A REVIEW OF GERD LÜDEMANN'S METHODOLOGY IN "THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST: A HISTORICAL INQUIRY"

Kelvin Ruel G. Novabos

Introduction

In his book, "*The Resurrection of Christ: A Historical Inquiry*" (2004)[1], Gerd Lüdemann, the New Testament scholar and acclaimed German historian, made waves of controversy in Europe and abroad. He puts into question the historical basis for the resurrection of Jesus.[2] Challenging the resurrection as the central event and foundation of Christianity and its whole enterprise of faith, evangelization, and mission in today's world, the book he published invited a great deal of attention and debate.[3] His earlier book, "*What Really Happened to Jesus?: A Historical Approach to the Resurrection (1996)*," first caused widespread reactions and served as the basis of his later book.

As a dedicated historian, Lüdemann rebuts theologians who are against his call for a historical investigation of the resurrection. These theologians argue that the historical foundations of this one-time event, which get increasingly remote and inaccessible over the centuries, are insignificant to the Christian faith. Moreover, he dissents opposition from thinkers who maintain that the reality of God raising Jesus

[1]Gerd Lüdemann, *The Resurrection of Christ: A Historical Inquiry* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2004).

[2]From here onward, the term "the resurrection" refers to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and not the general resurrection of the dead as understood by the Jewish mindset.

[3]Lüdemann, *The Resurrection of Christ*, 7.

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from the dead is considered a properly supernatural or divine event only assented to by faith and not through manufactured devices such as science and history.

In his book, Lüdemann attempts to analyze the historicity of the early Christian texts touching on the Easter narratives and reconstructs the historical development of the Easter tradition. At the end of his work, he makes a sensational and startling conclusion: that the resurrection of Christ fails the test of historical investigation.[4] There was no resurrection, but only a story of mass delusion, fabricated from grief-induced psychological visions of the primary Christian founders Peter and Paul and then handed on by tradition from the early Christian community. In other words, there was no empty tomb.

Certainly, with such a provocative claim, Lüdemann brought consequences not only to his own faith and professional life, but also to the Christian community of believers in his sphere of influence. The Confederation of Protestant Churches in Lower Saxony objected to his scholarly publications. He was also forbidden to be designated as Chair of New Testament Studies by the administration of the University of Göttingen, where he taught. On the 4th of July 2016, he was interviewed by Frankfurter Rundschau, with the transcript uploaded and entitled "*The Man Who Loves God*" on his internet homepage:

> The doubt was already there much earlier. I found that the Church lies to the public on this point. Whoever does research on the New Testament does not believe in the resurrection as it is preached and talked about by the Church in the creeds/confessional statements. The results of research are kept quiet from the congregation. This is not right. But it gets worse - the Bible - and all exegetes have become united on this point - is not the

[4]Lüdemann, *The Resurrection of Christ*, 190.

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> word of God. On Sundays, however, something completely different is said. I find that impossible.[5]

Causing a considerable stir in Germany and dominating the discussion on the historicity of the resurrection in his time, Lüdemann's book was subsequently reacted to by several scholars.

Does the Cornerstone Still Hold Up?

Could he be right? This article gives a review of Gerd Lüdemann's book. In particular, it will examine the German scholar's methodology - how he investigated the resurrection historically and what he deems as properly "historical." An assessment of his procedure is significant because it generated his controversial conclusions. The process defines the outcome.

This study bears great importance as it either affirms or challenges Lüdemann's claims surrounding the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, "the end-all and be-all of Christian Faith."[6] As the foundational truth or cornerstone on which Christianity hinges[7], the resurrection is the singular definitive moment that brings to fulfillment all that has been said, revealed, and done by a 1st-century Jewish man named Jesus of Nazareth – whom the church now proclaims as the Christ.

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[5]Gerd Lüdemann, "Gerd Lüdemann's Homepage," Nashville, TN, 2020, https://wwwuser.gwdg.de/~gluedem/eng/ (accessed 25 April 2023).

[6]Robert Barron, *The Word on Fire Bible (Volume 1): The Gospels*. The Word on Fire Bible 1 (Park Ridge: Word on Fire Catholic Ministries, 2020), 188.

[7]Eph 2:19-22 NKJV – [19]"Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, [20] having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, [21] in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, [22] in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit."

