Landas 20 (2006) 200-242

THE RESURRECTION APPEARANCES AND THE ORIGIN OF THE EASTER FAITH

Joseph J. Smith, S.J.

Fundamental theology studies the resurrection in order to show the credibility and validity of the Easter faith. Two questions are to be distinguished here: (1) the historical question concerning the origin of the Easter faith, i.e., how did the first Christians attain the conviction that the crucified Jesus was risen? (2) the question of principle concerning the permanently valid objective foundation of the Easter faith.[1]

This study concentrates on the first question concerning the origin of the Easter faith: after the disaster of Good Friday, how did the unanimous conviction arise concerning the resurrection of the crucified Jesus? No New Testament writing gives a description of

[1]"The two questions are to be distinguished, because the (possibly fortuitous) genesis of a conviction does not already guarantee its (unconditioned) validity; because, therefore, clarification must first be made whether that which produced the Easter conviction of the primitive community, can also supply the justification for a contemporary faith in the resurrection or whether this justification can be found in a different manner" (Hans Kessler, *Sucht den Lebenden nicht bei den Toten* [Düsseldorf: Patmos Verlag, 1985], 136 [hereafter cited as *Sucht den Lebenden*], all translations from this source are the author's own).

Jesus' resurrection or claims that anyone witnessed the actual event of the resurrection.

> Because in the New Testament no immediate witness of the occurrence of the resurrection is named and therefore no knowledge of it has reached us, this event remains in the strict sense theological, i.e., the resurrection of Jesus Christ is an occurrence hidden in the reality of the mysterious God, which in its full eschatological-transcendent dimension is withdrawn from human knowledge.[2]

The resurrection of Jesus is not directly accessible to us. According to the New Testament witness, it was the passage into the eschatological form of existence with God, therefore the beginning of a radically new, indestructible life. "We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died he died ... once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God" (Rom. 6:9-10; cf. Acts 13:34). Accordingly, the event of the resurrection transcends the realm of what is verifiable historically. "And its result, the risen One, cannot be simply an empirically perceptible reality; he does not belong to our world of sense experience ... and is therefore not subject to the conditions of objectifying knowledge; he transcends the conditions of historical knowledge."[3] As a consequence, the historian and his methods have no access to the resurrection of Jesus itself and to the reality of the risen One. The last historical fact available to them is the Easter faith of the first disciples and the astonishing reversal of their behaviour within a short period after the disaster of Good Friday.

On the one hand, the execution of Jesus on the cross was a catastrophe which shook the foundations of their incipient faith in him. During his ministry, Jesus had raised a previously unheard-of claim

---

[2]Karl Lehmann, "Zur Frage nach dem 'Wesen' der Erscheinungen des Herm," in *Resurrexit*, ed. Edouard Dhanis (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1974), 297 (hereafter cited as "Zur Frage"), all translations from this source are the author's own.

[3]Kessler, *Sucht den Lebenden*, 137; cf. 138-139.

to authority as the eschatological mediator of salvation and agent of the Kingdom of God.[4] But he had died the shameful and scandalous death of the cross,[5] which in the Jewish world meant that he died under the curse of God.[6] In this context, Jesus' claim to be the agent of the inbreaking rule of the merciful God appeared to be refuted publicly by God himself. For the Jewish authorities and the Jewish public, the question concerning the validity of Jesus' claim was settled once and for all. He had been exposed as a false prophet.

Against this background, "the confusion in the circle of disciples" and the sudden return of the "twelve" to Galilee "is easy to understand."[7] Jesus' execution on the cross at the initiative of the highest religious court of judgement in Israel, the guardians of Israel's

[4]Anton Vögtle, "Der verkündigende und der verkündigte Jesus 'Christus'," in *Wer ist Jesus Christus?* ed. Joseph Sauer (Freiburg: Herder, 1977), 37-48 (hereafter cited as "Jesus 'Christus'"), all translations from this source are the author's own.

[5]Cf. Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion* (London: SCM Press, 1977), 6-10.

[6]On the basis of a pre-Christian interpretation of Dt. 21:23b ("God's curse rests on him who hangs on a tree." NAB), crucified persons "are accursed of God and of men" (Temple Scroll 64:12; also cf. 4QPNah. 7f.; 4QPHab. 8); quoted in Kessler, *Sucht den Lebenden*, 105, with reference to Johann Maier, *Die Tempelrolle vom Toten Meer* (Munich: Reinhardt, 1978). Gal. 3:13 also gives an idea of the effect the crucifixion of Jesus must have had on a pious Jew.

[7]Gerhard Lohfink, "Der Ablauf der Osterereignisse und die Anfänge der Urgemeinde," *Tübinger Quartelschrift* 160 (1980), 163 (hereafter cited as "Der Ablauf"), author's own translation. The return of the "Twelve" to Galilee is well attested (Mk. 14:28; 16:7; Jn. 16:32) and "today with reason is almost universally reckoned with" (Anton Vögtle in Anton Vögtle and Rudolf Pesch, *Wie Kam es zum Osterglauben?* [Düsseldorf: Patmos Verlag, 1975], 73 [hereafter cited as *Osterglauben*], all translations from this source are the author's own). Lohfink adds that one of the most certain indications of the return of the Galilean disciples to their home province is the phenomenon that the first appearances to the "Twelve" took place not in Jerusalem but in Galilee. Cf. Lohfink, "Der Ablauf," 164 and Thorwald Lorenzen, "Ist der Auferstandene in Galiläa erschienen?" *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 64 (1973), 209-221.

religious-cultic order of law, was well-qualified to raise the question, even in the minds of his closest disciples, whether in fact his death was not a divine judgement on him. "Now, only the endtime Judge himself could pronounce the final word as to whether Jesus had been right or wrong.... Without confirmation of Jesus by God himself, the possibility of discipleship was shattered."[8] A. Vögtle concludes that the actual reaction of the "twelve," their return to Galilee, is most naturally explained as "an eloquent expression of the collapse which his death objectively signified for their situation within the Israel of that time."[9] Luke's graphic portrayal of the disillusionment and hopelessness of the followers of Jesus as the result of the crucifixion of Jesus by the Jewish authorities (Lk. 24:20-21) is hardly a distortion of the historical reality.[10]

On the other hand, the historian discovers that a short time later, the same circle of the "twelve" returned to Jerusalem, the hostile and dangerous center of Jesus' enemies, where they now fearlessly proclaimed Jesus' resurrection from the dead, and actively gathered Jesus' adherents into the primitive Christian community.

This surprising transformation of the disciples confronts the historian with the question concerning its cause. "That something decisive happened at Easter cannot reasonably be doubted even from (the) purely historical point of view."[11] M. Dibelius has given classic

---

[8]Ulrich Wilckens, "Die Überlieferungsgeschichte der Auferstehung Jesu," in *Die Bedeutung der Auferstehungsbotschaft für den Glauben an Jesus Christus*, ed. Fritz Viering (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1966), 54 (hereafter cited as "Überlieferungsgeschichte"), author's own translation. English translation: "The Tradition-History of the Resurrection of Jesus," in *The Significance of the Message of the Resurrection for Faith in Jesus Christ*, ed. Charles F. D. Moule (London: SCM Press, 1968), 64-65 (hereafter cited as "Tradition-History").

[9]Vögtle in Vögtle and Pesch, *Osterglauben*, 73, quoting Wilckens, "Überlieferungsgeschichte," 54.

[10]Kessler, *Sucht den Lebenden*, 107.

[11]Eduard Schweizer, *Jesus* (Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1971), 46.

formulation to this judgement. "Something must have happened in between, which in a short time not only produced a complete reversal of their attitude but also enabled them to engage in renewed activity.... This 'something' is the historical kernel of the Easter faith."[12] What was this "something," postulated by the historian, that produced the Easter faith?

I. THE WITNESS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

The earliest pre-Pauline confessional statements concerning the resurrection of Jesus as a rule do not mention the basis for the conviction that Jesus had been raised from the dead. In his first letter (around 50 A.D.), Paul quotes an old formula of faith which simply states that "Jesus died and rose again" (1 Thess. 4:14). In the same letter, Paul makes use of an ancient confession of faith which contains the formula, " ... his son ... whom he raised from the dead...." (1 Thess. 1:10). The kerygmatic formula quoted by Paul in the letter to the Romans simply affirms that "God raised him from the dead" (Rom. 10:9).

However, the very old "catechetical summary of the heart of the gospel"[13] in 1 Cor. 15:3-5 expands the statement that "he was raised"

[12]Martin Dibelius, *Jesus* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), 141.

[13]Leonhard Goppelt, *Theology of the New Testament* I (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1981), 233 (hereafter cited as *Theology*). Goppelt affirms that the formula "came from early Greek-speaking Jewish Christianity and probably went back to an Aramaic prototype. Presumably Paul appropriated this formula immediately after his conversion in Damascus or three years later during his first visit in Jerusalem (Gal. 1:18), i.e., three to six years after Jesus' exit. This formula, however, did not merely reach back very close to the origin of Easter faith; it found general acceptance as well. In 1 Cor. 15:11, Paul emphasized that he was in agreement with the apostles of Jerusalem in this proclamation" (Goppelt, *Theology*, 233). J. Kremer suggests that the formula was probably already formulated between 35 and 40 A.D. (Jacob Kremer, "Die Auferstehung Jesu Christi," in *Handbuch der Fundamentaltheologie*, Bd. II: *Traktat Offenbarung*, eds.

with the affirmation that "he appeared (ὤφθη) to Cephas, then to the twelve" (v. 5; also cf. v. 7 and the old liturgical formula in Lk. 24:34). Paul Hoffmann explains that this latter statement in v. 5 serves the purpose of "confirming the resurrection statement by recourse to the experiences of the witnesses."[14] In other words, "old, pre-Pauline tradition appeals to happenings ('appearances' of the risen One) that occurred to definite persons in their world as the cause of faith in the resurrection of Jesus."[15] From his own experience, Paul corroborates this early testimony for his own person (1 Cor. 15:8-10, 9:1; Gal. 1:12.15-16; compare Phil. 3:8-12; 2 Cor. 4:4-6, 5:16). Finally, the gospels later reaffirm and illustrate it with great variety in their appearance narratives.

