allowing our judgment on the whole of the history of the tradition to be influenced by the history of the literary material to an extent greater than the latter permits. We must not act "as though this *text*, which is the

was written by Paul in 56/57, about twenty-five years after the death of Jesus. It is generally agreed today that at least in 1 Cor. 15:3-5 we are dealing with material from kerygmatic and catechetical tradition which had a fixed form before Paul made use of it. Most would say that the passage is a stereotyped formula from its repetition, rhythm, and parallelism. Non-Pauline phrases and Semitic formulations point to an Aramaic or Hebrew original behind the present Greek text.[48] Wilckens formulates the cautious conclusion:

> It was very probably in use before A.D. 50 in Antioch, and perhaps even before A.D. 40 in Damascus, which was Paul's first home community. But this means it is perfectly possible that this formula was common to the oldest missionary communities of the Diaspora and goes back to the circle of the "Hellenists" (Stephen, etc.), who in their turn (whatever the wording may have been) learned it from the primitive community.[49]

Kremer, who has perhaps made the most thorough Catholic study of this passage, is more categorical: "It is admitted today that there is question here of an ancient formula transmitted to Paul when he was converted (about 35) or at his visit to Jerusalem (about 38) or at the latest at the beginning of the 40's."[50] Verse 11 explicitly mentions that this traditional formula agrees with the whole apostolic tradition, i.e.,

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oldest we possess, represented the earliest stage of the tradition, and as though the testimonies to the resurrection in the gospel, which are unquestionably more recent in the literary sense, should be judged on the basis of 1 Cor. 15" (Wilckens, "The Tradition-History of the Resurrection of Jesus," 56-57).

[48]Hans von Campenhausen, *Der Ablauf der Osterereignisse und das leere Grab*, 3rd ed. (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1966), 9f. (all translations from this source are the author's own); Ferdinand Hahn, *Christologische Hoheitstitel*, 3rd ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966), 199-200 (all translations from this source are the author's own); Berthold Klappert, "Zur Frage des semitischen oder griechischen Ur textes von I Cor 15, 3-5," *New Testament Studies* 13 (1966-67), 168-173.

[49]Wilckens, "The Tradition-History of the Resurrection of Jesus," 50.

[50]Jacob Kremer, "La resurrección de Cristo en I Cor 15, 3-8," *Selecciones de teología* 6 (1967), 210 (author's own translation).

that of Jerusalem in particular.[51] "Whoever, despite all this, wants to doubt its trustworthiness, must also doubt everything that is handed on in the New Testament—and more than this."[52]

In four clauses, the formula speaks of the death, burial, raising, and appearances of "the Christ."

1) " ... that He was buried." Agreement seems to have been reached that the clause "that He was buried" belongs in the context of His death and primarily affirms that the fact of His dying was final. It confirms that He died.[53] There is no agreement that this phrase together with the following phrase, "and that He was raised to life on the third day," implies the fact of the empty tomb. Certainly, Paul does not explicitly mention the empty tomb, nor does he mention the witnesses of the empty tomb. Wilckens concedes that "Paul himself obviously has no concrete knowledge about Jesus' grave, nor of the finding of the empty tomb."[54] Kremer will only affirm that we cannot exclude here the *possibility* of an implicit affirmation of the tradition of the empty tomb, at least for the original formula.[55] Wilckens will grant that "this statement perhaps signifies that certain traditions about Jesus' grave existed in the place from which the formula originally derived its material." He further insists that 1 Cor. 15:4a "can in no way be regarded, as has frequently been the case, as an argument that at the time of the writing of 1 Cor. the stories about the burial of Jesus and

[51]Gerhard Delling, "The Resurrection of Jesus and Its Significance for Faith in Jesus Christ," in Moule, *The Significance of the Message of the Resurrection for Faith in Jesus Christ*, 78-79.

[52]Campenhausen, *Der Ablauf der Osterereignisse und das leere Grab*, 10-11.

[53]Wilckens, "The Tradition-History of the Resurrection of Jesus," 57; Kremer, "La resurrección de Cristo en I Cor 15, 3-8," 210; Delling, "The Resurrection of Jesus and Its Significance for Faith in Jesus Christ," 81; Campenhausen, *Der Ablauf der Osterereignisse und das leere Grab*, 21.

[54]Wilckens, "The Tradition-History of the Resurrection of Jesus," 58.

[55]Kremer, *Das älteste Zeugnis*, 37-39, 58.

the finding of his empty tomb, which are recorded in Mark 15 and 16, could not yet have existed as such,"[56] and despite the contrary view of Grass,[57] Brändle,[58] and Seidensticker,[59] Campenhausen and others would seem to be correct in their assertion that even if Paul knew of no definite report of an empty tomb, he more probably assumed that there had been a true transformation and glorification of the dead body and thus also an "emptying" of the grave.[60] "The notion that a man might be 'spiritually' raised while his body lay on in the tomb would have seemed to the Jew an absurdity. In whatever form the Resurrection was first proclaimed by the apostles, it must have implied an empty sepulchre."[61]

It is often objected that Paul's notion of the risen body was radically different from the ordinary Jewish notion, that he emphasizes that the resurrection body is not a body of flesh but a spiritual body or a body of glory (1 Cor. 15:44; Phil. 3:21). Furthermore, in 1 Cor. 15:50 Paul insists that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." Brändle, following Grass, insists that in the two Corinthian epistles (2 Cor. 5:1-10 and 1 Cor. 15:35-53) Paul no longer promises a reawakening from the dead, but a new kind of existence after death: it will be a

[56]Wilckens, "The Tradition-History of the Resurrection of Jesus," 57-58.

