

CHAPTER 5

Jesus' Resurrection

Western Christianity enjoyed a quiet, confident belief in Jesus' resurrection up to the nineteenth century. But the Enlightenment and nineteenth-century historical criticism raised many questions. Reason doubted the plausibility of a person being raised from the dead and appearing publicly. When critical historiography was applied to biblical texts, the historicity of the resurrection narratives was called into question.¹ As a result, theological reflection on the resurrection of Jesus has taken on an apologetic character. This means that theology includes the task of explaining the resurrection of Jesus within a context of the fundamental problems or questions that arise from the conjunction of history and theology. For example, how are we to balance a critical historian's approach to the New Testament data pertaining to the resurrection and the theologian's reading of the same data as kerygma or the Word of God? How does one move from historical witness to a theological assertion of the resurrection that is intelligible to our world? Although these questions appear technical, an apologetic structure also responds to the exigencies of people within the churches. On the one hand, the gospels present what appear to be straightforward stories of an empty tomb being discovered, Jesus appearing to the disciples, Jesus being alive and interacting with the disciples. On the other hand, to read these texts naively as simple descriptive narratives is to misread them, for at bottom this is not what they are. And to so misread them as to encourage a naive, childlike belief does not help Christians integrate their faith with the rest of their lives. Basic adult catechesis must deal with this issue; the adult faith of the ordinary Christian is being forced to enter a certain postcritical or second naivete. It follows that the apologetic character of current resurrection theology also corresponds to the catechetical task of sorting out and explaining the elements of faith within the churches.

1. Joseph Moingt, *L'Homme qui venait de Dieu* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1993), 347; Thorwald Lorenzen, *Resurrection and Discipleship: Interpretive Models, Biblical Reflections, Theological Consequences* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1995), 37–42.

The structure of such a critical and apologetic approach to the resurrection of Jesus cannot avoid a certain tension between history and theology. This involves staying close to the New Testament data on Jesus' resurrection, and considering the testimony of the disciples, the narratives of the appearances and the empty tomb, and the confessions concerning the risen Christ. It also involves submitting these data to critical reflection, interpreting the testimony that is given, and trying to construct an understanding of the resurrection that both makes sense of this data and is intelligible to people living at the beginning of the third millennium. But this task of correlation is complicated by a pluralism of interpretations both on the level of scriptural data and theological reconstruction. There is no firm consensus on the character of the resurrection in the New Testament witnesses, which are multiple, nor on the historicity of the appearance narratives or the empty tomb tradition. And there is a whole spectrum of theological construals of the nature and significance of the resurrection in Christian faith.

This pluralism puts constraints on a chapter that tries to deal with the resurrection of Jesus in a short space. At least one must be clear in one's goals. My aim here is to propose one way of understanding what it means to say that Jesus is risen. The question implies attempting to explain theologically the Christian belief that Jesus is alive because God raised Jesus out of death. What is the structure of this Christian confession? What is the evidence? And what logic provides its intelligibility? But given the complexity and pluralistic character of the discussion, I will begin with a definition of the premises, presuppositions, and methodological options that help constitute the framework of this chapter. Christians generally agree that Jesus is risen. But since no consensus prevails on what this means, or how its meaning is to be interpreted, the least one can do in a single chapter is to be clear about the method governing one's own position.

This chapter, therefore, will unfold in the following way: the first section will define a hermeneutical perspective on the resurrection. The second will survey the kind of testimony to the resurrection presented to us by the New Testament witness. The third section will develop a theoretical reconstruction of the genesis of the Christian belief in Jesus' resurrection. And the fourth and concluding section will comment on the significance of the resurrection and this theological interpretation of it.

A HERMENEUTICAL PERSPECTIVE

I begin this discussion of the resurrection of Jesus with a clarification of the perspective that will guide it, an initial definition of what the term "resurrection" means in this christology, and a statement of principles and presuppositions that will be operative in the argument.

