

The Actualization of Christ's Achievement in our Historical Existence

Breaking Out of the New Babylonian Captivity

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Resurrection is the entry into a new moral order that is constituted as a terrestrial reality by the creative act of God, and therefore it is something that happens to individual human beings.

In John 14:12, more or less at the beginning of his long Farewell Speech, Jesus issues a startling pledge to his disciples: "Amen, amen I say to you, the one who believes into me will do the works which I do and greater than these she or he will do because I am going to the Father." Throughout most of the history of the Christian movement such a promise of fabulous possibilities, has tended to be regarded as unimaginable and unfulfillable. Not only has the Church subjected its members to a hierarchical relationship of dependency vis a vis the Christ that would preclude the actualization of such a divine potentiality. As a participant in the culture of the Western world, the Church has been captive to a five hundred year trajectory of material rationality that has eclipsed the reality of possibility. Both the verticality of the faith relationship between Jesus and his disciples and the delimitations of the materialist paradigm, which originated in the nominalism of William of Ockham,¹ have foreclosed the fulfillment of the covenantal promise of John 14:12. Accordingly, those who have embraced the Christian faith throughout this period of time have been confined to another kind of Babylonian Captivity which, like the paralytic at the pool of Bethesda of John 5:5, has prevented them from entering the promised land of health and wholeness and beginning to experience the transcendence implied in Jesus' summons,

"Keep on rising, take up your mattress and keep on walking."

Concomitantly this very same trajectory of material rationality has exerted a dominant influence on the exercise of historical reason in its scientific evaluation of the New Testament's witness to the Easter event. A materialist paradigm determined by causal calculating reason cannot affirm, much less corroborate, the reality of Jesus rising from the dead,² and contemporary New Testament scholarship that operates within this paradigm either compromises the witness of the New Testament or relegates it to the realm of faith. A very recent example is Gerd Luedemann's 1994 monograph, *The Resurrection of Jesus*. In the concluding chapter entitled, "Can We Still Be Christians?" Luedemann writes:

¹ See D.R. McGaughey, "Faith in a Post-Metaphysical Context," *Strangers and Pilgrims* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1997) 443-489. See also 1-34.

² See Richard R. Niebuhr's critique of biblical scholarship's interpretation of Jesus' resurrection in terms of Kantian epistemology in his book, *Resurrection and Historical Reason* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957) 1-71.

“So it is here on the historical Jesus, as he is presented to me by the texts and encounters me as a person through historical reconstruction, that the decision of faith is made, not on the risen Christ as I would have liked him to be, or as, for example, he is accessible archetypally to all human beings as a symbol of the self. However, I *believe* that this Jesus was not given over to annihilation through death, and the notion of his being with God, his exaltation, his resurrection and his life follow almost automatically from our communion with God - but in constant relationship to Jesus’ humanity - without, however, it being possible to make statements about his present being. He is hidden from us as the Exalted One; only God is manifest. We must stop at the historical Jesus, but we may believe that he is also with us as one who is alive now.”³

Why must we stop at the historical Jesus? For Luedemann, of course, it is necessary because the resurrection was nothing more than a hallucination. But is the post-Easter memory of the early Church invalid? And should that memory be disregarded because its formulations, which intimate a new, indeed, a divine possibility of human existence, cannot be subjected to enlightened, materialist reason. Moreover, why is it impossible to make statements about Jesus’ present being? Must the directions which the post-Easter gospels offer for such projections be dismissed? And why is Jesus hidden from us while God is manifest? Is it no longer possible to experience the post-Easter Jesus in the narrative worlds of the four gospels or in those arenas of historical existence that the gospels indicate? Why, after Richard R. Niebuhr’s formidable critique of earlier interpretations of the Easter event, is New Testament scholarship’s investigation of the gospel’s resurrection narratives still determined by the dualism of Kantian epistemology?