Consequently, according to testimony formulated within a few years of the death of Jesus and confirmed by Paul's personal testimony to his own experience, the "something" that produced the historically ascertainable reversal of the disciples' attitude was a new experience of the disciples, the experience of the "appearance"[16] of

---

Walter Kern, Hermann Pottmeyer and Max Seckler [Freiburg: Herder, 1985], 182 [hereafter cited as "Auferstehung Jesu Christi"], all translations from this source are the author's own). For a nuanced summary of the harvest to be gathered from the wide-ranging discussion of 1 Cor. 15:3ff. in recent years, cf. Joseph Schmitt, "Resurrection de Jésus dans le kerygme, la tradition, la catechèse," in *Supplement au Dictionnaire de la Bible* X, eds. Henri Cazelles and André Feuillet (Paris: Letouzey and Ané, 1985), 504-513 (hereafter cited as "Resurrection de Jésus"), all translations from this source are the author's own.

[14]Paul Hoffmann, "Auferstehung Jesu Christi (N.T.)," in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* IV, eds. Gerhard Krause and Gerhard Müller (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1979), 482 (hereafter cited as "Auferstehung Jesu Christi"), author's own translation.

[15]Kessler, *Sucht den Lebenden*, 145.

[16]With Kessler, we retain the customary expression "appearances" "because it is broader than others (for example 'visions') and does not prematurely narrow the view of the reality to be explained, but holds it open" (Kessler, *Sucht den Lebenden*, 146).

the one who had been crucified. What was meant by this testimony needs further clarification.

The Pre-Pauline Tradition: 1 Cor. 15:3-5.6-7

The key to the understanding of the "appearances" of the risen Jesus and thus to the answer to the question, what produced the conviction of the disciples concerning the resurrection of Jesus, is to be found in the pre-Pauline traditions contained in 1 Cor. 15:3b-5.6-7. There is universal agreement among scholars that v. 3b is the beginning of a quotation of formulated tradition,[17] and there is a wide consensus that this quotation terminates in v. 5.[18] In opposition to U. Wilckens and R. Fuller, who have argued that the tradition in vv. 3b-5 is a combination of four originally independent statements,[19] J. Murphy-O'Connor has recently strengthened the majority view that the tradition in vv. 3b-5 represents a substantive and formal unity:

> (that) Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures;
> and (that) he was buried;
> and (that) he was raised on the third day, according to the Scriptures; and (that) he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.[20]

---

[17]"The words (in v. 3a) translated in the Revised Standard Version as 'delivered' and 'received' are technical terms indicating the handing on of earlier traditions" (Reginald Fuller, "The Easter Event," in Reginald Fuller and Pheme Perkins, *Who Is This Christ?* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983], 29 [hereafter cited as "The Easter Event"]).

[18]Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "Tradition and Redaction in 1 Cor 15:3-7," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 43 (1981), 582 (hereafter cited as "1 Cor 15:3-7").

[19]Reginald Fuller, *The Formation of the Resurrection Narratives* (New York: Macmillan, 1971), 11-14 (hereafter cited as *Formation*).

[20]Murphy-O'Connor, "1 Cor 15:3-7," 583-584. The "that" is placed in parentheses, because Paul may have introduced it into the formula "as a technique of listing each item." See Pheme Perkins, *Resurrection: New Testament Witness and Contemporary Reflection* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1984), 88 (hereafter cited

Verses 6-7 are set off from the traditional formula (vv. 3b-5) by a change in grammatical structure, but they also contain traditional material. J. Murphy-O'Connor argues that v. 6 ("Afterwards he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep") was composed by Paul on the basis of information drawn from an earlier tradition (the reference to the "five hundred") and his own personal knowledge, in order to show that the resurrection could be verified.[21] Verse 7, however, contains an additional piece of formulated pre-Pauline tradition ("Afterwards he appeared to James, then to the apostles.").[22]

The old formula contained in vv. 3b-5 "came from early Greek-speaking Jewish Christianity and probably went back to an Aramaic prototype."[23] The Christian communities which come into question as the most likely place of formulation are (1) the early Hellenistic-Jewish Christian center, Antioch, and (2) Jerusalem, the originally bi-lingual primitive community with a Greek-speaking Jewish Christian component. But in any case, "the 'Hellenists' of Jerusalem (cf. Acts 6:1-6) could at least have had a determining role in the transmission of the initial, aramaic datum to the hellenistic churches of Syria."[24] For the formula's contribution to our understanding of the "appearances" of the risen Jesus, the following points deserve emphasis.

---

as *Resurrection*). The copulative "and" is "an original and ... fundamental element of the fragment" (Schmitt, "Resurrection de Jésus," 504-505).

[21]Murphy-O'Connor, "1 Cor 15:3-7," 585-586, 589; Perkins, *Resurrection*, 89.

[22]Murphy-O'Connor, "1 Cor 15:3-7," 587; Schmitt, "Resurrection de Jésus," 498 and 538. Murphy-O'Connor argues persuasively that Paul added the "all" in "then to all the apostles" (v. 7b), in order to prepare for his "presentation of himself as an 'apostle' of equal authority (v. 9)." Cf. Murphy-O'Connor, "1 Cor 15:3-7," 587-589.

[23]Goppelt, *Theology*, 233. Also cf. Schmitt, "Resurrection de Jésus," 508-511; Fuller, *Formation*, 11.

[24]Schmitt, "Resurrection de Jésus," 511; cf. 508-511. Also see Kessler, *Sucht den Lebenden*, 147.

1. The Reliability of the Data Concerning Witnesses of "Appearances"

According to the early tradition quoted by Paul, the recipients of appearances are (in order of their listing): Cephas, the twelve, more than five hundred brethren (who around the year 55 A.D., except for some who had died, may still be questioned), James, the brother of the Lord, and the apostles.[25] "Everything speaks for the fact that not only Paul and the tradition quoted by him, but also *the persons named were themselves convinced* that they had encountered Jesus after his real death (cf. the authenticating "buried") as present with new vitality, that means, as risen." We know from Paul's letters that Paul visited Jerusalem three years after his conversion (ca. 34-37 A.D.), stayed with Peter fifteen days and also spoke with James (Gal. 1:18-19). Of the twelve, he certainly knew Peter and John (cf. Gal. 2:9). Of the other witnesses, he certainly knew James and some of the more than five hundred (cf. 1 Cor. 15:6). Besides, he collaborated for extended periods with Barnabas and John Mark, members of the Jerusalem church (cf. Acts 4:36, 11:22-23, 12:12, 13:2ff., 13; 15:37ff.). H. Kessler concludes that, at least in its content, the tradition he received and handed on in 1 Cor. 15:3b-5.6-7 cannot contradict what he learned from the witnesses themselves. In 1 Cor. 15:11, Paul expressly emphasized that his testimony was in agreement with the testimony of the other apostles. "In the argumentation of 1 Cor. 15, it is precisely this common testimony on the basis of common witnessing of appearances that is decisive for Paul."[26]

2. The Appearance Statements in 1 Cor. 15:5.7

In the pre-Pauline traditions, the Easter "happening" which grounds the Easter faith of the disciples is expressed by the appearance

[25]Kessler, *Sucht den Lebenden*, 147.

[26]Kessler, *Sucht den Lebenden*, 147.

statement (ὤφθη[27] + dative; 1 Cor. 15:5.7; cf. Lk. 24:34). The fact that the persons named as recipients of the appearances are, apart from the "more than 500," authority figures of the early community has influenced the form critical analysis of the appearance statements and the definition of their "*Sitz-im-Leben.*" U. Wilckens classified these statements as "legitimation formulae," which were *originally* handed on not as evidences of the resurrection and proofs of the credibility of the resurrection preaching—this was presupposed—but "as proofs of legitimation" of the men who on the basis of their commissioning "through the authority of the risen One," had permanent authority in the church.[28] As used in 1 Cor. 15, however, the old legitimation formula no longer possesses its original function. "The mention of

[27]ὤφθη is the aorist passive form of the verb ὁράω which has the meanings: "see," "catch sight of," "notice," also "experience," "witness." In the appearance statements of 1 Cor. 15:5.7, ὤφθη is followed by a noun in the dative case, e.g., ὤφθη κηφᾷ (v. 5a). Two translations have been defended. 1) ὤφθη is understood as a theological passive and translated: "he was made visible to Cephas by God." See Karl H. Rengstorf, *Die Auferstehung Jesu* (Witten: Luther Verlag, 1960), 55-59; Gerhard Friedrich, "Die Auferweckung Jesu, eine Tat Gottes oder ein Interpretament der Jünger?" *Kerygma und Dogma* 17 (1971), 156-157. 2) ὤφθη is understood as a passive with intransitive deponent meaning (cf. Robert Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament* [Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1961], no. 313) and translated into "he made himself visible to Cephas" or "he appeared to Cephas" or "he showed himself to Cephas" (A. Vögtle, J. Kremer, X. Leon-Dufour). Since the New Testament use of ὤφθη + dative was most probably influenced by the deponent usage of the Septuagint in its translation of the theophany texts of the Hebrew Old Testament, A. Vögtle contends that the second translation (2), in which the "factitive" is to be underlined, is to be preferred and is the one most often chosen today. See Vögtle in Vögtle and Pesch, *Osterglauben*, 38-39; also Jacob Kremer, *Das älteste Zeugnis von der Auferstehung Christi* (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1967), 54-55; Xavier Leon-Dufour, *Resurrection and Message of Easter* (London: Chapman, 1974), 43 (hereafter cited as *Resurrection*); André Pelletier, "Les apparitions du Ressuscité en terms de la Septante," *Biblica* 51 (1970), 76-79.

[28]Ulrich Wilckens, *Auferstehung* (Stuttgart: Kreuz Verlag, 1970), 147-148; cf. idem, "Tradition-History," 58-61.

his appearances ... is intended to confirm his raising by naming the witnesses of the risen Christ."[29]

R. Pesch took up Wilckens' interpretation of the appearance statements as legitimation formulae, but (contrary to Wilckens) reduced them to mere literary legitimation formulae accrediting early Christian bearers of authority. "The (ὤφθη) formula names the authoritative, the authorized witnesses of this kerygma; it legitimizes them. Whether it at the same time gives information concerning the origin of their faith, which they express in the kerygma, remains questionable."[30] He concluded that no special experience lay at the basis of the formula and that the statement "He appeared to x" gives no information about the origin of the Easter faith. "Therefore, the explanation of the origin of the faith in the resurrection of Jesus as a revealed faith effected by God cannot be accomplished through the reference to appearances with the help of 1 Cor. 15:5ff."[31]

---

[29]Wilckens, "Tradition-History," 58.