In what sense is the orientation of these reflections called hermeneutical? All understanding is at the same time interpretation. But with the

term "hermeneutical" I want to call attention to the deliberate attempt to form a bridge between history and theology, and to do this in a number of different senses. The hermeneutical theories of Gadamer and Ricoeur have as one of their concerns the interpretation of the past as meaningful and true in and for the present situation. A hermeneutical perspective, therefore, explicitly intends to be faithful to the witness of the past, and to interpret it in such a way that it comes to bear on present-day consciousness. Hermeneutical theory thus participates simultaneously in the disciplines of history and constructive theology; it forms a bridge that so connects historical and present-day meanings as to render them interdependent. A hermeneutical perspective also tries to hold together attention to data, in the sense of empirical or imaginable events, and the constructive task of discovering transcendent theological meaning that is mediated by these events. It seeks to balance history, in the sense of what happens in this world, with transcendent reality by using the category of symbol.

THE SYMBOL OF RESURRECTION

In the introduction to this chapter I referred to the pluralism that characterizes the discussion of the resurrection of Jesus on almost every level.² This pluralism descends to the very meaning of the symbol "resurrection," which is not a univocal idea even in the New Testament. What is the object of this belief? The meaning of resurrection cannot be decided cleanly by the New Testament witness. And yet the essential meaning of resurrection is a matter of systematic importance, for it will influence the interpretation of all the issues that attend the discussion. For example, if one thinks that resurrection is the resuscitation of a corpse, one will tend to read the story of the empty tomb in literal, historical terms. If one thinks the resurrection means Jesus living on in the faith of the community, one can discount the question of the historicity of the empty tomb stories as irrelevant. The pluralism of the meaning of resurrection in the New Testament, however, does not provide license to decide the meaning of the resurrection on an a priori basis. One should be guided in one's conception by the data of the New Testament. In effect, the pluralism at the level

2. Two examples of typologies of understandings of the resurrection are those of David Fergusson, "Interpreting the Resurrection," *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 38 (1985), 287-305, who distinguishes radical, liberal, and traditional types, and Lorenzen, *Resurrection and Discipleship*, 11-111, who describes traditional, liberal, evangelical, and liberationist positions. John Galvin, "The Resurrection of Jesus in Contemporary Catholic Systematics," *Heythrop Journal*, 20 (1979), 123-45, surveys the range of different theories among Catholic theologians of the nature of the resurrection of Jesus, the genesis of faith in the resurrection, and the place of the resurrection in Christian faith. Hans Küng, in *On Being a Christian* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1976), 370-81, provides a handy description of a variety of different theories on how faith in the resurrection came about historically.

of the New Testament witness forces one to define at the outset the meaning of the symbol, at least in a preliminary way. But in so doing, we shall try faithfully to incorporate New Testament data.

Exegetes point to two quite distinct symbolizations of the destiny of Jesus at his death.³ The first finds a center of gravity around the equivalent of the English word "resurrection" itself. It is reflected in many texts. For example, during the course of his discourse at Pentecost, Peter speaks of Jesus' resurrection in this way: "This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses" (Acts 2:32). In another speech, later on in Acts, Peter uses almost the same formula: "They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and made him manifest; not to all the people but to us, who were chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead" (Acts 10:39-41). "The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon" (Luke 24:34). This basic creedal statement exists in various forms: God raised him, or, he was raised, or, he rose. The metaphor lying behind this general conception of the resurrection from death is an awakening from sleep and rising. It is distinctive in that it proposes the resurrection as a discrete event within a series of events in the continuous life of Jesus. Thus, Jesus lived, was executed and died, was buried, and then rose, and appeared to the disciples who ate and drank with him, and, finally, he ascended into glory. But the central burden of this symbol is the restoration of life to Jesus; it communicates that he is alive with new life by God's power. "It means the complete restoration to life of Jesus of Nazareth at every level of his being."⁴

The second conception of what happened to Jesus at his death is quite different from the first. It is contained in such terms as "exaltation" and "glorification." One also finds it in many texts. For example, during the same discourse in the second chapter of Acts, Peter continues as follows: "Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you see and hear" (Acts 2:33). Jesus was "taken up in glory" (1 Tim 3:16). This second line of imagery is found especially in some of the christological hymns. In this language of exaltation and glorification, the symbol is developed in contrast with descent, humility, and an earthly condition here below; it describes Jesus' destiny as ascent, glorification, a state of being with God above, exaltation (Phil 2:6-11). "Both ascension and exaltation derive from the symbolism of the lifting of the righteous man up to heaven."⁵ Jesus after his death is now in a state of glory; he is

3. I am dependent on Xavier Léon-Dufour, *Resurrection and the Message of Easter* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974), 5-45, for this analysis. This work is cited hereafter as *Resurrection*. Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), 533-44, deals with the distinction and relation between the notions of resurrection and exaltation.