The historicity of the resurrection is not frequently asked by the average Christian. The resurrection is already an accepted article of faith among believers. When seeking explanations for the resurrection particular to its theology, the ordinary believer can immediately find answers from within the church doctrine. However, when a non-believer challenges the typical Christian to prove if the resurrection was an actual historical event (not literary fiction) established by scientific or naturalistic ways, he will find it challenging to seek ready-made and sufficient answers from within the stories of proclamation themselves.

As Lüdemann may have discovered, there is more to uncover from the Gospels' Easter narratives. While these are testimonies of faith, they are not comprehensive histories. A markedly different perspective is seen for people outside the Church's tradition. They could ask, "What if the Easter reports were all made-up myths or fictional stories to promote a specific evangelistic agenda?" Within this group of people, we would like to include skeptics, scholars, and historians like Gerd Lüdemann, who earnestly inquire into the historicity of the resurrection. Individuals like him employ modern means of investigating truth; such means have been dismissed, overlooked, or even denounced by the Church during its earlier centuries. Among these people, the starting point of their inquiry is not faith or church teaching *per se*, but the more naturalistic and scientific route of arriving at what is true and what counts as objective evidence.

This article agrees with Lüdemann and his call for a fresh and "strictly historical" investigation of the resurrection, the foundation upon which Christianity stands or falls.[8] In terms of faith, Christians will surely benefit from such a study. For

[8]Lüdemann, *The Resurrection of Christ*, 11.

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Lüdemann, only this kind of investigation affirms the resurrection as real. Otherwise, no amount of alternative interpretations on the resurrection can hold any value as he asserts:

> If Jesus' resurrection did not take place (in time and space), neither revival myths nor metaphorical interpretation nor sermons guised in hermeneutical reflections can help. In that case Christian faith is as dead as Jesus and can be kept alive only by self-deception.[9]

In other words, he says, "No historical evidence of the Resurrection, no Christianity." As followers of Christ, we need to base our faith proclamations (*kerygma*) not only on religious sources (i.e., church doctrines handed down by tradition over generations) but also on non-religious sources such as history, natural science, or archeology. We should seek to know the Christ of Faith and the Jesus of History. In this way, Christians would be better informed with the knowledge and historical evidence available, fostering dialogue with other disciplines, thereby bolstering their faith.

The Three Quests for the Historical Jesus

Since the 17th century, there have been many efforts to "recover the Jesus of history." Thomas Rausch states, "The historical Jesus refers to the man Jesus of Nazareth as he can be known through historical research."[10] These efforts to search for the historical Jesus are categorized into three quests, like "waves" or generations of searches. Each pursuit is driven by principal scholars whose approaches or techniques of historical investigation define the quest. Each quest paved the way for the development of the next quest.

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[9]Ibid., 19.

[10]Thomas P. Rausch, *Who Is Jesus? An Introduction to Christology* (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 2003), 9.

The First Quest: Reimarus to Schweitzer (1694-1768)

Reimarus, a professor of Oriental languages in Hamburg, Germany, launched the first quest for the historical Jesus. He recognized the distinction between the Historical Jesus (what Jesus actually said and did) and the Christ of Faith (what Christians profess about Jesus as Messiah, Son of God, etc.).

He argued that "the aim of Jesus and that of his disciples was basically different. He noticed that Jesus' preaching in the Gospels, particularly in the Synoptics, was centered on repentance in preparation for the coming of the kingdom of heaven."[11] After Jesus' death, Reimarus reasoned that "they stole his body and claimed that he had been raised from the dead."[12] Consequently, the apostles "were the ones who created what became the Christian story." [13]

During this quest, Reimarus and other scholars were still under the philosophical influences of the Enlightenment. Using secular rationalism, they questioned all of divine revelation and were hostile to Christian proclamations and dogma. "They assumed that once the overlay of Church preaching and dogma, as well as the Jewishness of Jesus, was stripped away, the real, historical Jesus would emerge."[14]

However, dominated by the principles of the Enlightenment era or modernity, scholars like Reimarus produced less objective work than they claimed. Joachim Jeremias considers their conclusions of portraying the historical Jesus (only as a wise ethical teacher, social reformer, friend of the poor, etc.) as absurd, amateurish, and fashioned according to their own image.[15]

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[11]Ibid., 10.

[12]Rausch, *Who is Jesus?*, 10.

[13]Ibid., 11.

[14]Ibid., 11.