[30]Rudolf Pesch, "Zur Entstehung des Glaubens an die Auferstehung Jesu," *Theologische Quartelschrift* 153 (1973), 215 (hereafter cited as "Zur Entstehung"), all translations from this source are the author's own.

[31]Pesch, "Zur Entstehung," 218. In a subsequent study, Pesch conceded that it is possible that a legitimizing experience (ecstatic Christ-vision) could have corresponded to the legitimation formula. Yet in this case, it should be held that "these Christophanies were defined in content by the appointment of Peter as Cephas and the confirmation of the Twelve. The faith in Jesus as the risen/exalted Christ would then be presupposed as foundation of the Christophany on the side of Simon and the Twelve, rather than be derived from this Christophany" (Rudolf Pesch, "Materialien und Bemerkungen zu Entstehung und Sinn des Osterglaubens," in Vögtle and Pesch, *Osterglauben*, 156).

According to this interpretation of the origin of the Easter faith, the disciples would have attained faith in the resurrection of Jesus independently of appearances. Through their pre-Easter encounter with Jesus, they would have been convinced that he was the prophetic Messiah (Mk. 8:27-30). In the light of Jesus' explanation of the salvific significance of his death and against the background of contemporary Jewish traditions of the martyrdom and resurrection

In response to R. Pesch, exegetes concede that the idea of the special position and authority of Cephas and the twelve also comes to expression in the pre-Pauline formula, 1 Cor. 15:3b-5. But the critical point is the hypothesis that the pre-Pauline "he appeared" was used *exclusively* as a legitimation formula, which gives no information about the ground of the Easter faith. Against this speaks the very structure of the traditional formula. "According to the well founded and generally accepted view, this structure speaks decidedly for the fact that 'he was buried' proves the real, definitive death of Christ and the 'he appeared' correspondingly is meant to serve as corroboration of the resurrection statement."[32] Furthermore, J. Kremer points out that in the pre-Pauline formula, "'he appeared' already stands in a series with three other statements concerning an event and therefore must likewise be

---

of eschatological prophetic figures, the disciples would have been in a position to interpret the fate of Jesus as the fate of the eschatological-messianic prophet rejected by men but accepted by God, and to make the new decision of faith in the confession of Jesus' resurrection demanded in view of the crucified Jesus. With the message "He is risen," they proclaimed the definitive eschatological significance of the crucified Jesus. This confession of Jesus' resurrection was simply a new form of the faith in Jesus of Nazareth, namely its confirmation and deepening in face of his death. Cf. Pesch, "Zur Entstehung," 219-228; also cf. Pesch's brief summary of his 1973 proposal in Rudolf Pesch, "Zur Entstehung des Glaubens an die Auferstehung Jesu. Ein neuer Versuch," *Freiburger Zeitschrift fur Philosophie und Theologie* 30 (1983), 82-84. In this article, Pesch retracts his earlier proposal that the disciples came to faith in Jesus' resurrection independently of appearances of the risen Jesus. He now holds that the appearances of the risen One are sufficiently guaranteed as historical events (Pesch, "Zur Entstehung des Glaubens an die Auferstehung Jesu. Ein neuer Versuch," 87). For his development, present position and a critique, see Kessler, *Sucht den Lebenden*, 191-208; John Galvin, "The Origin of Faith in the Resurrection of Jesus: Two Recent Perspectives," *Theological Studies* 49 (1988), 26-34.

[32]Vögtle in Vögtle and Pesch, *Osterglauben*, 156; Wilckens, "Tradition-History," 58. Also cf. Hans Bartsch, "Inhalt und Funktion des urchristlichen Osterglaubens," *New Testament Studies* 26 (1979-80), 182-183 (hereafter cited as "Inhalt und Funktion"), all translations from this source are the author's own.

understood as a statement about a real occurrence."[33] Thirdly, against Pesch's hypothesis stands 1 Cor. 15:6 (appearance before more than five hundred brethren) which certainly does not intend to legitimize early Christian authorities. Finally, it is clear that in the context of 1 Cor. 15:3-8, Paul does not understand the "he appeared to x," at least immediately and fundamentally, as a legitimation formula but by it appeals to the experiences of the witnesses of appearances to confirm the resurrection of Jesus which is foundational for his argumentation in 1 Cor. 15 (cf. vv. 6b and 11).[34]

Consequently, the conclusion is justified that "the appearance statement designates the past and completed (aorist ὤφθη) happening which was experienced by the disciples and caused the faith in Jesus' resurrection: *Because* he 'was brought to appearance/made visible' by God (divine passive) or because he 'brought himself to appearance/let himself be seen/appeared' (deponent),[35] his resurrection became known."[36] The immediately necessary conclusion from the content of the appearances was: "He is risen." The verb ὤφθη indicates that the initiating and acting subject of the entire happening is God or Jesus Christ, not the subjectivity of the disciples. The disciples are the recipients of the appearances. As recipients, they are actively engaged with their powers of perception: "they see the one who lets himself be seen."[37]

The linguistic background of the verb ὤφθη in both the Hebrew Old Testament and the Septuagint shows that the visual element (the making visible) is clearly contained in the verb ὤφθη and may not be eliminated in favor of its interpretation as a purely theological term of

[33]Kremer, "Auferstehung Jesu Christi," 185.

[34]Vögtle in Vögtle and Pesch, *Osterglauben*, 48, 50; Kessler, *Sucht den Lebenden*, 148.

[35]Both translations are possible (see n. 27).

[36]Kessler, *Sucht den Lebenden*, 149.

[37]Kessler, *Sucht den Lebenden*, 149.

revelation.[38] J. Schmitt affirms that for the Judaeo-Christians familiar with the Hebrew and Greek expressions of the Old Testament, the word ὤφθη, which corresponds to the niphal of *ra'ah*, offers a precise, specific meaning. "It translates the visual perception of a person or of an object which, belonging to the real but invisible world of the divine, cannot become perceptible to man except by a gracious dispensation, lifting for a moment its essential invisibility."[39] In the appearance statements of 1 Cor. 15, there is question "of a becoming visible and a new encounter with the risen One."[40] However, as H. Kessler points out, the verb ὤφθη leaves the concrete mode of this becoming visible in darkness. "But in any case, the appearance statement is the precipitate of what was really experienced ... that original experience of the disciples which is the root of the resurrection faith."[41]

3. Closer Determination of the Content of the "Appearance" Statement

Since 1 Cor. 15:3b-5.6-7 was formulated in Greek under the

[38]Cf. Hoffmann, "Auferstehung Jesu Christi," 492-493; Vögtle in Vögtle and Pesch, *Osterglauben*, 42-43, against W. Michaelis who affirms: " ... when ὤφθη is used as a technical term to denote the resurrection appearances ... the dominant thought is that the appearances are revelations, encounters with the risen Lord who herein reveals himself, or is revealed.... The appearances are to be described as manifestations in the sense of revelation rather than making visible" (Wilhelm Michaelis, "ὁράω," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* V, ed. Gerhard Friedrich [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1967], 358-359; also cf. 326-327, 331-333 [hereafter cited as "ὁράω"]). H. Bartsch comments: "It is arbitrary and grounded only in a theological postulate, when W. Michaelis ... interprets the appearances of God merely as 'word revelation'" (Bartsch, "Inhalt und Funktion," 184, n. 8).

[39]Schmitt, "Resurrection de Jésus," 543.

[40]Peter Stuhlmacher, "Kritischer müssten mir die Historisch-Kritischen sein!," *Theologische Quartelschrift* 153 (1973), 249 (author's own translation).

[41]Kessler, *Sucht den Lebenden*, 149.

influence of Septuagint language,[42] and since, in particular, the use of ὤφθη in the appearance statement was most probably influenced by Septuagint usage,[43] this linguistic background has to be considered in the closer determination of the content of the appearance statement. In the Septuagint, ὤφθη + dative was used in theophany and angelophany texts to express the appearance (self-showing) of God, his angel or his glory (e.g., LXX Gen. 12:7, 17:1, 18:1; LXX Ex. 3:2, 16:12; LXX Num. 20:6; LXX Jgs. 6:12, 13:3; LXX 3 Kgs. 3:5, 9:2, 11:9). It is theophany terminology for designating the self-manifesting salvific presence of God. In the understanding of the Septuagint, on the one hand, this presence was limited to three periods of Israel's past: 1) the time of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, 2) the time of the wandering in the desert, 3) the time of Kings David and Solomon.[44] In the history of Israel after Solomon, "Yahweh no longer appears in the way that he appeared to the forefathers and David/Solomon. This is all the more striking as the bible reports ... of the powerful visions of Ezechiel and Isaiah. But never is it said of a prophet as of Abraham or Solomon: ὤφθη κύριος αὐτῷ."[45]

On the other hand, this self-manifesting salvific presence of God

[42]Schmitt, "Resurrection de Jésus," 508-510; Goppelt, *Theology*, 233.

[43]Vögtle in Vögtle and Pesch, *Osterglauben*, 38-39; Hoffmann, "Auferstehung Jesu Christi," 492. L. Goppelt points out that the ὤφθη statements are to be clearly distinguished from the hellenistic narratives about the appearance of translated heroes or divine men (in which the technical term was εφάνη, not ὤφθη). See Goppelt, *Theology*, 235, n. 15, 241, n. 28.

[44]Bartsch explains that this terminology "is to be found for the last time—according to the historical chronology of the events, not of the literature, which for the LXX translator was uninteresting—" in 3 Kgs. 11:9. It is never used in reporting a prophetic vision (Bartsch, "Inhalt und Funktion," 184; cf. 184-189).