4. Léon-Dufour, *Resurrection*, 20.

5. Léon-Dufour, *Resurrection*, 35.

Lord. The metaphor is not one of resurrection but of glorification: over against his humility in the flesh and death, Jesus is now revealed to be exalted in another sphere.⁶

Comparing the two symbols, both affirm or express that Jesus did not remain in the power of death but is alive. But they do so with different emphases. Resurrection, to be awakened, emphasizes the continuance of life; exaltation emphasizes being lifted up out of this empirical world. Resurrection tends to locate Jesus restored to life in this world where he appeared. Exaltation carries Jesus out of this world where there are no longer appearances nor a succession of events in time; Jesus' being glorified is a single mystery. These two patterns coexisted, showing that there can be different symbols to express the same experience, that "resurrection" is not the exclusive term for indicating the New Testament message about the destiny of Jesus after his death.⁷

How is this symbol of Jesus being resurrected to be interpreted today, especially in the light of the discussions that surround various aspects of "resurrection"? Although it is difficult, if not impossible, to arrive at a positive concept of Jesus' resurrection, a number of outside limit-statements can be established that help to define the symbol, at least in relation to other interpretations of it. A first fundamental point is that it is certain that the early disciples believed that Jesus himself was alive, had been raised, and was exalted in glory with God. In other words, the New Testament witness is not merely to an existential or communitarian phenomenon, that Jesus lives on in the faith of the community, but is "realist" and "objective," if such terms are appropriate, in affirming that God so acted in Jesus' behalf that he is alive. The existentialist interpretation of Jesus' resurrection includes a valuable perspective and rich insights into the experience and effect of Jesus' resurrection in the community of disciples.⁸ We shall borrow from the existentialist position in understanding how faith in Jesus' resurrection came about and the impact this faith had on the community. But it falls short of the position represented here in its agnosticism about the real continuity of Jesus' existence as an individual with God.

Second, Jesus' resurrection was not a return to life in this world, was not a resuscitation of a corpse, was not a resumption of an existence con-

6. Léon-Dufour, *Resurrection*, 29.

7. Léon-Dufour, *Resurrection*, 38-45.

8. Rudolf Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), 33-44, and "The Primitive Christian Kerygma and the Historical Jesus," in Carl Braaten and Roy A. Harrisville, eds., *The Historical Jesus and the Kerygmatic Christ: Essays on the New Quest of the Historical Jesus* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1964), 15-42; Willi Marxsen, "The Resurrection of Jesus as a Historical and Theological Problem," in C. F. D. Moule, ed., *The Significance of the Message of the Resurrection for Faith in Jesus Christ* (London: SCM, 1968), 15-50, *The Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), and *Jesus and Easter: Did God Raise the Historical Jesus from the Dead?* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990).

tained in or limited by the space-time continuum. Rather, Jesus' resurrection was a passage into "another world," an assumption into the sphere of the ultimate and absolute reality who is God and who, as creator, is other than creation. What occurred in the resurrection of Jesus pertains to another order of reality that transcends this world because it is God's realm. Transcendence does not mean "unrelated to finite reality." God is transcendent, but as creator and savior God is also engaged with finite reality. But God is infinitely and qualitatively other than created reality, and being in "God's sphere" implies transcending this world in a way that human imagination cannot follow. For this reason it is better to say that Jesus' resurrection is not an historical fact, because the idea of an historical fact suggests an empirical event which could have been witnessed and can now be imaginatively construed.

The language used here stands in contrast to those who speak of Jesus' resurrection as an historical fact or datum. For example, Wolfhart Pannenberg, who places the resurrection at the center of his christology, affirms that the resurrection was a public historical event open to the scrutiny of historians. He is motivated by an apologetic concern and understands revelation as being mediated through history. But he does not answer the critical epistemological questions of how the historical event of the resurrection appeared or might be imagined by historians.⁹ Nicholas Lash also insists, first, that the resurrection of Jesus is a fact. "If the doctrine of the resurrection is true, it is factually true, and the fact to which it refers is a fact about Jesus."¹⁰ But he goes on to characterize the resurrection as an "historical fact," "at least in the sense that no attempt to estimate the truth of stories about Jesus can ignore the historian's testimony."¹¹ Lash does not want the resurrection to be divorced from historical reference, to be considered merely or entirely a subjective perception on the part of the disciples, but as related to public testable data. While those reasons are solid in themselves, they do not, I think, justify calling the resurrection a historical fact. To do so tends too strongly to associate the resurrection with the empirical, making it a this-worldly event, and subject to an imaginative construal. Such historicizing undermines the fundamental nature of the resurrection as a transcendent object of faith.