Luedemann acknowledges that he has conducted his investigation of the resurrection traditions under the “treasured” influence of Wilhelm Herrmann, and therefore inherently within the framework of Herrmann’s loyalty to nineteenth century historical criticism and its determination by Kantian epistemology. Like other Kantian-oriented theologians, Herrmann identified history with nature as the realm of necessity and therefore presupposed that the scientific methods employed in the investigation of nature can also be applied to the historical-critical analysis of biblical texts. Christian faith cannot find a resting place or a foundation for itself within this Kantian domain of *The Critique of Pure Reason*. While the resurrection traditions of the gospels may be subject to critical analysis, the reality of Jesus rising from the dead to which they bear witness is suspect because, like the other miracles, it cannot be integrated into the causal nexus of either nature or history. Ironically, neither can it be regarded as a “noumenal reality” and apprehended under *The Critique of Practical Reason*, because in his analysis of the antinomies of reason Kant postulates that the thinking self is an immortal soul. The human body is a material reality, subject to the categories of substance and causality. Its finitude cannot actualize the *Summum Bonum* of perfect harmony between human reason and moral law. Practical reason, therefore, presupposes the self-evident proposition of the immortality of the soul, rather than the resurrection of the body, to enable the moral faculty of human being to achieve its moral perfection.

³ G. Luedemann, *The Resurrection of Jesus: History, Experience, Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994) 183. Also his more recent book, *What Really Happened to Jesus: A Historical Approach to the Resurrection* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995) 131-137.

Like Wilhelm Herrmann, Luedemann makes a Kantian-like differentiation between historical criticism and existential faith, but, unlike Herrmann, the “living personality of Jesus” is not encountered in the domain of practical reason, but in the historical-critical reconstruction of New Testament scholars that has been derived from the texts of the New Testament gospels. To quote Luedemann again:

“The man Jesus is the *objective* power which is the enduring basis of the experiences of a Christian. Through Jesus we are ‘first lifted into a true fellowship with God’. Jesus grasps me, makes me bow down, exalts me and makes me blessed, loves me, through all the strata of the tradition. He is the ground of faith.”⁴

But can a historically-critically reconstructed Jesus serve as an adequate foundation on which to build faith? Like Gerd Luedemann, John Dominic Crossan seems to think so. He concludes his critical investigation in *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* with the astonishing sentence, “If you cannot believe in something produced by reconstruction, you may have nothing left to believe in.”⁵ Yet no critical reconstruction of any kind can achieve a representation of the original reality of Jesus’ career beyond the realm of probability. And if such a reconstruction were to be adopted as the ground of faith, faith would be nothing more than intellectual consent.

Luedemann’s form and redaction-critical analysis of the Easter stories results in a virtual identification of the interpretations of the post-Easter Jesus by the earliest Christians with the critical reconstruction of the pre-Easter Jesus.

“Finally, our historical reconstruction led to the insight that the structural characteristics of the Easter experience ... of the forgiveness of sins, the experience of life, the experience of eternity, are contained in the words and story of Jesus. So we have to say that before Easter, everything that was finally recognized after Easter was already present.”⁶

For Luedemann the Easter event, whatever it was, is nothing more than the reinforcement of earlier experiences conveying to the disciples a better understanding of the Jesus they had known. But can this or any historical reconstruction constitute a provenance of human transformation? Can a historically reconstructed Jesus empower us to do his works, much less greater works than those which the gospels attribute to him. What is the basis of the extraordinary possibility that Jesus presupposes for his disciples? It appears that Luedemann’s investigation of the resurrection of Jesus leaves us captive to a Kantian epistemology, which, as Richard R. Niebuhr has recognized, absolutizes the categories of Newtonian science and cosmology as the forms of sensibility and the categories of reason by which the mind organizes and interprets the exogenous world.⁷ But if the universal structure of thought is essentially a sign process, that is, if the mediation of thought is always subject to a historically determined linguistic system, then no epistemological theory can ever establish the limits of pure reason. Luedemann, however, is

⁴ *Resurrection of Jesus*, 182.

⁵ San Francisco: Harper, 1991, 426.

⁶ *Resurrection of Jesus*, 181-182.