[57]Hans Grass, *Ostergeschehen und Osterberichte*, 3rd ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1964), 146-173.

[58]Max Brändle, "Müsste das Grab Jesu leer sein?" *Orientierung* 31 (1967), 108-112 (all translations from this source are the author's own); cf. idem, "Did Jesus' Tomb Have to Be Empty?" *Theology Digest* 16 (1968), 18-21.

[59]Philipp Seidensticker, "Das antiochenische Glaubensbekenntnis I Cor 15,3-7 im Lichte seiner Traditionsgeschichte," *Theologie und Glaube* 57 (1967), 286-323.

[60]Campenhausen, *Der Ablauf der Osterereignisse und das leere Grab*, 20-21 and the discussion in n. 67, 60.

[61]John A. T. Robinson, "Resurrection," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* IV, ed. George A. Buttrick, et al. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), 46.

bodily existence, but the body of the renewed existence stems not from thegrave but from heaven. He then draws the conclusion: "So when Paul thinks of Jesus risen, no empty tomb swims into his ken at all."[62]

The first thing to note is that it is risky to draw a conclusion concerning the body of Jesus from what Paul expressly says concerning Christians at the Parousia. With Pannenberg we must insist that "the empty grave of Jesus, if it should prove to be a historical fact, belongs to the particularity of the destiny of Jesus, who precisely unlike other dead people would not have lain in His grave for many years and corrupted, but after a short time would have been 'transformed'...."[63]

But secondly, even Paul's conception of the new body of the Christian is not as radically different from all Jewish ideas as Grass and others maintain. Certainly he did not retain the hope of a crassly material resurrection of the old body which was the content of the popular hope. But he does indicate that he believes the spiritual body will be produced by a transformation of the physical body (or what is left of it—according to Jewish ideas, the bones in the grave or the one indestructible bone).[64] He wrote: "We are not all going to die, but we shall *all* be changed" (1 Cor. 15:51). "It is this perishable and mortal nature ... that must put on immortality. And it is essential to the argument that the body of Jesus should have undergone such a metamorphosis."[65]

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[62]Brändle, "Did Jesus' Tomb Have to Be Empty?", 20-21.

[63]Pannenberg, *Grundzüge der Christologie*, 97.

[64]Walter Künneth, *The Theology of the Resurrection* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1965), 94, n. 52; C.F.D. Moule, "St. Paul and Dualism: The Pauline Conception of Resurrection," *New Testament Studies* 12 (1965-66), 109.

[65]George Caird, *The Gospel of Luke* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963), 255; cf. Lucien Cerfaux, *The Christian in the Theology of St. Paul* (London: Chapman, 1967), 183-184. Brändle can interpret 1 Cor. 15:35-53 to mean that in Paul's mind, "the resurrection body has nothing in common with the corpse that was carried to the grave" (Brändle, "Müsste das Grab Jesu leer sein?", 111) because he interprets this passage in the light of 2 Cor. 5:1-10. For both Brändle and Grass (Grass, *Ostergeschehen und Osterberichte*, 155ff.), this is the decisive text for their argument

2) " ... that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures." The statement in v. 4b concerning His raising signifies that God has acted upon Jesus in raising Him. The word "raise" is a metaphor to express something of which we do not have direct experience. From the analogy of sleeping and awakening, the closest representation of the Resurrection would be that of a revivification of the corpse. But the early Church did not understand this metaphor in the sense of a simple return to the life of this world.[66] It signified the passage of the whole reality of Jesus of Nazareth into the life and condition of existence of God.

Both the meaning and the origin of the expression "on the third day" are disputed.[67] Those who deny the dependability of the Gospel

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that Paul did not reckon with a transformation of the corpse of Jesus and an empty tomb. In the latter passage, Paul states that when we die "there is a house built by God for us, an everlasting house not made by human hands, in the heavens" (v. 1). They interpret this to mean that when we die we lose our earthly body and are in a state of nakedness. But this nakedness will be covered by a new and heavenly body. They conclude that Paul had the same idea concerning the lot of Jesus. Unfortunately, this text is one of the most difficult texts to interpret in the Pauline letters. Feuillet has exposed and criticized four of the most current interpretations and then has given a fifth which he prefers (André Feuillet, "La demeure céleste et la destinée des chrétiens," *Recherches de Science Religiense* 44 [1956], 161-192, 360-402). This text, therefore, is a shaky foundation on which to build the eschatology of Paul. Moreover, there is reason to believe that "the heavenly dwelling is the glorious body of Christ considered as the 'first fruits' of the new creation, i.e., inasmuch as virtually including the glorious body of all Christians" (Feuillet, "La demeure céleste et la destinée des chrétiens," 377-378; cf. 378-402; also cf. John A. T. Robinson, *The Body* [London: SCM Press, 1953], 75-78). Therefore, while Grass and Brändle have perhaps shown that the position defended here concerning the presuppositions of Paul about the body of Jesus is not incontestable, the position defended here appears to be more probable than that proposed by Grass and Brändle. Cf. Campenhausen, *Der Ablauf der Osterereignisse und das leere Grab*, 20-21 and the literature cited.