Third, the resurrection was the exaltation and glorification of the whole individual person, Jesus of Nazareth. The one who was resurrected is no one else than Jesus, so that there is continuity and personal identity between Jesus during his lifetime and his being with God. But this resur-

9. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968), 88–106, insists on the public historical character of the resurrection by arguing for the historicity of the appearances referred to by Paul in 1 Cor 15:1–8 (as distinct from the appearances in the gospels) and the empty tomb narratives.

10. Nicholas Lash, "Easter Meaning," *Heythrop Journal*, 25 (1984), 12. In other words, the idea of a fact corresponds to what I have described as the realistic truth of the resurrection concerning Jesus.

11. Lash, "Easter Meaning," 13.

rection need not entail the assumption of his physical corpse. One should conceive the symbolism operating in the other direction: the idea of the disappearance of Jesus' body is a way of signifying that the integral person, Jesus of Nazareth, was resurrected.¹² Jewish anthropology demanded in some way at least an attenuated body for the integrity of the person. The insistence of the texts on the disappearance of Jesus' body is thus an insistence on Jesus' real resurrection. The bodily resurrection of Jesus thus means that Jesus in his whole integral identity has been assumed into God's life. But the resurrection may be conceived as a meta-historical and meta-empirical happening at the moment of death, and does not require the disappearance of Jesus' corpse. Identifying the resurrection with the empirical disappearance of the body of Jesus may be seen as a category mistake that tends to distort the symbol.

Finally, it seems important to insist again on the transcendent character of Jesus' resurrection. What happened to Jesus in and through his death is transcendent; it is an eschatological reality that transpired in a region that is not circumscribed by the physicality of the finite world. Jesus was not, as far as we know, transferred to another space and time. Because being exalted is transcendent, the term "resurrection" is symbolic in pointing attention to another order of reality, that of existing within the creator God's own life, which cannot be grasped directly or immediately. Being resurrected is an object of faith-hope: faith, as an engaged commitment to the reality symbolized in the story of Jesus; hope, as openness to the future, and as involving concern about one's own destiny. At their source in the human spirit as such, at the core of human openness to all reality and to the future, faith and hope are identical. Faith in the message of Jesus and hope for absolute being with God form the ground of the recognition of the resurrection of Jesus. This faith-hope fully engages and is partly driven by the creative side of the imagination. The sheer openness to reality that characterizes the human spirit is channeled through the imagination to envisage possibilities that transcend actuality. Here the imagination "sees" real possibilities on the basis of creative extrapolation from the present. In this dynamic sense, faith-hope in the resurrection gains expression as a function of the creative imagination. This will be developed more fully in the course of this chapter, but at this point it serves to define the region of the meaning of resurrection. The resurrection is not a datum lying on the surface of history, or in the region where dead bodies are buried. As a transcendent reality resurrection can only be appreciated by faith-hope.¹³

12. Galvin, "The Resurrection of Jesus," 126, 132-34.

13. Gerald O'Collins makes a distinction between a physical resurrection, suggesting a reanimation of Jesus' corpse, and a bodily resurrection, suggesting the resurrection of Jesus' personal reality or self. This helps to clarify the meaning of "bodily." Gerald O'Collins, *Jesus Risen: An Historical, Fundamental and Systematic Examination of Christ's Resurrection* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 122.