[45]Hans Bartsch, "Inhalt und Funktion des urchristlichen Osterglaubens," in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, Teil II, Bd. XXV/1, eds. Hildegard Temporini and Wolfgang Haase (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1982), 824 (author's own translation), quoted in Kessler, *Sucht den Lebenden*, 151.

was promised for the future in the eschatological promises of the prophets and psalms (e.g., LXX Is. 60:2; LXX Ps. 101:17),[46] and the linguistic usage of the post-biblical apocalypses provides evidence that this future expectation of the Septuagint prophets "corresponded to the apocalyptic expectation at the time of Jesus and of primitive Christianity." In these writings, "the awaited coming of the time of salvation is promised as an appearance of God or of his Messiah (= his Son)." But since this promise "corresponds with the fulfillment designated as ὤφθη κύριος or ἄγγελος or δόξα κυρίου," Bartsch concludes that for the first Christians, who formulated 1 Cor. 15:3b-5, "the sentence χριοτὸς ὤφθη κηφᾷ was meant to bear witness to the fulfillment of the prophetic promises as they are found above all in 2nd and 3rd Isaiah, but also in the psalms."[47] This means that when in 1 Cor. 15:5-7

> the encounter with the risen Messiah Jesus is expressed through ὤφθη with the dative ... it is characterized not merely as any kind of revelation happening, but as *the* event which manifests the end time-definitive saving presence of God, with which the end time saving presence of God has become reality.[48]

4. Result

The preceding analysis has shown that the ὤφθη in 1 Cor. 15:5-7 is a theologically reflected (but early) expression of a very extraordinary experience which was the origin of the resurrection faith. This Easter experience has as its content 1) Jesus' showing of himself as an occurrence (complete aorist ὤφθη) proceeding from the power of God, 2) "his state of being raised and exalted (durative perfect ἐγήγερται) in a completely new unity with God, from out of which he can—like the invisible Yahweh himself—make himself perceptibly present (appear)

[46]Cf. Bartsch, "Inhalt und Funktion," 189-190.

[47]Bartsch, "Inhalt und Funktion," 190-191.

[48]Kessler, *Sucht den Lebenden*, 151.

and create witnesses to himself," and 3) this as the definitive beginning of the end time saving presence of God.[49]

Paul's Witness of His Own Experience

Paul confirms this testimony from his personal experience, the Damascus experience (1 Cor. 15:8-10, 9:1; Gal. 1:12.15-16; compare Phil. 3:8-12; 2 Cor. 4:4-6; 5:16).

1. The Different Terminology

In 1 Cor. 15:8, Paul places his Damascus experience in a series with the other appearances of the tradition and expresses it with the same traditional term (ὤφθη): "Last of all ... he appeared also to me." This means that Paul was convinced of the "qualitative equality" of his experience with the original Easter experiences.[50]

But Paul can speak of the same experience using different terminology. In defense of his legitimacy as an apostle and in the language of a prophetic call vision (cf. Is. 6:1.5), he can designate his experience as an apostolic call grounded in "seeing": "Have I not seen the Lord?" (1 Cor. 9:1).[51] Here Paul has reversed the traditional expression (ὤφθη) which emphasized the initiative of Christ and underlines his personal role in the event as active subject.[52] On another occasion, again in confrontation with opponents of his apostolate, Paul describes his Damascus experience in terms of a prophetic vocation and as a "revelation" or eschatological unveiling (ἀποκάλυψις) by God of a previously hidden reality: the risen Son of God as the essential content of the gospel Paul is called to proclaim (Gal. 1:12.15-16; cf.

[49]Kessler, *Sucht den Lebenden*, 152-153.

[50]Vögtle in Vögtle and Pesch, *Osterglauben*, 60.

[51]Kessler, *Sucht den Lebenden*, 153-154; cf. Vögtle in Vögtle and Pesch, *Osterglauben*, 65-66.

[52]Leon-Dufour, *Resurrection*, 56, 58.

Is. 49:1-6; Jer. 1:5; Is. 6:1-13).[53] Finally, Paul can characterize his Damascus experience as a "seizure" by Christ (Phil. 3:12: κατελήμφθαν = "I have been seized") which communicates an existential knowledge of the Lord and of the power of his resurrection (Phil. 3:8-10). By his action, Christ made Paul his own. "In Phil. 3:10 and 12, Paul uses the words δύναμις and καταλήμπσις to characterize ... the most intimate aspect of the Christophany of Damascus."[54]

2. *Conclusion from Paul's Testimony*

The importance of Paul's testimony can hardly be overestimated. Here we have the firsthand statements of one who personally experienced the "appearance" of the crucified and risen Jesus of Nazareth. For him it was a certainty which could not be open to question (cf. 1 Cor. 15:14-19).

As H. Kessler points out, it is clear from the texts that Paul understood what happened to him before Damascus not as *conversion*, a term Paul never uses when referring to it, but as *vocation* (apostolic call: cf. the clear contacts with prophetic call narratives).[55] All Paul's formulations of the Damascus experience (1] as the seeing of the Lord [1 Cor. 9:1], 2] as the unveiling of Jesus as the Son of God and the content of his gospel [Gal. 1:12.15-16], 3] as appearance of the dead, buried and risen Christ [1 Cor. 15:8], 4] as a being seized by Christ [Phil. 3:10-12]) contain the risen state of Jesus as essential element. "According to his own testimony as last and untimely witness of the

[53]Franz Mussner, *Der Galaterbrief* (Freiburg: Herder, 1974), 67-68, 81-87; Leon-Dufour, *Resurrection*, 47-51.

[54]Schmitt, "Resurrection de Jésus," 544-545.

[55]Kessler, *Sucht den Lebenden*, 154; Fuller, *Formation*, 45. Kessler comments: "This distinction is not meaningless. Both categories have *a different structure* which can be decisive for the view of the matter. I myself am subject of my conversion (in connection with which a subjectively mediated divine activity need not be excluded). Subject of my vocation is another (who so addresses me that his call is experienced as one coming to me from outside" (Kessler, *Sucht den Lebenden*, 154, n. 42).

appearances of the risen One (1 Cor. 15:8), Paul has seen the Lord (exalted through the resurrection) (1 Cor. 9:1). This seeing has brought him knowledge of Jesus Christ (Phil. 3:8-10). According to Gal. 1:16, the content of this knowledge is Jesus as Son of God. Therefore, the knowledge mediated through the appearance of the risen Jesus brings for Paul the fundamental turning point of his life."[56]

3. The Damascus Experience and Later Ecstatic Experiences

Visions and Revelations. Another point is important for the evaluation of Paul's witness to the appearance of the risen Lord. Paul sharply distinguishes the appearance of the risen Jesus granted to him on the way to Damascus from his later visionary experiences and revelations of which he speaks especially in 2 Cor. 12:1-7. There he does not mention the encounter with Christ that grounded his apostolic call. In 1 Cor. 15:8, he expressly called the latter the "last of all" the appearances,[57] and he nowhere presents his visionary experiences and revelations as repetitions of the first and foundational revelation of the risen Jesus as Son of God which alone grounded his gospel and his mission-consciousness. The appearance of the risen Christ was a unique event. "In 1 Cor. 9:1 Paul did not expect that those he addressed had made or could make in the future the same experience. Therefore his encounter with the risen One may not be exchanged with the coming to faith as every Christian can experience it."[58]

4. The Pauline Damascus Experience in the Presentation of the Acts of the Apostles

The influence of the later Lukan presentation of Paul's Damascus

[56]Kessler, *Sucht den Lebenden*, 154.

[57]Fuller, *Formation*, 42-43. This is the usual interpretation of ἔσχατου δὲ πάντων of v. 8. But Leon-Dufour says that he "would not be so bold as to adopt this interpretation" (Leon-Dufour, *Resurrection*, 57; also cf. 59).

[58]Kremer, "Auferstehung Jesu Christi," 184. Cf. idem, *Das älteste Zeugnis*, 59; Kessler, *Sucht den Lebenden*, 155.

experience on recent discussion of the origin of the Easter faith[59] makes it necessary to consider this version, at least briefly. Exegetes are in agreement that the conversion narratives in the book of Acts (Acts 9:1-22, 22:3-21, 26:1-23) "are not primary materials for the interpretation of Paul's Damascus road experience, but largely the product of Lukan theology."[60]

In contrast to Paul's testimony, Luke is silent about Paul's call to be an apostle of equal status with the twelve. According to the criteria given in the narrative of the choice of Matthias (Acts 1:21-26), Luke cannot consider Paul to be an apostle. Only one who had accompanied Jesus during his public ministry, beginning from the baptism of John, could be an apostle (Acts 1:21-22, 13:31). A second difference is that while Paul considers his Damascus experience to be an Easter appearance of the same nature as that of the twelve, Luke does not, since according to his conception the Easter appearances ended after forty days with the Ascension (Acts 1:9ff.). For Luke, Paul's Damascus experience "is merely a post-resurrection vision, precisely an ὀπτασία (Acts 26:19),"[61] which he distinguishes from "other heavenly visions—following his tradition—as a special act of self-manifestation of the risen and exalted One (Acts 26:14-18), through which Paul was called to be the special *witness* of the risen One in view of the mission to the Gentiles (Acts 26:16; cf. 22:15)."[62] Using "motifs of popular Hellenistic Jewish conversion stories (cf. for instance the novel *Joseph*

[59]Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), 360-385 (hereafter cited as *Jesus*).

[60]Fuller, "The Easter Event," 33; cf. idem, *Formation*, 44-47; Gerhard Lohfink, *Paulus vor Damaskus* (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1967), 41-91; Leon-Dufour, *Resurrection*, 63-79; Charles Hedrick, "Paul's Conversion/Call: A Comparative Analysis of the Three Reports in Acts," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 100 (1981), 415-432.

[61]Fuller, *Formation*, 45.