[66]Kremer, "La resurrección de Cristo en I Cor 15,3-8," 210; Pannenberg, *Grundzüge der Christologie*, 70-71.

[67]Wilckens, "The Tradition-History of the Resurrection of Jesus," 58; Campenhausen, *Der Ablauf der Osterereignisse und das leere Grab*, 11.

tradition concerning the discovery of the empty tomb on the third day see in the phrase merely a theological and scriptural interpretation of the Resurrection, perhaps in the light of Hos. 6:2.[68] Others would agree with Delling: "the term 'on the third day' is evidently associated from the first with the announcement of the fact of the resurrection. The discovery of the empty tomb is firmly associated with the third day according to the synoptic tradition, and this is the basis of the catechetical statement 'raised on the third day'."[69] They would argue that "it can hardly have been taken from Scripture alone. For there is scarcely a text which of itself had to be understood in this sense."[70]

Seidensticker, however, has suggested that we should give up seeking an individual text in the Old Testament to which the phrase refers. He points out that the expression "the third day" is frequently used in the Old Testament not as an exact determination of time, but in a symbolic-theological meaning.[71] It is used at decisive points in salvation history to indicate a turning point that separates the old from the new, brings punishment to the blasphemer but justice, health, and life to God's faithful.[72] This would be the theological background of the phrase in v. 4b: "on the third day according to the Scriptures."

Seidensticker's further suggestion that this phrase meant nothing more than this originally and had no chronological reference is less probable in the light of the conclusions we will come to later concerning the Gospel tradition of the discovery of the empty tomb. He is correct in suggesting that the foundation for the use of the phrase is

[68]Cf. Grass, *Ostergeschehen und Osterberichte*, 136f.

[69]Delling, "The Resurrection of Jesus and Its Significance for Faith in Jesus Christ," 80; also Hahn, *Christologische Hoheitstitel*, 204ff.

[70]Campenhausen, *Der Ablauf der Osterereignisse und das leere Grab*, 11.

[71]Gen. 22:3; Gen. 22:1-19; Gen. 42:18ff.; Ex. 19:11-16; 2 Sam. 1:1-16; 1 Kgs. 12:12; Est. 5:1-8, 17; 1 Macc. 11:18; Hos. 6:1, etc.

[72]Seidensticker, "Das antiochenische Glaubensbekenntnis I Cor 15,3-7 im Lichte seiner Traditionsgeschichte," 302.

probably to be found in Jesus Himself. Jesus in His lifetime probably predicted that His death, though inevitable, would mean a national revival in the near future, i.e., He probably used the phrase "on the third day" or "after three days" in the sense of "a little while" similar to Hos. 6:2, etc.[73] But B. Lindars is more correct in concluding that it was the actual Resurrection "on the third day" (i.e., its discovery) which caused the literal interpretation of the phrase. The apostles realized that the mysterious "little while" was literally fulfilled. "A prophecy of speedy renewal on the lips of Jesus spoken in terms of" the Old Testament "was adopted by the Church as a triumphant example of literal fulfillment, and then used conveniently as a theologoumenon of the Resurrection."[74]

3) " ... that he appeared to Peter, etc." Paul here lists the witnesses to whom Jesus appeared. He clearly understands these appearances to witnesses as a confirmation of the fact that Jesus has been raised.[75]

a) "He appeared." Hahn has rightly criticized Grass[76] for too hastily concluding that from the repeated use of the word "He appeared" (*ōphthē*) nothing could be concluded concerning the nature of the appearances.[77] This word belonged to the biblical terminology for the revelatory event, and guarantees the objectivity of the event. In the use of this word, there is question in particular of a coming forth from invisibility, especially from the world of God, of a becoming visible that

[73]Cf. the predictions of the Passion and Lk. 13:32; see Barnabus Lindars, *New Testament Apologetic* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), 60-63.

[74]Lindars, *New Testament Apologetic*, 66; cf. 71-72.

[75]Delling, "The Resurrection of Jesus and Its Significance for Faith in Jesus Christ," 86-87.

[76]Grass, *Ostergeschehen und Osterberichte*, 181ff.

[77]Hahn, *Christologische Hoheitstitel*, 207 and n. 3.

does not depend upon the one seeing.[78] Furthermore, it is also clear in the context of the Resurrection appearances that *ōphthē* does not merely mean to reveal oneself as present without sensible perception playing a role,[79] but "to be manifested as visibly present."[80] This is confirmed by Paul's exclamation "I have seen the Lord" (1 Cor. 9:1). On the other hand, it must be conceded that the "seeing" because of its object should only be called a "seeing" in an analogous sense.[81] Because of its character as mystery, the world of God breaking into visibility must have effected a "seeing" of an extraordinary kind and was not a reality visible to everybody. This is especially clear in view of the Damascus event (cf. Acts 9).[82] But the word *ōphthē* was very well suited to express that experience of reality which the disciples had in their meeting with the risen Christ. It makes clear that they were conscious of standing in the face of reality. It emphasizes the action of the one revealing himself, the real becoming visible, and also the possibility of perceiving him.[83]

b) The witnesses (verses 5-8). On the basis of this early (Jerusalem) tradition and the proximity of Paul to the witnesses and to the events, the assumption that appearances of the risen one were really experienced by a number of the members of the primitive Christian community possesses good historical foundation. Verse 8 is certainly an addition of Paul and v. 6b is generally held to be a Pauline addition with an apologetic purpose to emphasize the reality of the appearances

[78]Hahn, *Christologische Hoheitstitel*, 207 and n. 3.