Almost all of the theological problems connected with resurrection revolve around a sensible, imaginative construal of it. In earlier chapters I underscored the active role of the imagination that is engaged by Jesus research. When we begin to talk of the resurrection, however, this function of the imagination causes problems. "The reality of the resurrection itself therefore is completely *intangible* and *unimaginable*."¹⁴ Use of the imagination, of course, is encouraged by the New Testament witness which, although it does not describe or portray the resurrection itself, is filled with testimonies to Jesus alive in vivid, imaginative stories about Jesus appearing. The stories propose objective, public, extraordinary events with a divine cause. God is thus shown as intervening in such a way that the immediate effects are visible, and God or God's angelic envoys appear as an immediate presence and cause of historical events. The reader is naturally drawn into these stories, and imagination is schooled in this concreteness. But the sensible imagination is precisely what tends to render the resurrection incredible today. As long as the resurrection itself is tied to the sensible representations, one will operate at a level of understanding that caricatures the symbol and unnecessarily causes problems for faith. It inevitably leads to a set of questions that mislead: "Where was Jesus when his body was being prepared for burial and finally laid in the tomb?" "What happened to Jesus' body?" "What kind of body was Jesus' resurrected spiritual body that passed through walls?" These questions are inappropriate to the reality of resurrection. It will become clear in the course of this chapter that the imaginative accounts of the New Testament are symbolic vehicles for expressing faith in and asserting the reality of Jesus' resurrection.

In sum, what is the nature of the resurrection? It is the assumption of Jesus of Nazareth into the life of God. It is Jesus being exalted and glorified within God's reality. This occurred through and at the moment of Jesus' death, so that there was no time between his death and his resurrection and exaltation. This is a transcendent reality which can only be appreciated by faith-hope. I take this to be a middle and mediating position between an existentialist and an empirical-historicist interpretation of the New Testament witness.

THE OBJECT OF HISTORICAL INQUIRY

Since the resurrection of Jesus is an indescribable and unimaginable transcendent reality, how is it to be studied with an historical and genetic method in christology? This question can be answered unambiguously: through the reactions of the disciples who recognized and were affected

14. Küng, *On Being a Christian*, 350. Küng is clear and perceptive in drawing attention to this problem. The imagination tends to bind the transcendent reality of Jesus' being exalted to describable earthly conditions and thereby reduce its transcendent character.

by this transcendent event. In other words, the analysis which follows focuses its attention on the New Testament witness, and pursues an investigation of the resurrection through the reactions and testimony to it of the first witnesses. The resurrection has a bearing on history through those who recognized it in faith and have provided a public witness to their experience. The New Testament is the record of the witness of faith to Jesus resurrected.

It is generally if not universally agreed that with the execution of Jesus the disciples were left confused and discouraged. There is evidence that they left Jerusalem, perhaps fled, in the wake of what was taken to be the disaster of Jesus' crucifixion. But at the other end of the New Testament witness one finds a Jesus movement that evolves into the Christian church and an autonomous faith and religion. The historical question that is posed here is directed toward the disciples: what happened to them to cause this reversal? The witness of the gospels says that they encountered Jesus risen, but what is this Easter experience of the disciples? How are we to understand the dynamics of what occurred in their lives to reverse the trajectory of despair initiated by the sudden and violent death of Jesus? A critical, hermeneutical method in christology approaches the resurrection not only by a theological analysis of the texts of the New Testament, that is, by an internal literary criticism, but also by an inquiry into the experience behind the early testimony to the resurrection as this is recorded in the New Testament. The experience of the resurrection is the bridge, the connection, between Jesus' own public ministry and the christologies that were developed and recorded in the New Testament. It also forms a bond uniting the first disciples with Christians today.

One of the principles that will govern this inquiry into the Easter experience that led to the affirmation that Jesus is risen is the principle of analogy. There are several ways of expressing this principle and its implications.¹⁵ A positive statement of the principle is that one must understand historical events within a unified ontological framework. This means simply that if one is to understand something and affirm that it is true, one has to be able to grasp its intelligibility and its possibility of existence. And this can only be done on the basis of some analogy with what one experiences as being intelligible and true within the sphere of common human experience today. Of course, one must be rather careful not to allow one's own personal experience to short-circuit the broad range of common human experience. A negative statement of the same idea is that one should ordinarily not expect to have happened in the past what is presumed or proven to be impossible today.

The question of the uniqueness of the resurrection of Jesus provides an example of how the principle of analogy is relevant. Jesus' resurrection is often depicted as a completely unique event and totally unexpected. But Paul is explicit in affirming the analogy between Jesus' resurrection and

15. See Roger Haight, *Dynamics of Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 172-73.

our own in the following terms: "But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ" (1 Cor 15:20-23). The resurrection of Jesus and the resurrection of all human beings are interdependent concepts, that of Jesus being the "first fruits" or prototype of the latter. Paul states that there is a kind of reciprocal condition of possibility that obtains between the two concepts. "For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied" (1 Cor 15:16-19).