[62]Kessler, *Sucht den Lebenden*, 156, referring to Christoph Burchard, *Der dreizehnte Zeuge* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1970), 119-124, who characterizes Luke's conception of the relation of Paul to the Twelve as follows: "Paul is

and Asenath) Luke presents Paul's Damascus experience, not as a resurrection appearance ... but precisely as a *conversion*, triggered by an overwhelming appearance of *light* from heaven (Acts 9:3f., cf. 22:6f., 26:13f.)."[63] This is a clear divergence from Paul's testimony. Paul does not understand his Damascus experience as a mere conversion (nor is the conversion terminology and its associated light-terminology found in the early appearance statements and in appearance narratives of the gospels). The conclusion is that the original Pauline understanding of the Damascus experience cannot be attained in the Lukan presentation in the Acts of the Apostles.[64]

II. EDWARD SCHILLEBEECKX AND THE ORIGIN OF THE EASTER FAITH

The preceding analysis of the early New Testament testimonies indicates that the Easter faith arose on the basis of a new experience of the disciples shortly after their experience of the catastrophic death of Jesus on the cross, and that this new experience had as its cause the encounter with and self-manifestation (appearance) of the crucified Jesus as the risen One. This does not yet explain how the encounter and self-manifestation are to be conceived more in detail.

In 1974, Edward Schillebeeckx proposed an interpretation of the Easter experience which does not depend on the acceptance of

---

not one of them, but is the same as they" (Burchard, *Der dreizehnte Zeuge*, 136), author's own translation.

[63]Kessler, *Sucht den Lebenden*, 157; cf. Fuller, *Formation*, 45.

[64]Kessler, *Sucht den Lebenden*, 157. However, both Luke and Paul "agree about the reality of the event. Neither doubts that Paul was vouchsafed an appearance of the risen Christ" (Leon-Dufour, *Resurrection*, 77; cf. 76-79). "Although Luke looks back on Paul from a completely different temporal and theological perspective, in much he comes surprisingly near to him" (Lohfink, *Paulus vor Damaskus*, 89; cf. 85-89).

appearances or visions.[65] He explicitly affirms the personal resurrection of Jesus as a "real event accomplished by God in Jesus,"[66] and explicitly dissociates himself from the view "that the resurrection was achieved not in the person of Jesus but only in the believing disciples, as it were."[67] "Jesus' personal-cum-bodily resurrection" has "a logical and ontological priority" over the Easter experience and Easter faith of the disciples. Without the personal resurrection of Jesus, no Easter experience would be possible. But, conversely, "apart from the experience of Christian faith, the disciples had no organ that could afford them a sight of Jesus' resurrection."[68]

Interest and Intention

In *Jesus*, Schillebeeckx intended to undertake "a historical and genetic analysis" of the disciples' belief in Jesus' resurrection "as an event of and in our history."[69] He was concerned to show the historical and empirically tangible form through which the revelation-grace at the origin of the Easter faith was mediated, "the factors which can be reconstructed as a historical communication of the grace of the risen Jesus which brought the disciples to that belief."[70] Schillebeeckx insists that the revelation-grace through which Jesus' resurrection became accessible to the disciples was no "supernatural 'hocus pocus'," "no

[65]Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 320-397 (from a historical point of view); 518-571 (from a Christological point of view); 644-650 (an addition to the original Dutch edition: "The Intrinsic Significance of Jesus' Resurrection for Salvation"); Edward Schillebeeckx, *Interim Report on the Books "Jesus" and "Christ"* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 74-93 (hereafter cited as *Interim Report*).

[66]Schillebeeckx, *Interim Report*, 77, cf. 79; idem, *Jesus*, 645.

[67]Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 644.

[68]Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 645.

[69]Schillebeeckx, *Interim Report*, 75.

[70]Schillebeeckx, *Interim Report*, 75.

sudden 'incursion from above'" into the "normal" course of history.[71] Rather, it became "effective in and through psychological realities and human experiences,"[72] for God's revelatory initiative is manifested in (possibly "surprising, discontinuous" but) historical events and experiences accessible to human analysis which in themselves "are, like every historical phenomenon, ambiguous, ambivalent and calling for interpretation."[73]

Traditionally, fundamental theology pointed to the appearances of the risen Jesus as the foundation of the Easter faith of the disciples, and frequently the experience of the disciples was understood as a physical, objective "seeing" of Jesus, who showed himself in a manner which was physically and empirically ascertainable.[74]

According to Schillebeeckx, this understanding reflected the problematic and unacceptable conception of miraculous divine interventions in the causal context of this world.[75] In *Jesus*, Schillebeeckx's concern was to remove from the possible visual element in the Easter experience "the deep dogmatic significance which some people attach to it, namely of being the foundation of the whole of the Christian (resurrection-) faith."[76] It is neither the apologetic foundation of the faith nor a historical, genetic explanation of the origin of that faith. He maintains that "initially the appearances are not reported with any apologetic purpose in view, as a kind of proof of Jesus' resurrection.

[71]Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 649, 634; idem, *Interim Report*, 76.

[72]Schillebeeckx, *Interim Report*, 76.

[73]Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 634, 646.

[74]E.g., Albert Lang, *Die Sendung Christi* (Munich: Max Hueber Verlag, 1954), 249-251; more cautiously in the 4th ed. (1967), 273. Cited by Jacob Kremer, "Entstehung und Inhalt des Oster-Glaubens: Zur neuesten Diskussion," *Theologische Revue* 72 (1976), 3.

[75]Schillebeeckx, *Interim Report*, 82; idem, *Jesus*, 634.

[76]Schillebeeckx, *Interim Report*, 82.

At issue is the legitimation of the apostolic missionary mandate, not some confirmation of the resurrection having taken place."[77] In a "historical and genetic analysis,"[78] he uncovers as source of the Easter faith "more normal" human occurrences which can be generalized and which are comprehensible as disclosure-situations for a new disclosure-experience of Jesus.[79]

Since the resurrection of Jesus is a real, but "meta-empirical, meta-historical: 'eschatological'" event, in which, therefore, the disciples could not "participate,"[80] the question arises: "How did the first Christians arrive at the knowledge that Jesus was risen, not simply that he would rise at the end of time?" What happened between the death of Jesus (or the scattering of the disciples) and the proclamation of the resurrection (or the renewed gathering of the disciples)?[81]

The Hypothesis and Argumentation

As a "first reply" to the question, Schillebeeckx feels bound to answer: What happened to the disciples was a (cognitive) "process of conversion."[82] This, he claims, is the historically demonstrable reality. But it is at the same time (and this is a "second reply" to the question) the historical mediation of "the revelation-grace from God in and through the risen Jesus" which is not historically demonstrable.[83] Through this revelation-grace mediated in a "conversion-experience,"

[77]Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 354. Against this, see above 211-213.

[78]Schillebeeckx, *Interim Report*, 75.

[79]Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 647, 634, 641-642; cf. Kessler, *Sucht den Lebenden*, 183.

[80]Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 380; idem, *Interim Report*, 77.

[81]Schillebeeckx, *Interim Report*, 75, 77; cf. idem, *Jesus*, 380-381.

[82]Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 381, 645; idem, *Interim Report*, 76-77.

[83]Schillebeeckx, *Interim Report*, 76; cf. Kessler, *Sucht den Lebenden*, 183.

the disciples attained the Easter faith that Jesus is risen. Schillebeeckx develops this summary answer in detail in the following manner.

Though he insists that belief in the resurrection of Jesus necessarily involved new (faith-motivated) experiences after Jesus' death,[84] Schillebeeckx also affirms a foundation for this belief in the life of Jesus and in the disciples' memory of the historical Jesus. "After the first shock of his dying, the memory of Jesus' life and especially of the last supper must have played a vital role in the process of their conversion to faith in Jesus as the Christ, the one imbued to the full with God's Spirit."[85] One factor was the memory of Jesus' self understanding. Relying on the exegetical studies of K. Berger, G. Nickelsburg and L. Ruppert,[86] Schillebeeckx maintains that at the time of Jesus belief in the martyrdom and vindication of God's eschatological prophet was not only current but also formed Jesus' self understanding.[87] Jesus understood his death "as part and parcel of his mission of tendering salvation" from God, while leaving it as a final prophetic sign for others to interpret.[88] Therefore, the post-Easter understanding of Jesus "is not ... based solely on the disciples' Easter experience; it is his self-understanding that creates the possibility and lays the foundation of the subsequent interpretation by the Christians."[89]

Schillebeeckx also points out that (in view of the historicity of

[84]Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 646.

[85]Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 312.

[86]Klaus Berger, "Zum traditionsgeschichtlichen Hintergrund christologischer Hoheitstitel," *New Testament Studies* 17 (1970-71), 391-425; idem, "Die königlichen Messiastraditionen des neuen Testaments," *New Testament Studies* 20 (1973-74), 1-44; George Nickelsburg, *Resurrection, Immortality and Eternal Life in Intertestamental Judaism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1972); Lothar Ruppert, *Jesus als der leidende Gerechte?* (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1972).

[87]Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 383, 441-449, 475-480, 480ff.

[88]Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 311; cf. 310.

[89]Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 311-312.

God's revelation in Jesus) as long as Jesus was still living on earth, his disciples had not yet come to recognize that "he was in his person of constitutive, all-decisive significance for the dawning of the Kingdom of God." Only the totality of the life of Jesus, up to and including his execution, is God's revelation in Jesus of Nazareth.[90] For the disciples, the violent death of Jesus was a tremendous shock. They abandoned Jesus in his critical hour, i.e., they had not "followed him"—"they fled." This did not imply a total loss of faith, but "a 'being of little faith'."[91] Therein lies the foundation for a new conversion to Jesus. There are reasonable grounds for postulating that "Peter was the first (male) disciple to reach the point of 'conversion' and to resume 'following after Jesus'." On the basis of his conversion, Peter took the initiative in re-assembling the disciples, in constituting them disciples of Christ, as is reflected in Lk. 22:32. At the same time, "Peter's act of conversion is not something detached from that of the Twelve: belief in the resurrection presupposes a process of reciprocal communication among the Twelve."[92]

It is no longer possible to reconstruct the process of repentance and conversion on a historical basis,[93] but Schillebeeckx suggests that Simon Peter—and the Twelve—experienced this whole process as a surprising event of grace from God and Jesus. He points to the New Testament texts which connect the resurrection of Jesus with the gift of forgiveness of sins (Jn. 20:22-23; Lk. 24:47; Mt. 28:19; Acts 26:18; 1 Cor. 15:17-18; Rom. 4:25b) and finds therein an indication that Simon

[90]Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 386-387.

[91]Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 387; cf. 327.

[92]Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 389-390.