[15]Joachim Jeremias, *The Problem of the Historical Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964), 15-47.

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The Second Quest: Käsemann to Schillebeeckx (1953-1980)

Ernst Käsemann, a New Testament professor at Tubingen in Germany, called the New Quest. Käsemann called on scholars to move on from the Enlightenment's heavily rationalistic and secular approach. He argued for a second quest, now possible with the new so-called "historical-critical" methods such as source criticism, form criticism, redaction criticism, and tradition criticism.[16]

Walter Kasper notes three historical and theological principles of Käsemann's New Quest. First, he admits that while the Gospels are not histories in themselves, he recognizes that they contain more historical material than previously acknowledged. Second, he argues that Faith not only focuses on what was proclaimed by the early church. Instead, it should be firmly tied to the life history of the earthly Jesus. Lastly, Kasper espoused a dialectical approach to Christology, a continuity that could not be ignored between the kerygma and the historical Jesus. For this, he emphasizes the proper approach:

> The New Quest does not bypass the kerygma, as a purely historical approach would do. Rather it proceeds from the medium of that preaching, so that the historical Jesus is interpreted through the kerygma while, at the same time, the historical Jesus helps us to interpret the kerygma.[17]

With its rediscovery of the kerygma, the New Quest, departed from First Quest, which was heavily burdened by the Enlightenment, rejecting divine revelation and approaching the scriptures in a rationalist, secular manner. However, most

[16]Ernst Käsemann, *Essays on New Testament Themes* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 13-14.

[17]Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ,* new ed. (London; New York: T & T Clark, 2011), 33-34.

of the proponents of the second quest too quickly dismissed the miraculous, prophetic, and eschatological, thus remaining half-liberal and modernist in their presuppositions, reflecting thinking from the Enlightenment characteristic of the previous quest.[18]

In response to new methods available, a host of books emerged searching for the historical Jesus and Christology. Scholars from this quest were Protestant commentators G. Bornkamm, E. Fuchs, H. Conzelmann, H. Braun, J. Robinson, G. Ebeling, F. Gogarten, W. Marxsen, and W. Pannenberg. There were also Catholic scholars J. R. Geiselmann, A. Vogtle, H. Schurmann, F. Mussner, R. Schnackenburg, H. Kung, J. Blank, R. Pesch, W. Kasper, J. Sobrino, and E. Schillebeeckx. It is worth noting that most of them were Europeans, particularly Germans.

The Third Quest

Since the early 1980s, scholars have begun talking about "The Third Quest" for the historical Jesus. The efforts in this period were marked by proper historical methods and, increasingly, the social sciences rather than the literary disciplines (e.g., source, form, redaction criticism).

In this period, importance was given to historical-cultural studies to understand better Jesus' 1st-century Jewish Palestinian context. Third Quest scholars took an interest in appreciating the social, cultural, and anthropological factors at play in the life of Jesus in his own milieu and within the social hierarchy and fabric of Galilean life. To further appreciate his political and religious environments, research was done into the 2nd temple Judaism - how the tradition was passed on and

[18]Ibid., 15.

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communally expressed, who the ruling elites were, the impact of Roman oppression, and its taxation system. What does it mean to be "holy" during this time?

Unlike prior quests, a distinct feature of this Third Quest was the use of sources outside the traditional biblical and canonical sources (such as the Gospels, Pauline writings, and Old Testament literature). These ancient sources include the works of Josephus, a 1st-century historian whose writings were long ignored by scholars, documents from Qumran, and the apocalyptic writings used to give depth to Jesus' historical context.

Most notable among the Third Quest scholars was John P. Meier, who produced a massive three-volume work entitled "*A Marginal Jew*," considered "the most ambitious modern reconstruction of the historical Jesus."[19] Employing the discipline of archaeology, Meier's historical investigations yielded new and ground-breaking findings, affirming the historicity of Jesus' resurrection and changing the game on the quest for the historical Jesus. Against objections from secular critics, Meier accepts the miraculous as having historical value. "That Jesus acted as and was viewed as exorcist/healer has as much historical corroboration as almost any other statement we can make about the Jesus of history."[20]

While emphasizing the historical, the proponents of the Third Quest, also took seriously the eschatological themes of Jesus' context, breaking free from the closed system of secular

[19]Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 826.