If one can make the distinction within the symbol of resurrection between dimensions corresponding to the ideas of resurrection narrowly conceived and exaltation seen earlier, one might say that what happened to Jesus at his death differs from the destiny of other human beings not insofar as it is resurrection but insofar as it is exaltation or glorification.¹⁶ This would provide a way of distinguishing the unique identity and destiny of Jesus of Nazareth, a concept which is still to be discussed. The analogy and correlation between Jesus' resurrection and the resurrection that Christians hope will be the destiny of all human life lends credibility to the genesis of faith in Jesus' resurrection. The principle of analogy legitimates this continuity while at the same time allowing that Jesus' resurrection remains distinct and different from the object of a common human hope. The principle means that the resurrection of Jesus is in some respects *sui generis*, while in others it should be understood within the realm of the possibilities of human hope.

The principle of analogy generates another application that is clearly enunciated by Edward Schillebeeckx: "There is not such a big difference between the way we are able, after Jesus' death, to come to faith in the crucified-and-risen One and the way in which the disciples of Jesus arrived at the same faith."¹⁷ The "not such a big difference" should be interpreted as meaning that there is an analogy between the two. There are differences stemming from the fact that the disciples had a vivid memory of Jesus during his lifetime, and in many cases a personal contact with him. But one must distinguish between the differences of context and situation on the one side and the sameness that characterizes the structure of the experience and affirmation on the other. The disciples' basic experience is that

16. Gerald Bostock, "Do We Need an Empty Tomb?" *The Expository Times*, 105 (1994), 203. The principle will also have a bearing on the consideration of the empty tomb stories. Christians see no contradiction in using the language of resurrection during the very act of burying the dead.

17. Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 346.

Jesus lives in God's glory. This essential experience "is accessible to all Christians, who remain dependent on the initial disciples for the knowledge of the historical Jesus which enables them to believe and hope that [the] transcendental desire for resurrection has been fulfilled in him."¹⁸ This principle of the continuity of Christian experience across the differences of circumstance and historical situation allows one to understand more intimately the deep structure of what is going on within, or what is represented by, the gospel narratives. The principle of analogy works in both directions; it gives the inquirer leverage in understanding the past, and it gives the texts of the past a right to be heard in our distinctly different situation today.

To sum up this first stage of our discussion of the resurrection, this symbol is not to be understood in imaginative categories as something that occurs within the concrete environment of our everyday world. The imagination accompanies all understanding, and it inevitably causes difficulties when applied to this transcendent reality. It is not the imagination that ties human conception to sensible data, but the imagination that constructs new possibilities of being that informs the concept of resurrection. Resurrection should be conceived as belonging to the transcendent sphere, an object of faith-hope which is that of God. But at the same time, we can approach the resurrection obliquely on the basis of the New Testament witness to this faith-hope and its object by means of an inquiry into the human experience that generated the initial conviction that Jesus was alive with God.

THE NEW TESTAMENT WITNESS

Earlier I quoted examples of creedal formulas, concise confessional statements of the kerygma. There are no direct or immediate witnesses to the resurrection in the New Testament, and I have indicated why that is the case in principle. I now want briefly to consider the indirect kinds of witness to the resurrection contained in the New Testament, namely, narratives about the discovery of his tomb empty and appearances of Jesus. I begin with the earliest and perhaps single most authoritative witness of all, Paul, who although he is completely silent about an empty tomb, lists a series of occasions in which Jesus appeared to people. And still more astonishingly, Paul's testimony includes what seems to be an eye-witness account of an appearance of Jesus to him. This whole treatment will amount to little more than a taking of a position, since I will deal only schematically with the evidence and only by examples. The two examples

18. Galvin, "The Resurrection of Jesus," 128, paraphrasing Karl Rahner, "Hope and Easter," *Christian at the Crossroads* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), 90-91. "The evidence of the disciples and our own inner evidence of the experience of the living power of Jesus . . . together form one testimony: he lives." Rahner, *ibid.*, 90.

of appearances are the one to Paul and to the disciples on their way to Emmaus. The point is to show how the data may be handled hermeneutically, for space does not allow exhaustively building a case.