[93]Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 387. But in this process many factors play a part: "the productive remembrance of Jesus' basic message of a merciful God, concerned for mankind who does not put any conditions on his love; the supposition that Jesus must be the eschatological prophet; reflection on the fate of the innocent sufferers in the bible and the suffering prophet, and so on" (Schillebeeckx, *Interim Report*, 77, cf. 82; idem, *Jesus*, 382, 387-388, 391).

Peter—and the Twelve—experienced forgiveness after Jesus' death for their cowardice and lack of faith, i.e., experienced that Jesus renewed for them the offer of salvation. The disciples would have discussed this experience among themselves (a detail which Schillebeeckx perceives to be suggested by the theme of doubt in some later appearance narratives: Mt. 28:17; Lk. 24:11.37-41; Jn. 20:9.25-27).[94]

In this "process of reciprocal communication"[95] and possibly lengthy "process of maturation," a consensus of faith emerged and they came to the "evidence of faith": the Lord lives; *he* renews for us the offer of forgiveness and salvation. "In their experience here and now of 'returning to Jesus' ... they encounter in the present the grace of Jesus' forgiving; in doing so they experience Jesus as the one who is alive. A dead man does not proffer forgiveness.... They all of a sudden 'saw' it."[96] This "seeing" that Jesus lives was also a "recognition" and "acknowledgement" of Jesus in the totality of his life. This is what Schillebeeckx calls the "Easter experience," which could be expressed in a variety of ways: "the crucified One is the coming judge (a Maranatha Christology); the crucified One as miracle-worker is actively present in his disciples; the crucified One is risen." Here occurs the realization of really seeing Jesus at last. The later appearance narratives make explicit what is the basic insight: "Jesus 'makes himself seen' (ὤφθη)."[97]

Therefore, experience of forgiveness in the renewal of their own life, illuminated by their memory of Jesus, was "the matrix in which faith in Jesus as the risen One was brought to birth."[98] Through the experience of Jesus' renewed presence made in this process of conversion, the disciples arrived at the conviction of faith that Jesus

[94]Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 391, cf. 390, 358-359.

[95]Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 390.

[96]Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 391.

[97]Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 387.

[98]Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 391.

had truly risen and was the eschatological prophet that God had vindicated, the Christ.[99]

In *Jesus*, Schillebeeckx explained that "the resurrection was believed in before there was any question of appearances."[100] Later, the Easter experience of conversion and disclosure engendered by revelation-grace was articulated and put into words by means of the classic Jewish "model of a conversion vision" (conversion by way of illumination from above, frequently pictured in a light vision). "In the Christian resurrection vision (the Easter appearances)" the gracious gift of conversion to Jesus *as* the Christ is effected by Jesus himself who discloses himself as the risen Christ—"makes himself seen"—in and through the grace of conversion (= illumination).[101]

Therefore, the whole tradition of appearances is a later means of presenting the conversion of the disciples and their disclosure experience as the fruit of God's grace in and through the risen Jesus.[102]

Consequently, Schillebeeckx distinguished talk of appearances as model of representation, on the one hand, and "what is meant by appearances," on the other hand.[103] What is meant "is no model but a living reality,"[104] the real Easter experience of the disciples. In the accounts of the appearances, the New Testament meant to say two things about this Easter experience: 1) the resurrection faith "is not a mere human invention, but a revelation-grace" of God through the risen Jesus himself; 2) this revelation-grace "is no sudden 'incursion from above', i.e., no hocus pocus, but becomes effective in and

[99]Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 645-646; idem, *Interim Report*, 77-79.

[100]Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 354, cf. 645.

[101]Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 383-384, 386, 390.

[102]Schillebeeckx, *Interim Report*, 80.

[103]Schillebeeckx, *Interim Report*, 74ff.

[104]Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 390.

through psychological realities and human experiences."[105] For this reason, Schillebeeckx insists strongly that the resurrection faith is not "pure interpretation" of the earthly life of Jesus, but presupposes "new (faith-motivated) experiences after Jesus' death," centered around the experience of "Jesus' renewed presence and the renewed offer of salvation."[106]

In his *Interim Report on the Books "Jesus" and "Christ,"* Schillebeeckx points out that in *Jesus* he "deliberately kept silent about possible visual elements in the process of conversion or the Easter experience." His intention was "to relieve this visual element of the deep dogmatic significance which some people attach to it, namely of being the foundation of the whole of the Christian faith." An added concern was to avoid giving the impression that the risen Jesus showed himself physically in the (cognitive) process of conversion.[107]

Schillebeeckx now concedes that when the first Christians used "the existing conversion model that is expressed in terms of appearances" in order to express their complex experience, "the constant and stereotyped elements of (the) model need not of themselves belong only to the model; they can also be part of the events which are narrated."[108] He affirms that he would not deny the possible presence of visual elements in what the New Testament calls "appearances of Jesus." "In view of the nature of man in ancient culture ... it does not seem to me at all necessary to deny visual elements in the Easter experience of the first Christians. Easter grace seized their heart and senses, and their senses through heart and spirit."[109] However, this visual element "was not the foundation of Christian belief (in the

[105]Schillebeeckx, *Interim Report*, 76.

[106]Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 646, cf. 390; idem, *Interim Report*, 79-80.

[107]Schillebeeckx, *Interim Report*, 82.

[108]Schillebeeckx, *Interim Report*, 80, cf. 147, n. 43.

[109]Schillebeeckx, *Interim Report*, 80-81.

resurrection)" but "merely a medium of the reception and articulation of revelation."[110] Schillebeeckx understands this visual element as "the redundancy-aspect of a cognitive and emotive event."[111] The visionary elements are "concomitant visual phenomena; at most they are an emotional sign of what really overwhelmed the disciples: the experience of Jesus' new (spiritual) saving presence in the midst of his own people on earth."[112]

Schillebeeckx rejects modern attempts to make the Christ-appearances intelligible by explaining them as "a sort of condensation of various pneumatic experiences within the primitive local congregations." This explanation presupposes what has to be explained, namely "the existence of the 'gathered congregation'," whereas the reality meant by the New Testament appearance traditions marks the starting point for the reassembling of the disciples, "in other words the very earliest event constitutive of the Church."[113]

But H. Kessler points out that now and then Schillebeeckx formulates statements which come close to the rejected position. For example, the nucleus of the Easter conversion-process is "the experience of the new (spiritual) presence of the risen Jesus in the gathered community," or "the Easter experience lies in the experience of an event: namely the reassembling of the disciples ... in the power of the risen Christ himself: 'Where two or three are gathered together in his name, Jesus is in the midst of them'; this New Testament text is ... perhaps the purest, most adequate reflection of the Easter experience."[114]

---

[110]Schillebeeckx, *Interim Report*, 148, n. 46, 147, n. 43.

[111]Schillebeeckx, *Interim Report*, 147, n. 43.

[112]Schillebeeckx, *Interim Report*, 81, cf. 78.

[113]Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 382.

[114]The quotations are from Schillebeeckx, *Interim Report*, 80 and Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 646.

Kessler discovers the foundation of this vacillation in an insufficient distinction between original (community grounding) Easter experience of the first disciples and later (already presupposing community) coming-to-faith of the disciples "of second hand" (Kierkegaard). Behind this stands the concern to "generalize"[115] the structure of the original Easter experience in order to mediate and make it more plausible to present-day contemporaries. "For Schillebeeckx there is no essential distinction between the way in which the first disciples in the beginning came to faith in the risen Jesus, and the way in which we do so."[116] We too can make a faith-motivated experience of renewal of life effected by Jesus in which the certitude of faith is given that Jesus lives.[117] Kessler suggests that it was this interest in generalizing the original Easter experience of the first disciples which also caused Schillebeeckx to assume "that in the origin of the Easter faith, extraordinary, unrepeatable experiences and occurrences could not have played a triggering role."[118]

---

[115]Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 647.

[116]Kessler, *Sucht den Lebenden*, 186. The only special aspect of the first disciples' Easter experience mentioned by Schillebeeckx is the fact that they had known Jesus before his death, "a circumstance which gave them a unique privilege" (Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 647). G. O'Collins warns that one should be clear about the theological implications of Schillebeeckx's position. "Once the special nature of the Easter appearances gets left behind, the apostolic witnesses cease to be normative interpreters of the risen Jesus and authoritative founders of the Christian Church. It is difficult to see why their experience of him should remain a lasting criterion for believers and why their conversion should be the norm for Christian conversion. Schillebeeckx himself seems to draw this conclusion by remarking that it is only 'for the knowledge (but not for any normative interpretation?) of Jesus in whom we believe' that we depend on these witnesses. They 'have no (other) advantage over us than that they were there at the time' (Schillebeeckx, *Interim Report*, 7)" (G. O'Collins, *Jesus Risen* [New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1987], 117).

[117]Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 346, 647.

[118]Kessler, *Sucht den Lebenden*, 186.

CRITIQUE

H. Kessler agrees that Schillebeeckx's fundamental concern, to take seriously the human-historical mediatedness of the "appearances" of the risen Jesus, is justified. But the question remains whether Schillebeeckx has succeeded in the execution of this concern. Three decisive points call for comment.[119]

1. A Process of Conversion? R. E. Brown observed that "No major arguments are needed to refute Schillebeeckx's reconstruction of the genesis of the post-resurrection appearances, for it is an imaginative thesis that has no *prima facie* support in the resurrection accounts themselves."[120] In point of fact, the New Testament does *not* portray the original Easter experience as a process of conversion. In 1979, Schillebeeckx himself had to concede that "outside the stories about Paul's conversion in Acts, no conversion terminology can be found."[121] What about these stories of Paul's conversion in the Acts of the Apostles?

Schillebeeckx bases his interpretation of the appearance stories in the gospels on the conversion stories in the three-fold presentation of Paul's Damascus experience in the Acts of the Apostles. There, he claims, a conversion event (Acts 9 and 22) has been transformed into an almost exclusive mission event (Acts 26). Schillebeeckx uses this as a model for postulating a similar development in the narratives of appearances to Peter and the Twelve. In the process of development from conversion appearance narratives to explicit mission appearances, an original conversion event was forced into the background.[122]

Against this, it has been objected that Schillebeeckx is

---

[119]Cf. Kessler, *Sucht den Lebenden*, 186-191.

[120]Raymond E. Brown, Review of *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology* in *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 42 (1980), 422-423.