[20]John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, Vol. One, *The Roots of the Problem and the Person* (New York: Doubleday, 1991); Vol. *Two, Mentor, Message, and Miracles* (New York: Doubleday, 1994); Vol. *Three, Companions and Competitors* (New York: Doubleday, 2001).

rationalism. With the onset of the Third Quest, the narrow mindset of Enlightenment scholars lost its grip on the ongoing conversation on the search for the historical Jesus.

Other scholars from this quest were J. P. Meier, N. T. Wright, B.F. Meyer, A. E. Harvey, E. P. Sanders, and Ben Witherington. More radical critics include Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza and Richard Horsley.

In Light of the Three Quests

In the succeeding sections, this article praises to Lüdemann's work, highlighting what he finds admirable and of great value. What follows are criticisms of Lüdemann's study, focusing on the author's applied methodology of historical investigation, which gave rise to his provocative conclusions.

To provide criticism, this article assesses Lüdemann's methodology of historical investigation as defined in Chapter 3, "The Procedure" of his book,[21] and what the author considers as strictly "historical." To do this, a comparison will be made, putting Lüdemann's methodology of historical inquiry *vis-à-vis* the related literature on the Three Quests for the Historical Jesus.

This study does not intend to make a point-by-point criticism of Chapter 3, where Lüdemann extensively applies textual translation and analysis[22] on the various Easter narratives and proceeds to make his historical reconstruction of what happened on Easter. Aside from being a very lengthy process, this part already falls in the area of biblical exegesis, which is not the focus of this article. Moreover, by examining Lüdemann's methodology alone, the foundation of his analyses, this study

[21]Lüdemann, *The Resurrection of Christ*, 23.

[22]Ibid., 39.

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opens up a wide room for future studies to critique the rest of the book's claims and conclusions of the Easter story.

Finally, this article provides a set of conclusions that summarizes the method of historical inquiry made by Gerd Lüdemann, a critique of his claims on the non-resurrection of Jesus.

The Historian's Work: Lights and Shadows

Summary of Lüdemann's Methodology

For the purpose of discussion in this article, this part summarizes the methodology of historical investigation used by Lüdemann indicated in the section "The Procedure" of his book.[23] His methods are mainly that of textual analysis, drawing from sources, both canonical and non-canonical early Christian writings, ordered by date below:

1 Cor. 15:1-11: The Easter Traditions in Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians

The Easter Narrative in the Gospel of Mark

The Easter Narrative in the Gospel of Matthew

The Easter Narrative in the Gospel of Luke

The Easter Narrative in the Gospel of John

The Easter Narrative in the Gospel of Peter

The Easter Narrative in the Epistle of the Apostles (*Epistula Apostolorum*)

His methodology is systematic and is described as follows:

> Chapter 2 surveys the early Christian sources for the resurrection of Jesus. Here, I not only compare the content of the individual texts, but also classify them by characteristics of form in order to arrive at a starting

[23]Lüdemann, *The Resurrection of Christ*, 23.

> point for the history of the resurrection traditions. This task is especially important for the present work, not only because it is about the resurrection of Jesus, but also because it deals with the origins of the resurrection traditions.[24]

He expounds on how the texts are to be treated:

> The task of Chapter 3 is to offer fresh translations of the most important early Christian texts concerning Jesus' resurrection and to assess their historical value. [...] I analyze the texts in three steps -purpose, reworked tradition, and historical elements. [...] Among the chief tools for identifying the purpose of the author and the reworked tradition are linguistic and stylistic considerations or tensions in the text. [...] Only after establishing the purpose of the author [redaction criticism] and the reworked tradition [tradition criticism] may one meaningfully evaluate the historical worth of the text and so gain a credible understanding of the events it relates.[25]

From here, he then proceeds to implement his methodology of textual analysis on the various Easter narratives he surveyed. He makes his version of the Easter story from his historical reconstruction upon which he draws his conclusions.

Strengths of Lüdemann's Methodology

In Chapter 2, Lüdemann uses his skills in form criticism to survey and classify the various texts containing reports of Jesus' resurrection according to six groups.[26] He draws parallels among the passages to determine the earliest written ones where he makes his starting point, the narratives constituting the origin of the Easter faith.

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[24]Ibid., 23.

[25]Lüdemann, *The Resurrection of Christ*, 23.

[26]Ibid., 29.