[79]See W. Michaelis, "oraō," *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* V, ed. Gerhard Friedrich (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1957), 355f., 359.

[80]Delling, "The Resurrection of Jesus and Its Significance for Faith in Jesus Christ," 84.

[81]Adolf Kolping, "Auferstehung," in *Handbuch theologischer Grundbegriffe* I, ed. Heinrich Fries (Munich: Kösel, 1962), 142.

[82]Pannenberg, *Grundzüge der Christologie*, 90.

[83]Hahn, *Christologische Hoheitstitel*, 207.

of Jesus. For the rest we can say with Hahn: "However it may be with the appearances of vv. 6a and 7, whether they belonged to the formula from the beginning, or were subsequently added, whether it is a question of a truly chronological series, or of 'rivaling' enumerations of the first Resurrection-witnesses, whether the combination with the old formula was already completed before Paul or first by him, it can be said with certitude that v. 5 still belongs to the old formula."[84]

However, even though it is possible that vv. 6 and 7 were later additions to the early confessional formula, there is no reason for holding this data to be less dependable or even legendary. Paul knew not only Peter but also James personally, and at the beginning of his Christian activity had visited Jerusalem (Gal. 1:18). Paul therefore was informed at first hand about that which he now passed on.[85]

This enumeration of the various witnesses of the Resurrection has as its purpose to show that the Resurrection was a real event and was assured by credible witnesses. It was on the basis of the testimony of immediate eyewitnesses that the early Church believed in the real Resurrection. Note that Paul says that we attain salvation only by persevering in this formula (*logos*).

The Empty Tomb

As we have seen, the earliest record does not speak specifically of the empty tomb. We have indicated that Paul probably assumed a real transformation of the dead body of Jesus and thus the fact of the tomb becoming empty. It is possible that he knew of the stories of the empty tomb, but this is not ascertainable. But Pannenberg is correct in affirming that the fact that Paul nowhere mentions the empty

[84]Hahn, *Christologische Hoheitstitel*, 197-198. Seidensticker (Seidensticker, "Das antiochenische Glaubensbekenntnis I Cor 15,3-7 im Lichte seiner Traditionsgeschichte," 311-312) has made an effort to prove that the original confessional formula closed with v. 6a and that v. 5 was added later. But the argumentation is not convincing.

[85]Campenhausen, *Der Ablauf der Ostereignisse und das leere Grab*, 10.

tomb need not shake the dependability of the reports in the Gospels.[86] The primary basis for the Resurrection faith was the testimony of the official eyewitnesses of the risen Jesus. This was the theme exploited in the proclamation to nonbelievers. Women had no official status as witnesses in Jewish law.

J. A. T. Robinson would go further and hold that though the empty tomb may not receive specific mention in the most primitive evidence, it is almost certainly implicit in the pre-Gospel tradition insofar as this can be reconstructed from the Pauline letters and the speeches in Acts.[87] 1 Cor. 15:4 (buried-raised), Acts 13:29-30 (laid in the tomb-God raised Him), Acts 2:31 (He did not see corruption[88]) all imply the belief in a bodily resurrection from the tomb.

However, for what occurred in Jerusalem, we must depend almost exclusively on the Gospel tradition. In its present form, this is later than Paul and possesses far less favorable indices of historical trustworthiness than the text of Paul. "Legendary, apologetic, in part also cultic-liturgical and polemical-ecclesiastical political tendencies make themselves especially noticeable here."[89] They are narrations written down in close connection with preaching. They are stamped by faith, and "corresponding to the understanding of history at that time are not free also from legendary touches and midrashic embellishments."[90] Among all the narratives we possess, no two agree with one another. However, as Campenhausen points out, the unfavorable impression is considerably decreased if we once decide to set aside the provably later accounts and follow the Marcan tradition, which is used and developed

[86]Pannenberg, *Grundzüge der Christologie*, 97.

[87]Robinson, *The Body*, 45-46.

[88]Lindars affirms: "There can be no doubt that the argument is primitive" (Lindars, *New Testament Apologetic*, 42).

[89]Campenhausen, *Der Ablauf der Osterereignisse und das leere Grab*, 21.

[90]Anton Vögtle, in Wilfried Joest, et al., *Was heisst Auslegung der Heiligen Schrift* (Regensburg: Pustet, 1966), 63 (author's own translation).

in all the later Gospels. It is true that Mark is not simply the report of an eyewitness. Here too the stories betray the contradictions of different traditions, additions, and legendary traits. But as a whole the account is in no way fantastic. Manifestly ancient reports often lie at its basis, and the presentation is in large part so sober and objective that it is not permitted to reject a priori what it contains as incredible. All the data must be tested step by step.[91]

The Burial: Mk. 15:42-47

The narrative of the burial is credible and trustworthy. "The tradition that he was given burial in a tomb with its circumstantial explanation in all the gospel accounts (Mk. 15:42-47; Mt. 27:57-61; Lk. 23:50-56; Jn. 19:38-42) must be accepted as one of the most firmly grounded facts of Jesus' life."[92] Bultmann concedes that "abstraction made from vv. 44-45, 47, the historical notice does not give the impression of legend. It would be difficult to show that it was introduced afterwards in view of the story of Easter."[93] In particular, there is no reason to doubt the notice concerning the role of Joseph of Arimathea. Benoit insists that he is certainly historical.