[121]Schillebeeckx, *Interim Report*, 83.

[122]Schillebeeckx, *Interim Report*, 83; also idem, *Jesus*, 381.

"methodologically wrong" in basing so much on the conversion stories in the book of Acts for the interpretation of the appearance narratives. "These are not primary materials for the interpretation of Paul's Damascus road experience, but largely the product of Lukan theology."[123] To conclude from this later interpretative presentation in the Acts of the Apostles, that the Damascus experience was a purely cognitive, interior conversion process, and then to extend this conclusion to the first Easter experiences of the original witnesses, is to turn the development of the tradition upside down.[124] H. Kessler points out that neither the early pre-Pauline tradition (which Schillebeeckx nowhere analyzes in detail), nor Paul in his personal testimony, nor the appearance narratives of the gospels corroborate the development postulated by Schillebeeckx. On the contrary, the fact that the latter, unlike Acts 9 and 22, are not presented according to the model of the vision of light (which was familiar to the hellenistic communities) is an argument for their fidelity to the origin.[125]

Furthermore, supposing but not conceding[126] that there was a conversion model, as Schillebeeckx claims, "its influence would seem

[123]Fuller, "The Easter Event," 33. Also cf. Kremer, "Entstehung und Inhalt," 5.

[124]Cf. Goppelt, *Theology*, 240-241 for the tradition-history analysis of the appearance stories.

[125]Kessler, *Sucht den Lebenden*, 187.

[126]Fuller comments that both bibliography and footnotes are somewhat meager for Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 380-385. It is not clear what exegete (or exegetes) gave Schillebeeckx the idea of the existence of a conversion model. But A. E. Harvey affirms that Schillebeeckx is following Klaus Berger, who made heavy use of the romance *Joseph and Asenath* (written in Greek in Egypt in the Roman period) to establish an existing Jewish "conversion model." "But it must never be forgotten, first, that there is virtually no other evidence for this model anywhere in Jewish literature, and secondly, that *Joseph and Asenath* itself ... represents an exceedingly exotic kind of Judaism and cannot be relied on to preserve standard Jewish material which would have influenced Christians. The existence of this 'conversion model' ... must remain highly problematic" (A.E. Harvey, Review of *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology* in *Journal of Theological Studies* 31 [1980], 604).

to have entered only at a comparatively late stage of the development of the tradition with the author of Luke-Acts." The reason is that before that stage, "the conversion or forgiveness element is a secondary effect of the Easter experiences, not their constitutive element,"[127] as will be seen in the following point.

2. What is the Primary Element in the Easter Experience? Schillebeeckx answers: the experience of forgiveness or of the renewed offer of salvation, and he points to the connection of resurrection and forgiveness of sins in Jn. 20:22-23; Lk. 24:47; Mt. 28:19; Acts 26:18; 1 Cor. 15:17-18; Rom. 4:25b. But H. Kessler replies that if these texts are examined more closely, two things become clear. First, they nowhere affirm that the first disciples had a new experience of forgiveness after Good Friday. They affirm that the disciples were sent by the risen Jesus to preach the resurrection of Jesus and the forgiveness of sins (through Jesus' death and resurrection). Second, all these texts are the products of theological reflection and explicitate the meaning of the resurrection of Jesus according to one of its aspects. This implies that the original Easter experience was also an experience of forgiveness. "However, not this is its primary aspect, but rather the self-manifestation and new presence of the risen Jesus that was given to the disciples." This was experienced first and was not a secondary inference (from a primary experience of forgiveness and conversion).[128]

3. Appearances as Literary Form of Presentation? Contrary to Schillebeeckx's hypothesis that appearances are a later means of presenting the Easter conversion and disclosure experience of the disciples, the tradition-history analysis shows that appearances were spoken of very early in concise formulas without any narrative illustration. As we saw, Paul used the word ὤφθη ("he appeared") with reference to his own Damascus experience. "He was not articulating

[127]Fuller, "The Easter Event," 34.

[128]Kessler, *Sucht den Lebenden*, 189; cf. Fuller, "The Easter Event," 31.

some other experience which lay behind the expression. We cannot get back behind the statement 'he appeared' to something more primary."[129] As has been shown previously, ὤφθη ("he appeared") expresses an original encounter with the risen Jesus who makes himself perceptibly present from out of the sphere of God. H. Kessler objects that Schillebeeckx has suppressed the early statements in favor of the later Easter stories which he calls "appearance reports" and has not sufficiently evaluated them. "This procedure betrays, on the one hand, a deficient consideration of the tradition-history; on the other hand, allows the suspicion to arise that here also a systematic (dogmatic) prejudice is at work."[130]

Kessler sees this prejudice surfacing in Schillebeeckx's later self-correction. Schillebeeckx had to concede to his exegetical critics that in the New Testament there is talk very early of "seeing" (appearances), and he grants, in addition, that this use of the model of appearances "need not be a pure model; it can also imply a historical event."[131] But the further argument is revealing: "In view of the mentality of man in ancient culture ... *it does not seem to me at all necessary to deny* visual elements in the Easter experience of the first Christians. The Easter grace seized their heart and senses, and their senses through heart and spirit.... But it is not a question of these concomitant visual phenomena."[132] They form the visual "redundancy-element" of the fundamentally cognitive Easter experience of conversion.[133] Kessler finds this argumentation revealing because of its formal structure: "If we could not understand

[129]Fuller, "The Easter Event," 31: "Schillebeeckx takes the statement 'he appeared' as originating not in primary witness but in subsequent theological reflection on a prior experience of conversion/forgiveness." Cf. Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 380-385.

[130]Kessler, *Sucht den Lebenden*, 190.

[131]Schillebeeckx, *Interim Report*, 147, n. 43, cf. 80.

[132]Schillebeeckx, *Interim Report*, 80-81.

[133]Schillebeeckx, *Interim Report*, 75, 80.

this visual element as a purely time-conditioned, for us redundant accompaniment, would we have to deny them as historically factual? Because what is not permitted to be, cannot be? Here also the systematic-dogmatic premises appear to determine what is (this time not demanded, but if need be) allowed as historical facticity."[134]

Conclusion to Critique. Schillebeeckx's explanation of the origin of the Easter faith is not supported by the New Testament texts and does not do justice to their tradition history. "It is based on a partially untenable exegesis and on quite a few conjectures; these again appear to spring from definite systematic preliminary decisions which are thoroughly questionable."[135]

III. THE ENIGMATIC MODE OF THE EASTER EXPERIENCE

According to the credible witness of the early traditions of the New Testament, the Easter faith of the disciples had its origin in a radically new divine initiative coming from outside themselves: in the manifestation by God of the crucified Jesus as the risen One, or as the self-manifestation of the risen One from out of the sphere of God. "This has the character of an *encounter* (ab extra), of an encounter that *befell* the disciples."[136] This surprising self-manifestation of the risen Jesus from out of hiddenness with God in the historical experience of the disciples is the decisive reality which comes to expression in the

[134]Kessler, *Sucht den Lebenden*, 190-191.

[135]Kessler, *Sucht den Lebenden*, 191. G. O'Collins explains: "It seems that Schillebeeckx is uneasy about two things: empirical grounds of faith, and a God who may also intervene in such a strikingly special way as through appearances of the risen Christ.... I strongly suspect that certain prior theological convictions control his interpretation of the New Testament texts which report the Easter appearances" (Gerald O'Collins, *Interpreting Jesus* [London: G. Chapman, 1983], 124).

[136]Kessler, *Sucht den Lebenden*, 216.

word ὤφθη ("he appeared") or in talk of "appearances." This self-revelation of the risen One was the new impulse from outside which formed the objective foundation of the Easter faith of the disciples.

The question concerning the more detailed explanation of the nature of the Easter revelation-encounter experienced by the first disciples is not easy to answer, for the New Testament witness is "in no way interested in the *psychological* process and the act of 'perception' of the appearances."[137] In contradistinction to modern thinking which tends to proceed from the question concerning the perceiving subject, the interest of the New Testament presentation of the appearances focuses on the "object" which became manifest, or more accurately on the "one encountering" (the risen Jesus who came to them).[138]

In 1975, A. Vögtle concluded that the early as well as the later New Testament statements concerning appearances (1 Cor. 15:3-8; Gal. 1:12.15-16; 1 Cor. 9:1) make possible "no reconstructable representation" concerning the concrete mode and manner in which the original Easter experiences, attested as appearances or revelations, took place.[139]

---

[137]Lehmann, "Zur Frage," 308.

[138]Lehmann, "Zur Frage," 307.

[139]Vögtle in Vögtle and Pesch, *Osterglauben*, 68, cf. 56-57, 59. Vögtle concludes: "As founded as the thesis may be that the Easter faith of the disciples rests 'on an occurrence ... which cannot be explained from the disciples, but which itself first allows their faith to arise': that 'occurrence' remains for us an unknown which debars us from a corresponding insightful explanation how that 'occurrence' led to the articulation of the Easter faith" (Vögtle in Vögtle and Pesch, *Osterglauben*, 129). Kessler judges that "with this view Vögtle remains in the right against Kolping, who thinks he is able to reconstruct the 'possible details (*Hergang*) of an appearance of the risen One' (Adolf Kolping, *Fundamentaltheologie*, Bd. III/1 [Münster: Regensberg, 1968], 650-659)" (Kessler, *Sucht den Lebenden*, 230, n. 267). In 1976, J. Kremer observed that "today most exegetes tend to interpret the appearances as real, but yet unique experiences of the disciples, which cannot be adequately defined" (Kremer, "Entstehung und Inhalt," 3).