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From Chapter 3 onwards, Lüdemann makes a solid and remarkable work of scholarship. He performs what biblical scholars call an "exegesis." He deals with the scripture passages concerning Jesus' resurrection listed under the section that defines his procedure. In his actual analysis of the texts, Lüdemann engages and deconstructs all available scriptural details on Jesus' resurrection in a manner akin to "splitting hairs" with the texts. He ensures a smooth flow from one narrative to the next, identifies loose ends in the stories, and determines how the stories interrelate even from independent Gospel traditions. He is very particular about the chronology of the events, even referring to Old Testament writings to expose cross-references and further meaning among the texts.

Some Critiques of Lüdemann's Methodology

In light of the related literature discussed earlier, this section assesses Lüdemann's methodology and where and how it figures among the Three Quests of the Historical Jesus and findings from historical investigations of other scholars.

The Outdated Method of Historical Investigation

While Lüdemann 's work is praiseworthy, it is important to note that the methodology of his historical inquiry is outdated. To interpret the many Easter narratives, he employs only textual analysis reminiscent of the Second Quest, dated before the 1980's. During this quest, the historical-critical methods used were source criticism, form criticism, redaction criticism, and tradition criticism – all are purely literary disciplines adopted by Lüdemann.

Furthermore, Lüdemann's historical investigations could have been more up-to-date had he followed approaches from the Third Quest of the historical Jesus. It was observed that

he did not account for any historical evidence apart from the canonical and non-canonical texts he identified through which he derived their historical value by heavily using redaction and tradition criticism. Had he examined new historical evidence and material, as Third Quest scholar J. P. Meier did by consulting archeological findings, Jewish socio-cultural data, or documents from other historians like Josephus, his understanding of Jesus' historical context would have been deeper and more holistic. His conclusions of the Easter story would have been more accurate, and thus told a story entirely different from what he "reconstructed from history." [27]

Hence, from these findings, we categorize Lüdemann's historical methodology and scholarship as belonging to the Second Quest, despite his book already being published (in 2004) long after the quest's timeline.

Lüdemann's Position in the History-Kerygma Dialectic

What is "historical" for Lüdemann? Does he understand history to be in continuity with the kerygma, or as independent from it? Here, this study probes not only the methodology he used, but also attempts to go further, into the mindset of the historian and what he intends for a strictly historical investigation into Jesus' resurrection. We discern Lüdemann's position on this matter by referring to Chapter 1 of his book, entitled *"On the Need for A Fresh Investigation into the Historicity of the Resurrection,"* where he makes a discussion before delving into the actual historical investigations.[28]

Lüdemann was aware of the dialectic approach of Christology espoused by Second Quest scholars like Kasper,[29]

[27]Lüdemann, *The Resurrection of Christ*, 153.

[28]Lüdemann, *The Resurrection of Christ*, 11-28.

[29]Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 33-34.

who understand the historicity of Jesus by recognizing a continuity between history and kerygma. Lüdemann believes that history is necessarily part of the proclamation, although the notion of "fact" was coined only in modern times. On this, he agrees with Gerhard Ebeling (presumably from the Second Quest):

> As long as theology is "paired" with historical thought (as it is on the one hand by the character of its central sources and on the other by modern criteria of truth like history)... then it must be interested in a natural explanation of the miracle...[30]

However, Lüdemann insisted that in this continuity, history precedes proclamation. He sides with those who support a purely historical investigation:

> Yet even if the concept of factuality was unknown to the writers of sacred history...[and in] their narration of events they thus allow heterogeneous elements to flow together which the historian today must fundamentally separate.[31]

Lüdemann sees the historian's task as separating or discriminating fact (physical evidence) from faith testimonies. He disagrees that historical facts are merely derived from faith testimonies. He responds to a common objection:

> Event and interpretation are always interlocked so that it is impossible to access the event [resurrection] without the interpretation [kerygma]. Thus, many Easter texts are unfit for historical investigation.[32]

To this, Lüdemann responds that this objection applies not only to Christian texts but all texts and myths in general. Lüdemann rejects the postmodernist slogan, "There are no

[30]Lüdemann, *The Resurrection of Christ*, 21.

[31]Lüdemann, *The Resurrection of Christ*, 14.

[32]Ibid., 21.

facts, only interpretations." He believes the facts exist first, before their interpretations. He is skeptical of those who say that "the resurrection traditions cannot be disentangled and the historical sources inadequate"[33], for they might only serve an apologetic agenda to defend the faith.