> They knew his function, his village.... If the Christians had afterwards imagined the burial of Jesus by the hands of friends, they would have

[91]Campenhausen, *Der Ablauf der Osterereignisse und das leere Grab*, 21.

[92]Robinson, *The Body*, 45. Others, while agreeing that the arguments for the reliability of the account of the burial possess real force, feel that "scholarly opinion has been a little inclined to underestimate some of the difficulties" (Dennis E. Nineham, *Saint Mark* [Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963], 433. Cf. Grass, *Ostergeschehen und Osterberichte*, 173-182, 184). But the judgment of Campenhausen appears very sound: "Grass ... would like to at least hold open the possibility that all accounts concerning the burial are later legends—which would naturally facilitate the explanation of the 'empty tomb' as legend. But he cannot produce convincing reasons for this" (Campenhausen, *Der Ablauf der Osterereignisse und das leere Grab*, 23, n. 81).

[93]Rudolf Bultmann, *Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition*, 3rd ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1957), 296 (author's own translation).

attributed it to Peter or to James or to some other personage of the Gospels. Where except in real life did they find this Joseph of Arimathea who is named nowhere else? This personage is a precious historical datum, which imposed itself on all the Evangelists and which by itself guarantees the burial of Jesus.[94]

The Discovery of the Tomb: Mk. 16:1-8

This narrative possesses a very different character from the preceding one. We find here a "young man," i.e., an angel, who interprets the meaning of the empty tomb and gives a command to the women to tell Peter and the disciples about it. A further peculiarity is the fact that the women do not carry out the command for which they have been given a special revelation. "They said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid" (Mk. 16:8). From a historiographical point of view this is incredible.

However, the "strange" character of this pericope disappears when we realize that it has been literarily developed from a historical kernel for didactic purposes (Gutwenger, Vögtle, Benoit, Wilckens, Campenhausen, etc.). The oldest preliterary form spoke of women coming to the tomb, of their astonishment at finding it empty, and of their flight. This form knew nothing of the silence of the women, nor of their encounter with the angel. Gutwenger would find the original kernel reflected in vv. 2, 4, 5a, and 8a.[95] He holds that v. 1 was a later addition when the question was raised why the women came to the tomb so early. Verses 5b-7, the scene with the angel, were added once the kerygmatically orientated tradition felt the need of uniting to the story of the ambivalent empty tomb the message of the Resurrection as

[94]Pierre Benoit, *Passion et résurrection du Seigneur* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1966), 260-261 (all translations from this source are the author's own). Cf. Campenhausen, *Der Ablauf der Osterereignisse und das leere Grab*, 22-23, 42; Nineham, *Saint Mark*, 434.

[95]Engelbert Gutwenger, "Zur Geschichtlichkeit der Auferstehung Jesu," *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 88 (1966), 273-274.

its interpretation, and a pointer to the later appearance which according to the oldest tradition occurred first in Galilee. How could this be done? In the sphere of biblical conceptions, an angel, a messenger of God, presented itself as the natural and traditional form. Notice that in the proclamation of the Resurrection placed on the mouth of the angel, the knowledge of the Resurrection is grounded in the revealing action of God. The pointer to the empty tomb ("see where they have laid Him") is added subsequently as a confirmation of the message.[96]

Verse 8b, the silence of the women, is a later intensification of the astonishment of the women. Vögtle proposes that the silence of the women was an apologetic addition intended to underline the historical fact that the Resurrection faith of the official witnesses was not a conclusion from the discovery of the empty tomb, did not rest on the

[96]Anton Vögtle, "Literarische Gattungen und Formen," *Anzeiger* 74 (1965), 3. Cf. Joseph Schmitt, "Auferstehung Jesu II," in Karl Rahner, *Sacramentum mundi* I (Freiburg: Herder, 1967), 410. Maurice Goguel (*La foi a la résurrection de Jésus dans le christianisme primitif* [Paris: Leroux, 1933], 175) also proposed that the "angelophany" (vv. 5-7) was introduced subsequently and that the original narrative (vv. 1-4, 8) only told of the discovery of the empty grave and the flight of the women. Ernst Lohmeyer (*Das Evangelium des Markus*, 17th ed. [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967], 357) and Vincent Taylor (*The Gospel according to Mark* [London: Macmillan, 1959], 609) find this conjecture questionable, because the mere discovery of the empty tomb would not explain the quaking (Taylor) and the terror of the women (Lohmeyer) in v. 8. Grass (Grass, *Ostergeschehen und Osterberichte*, 182-183) also argues that the terror of the women is clearly connected with the appearance of the angel as a characteristic trait common to many biblical narratives of legendary character which speak of the appearance of the divine. However, this would only mean that the reference to terror (*tromos*) in v. 8 was added as a connecting link with the inserted "angelophany" (vv. 5-7), while the *ekstasis* reflects the original astonishment and confusion of the women at their discovery. Note that the expression *tromos kai ekstasis* is an unusual combination, since *tromos* is "mostly combined with *phobos*" (William Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexikon of the New Testament* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957], 834). *Ekstasis* means "properly distraction or disturbance of mind caused by a shock" (Alexander Souter, *A Pocket Lexicon to the Greek New Testament* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949], 77).

word of women, whose word as witnesses was considered worthless in Jewish law, but was grounded exclusively in the appearances of the risen Lord.[97]

Under the presupposition that the verses concerning the angel (5b-7) were understood by the tradition itself as a biblical element of style, it becomes still more understandable that the oldest Easter preaching available to us does not explicitly appeal to the discovery of the empty tomb. Above all, it would explain why Matthew and Luke, independently of one another, do not scruple to transform the circumstances and message of the scene involving the angel. They realized that its purpose was kerygmatic and not historical.