⁷ R.R. Niebuhr, *Resurrection and Historical Reason*, 119.

content in his reductionism to embrace an elementary faith. As a last word he acknowledges that “the unity with God experienced in faith continues beyond death...”⁸ That evidently is enough, and consequently he exhorts “Christians to live by the little that they really believe, not by the much that they take pains to believe.”⁹

A postmodern approach to the New Testament witness to Jesus’ resurrection, as it is developed by Marianne Sawicki in her book, *Seeing the Lord: Resurrection and Early Christian Practices*¹⁰ is more efficacious in enabling access to the reality of resurrection than any analysis of the biblical texts that is determined by a critical methodology founded on a Kantian epistemology. The reality of the Easter event is not established by academic scholarship performing autopsies on those gospel narratives that bear witness to the Easter event but rather by engaging in those activities which are prescribed by them: that is, identifying with the hungry and the poor, obeying the teaching of Jesus and devoting oneself to liturgy. Evidently influenced by Jacques Derrida’s dictum, “There is nothing outside of the text;”¹¹ Sawicki contends that the continuity of the risen Lord’s presence and the experience of “seeing the Lord” are constituted by the reality of intertextuality. Of course, if there is nothing outside of the text, there are many different kinds of texts which are inscribed with meaning: not only the great diversity of printed matter, but also culture and human beings. Ironically, however, the texts of the New Testament gospels are like Jesus’ tomb, empty.¹² They will not enable us to encounter the risen Lord. At best they are “professional training manuals” which convey bodily and textual strategies which indicate those contexts and activities in which the risen Lord will be seen. According to Matthew, that experience will occur in the practice of the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount; according to Luke-Acts, it will take place in our participation in and our response to a community of hungry people.¹³ The referents of the term “resurrection,” are established by the gospels and are always beyond the New Testament texts enabling readers to identify and recognize the living presence of the risen Lord in the texts of the world. Accordingly Sawicki argues,

“It would be a misconception to regard the gospel words as referring, after the fact, to some event separate and self-contained that happened independently of those words and that subsists apart from them somewhere in the human past.”¹⁴

And again:

“... those who want to see the Lord must devote themselves to liturgy and the poor (better yet, the liturgy *with* the poor) as well as to printed texts.”¹⁵

Certainly the gospels are not historical reconstructions which re-present the actuality of the unfolding of Jesus’ career in its original Palestinian context. But are they simply “professional training manuals,” designed to instruct us where we will see the risen Lord? As artistically

⁸ *Resurrection of Jesus*, 184.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994.

¹¹ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976) 158.

¹² Sawicki, *Seeing the Lord*, 84-89.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 83, 89-91.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 93. See also 302-303.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 303.

constructed texts they, by the signs that constitute them, put forward potential narrative worlds; and we by the activity of reading (1) transform those signs into people, places, actions and teaching and (2) concomitantly create discrete, self-contained story worlds. Our own discipleship is not deferred as we engage in this aesthetic activity. But we are the advantaged disciples because we are listening to an omniscient narrator informing us of events and actions in the life of Jesus that his original disciples do not experience. For example, we, as the disciples from outside the text, in contrast to the disciples inside the text, (we) learn from the narrator of Mark's gospel the words which the heavenly voice spoke to Jesus as the Spirit descended into him at his baptism, "You are my beloved Son; in you I began to take pleasure." How will we, privileged with this knowledge, how will we answer the question which the disciples verbalize when they have experienced Jesus' authority over the forces of chaos in the stilling of the storm, "Who then is this for even the wind and the sea obey him?" How will we evaluate Simon Peter's confession, "You are the Christ" or how will we judge his subsequent elevation of Jesus to the rank of Elijah and Moses in response to the transfiguration? What happens to us or what do we do when we reach the conclusion of Mark's gospel and discover there is no closure. The end proves not to be the end! According to the youth of Mk.16:5, Jesus has been raised from the dead, and, even as he is no longer in the tomb, he is no longer in the text. He is on his way to Galilee, most likely to inaugurate a second career that will be similar to the first. Inexplicably the three women who came to complete the burial of Jesus' corpse remain silent in spite of the ecstasy of their revelatory experience. What will be our response? Will we believe the good news of Jesus' resurrection? Will we, the disciples outside the text, create a continuation of the narrative by following Jesus to Galilee? Evidently that is our only recourse to determine the truth of the youth's testimony. Words cannot deliver the certainty of Jesus' resurrection, even in the light of the witness of Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus inscribed in the gospel according to Matthew. Nevertheless, their empirical experience of both seeing the risen Lord and grasping his feet is indispensable in establishing the ontological reality of his resurrection.