Lüdemann's position in the history-kerygmatic is clear. Between two ends, he situates himself on the far end of history. He insists that there must be historical evidence first on Jesus' resurrection, before any discussion of faith is opened up. For him, the natural explanations lay firmly on the grounds of faith and belief. Seemingly a scholar from the Second Quest, he agrees with Kasper's first two principles on history and theology.[34] However, having made his point, Lüdemann rejects Kasper's third principle, stating the inter-dependency of history and kerygma. Unlike scholars from the Third Quest who have the New Testament proclamations as their starting point, Lüdemann strongly argues that history can stand alone and be independent of the kerygmatic interpretation. Therefore, he affirms continuity *only* from history *to* kerygma, and the reverse direction of continuity is impossible: history *through* kerygma. In other words, for Lüdemann, before there could be any form of Easter faith, there has to be a prior proven and untouched-by-faith Easter history. In summary, he maintains that a one-way, not two-way street, exists between history and kerygma.

Back to the First Quest mindset

In this sense, Lüdemann does not fully subscribe to the principles of the Second Quest; but only partially, as he insists on his biases. Here, we see that although the historian's methodology

[33]Ibid., 20.

[34]Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 33-34.

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belongs to the Second Quest, his mindset remains on the outdated First Quest. Scholars from the First Quest are notable for their allegiance to the principles of the Enlightenment, where rationalistic thinking is glorified while doctrines and miracles are easily dismissed.[35]

From his book, we quote Lüdemann's own words, admitting his influences from the Enlightenment. He comments on the objection that even if we have no eyewitness accounts of the resurrection, we do have the testimony of Paul himself, who claims to have seen the "Risen One." He says:

> Even if the above objection is correct, the question of the manner of the resurrection must be legitimate as long as theology makes a claim to be "scientific" and to be related to the enlightenment.[36]

Lüdemann wants it to be scientific and related to the Enlightenment. Additionally, in Chapter 5 of his conclusions, he claims the non-resurrection of Jesus. Reacted upon by modern scholars who see this as a negative consequence of the historical search, he accepts that:

> This 'modern' circle, which always wants to be in tune with the times, has recently criticized me for being an Enlightenment fundamentalist, for slashing and burning religion, and sowing only doubt [...] "Precisely because our nature is such that we cannot face life without illusions, I happily accept the taunting label of historical or Enlightenment fundamentalist.[37]

The man has spoken. Lüdemann even claims for himself the title of "historical or Enlightenment fundamentalist." This reveals that, like the First Quest scholars, he is dominated by the principles and mindset of the Enlightenment, producing

[35]Jeremias, *The Problem of the Historical Jesus,* 5.

[36]Lüdemann, *The Resurrection of Christ*, 20.

[37]Lüdemann, *The Resurrection of Christ*, 204.

work that was not as objective as they claimed.[38] They reconstruct a portrait of a historical Jesus fashioned in their own image, which is only earthly and not divine and over the Church.[39]

The Limits of the Historian's Presuppositions

This section puts into further question Lüdemann's methodology, which only had the Christian texts as its starting point and basis. In Chapter 3, "The Procedure," he says:

> The task of Chapter 3 is to offer fresh translations of the most important early Christian texts concerning Jesus' resurrection and to assess their historical value [...] Therefore, my analysis begins with the old kerygmatic formulations and only after that turns to the texts of the Gospels and of other noncanonical early texts.[40]

The kicker here is the phrase "my analysis begins with the old kerygmatic formulations." It is hard to think that a serious historian like him, who strongly insists that historical fact precedes and is independent of the kerygma, actually begins (and ends) his historical inquiry and arguments from within the kerygma - the Christian proclamation itself. Is not his "strictly historical inquiry" questionable and self-defeating? Thomas Raush has a supporting statement:

> The Gospels and other New Testament documents are written in light of the Resurrection and of the disciple's Easter experience of new life in Jesus; they are products of Christian Faith. Though there is considerable historic memory enshrined in the texts... they do not count as historical writings in the modern sense.[41]

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[38]Rausch, *Who is Jesus?*, 15.

[39]Jeremias, *The Problem of the Historical Jesus*, 15-47.

[40]Lüdemann, *The Resurrection of Christ*, 23.

[41]Rausch, *Who is Jesus?*, 6.