Wilckens affirms that the body of this narrative "is not merely pre-Marcan, but goes back to a very early stage in the history of the tradition."[98]

> There was a story by the women about their discovery of the empty tomb, which was known at the time the primitive community was constituted in Jerusalem. In the course of the elaboration of the tradition of the passion it became the narrative framework of the preaching of the resurrection, in that the "meaning" of the discovery by the women of the empty tomb—as the earthly evidence that Jesus' resurrection had taken place—was stylized in the form of the proclamation by the angel.[99]

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[97]Vögtle, "Literarische Gattungen und Formen," 3. Cf. also Anton Vögtle, "Growth and Nature of the Gospels," in *The Bible in a New Age*, ed. Ludwig Klein (London: Sheed & Ward, 1965), 92ff.

[98]Wilckens, "The Tradition-History of the Resurrection of Jesus," 71.

[99]Wilckens, "The Tradition-History of the Resurrection of Jesus," 73; cf. Delling, "The Resurrection of Jesus and Its Significance for Faith in Jesus Christ," 92; Pannenberg, *Grundzüge der Christologie*, 99-100; Hans Waldenfels, "Ostern und wir Christen heute," *Geist und Leben* 40 (1967), 31-33. Although Seidensticker retains a numinous experience of the women at the tomb (p. 87), he concedes that, critically considered, it remains uncertain what the women experienced. "Only that the grave was empty is the univocal statement of all the narratives

Benoit concludes: "The tradition of the finding of the empty tomb is of great value; it is not a suspect and late invention; it is a primitive datum which can really, with the subsequent apparitions, justify and ground the Christian faith."[100]

This conclusion, obtained from a literary analysis of the tradition, is strengthened by general historical considerations.[101] First of all, the disciples of Jesus would not have been able to preach His resurrection if they could be refuted by the presence of the tomb of Jesus in which His body was present. This is especially true in view of the popular Pharisaic notion of resurrection. The Resurrection kerygma "could not have continued in Jerusalem one day, one hour, if the emptiness of the grave was not firmly established as a fact for all involved."[102]

A second consideration strengthens the dependability of the narrative of the discovery of the empty tomb. It is a fact that the early Jewish polemic against the Christian message of the Resurrection, which has left traces in the Gospels themselves, gave various explanations for the emptiness of the tomb.[103] They first said the disciples stole the body (Matthew). They later said the gardener had taken it (John). But they never objected that the grave of Jesus was intact. Jewish polemic would have had every interest in emphasizing such an objection if it could have

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concerning Easter morning" (Philipp Seidensticker, *Die Auferstehung Jesu in der Botschaft der Evangelisten* [Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1968], 81).

[100]Benoit, *Passion et résurrection du Seigneur*, 295.

[101]For what follows, cf. Pannenberg, *Grundzüge der Christologie*, 97-99.

[102]Paul Althaus, *Die Wahrheit des kirchlichen Osterglaubens* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1940), 22ff. (author's own translation). Brändle and others object that the earliest preaching could not have avoided speaking explicitly of the empty tomb if it were a known fact. It would have to be proven by the early preachers. This objection is unjustified for the simple reason that everyone in Jerusalem knew of the empty tomb. It could be presupposed. Cf. Werner Bulst, "Auferstehung Jesu III," in Rahner, *Sacramentum mundi* I, 414-415.

[103]Campenhausen, *Der Ablauf der Osterereignisse und das leere Grab*, 31ff.

been maintained. On the contrary, they shared with their Christian opponents the conviction that the grave of Jesus was empty and never hinted at the contrary. They contented themselves with explaining the emptiness of the tomb in a way other than resurrection.

A third consideration is also important. The story in its essentials is difficult to explain as a late fabrication by Christians to answer the demands of apologetic or to express their understanding of the Resurrection. If these were the circumstances in which it originated, why did it come to be framed almost exclusively in terms of women witnesses, who were invalid witnesses according to the Jewish principles of evidence? "The later and the more fictitious the story, the harder it is to explain why the apostles are not brought to the forefront" as the discoverers of the empty tomb.[104]

Pannenberg insists that the weight of the general historical considerations would still stand even if the narratives of the finding of the empty tomb should be proven to be late legends first conceived in the Hellenistic communities. He rightly maintains that only if one onesidedly limits oneself to the analysis of the text tradition for the grounding of the historical judgment, as Grass has done, can one come to a negative result in the question of the empty tomb of Jesus.[105]

Furthermore, Grass believes that the state of the tradition by itself provides no argument which would be unconditionally convincing for the historicity of the empty tomb.[106] Still, in debate with Campenhausen even Grass concedes "that the gap in the historical argumentation for the empty tomb is very small," even though he does not pose the question in the light of the situation of the Easter kerygma in Jerusalem, but limits himself to the analysis of the tradition of the text. Pannenberg maintains that if one proceeds from the historical consideration

[104]Moule, "St. Paul and Dualism: The Pauline Conception of Resurrection," 9.