Jesus did not merely rise into the Christian proclamation, as Rudolf Bultmann maintained; nor did he rise into intertextuality, as Sawicki proposes. At the same time the Easter event is not to be reduced to a hallucination or a psychological episode that occurred within the consciousness of the disciples. In his post-Easter appearances Jesus presented himself to his disciples as an objective—not physical!—but objective reality; and a number of Easter stories utilize attributes of physicality to express that objectivity. According to Lk. 24:34, he invited his disciples to "Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and blood as you see that I have." To provide additional confirmation, he asks for and receives a piece of broiled fish which he eats in their presence.

The ontological reality of Jesus' resurrection from the dead can only be experienced in terms of physicality. Sawicki, therefore, rightly connects resurrection with the bodily imaging of God.¹⁶ Seeing the Lord occurs concretely in "sharing the necessities of life:"¹⁷ that is, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, giving hospitality to the stranger, caring for the sick and visiting the imprisoned, as the parable of the sheep and the goats in Matt. 25:31-46 discloses. Nevertheless, resurrection is more than caring for the poor and celebrating the liturgy.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 336.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 84.

Resurrection is more than engaging in bodily and physical strategies. Resurrection is more than something that happens between and among persons.¹⁸

Resurrection is the entry into a new moral order that is constituted as a terrestrial reality by the creative act of God, and therefore it is something that happens to individual human beings. It is a principle component of the eschatological projection of a new heaven and a new earth that originated in the millennialism of Jewish apocalypticism, and it seems to have made its earliest appearance in the Apocalypse of Isaiah (24-27), specifically in Is. 26:19.

“Your dead shall live; their corpses shall rise.
O dwellers in the dust, awake and sing for joy!
For your dew is a radiant dew and the earth shall give birth to those long dead.”

Dan.12:2 enlarges this eschatological vision to include the despicable and the ignoble.

“Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt.”

Resurrection and its attendant reconstitution of all things is preceded, however, by a cataclysmic judgment that terminates the old moral order. The process of redemption in society has disintegrated.¹⁹ New forms of power have been introduced which have altered the distribution of wealth. The old rules which governed the ordering of power no longer guarantee the truth of things. As political oppression and economic exploitation intensify the social unrest, those who become aware of their disenfranchisement isolate themselves from the current moral order and form communities that are oriented toward the search for a new kind of social being. Intellectual activity aided by scriptural interpretation endeavors to comprehend the changes that have occurred in the social construction of reality.

Exemplifying this phase of millenarian formation is Book 1 of 1 Enoch, which, by an appropriation of the myth of Gen.6:1-4 attributes the disintegration of the current social order to the birth of giants “who consumed the produce of all the people until the people detested feeding them. So the giants turned against the people in order to eat them.”²⁰ These giants are identifiable as systemic structures and social institutions which transcend the power and control of the peasantry and extract the surplus of their agricultural production. The injustices that prevail cannot be eradicated by a reformist response. A new condition of being is required, and therefore the irremediable moral order that predominates must be terminated.

Book 1 of 1 Enoch foretells the eternal punishment of the Watchers, “the children of heaven,” as well as the destruction of the giants. Daniel foresees the annihilation of the four chaos monsters that devour much flesh. The Apocalypse of Weeks anticipates the final judgment to occur during the tenth week of human history:

“... there shall be the eternal judgment and it shall be executed by the angels of the eternal heaven... The first heaven shall depart and pass away; a new heaven shall appear; and all

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹⁹ See Kenelm Burridge, *New Heaven - New Earth: A Study of Millenarian Activities* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969) 4-14.

²⁰ 1 (Ethiopic Apocalypse of) ENOCH, Translation by E. Isaac, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha. Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*, ed. by James H. Charlesworth (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., 1983) I, 16.

the powers of heaven shall shine forever sevenfold. Then after that there shall be many weeks without number forever; it shall be a time of goodness and righteousness, and sin shall no more be heard of forever.”²¹

The Messiah apocalypse of 2 Baruch offers essentially the same vision. The creation will be returned to primordial chaos during the thirteenth epoch of human history, and the fourteenth and final age will mark the beginning of eternal justice and peace.