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Rausch understood that primarily, the scriptures were born from the kerygmatic proclamation, as he explains, "the early Christian texts were written to proclaim faith in the risen Jesus present in the Christian community and the lives of his disciples, not to document the story of his life as a modern historian might do." By entering his historical investigation through the kerygmatic formulations, the products of the Christian faith themselves, Lüdemann mistakenly contradicts himself. He is undermining his own historical assertions, rendering his conclusions unfounded and totally absurd. This leads to a question: are there limits to a historical-critical study of Jesus, particularly on his resurrection? Thomas Rausch has more to say on the limits of historical-critical research. He states:

> Historical-critical research by itself is not sufficient. First, some elements at the center of the Jesus story, for example, his resurrection, are not accessible to historical research or are only obliquely so...[42]

Rausch explains further that a "strictly historical" approach is not really objective but is conditioned by the proponents' own unrecognized secular, modernist, or postmodern biases. Such an approach cannot "prove" the resurrection, nor establish the truth of miracle stories, but only tell if these are rooted in the Jesus tradition or are later additions.

Thus, we are drawn to believe that a pure or "strictly historical inquiry," particularly on Jesus' resurrection, is a tough subject to tackle. Especially when the methods used are characteristic of Second Quest methodology coupled with Lüdemann's narrow, overly rationalistic, and naturalist approach, such a study can only go so far.

[42]Ibid., 6.

Conclusion

While Lüdemann's impressive work and sincere scholarship of the historicity of Jesus' resurrection are admirable, his methodology finds several weaknesses, compromising his historical reconstructions and conclusions.

For one, his methodology of historical inquiry is outdated and limited, reflecting approaches of historical inquiry from the Second Quest of the Historical Jesus. Also, his presuppositions of a strictly historical-critical method reveal vestiges of a First Quest mindset still glorifying the rationalistic thinking of the Enlightenment from the 1680s. He intends his study to be a purely historical investigation with historical facts per se as starting point, but instead begins his analysis in the kerygma or the church's faith interpretation of the resurrection. This largely contradicts his desired methodology.

Lüdemann would have arrived at different conclusions had he updated his methods of "historical inquiry" on the life and story of Jesus, especially the resurrection. Despite Lüdemann performing solid exegetical work on the Easter narratives, a more comprehensive historical investigation clearly necessitates new historical methods from the Third Quest. This is proven by Third Quest scholars like J.P. Meier[43] who affirm the historicity of the resurrection with their more recent findings. The Resurrection of Christ can, therefore, stand the scrutiny of historical research. Albeit pure textual analysis, using literary disciplines alone from the Second Quest - or perhaps, a personal skeptical bias - is in itself insufficient as Lüdemann has proven.

As a recommendation, future studies should continue to investigate the historicity of Jesus' Resurrection. Such studies

[43]Meier, "The Real Jesus," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XAN3kQHTKWI.

take on great significance as they spell vast contributions to the whole of Christian faith and tradition. Related studies could look into how Third Quest scholars like J. P. Meier, Gary Habermas, or William Lane Craig provided new evidence for the historicity of the resurrection. During Lüdemann's time, from the late 20th century to the early 21st century, Meier had already produced his remarkable three-volume work "*A Marginal Jew*" while Habermas was in the works of building his case for the resurrection debating with Antony Flew.[44]

Unfortunately, Lüdemann did not interact as much with these Third Quest contemporary scholars from what he calls the "modern circle."[45] It is tragic to read his chilling Epilogue in the last pages of his book. In his closing statements, we discover that the acclaimed historian and New Testament scholar firmly stands his ground on the non-resurrection of Christ, effectively "annuls the Christian tradition", re-interprets Easter faith as only keeping the flame of love and goodness for others in this brief and passing human existence in a cold impersonal universe. He sees the end of his life discarding all belief in the hope and joy of the resurrection, refuting an ultimate eschatology where Christ lovingly awaits him in the life hereafter.[46]

[44]Gary R. Habermas, Antony Flew, and Terry L. Miethe, *Did Jesus Rise from the Dead? The Resurrection Debate*. 1st ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 15-29.

[45]"Book Review on Lüdemann 's 'The Resurrection of Christ: A Historical Inquiry,'" *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 4, no. 2 (2006): 225–29.

[46]Lüdemann, *The Resurrection of Christ*, 209.