[105]Pannenberg, *Grundzüge der Christologie*, 99.

[106]Grass, *Ostergeschehen und Osterberichte*, 183.

of the situation of the Resurrection kerygma in the first Jerusalem community, then the state of the tradition confirms what is already to be presupposed from elsewhere as historically more probable: in Jerusalem it was known that the grave was empty. "Only if the state of the text *forced* one to an opposite judgment could the weight of the historical argument from the relation between the Resurrection preaching in Jerusalem and the therein presupposed emptiness of the grave of Jesus be met."[107] As a matter of fact, however, the traditions, even though exhibiting strongly legendary additions, point in the direction which a priori was to be expected historically as the presupposition for the Resurrection kerygma of the Jerusalem community. "In Jewish as well as Christian circles, the fact of the empty grave was well known."[108]

We have every reason, therefore, to conclude with Campenhausen that when we have investigated what can be investigated, we cannot avoid allowing to stand the report of the empty tomb itself and of its early discovery. Much speaks for it and nothing decisive and definite against it. In the language of the historian, it is therefore probably historical. "The discovery of the empty tomb is one of the two data which emerge from the traditional material as essential and dependable."[109]

It is hardly accurate to say concerning the discussion of the empty tomb that "both sides have good arguments."[110] At least they are not equally good. Ebert admits that the main argument against the historicity of the empty-tomb narratives is that the grave narratives are secondary and of late origin. Unquestionably, the stories of the empty tomb as we have them are more recent in the literary sense. But this does not mean that the tradition of the empty tomb is late and secondary. "It is one thing to point out the lateness of the story

[107]Pannenberg, *Grundzüge der Christologie*, 89.

[108]Pannenberg, *Grundzüge der Christologie*, 101.

[109]Campenhausen, *Der Ablauf der Osterereignisse und das leere Grab*, 42.

[110]Hans Ebert, "Die Krise des Osterglaubens," 324.

of the women at the tomb and the embellishments it has undergone. It is something else to jump to the conclusion that the tomb was not empty and that Jesus' body remained in it."[111] The literary lateness of the story of the women at the tomb is explained by the fact that in the early proclamation only the visions of the official witnesses, the decisive ground of the Easter faith, would have been exploited. Women had no official status as witnesses in Jewish law. "Only when there was an attempt at a continuous narrative such as we now find in the Gospels would it have been necessary to supply the connective between the burial story and that of the first appearance."[112]

THEOLOGICAL OBJECTION AND CONCLUSION

Some theologians make use of a theological argument to bolster their scepticism concerning the empty tomb, the historical arguments against which they admit to be inconclusive.[113] As theologians, they repel any inference that the character of Christ's resurrection is different from that which belongs to those who are in Christ (whose bodies undoubtedly decay and are destroyed).[114]

To this must be opposed the theological argument that the transformation of the material body of Christ is theologically very meaningful as the revelation, guarantee, and first fruits of the future transformation not only of persons but of the entire cosmos.

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[111]Raymond E. Brown, "The Resurrection and Biblical Criticism," *Commonweal* 87 (1967), 235; cf. Wilckens, "The Tradition-History of the Resurrection of Jesus," 235.

[112]Brown, "The Resurrection and Biblical Criticism," 235.

[113]Geoffrey Lampe and Donald MacKinnon, *The Resurrection: A Dialogue* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), 58; Emil Brunner, *Dogmatics* II (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1952), 371.

[114]Lampe, *The Resurrection: A Dialogue*, 58-60; Brunner, *Dogmatics* II, 371-372.

Furthermore, it can be shown that the resurrection of Christ's material body does not make His resurrection totally different from that which belongs to those who are in Christ. Moule would suggest that the total matter of this time-space existence is destined by the Creator not to be "scrapped" but to be used up into some other existence.

> If so, is it inconceivable that in just the area of the body of Jesus, which alone had been surrendered to death in total absolute obedience to the will of God, this transformation and using up was anticipated; while with the rest of mankind their "material" returns to the collective reservoir of the totality of matter one way or another, by decomposition slow or sudden, until this totality of things is ultimately used as the material of a new existence, in which they, by the grace of God, will share? If this were true, then the difference between Christ and believers ... would be only that Jesus *anticipates* their ultimate destiny.[115]

Finally, it is not true to say that the character of Christ's resurrection must be the same as our resurrection. The resurrection of Christ is a unique event. His is pre-eminent rather than typical. "It is by definition the resurrection of the Messiah."[116] Its character will depend on the significance He possesses in the history of salvation.

Many of the objections against the idea of the corpse of Christ being transformed and disappearing from the tomb stem from the modern understanding of self and the world. We are more aware today of the "preunderstanding" that conditions all men's statements concerning self and the world. We are therefore aware also that a time-conditioned "preunderstanding" conditioned the early Church's formulation of its faith, and therefore of its Easter faith. For the primitive community this "preunderstanding" was, at least in part, that of Jewish apocalyptic, one of whose elements was the conception of the material body rising from the grave at the last day.[117] Today this "preunderstanding" is not ours, and Ebert affirms: "For us today the empty tomb is not a help

[115]Moule, "St. Paul and Dualism: The Pauline Conception of Resurrection," 10.