Resurrection is God’s re-creation of the deceased elect, those who are identified in Is.26:19 as the dead who belong to God: “Your dead shall live; their corpses shall rise.” Resurrection opens the door to a joyful participation in the reconstitution of all things. In the Similitudes of 1 Enoch 62:13-16 Enoch is assured:

“The righteous and elect ones shall be saved on that day... The Lord of the Spirits will abide over them; they shall eat and rest and rise with that Son of Man forever. The righteous and elect ones shall rise from the earth and shall cease being of downcast face. They shall wear the garments of glory. These garments of yours shall become the garments of life from the Lord of the Spirits. Neither shall your garments wear out, nor your glory come to an end before the Lord of the Spirits.”

The Easter appearances of the risen Jesus to Cephas, the Twelve, and “to more than five hundred sisters and brothers at one time” unquestionably engendered intellectual ferment (1 Cor.15:5-6). Recognition was vital requiring the identification of the risen one with Jesus of Nazareth and alternately determining the significance of both the event and the person. Among the variety of interpretations that emerged was the myth of resurrection, derived from the eschatology of Jewish apocalypticism and imposed on the event of Jesus rising from the dead to signify the inauguration of the millenarian vision of a new heaven and a new earth. Attendantly from within this millenarian orientation Jesus himself was identified with the *bar nasha* of Dan.7:13-14, a type of new Adam, who, on the basis of his appearance before the Ancient of Days, recovered the characteristics that distinguish the human being created in the image and likeness of God: dominion, glory and kingship.²² In the Hellenistic Jewish-Christian community the identification of Jesus with the *bar nasha* of Dan.7:13-14 was translated into the christological, but corporately-oriented, title: *ho huios tou anthropou*. By raising Jesus from the dead God appointed him to be the founder of a New Humanity. Accordingly in 1 Cor.15:45 the Apostle Paul acknowledges him to be the “Last Adam” who is a “life-giving spirit,” the image of the glory of God into which those who follow him are being metamorphosed from one degree of glory to another (2 Cor.3:18).

A number of passages in the letters of the Apostle Paul indicate that he embraced this interpretation of the Easter event. Above all, of course, 1 Cor.15; and it is especially obvious in his circular argumentation of verses 12-13:

“Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised.”

²¹ 1 Enoch 91:15-17.

²² See Psalm 8:4-8.

What the Corinthian Christians evidently are rejecting is the eschatology of the resurrection of the dead, a reality of the future when “the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.” In an effort to convince them Paul utilizes the analogy of a grain of wheat in order to develop the difference between two kinds of bodies, the flesh and blood body of the present which has its own glory, and the spiritual body of the future which will be superior in glory to the physical body as one star is superior in splendor to another.

But the millennial myth of resurrection, as applied to the Easter event, not only guarantees the future resurrection. Above all it identifies the reality of Jesus rising from the dead as the beginning of a new creation as well as the birth of a New Humanity. The realized eschatology of the new creation is the hub of Pauline theology from which the spokes of his contextualizing interpretations radiate. Jan Christiaan Beker has articulated it well. The apocalyptic reality of the *regnum Christi* is the “deep structure” or “coherent center” from which “a variety of symbols” is drawn in response to the contingencies of his evangelizing contexts.²³ Paul himself acknowledges it as such in Gal. 6:15.

“For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything, but a new creation. And as many as follow this rule, peace on them and mercy and upon the Israel of God.”

If the Easter event of Jesus rising from the dead, as interpreted by the myth of resurrection, signifies the establishment of a new creation, Jesus’ death accordingly must denote the end of the old creation. In this respect the millennialism of Jewish apocalypticism also functions as the “deep structure” of Pauline theology. For if Jesus’ death terminates the old moral order, Paul can simultaneously declare, as he does in 2 Cor. 5:17, “... old things passed away; new things have happened.”

Moreover, Jesus’ death, like his rising from the dead, becomes a vital factor in the establishment of a paradigmatic experience into which all humanity can enter, namely dying and rising with Christ. Paul enlarges on this in Rom. 6:4.

“Therefore we were buried with him through baptism into death so that even as Christ was resurrected from the dead through the glory of the Father, so let us walk in the newness of life.”