ST. PAUL: KERYGMA, APPEARANCE, AND CALLING

The fifteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians is an extensive discussion of the theme of resurrection that begins with Paul's witness to the message that he himself received. It is clear, direct, and forceful:

(v. 3) For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, (4) that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, (5) and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. (6) Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. (7) Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. (8) Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

The text is important because of the number of significant features it contains. I begin by commenting on the classic formula of the kerygma about Jesus: "he was raised." Second, among the appearances that Paul lists is the one to himself. Luke's description of that appearance in Acts deserves attention. And, thirdly, I shall briefly note the aspect of calling that is intrinsic to the appearance narratives.

The Kerygmatic Formula

Paul's statement in v. 4 that "he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures" is the oldest statement of the Easter message and its most authoritative form. Since Paul received it himself, presumably on his conversion, it is part of the earliest tradition and can be dated within five years of Jesus' death. The meaning of the formula is "that his whole self in his entire psychosomatic existence was transformed and entered thereby into the eschatological existence."¹⁹ As was noted earlier, this is an eschatological and meta-historical event correlated with a general expectation of a resurrection of the dead (1 Cor 15:16).

The Appearance to Paul

The passage 1 Corinthians 15:1-8 contains a straightforward statement that Jesus appeared to many, in different situations and constellations of circumstances. An apologetic note is struck in v. 6 when Paul says some of the

19. Reginald H. Fuller, *The Formation of the Resurrection Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 18. See also 30-34, 48-49, 169-70. Edward Schillebeeckx analyzes the New Testament data and interprets it in *Jesus*, 320-97, 516-44.

witnesses are still alive, as if to invite verification. More than any other single text, this one lends credibility to the phenomenon of appearances generally. But one does not have to check the other witnesses, because Paul himself is one: Jesus appeared to Paul (v. 8). Paul uses a standard expression for Jesus' appearances in characterizing Jesus' appearance to him. This indicates that in Paul's mind Jesus' appearance to him was equivalent to the earlier appearances.²⁰ One thus has a personal testimony to an appearance of Jesus.

According to Paul, Christ "was seen" by him, or Christ "appeared to him," or Christ "showed himself" to him. The verb *ophthē* can carry all of these meanings. But in 1 Corinthians 9:1 Paul changes the passive character of his receiving a vision into an active voice: "Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" The term used in these cases, "to see," "to be seen," or "to show oneself," "to let oneself be seen," is a standard term, used frequently, and thus approaching a technical expression. But should it be understood in a physical sense of seeing, or in a deeper symbolic sense pointing to a religious experience, an encounter, or recognition, or sudden new awareness of Jesus as one who is alive? Or, still more removed from a direct or immediate encounter with Jesus, can the term symbolize an objective conclusion or an inference or more generally mediated conviction *that* Jesus is risen, alive, and exalted with God? A direction for answering these questions has already been set in principle with the characterization of theology as such as a symbolic discipline. All language about transcendent reality is symbolic of experience that is historically mediated. The divergent responses to the question show that one cannot determine the exact nature of this experience by critical-historical means. But one can examine the clues in the New Testament that point toward the symbolic character of the language of the appearances. What are the indications that appearance-language is a way of expressing religious experience?

One way of going about this is to take the case of Paul as paradigmatic. This seems legitimate since his is the only firsthand or personal witness to such an appearance that we possess. Also, he himself ranks his experience of an appearance with those of the other leaders of the community. There are two avenues in which Paul's experience may be examined: first, through his own characterization of it, and second, through Luke's narrative description of it in Acts in the genre of an appearance story (Acts 9:3-19; 21:6-21; 26:12-23).²¹ Each of these approaches will contribute to an understanding of the character of the "appearances" of Jesus.

20. Léon-Dufour, *Resurrection*, 57. Yet, in referring to himself as "one untimely born," Paul also seems to differentiate himself from the others in a way that is not completely clear.

21. This strategy is used by Fuller, in *Resurrection Narratives*. "What we know of Paul's appearances . . . can be applied . . . to the interpretation of the earlier appearances" (43). Others agree with this principle, for example, Pheme Perkins, *Resurrection: New Testament Witness and Contemporary Reflection* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1984), 200; Kenan B. Osborne, *The Resurrection of Jesus: New Considerations for Its Theological Interpretation* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 90-95.