1. The ὤφθη of the pre-Pauline formula in 1 Cor. 15:3b-5.7 (which has as its background, not prophetic or apocalyptic visions, but the appearance-of-God formula of the Septuagint, and therefore the manifestation of the salvific presence of God in patriarchal and eschatological times) signifies the (self-) manifestation of the risen One in and through an experience which contains the moment of making visible and being seen (although not necessarily with the external bodily eyes); concerning word revelation, nothing is explicitly said.[140] A. Kolping concludes from this: "The original act of appearance was wordless."[141] But Kessler objects that this conclusion to an originally "wordless appearance or mere seeing"[142] is precipitate and unfounded. "From the silence in relation to words, speaking, hearing (audition), it is not permitted to conclude without further ado to their absence." His reason is that in biblical language, the functions of seeing and hearing are not separated in ways that exclude one another (Is. 1:1, 2:1, 13:1; Am. 1:1; Hab. 1:1, etc. can, for example, speak of a "seeing" of the *words* of revelation). The point is that the evidence of perception given in the pre-Pauline formula could precede the distinction between seeing and hearing. But "that notwithstanding, the statement remains valid that from the ὤφθη no conclusions may be drawn concerning the specific nature of the appearances of the risen One; nothing is expressed concerning the how."[143]

2. In Gal. 1:12.15-16, Paul uses terminology "which has noticeable parallels in the gospel tradition" and may possibly go back to the

[140]See above 211-216, as well as Vögtle in Vögtle and Pesch, *Osterglauben*, 40-59; Hoffmann, "Auferstehung Jesu Christi," 492; Schmitt, "Resurrection de Jésus," 543; Johannes Lindblom, *Gesichte und Offenbarungen* (Lund: Gleerup, 1968), 86-89, against Michaelis, "ὁράω," 358-359.

[141]Kolping, *Fundamentaltheologie*, Bd. III/1, 652 (all translations from this source are the author's own).

[142]Kolping, *Fundamentaltheologie*, Bd. III/1, 654.

[143]Kessler, *Sucht den Lebenden*, 231. Cf. Vögtle in Vögtle and Pesch, *Osterglauben*, 69.

primitive community.[144] He affirms that God unveiled or revealed (ἀποκαλύπτειν - *galah*) his Son (Jesus Christ). In the Hebrew Old Testament, *galah* can "designate God's showing himself or revealing himself in a word or in an action...."[145] More specifically, *galah* can designate the prophetic reception of the word of God (1 Sam. 3:7.21, 9:15; Am. 3:7; Dan. 10:1), occasionally also the vision of God (Num. 24:4.16; the seer Balaam), or the vision of his end-time mysteries (Dan. 2:19.28-30), once an appearance of God (the theophany referred to in Gen. 35:7), and also God's activity in history (Is. 40:5, 53:1).[146] This variety of meanings continues in the Septuagint, which predominantly translates *galah* as ἀποκαλύπτειν and in the apocalyptic literature (compare, for instance, Dan. 10:1 with 2:19.22 or 1QH 1:21) and right into the New Testament (Rom. 1:16-17; 2 Cor. 12:1.7; Mt. 11:25, 16:17). From this variety in the use of *galah* and ἀποκαλύπτειν, Kessler concludes that in Gal. 1:12.15-16, the visionary element, the seeing, is not necessarily included.[147] The text gives us no information concerning the concrete manner in which the revelation occurred.[148] We only know that the crucified Jesus was revealed to Paul as the risen

[144]Kremer, "Auferstehung Jesu Christi," 185.

[145]Claus Westermann - Rainer Albertz, "glh: aufdecken," in *Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament* I, eds. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1971), 425 (author's own translation), quoted in Mussner, *Der Galaterbrief*, 67, n. 119.

[146]Hans-Jürgen Zobel, "galah," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* II, eds. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmar Ringgren (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1977), 481-487.

[147]Kessler, *Sucht den Lebenden*, 232, against Hoffmann, who thinks that the formulation in Gal. 1 depends on apocalyptic terminology and consequently supposes that the Easter-revelation occurred "in a way analogous to the apocalyptic vision" (Kremer, "Auferstehung Jesu Christi," 496).

[148]Vögtle in Vögtle and Pesch, *Osterglauben*, 68.

and exalted Christ, "and in this revelation Paul received the gospel (to be explicitated and proclaimed in words)."[149]

3. Many texts make use of explicit verbs of "seeing" to designate the Easter experience. This is encountered for the first and only time with Paul in 1 Cor. 9:1 (ἑώρακα; occasioned, as observed previously, by recourse to the language of the prophetic call visions, for instance Is. 6:1.5). Subsequently, verbs of "seeing" are found in the tomb-narratives and appearance-narratives of the gospels: Mk. 16:17; Mt. 28:7 (ὄψεσθε as promise); Mt. 28:17 and Jn. 20:20.29 (ἰδόντες); Lk. 24:39 (ἴδετε); Jn. 20:18.25.29 (ἑώρακα). "They obviously designate a visual perception, but the manner of the seeing—whether with external or inner eyes, etc.—is not specified."[150] Kessler points out that in the Easter texts this seeing is hardly emphasized as such. He also observes that the risen One who gives himself to be seen also expressly addresses the disciples (except in 1 Cor. 9:1) and speaks words which bear the stamp of later theological, ecclesiological, apologetic and missionary development.[151] He suggests that if, with John Alsup and Leonhard Goppelt, one may understand the gospel appearance narratives in the light of the anthropomorphic theophany narratives of the Old Testament (cf. Gen. 18:1-33; Ex. 3:2-10; Jgs. 6:11-21; 1 Sam. 3:1-14; cf. Tb. 5:4-8, 12:11-21; 4 Ezr. 14:1-5)[152] whose form and way of speaking they adopt, "then they want to report neither external-physical nor visionary experiences, but to attest the new, definitive turning of

[149]Kessler, *Sucht den Lebenden*, 232.

[150]Kessler, *Sucht den Lebenden*, 232. "What, for instance, does Isaiah, to whom Paul alludes, 'see' in his call vision 'with his eyes' (Is. 6:5) of Yahweh sitting on his exalted throne, when Yahweh's *train* fills the whole temple in which Isaiah is (Is. 6:1)!" (Kessler, *Sucht den Lebenden*, 232-233).

[151]Cf. Vögtle in Vögtle and Pesch, *Osterglauben*, 55-56.

[152]John Alsup, *The Post-Resurrection Appearance Stories of the Gospel-Tradition* (London: SPCK, 1975), 239-247; Goppelt, *Theology*, 240-245.

God to men in the risen Jesus, i.e., they treat of a new revelation."[153] Concerning the appearance narratives, H. Schlier concluded "that the 'seeing', as much as it means the perception of the one showing himself, is completely burst open in its concept. 'Seeing' goes in the direction of 'experience'."[154] As a positive formulation concerning the appearances, X. Leon-Dufour proposes: "The spiritual experience of the disciples, not purely subjective ... communicated through the medium of contemporary language and their religious tradition...."[155]

Karl Rahner suggests that so far as the nature of the experience of the original witnesses is accessible to us, it is to be conceived

> after the manner of our experience of the powerful Spirit of the living Lord, rather than in any way which either likens this experience too closely to mystical visions of an imaginative kind in later times, or understands it as an almost physical sense experience. There is no such sense experience of someone who has really reached fulfillment, even presupposing that he must indeed have freely 'manifested' himself.[156]

CONCLUSIONS

From the New Testament data, the following conclusions may be drawn:[157]

---

[153]Kessler, *Sucht den Lebenden*, 233.

[154]Heinrich Schlier, *Über die Auferstehung Jesu Christi* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1968), 36 (hereafter cited as *Über die Auferstehung*), author's own translation. In reference to the idea of sight/appearance in Paul's description of the risen Jesus, R. E. Brown concludes: "Our language of space-time experience breaks down when it is used to describe the eschatological" (Raymond E. Brown, *The Virginal Conception and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus* [New York: Paulist Press, 1973], 91).

[155]Leon-Dufour, *Resurrection*, 216.

[156]Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith* (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), 276. Rahner affirms that the experience of the original witnesses was "strictly *sui generis*" (Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 277).

[157]Cf. Kessler, *Sucht den Lebenden*, 233-236.

1. It is not possible for us to concretize the "how" of the original experiences attested as revelations or appearances, since the texts "simply give us no information about that." Their interest is concentrated on the "decisive 'that' of the encounter with and self-manifestation (appearance, self-revelation) of the risen crucified One." All attempts to get behind this "overpowering 'that' and 'what' of the Easter revelation" possess the character of "subjective surmises conditioned by the spirit of the age" and, in any case, overstep the limits of what is historically and theologically knowable.[158]

2. However, the *that* and *what* of the Easter experience stand out all the more sharply. The enigmatic "something" postulated by the historian is the "experience of the encounter with and the self-manifestation of the risen One himself." This is the source of both "the knowledge of his resurrection and the radical change in the lives of the disciples (new existence in faith, mission community)."[159] As A. Vögtle accurately formulated it:

> The reception of a revelatory impulse claimed by the tradition can in principle ... count as fully sufficient explanation for the fact that the disciples again came to Jerusalem and affirmed here an intervening action of God on the crucified One, namely his resurrection and exaltation to heaven. That may be held fast with a good conscience, although the sources at our disposal do not enable us to grasp the revelation event grounding the Easter faith in its concrete how.[160]

3. The concepts of *encounter* and *self-manifestation* in encounter, used in (1) and (2) to interpret the Easter appearances of the risen One, are qualified to include "both the primary and constitutive, central element of non-derivability and irreducibility as well as the secondary and non-negotiable element of the profound positive transformation of those affected by the encounter."[161] H. Schlier coined the word

[158]Kessler, *Sucht den Lebenden*, 234.

[159]Kessler, *Sucht den Lebenden*, 235.

[160]Vögtle, "Jesus 'Christus'," 73.

[161]Kessler, *Sucht den Lebenden*, 235.

Begegnis to express the communion-creating encounter proceeding from the initiative of the risen Lord.[162]

4. Kessler concedes that the encounter with the risen crucified One affirmed by the original witnesses cannot be directly verified. But he affirms the possibility of historically examining the surrounding field of this affirmation: "what preceded it and, above all, the profound effects of the affirmed encounters in the conduct and subsequent lives of the disciples." Consequently, a certain empirical-historical control is possible and the credibility of the disciples' testimony can be illuminated and become a summons to faith. "Such a decision of faith is in no way arbitrary, but has its solid reasons."[163] Now, as before, the appearances of the risen Jesus, attested by the disciples and Paul, provide the most credible explanation of how the Easter faith arose.[164]

[162]Schlier, *Über die Auferstehung*, 38.

[163]Kessler, *Sucht den Lebenden*, 235-236.

[164]Kremer, "Auferstehung Jesu Christi," 193.