[116]Robinson, *The Body*, 43-44.

[117]Ebert, "Die Krise des Osterglaubens," 315-318.

for our faith as it was for the primitive community, but for many it is rather a hindrance."[118] Just as the early Church interpreted its Easter faith in time-conditioned thought forms and conceptions, so today we must "deapocalypticize" their expression of the Easter faith and reinterpret it in a manner compatible with the modern understanding of man and existence.

Ebert is aware that this does not mean that the apocalyptic thought schemes can be simply stripped from the content of the Easter faith in a mechanical manner and replaced by others, as though we could peel away the linguistic formulation, grasp the thought content in its pure form, and then reclothe it again with a new linguistic formulation. But he urges that precisely in order to remain true to the Resurrection faith, we must attempt to translate it into forms in keeping with our understanding of the world and of existence.[119]

In the climate produced by Vatican II, no one will disagree in principle with the necessity of such retranslation of the meaning of our faith for today. But we are also aware that this process of translation is a very delicate operation. Extreme care must be taken that translation does not result in dissipation, and here the question is: Is the element of the transformation of the corpse of Christ, the empty tomb, a time-conditioned expression of the Easter faith and an element of no significance? What we have seen thus far does not lead us to assume so. It may not be easy for the nonbeliever and "modern man" to grasp. But neither is the Incarnation of the Son of God. In an attempt to make this latter point of faith comprehensible to modern man, Bultmann has effectively eliminated it. Elimination of the empty tomb would not necessarily eliminate the Resurrection as a "real event," the point upon which the German bishops insisted. But it would certainly change the meaning of that event as the Church has until now understood it, and there does not appear to be sufficient reason for doing this. We do not

[118]Ebert, "Die Krise des Osterglaubens," 325.

[119]Ebert, "Die Krise des Osterglaubens," 326-327.

"hang on to" the empty tomb because we mistakenly believe that the empty tomb can *prove* the Easter faith historically, as Brändle charges.[120] But we insist on the empty tomb because there is reason for thinking that the sources of our faith insist on it, not as a time-conditioned interpretation of the Resurrection, but as the historical context of the divine event of the Resurrection itself. "The resurrection accounts indicate that the divine occurrence is revealed in empirical events.... The occurrence of Jesus' resurrection, which is not itself accessible to historical control ... is linked with facts at least theoretically provable within the historical framework—the resurrection appearances and the empty tomb."[121]

Furthermore, both these facts are important for the correct interpretation of the Resurrection and for its meaning for modern man. In the last four pages of his article, Ebert sketches an outline of a new interpretation of the Easter faith for our time. The remarkable thing about the sketch is that it is equally valid if the event of the Resurrection included a transformation of Jesus' corpse from the tomb. In fact, the sketch is heavily dependent upon Karl Rahner's theology of the Resurrection, which was certainly elaborated under the presupposition of the empty tomb.

It is true that our faith is not directed primarily toward individual historical facts but to the mystery of God in Christ, and our Easter faith is not directed primarily to the empty tomb but to the mystery of the definitive and total self-communication of God to the total reality of Jesus of Nazareth as the revelation and initiation of the definitive self-communication of God to the world as its salvation.[122] But precisely therein lies the deepest reason for believing that the resurrection of

[120]Brändle, "Did Jesus' Tomb Have to Be Empty?", 18.

[121]Oscar Cullmann, *Salvation in History* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 143.

[122]Karl Rahner, "Auferstehung Christi, IV," in Karl Rahner, et al., *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* I (Freiburg: Herder, 1957), 1038 (all translations from this source are the author's own).

Jesus was a bodily resurrection from the tomb. Because Jesus' bodily humanity was a part of the one world with one dynamic tendency, the resurrection of *this* bodily humanity, and therefore of *this* body, "is objectively the beginning of the transfiguration of the world as an ontologically unified event, because in this event the fate of the world has been fundamentally decided and already begun."[123] Rahner insists that there is a real ontological unity of the material universe, a basic oneness of the world by which all things in the world are related and communicate anteriorly to any mutual influence upon each other.[124] By the Incarnation the Logos has united to Himself once and for all a portion of this world, and indeed, a portion of its material reality. In view of the unity of the material universe, it is important that the body of Jesus, a portion of the material reality of this one world, should have been glorified. It is in this way that the world as a whole, the totality of this material cosmos, is actually in process of reaching in and through the risen Jesus that final state in which God will be all in all.[125]

According to Teilhard de Chardin, modern man's most pressing psychological need is an assurance that some successful outcome exists for the world and for that progress on earth for which he knows himself to be responsible. The risen body of Christ, that part of the material universe in which the successful outcome already exists, is this assurance and is at the same time the physical center for mankind and the whole material world,[126] drawing the remainder of its unity toward the totally successful outcome. The whole concept of the cosmos being restored in and by Jesus Christ, the theme of Col. 1:15-20, is involved in the Resurrection as a bodily resurrection from the tomb.

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[123]Rahner, "Auferstehung Christi, IV," 1040.

[124]Karl Rahner, *On the Theology of Death* (New York: Herder, 1961), 27.

[125]Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations* I (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1960), 165.

[126]Cf. Christopher Mooney, "The Body of Christ in the Writings of Teilhard de Chardin," *Theological Studies* 25 (1964), 576-578.