The only New Testament witness who describes the appearances of the risen Jesus does so from a personal, experiential standpoint in terms of religious experience. Paul's own characterization of his own experience is not as a vision. His experiences are not objectified and open for examination. Rather, his language about his experience of the risen Jesus indicates that it is a religious revelation, an internal "seeing" in which God takes the initiative. Referring to his experience on the road to Damascus, he speaks of God who "had called me through his grace," and "was pleased to reveal his Son to me" (Gal 1:15-16). "Paul is a transformed individual, and this transformation is described in a variety of terms: a revelation, being seized by Christ, knowing Christ, seeing Christ, an appearance. In all of this, God is presented as the initiator, and through the event Paul is given a mission."²² Paul's own characterization of his own experience forms a hermeneutical principle for understanding Luke's narrative account of it as a phenomenal event.

Luke's story of the appearance of the risen Christ to Paul is well known: Paul, on his way to Damascus, at around midday encounters a great light, falls to the ground, hears the voice of the Lord who identifies himself as Jesus, is struck blind, is instructed to go to the city, where he is healed and prepared to be the Lord's instrument in the apostolate or mission to the gentiles. It is commonly judged that the three versions of this story (Acts 9, 22, 26) are not historical narratives in the sense of accurately recounting events as they happened. Rather, they are constructions to make a point, communicate a message, in a narrative form, as was customary at the time. As the speeches in Acts were constructed by Luke, so too were the three narratives of Paul's encounter. Just as Paul's speeches in Acts were not transcriptions, neither are these narratives reportorial. Luke may have had a tradition with which to work. In fact, the accounts have a similar structure to other appearances and commissioning accounts in Jewish scripture. But the bottom line is that Luke creatively put together the story of Paul's conversion through an appearance just as he creatively constructed Paul's and others' speeches.²³ The common theme in the three accounts is light. But exactly what this light was and how it was experienced is not clear, for it was "not an ordinary experience capable of ordinary apprehension or neutral observation, but a revelatory event."²⁴ Some

22. Osborne, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 95. In the end, whether the revelatory experiences came through the physical eye or the mind's eye is irrelevant; the point is that the appearances are revelations from God. See Fuller, *Resurrection Narratives*, 30-31. Fuller's view of the New Testament language about the resurrection resembles the logic of symbol: "All such language is analogical. Language was made for the description of events in this age; the New Testament has the problem of conveying events which belong to the eschatological age, but which are disclosed through this-worldly, historical events." *Ibid.*, 33.

23. Osborne, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 101-03.

24. Fuller, *Resurrection Narratives*, 47.

exegetes believe that Paul was referring to this light when he wrote the following with reference to the source of his ministry: "For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Cor 4:6). In sum, there was a before and after to Saul, and this is what the story depicts. "Reduced to basics, what happened involved the (by definition incommunicable) personal experience of the risen Lord, and the ritual acceptance into the community. To give narrative life to that bald statement, Luke employs models and symbols available to him in the tradition."²⁵

Calling and Mission

The experience that Jesus was alive and with God carried the themes of calling and an impulse to continue Jesus' work. The initiative in these experiences, according to the witnesses, came from God. The missionary dimension of the experience involved spreading the movement that had begun with Jesus. This is the explicit message of Paul, and of Luke's depiction of the content of Paul's experience. In the third account of the appearance, Jesus himself announces Paul's mission. The appearance stories are analogous to accounts of the vocation or calling of the prophets in the Jewish scriptures. Willi Marxsen understands the appearance stories as intimately linked to, if not reduced to, a call to mission; they contain the imperative that Jesus' message and cause must be carried forward.²⁶

This theme is formalized in the appearance on the mountain to the eleven that constitutes the conclusion of Matthew's gospel. Of the eleven who gathered at the mountain in Galilee which Jesus had appointed, some worshiped him when he appeared, while others doubted. But Jesus said:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age (Matt 28:18-20).

This engagement with the risen Jesus in such a way that one actively joins his cause and movement is implicit in all the appearance stories. And the strongest warrant for the belief that Jesus is risen lies in the effects of the experience that these stories express. This is the other end of the

25. Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1992), 167. What Luke does is to put "in narrative terms what is essentially an internal transformation." Ibid.

26. See Küng, *On Being a Christian*, 376-77; Marxsen, *The Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth*, 83-86; Léon-Dufour, *Resurrection*, 213-17.