The myth of resurrection, accordingly, provides the key to the interpretation of Jesus rising from the dead and retrospectively to the interpretation of Jesus’ death.

But the consequence of participating in Jesus’ death must be clearly apprehended. “If,” as Paul says, “one died on behalf of all and consequently all died,” that death must be claimed as the end of my involvement in the old moral order. “Old things passed away.” My eschatological death, therefore, terminates my participation in the human condition of sin that dominates the old moral order as well as the alienation which that disease engenders. The wonderful outcome is reconciliation with God. Paul’s understanding of atonement is not derived from the Temple cult but from the interpretation of Jesus’ death as the end of the old creation.²⁴

²³ J. Christiaan Beker, *Paul the Apostle. The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980) 17.

²⁴ See Matt. 27:51-53 for the influence of the millennialism of Jewish apocalypticism.

“For if being enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of his son, how much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.” (Rom.5:10)

We are reconciled to God through the death of his son, but not without our own participation in that death. We are also saved by his life, but not without our participation in his resurrection. There is no cheap grace here!

“Being saved” begins with an entry into the reality of resurrection. It is analogous to the experience of Lazarus, the Beloved Disciple in the narrative world of the Fourth Gospel. After the stone, which seals the cave of non-being in which he is buried, has been rolled away and Jesus has issued the call to come forth, he, with hands and feet bound and his eyes covered with a burial cloth, by some prodigious effort succeeds in exiting from the tomb. Re-created or resurrected, he is ready to begin a journey into a new moral order. But unbinding must first take place before he is able to walk and to see; and since he is unable to set himself free, he needs some assistance from the community to which he belongs. Like Lazarus, our salvation, our being saved, lies in our being unbound and set free. By entering the new creation which God constituted through the Easter event, we have been resurrected with Christ, and therefore we have become members of a New Humanity bearing the identity of “life-giving spirits.” As Paul says in 1 Cor.15:45,

“The first human Adam became a living being; the last Adam a life-giving spirit.”

Those who are “in Christ,” the last Adam, are “life-giving spirits!” That, however, is a paradoxical identity. For although we have died with Christ and have been raised with Christ, and therefore are participating in the New Humanity of “life-giving spirits,” we are undergoing a metamorphosis that is transfiguring us into the image and stature of our pioneer, the resurrected Christ. The process of transformation gradually enables us to “rule in life” and to engage in the activities of the *dikaiosyne tou theou*, the justice of God (Rom.5:17).

It is in this domain of being “in Christ,” the last Adam, and consequently also being on the way into a reordering of power that all the possibilities of this new creation become realizable. The scale and scope of those possibilities, disclosed by Jesus in the narrative world of the four gospels, are originated and activated by God’s Breath, the holy Spirit. We who are “life-giving spirits” because we belong to a New Humanity and are therefore being metamorphosed from one degree of glory to another (2 Cor.3:18), we are called to incarnate those possibilities as God’s surrogates with and for our fellow human beings.

The Easter event, as interpreted by the myth of resurrection, has inaugurated the long awaited reconstitution of all things. This is the time of the *regnum Christi*, the reign of Christ. Paul characterizes it as the age in which the Christ abolishes every rule, every authority and every power; that is, all the forms and forces of death which prevent all who have been created in God’s image and likeness from “ruling in life.” Only after this work has successfully been completed will the Christ return the kingship to God and become subordinate to God, as Paul states in 1 Cor.15:28. This reign of Christ, however, must not be construed as the elite sovereignty of the Lord Jesus Christ. The new creation is not a reconstruction of a hierarchical ordering of power. The kingship of the risen Christ is a horizontally structured rule in which all

the members of the New Humanity have an equal share. For the Christ, as Paul contends in 1 Cor.12:12 is the community of the One and the Many:²⁵

“For even as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body being many are one body, so also the Christ.”

The objective of this corporate, horizontally constituted kingship is the deliverance of the creation from its bondage, the redemption of the old moral order and all who participate in it. This is the work that God has reserved for and entrusted to the New Humanity; and the languishing creation is awaiting its manifestation. “For,” as Paul declares in Rom.8:19-21,

“the eager expectation of the creation is waiting for the unveiling of the sons and daughters of God. For the creation was subordinated to futility, not willingly, but on account of the one (who) subordinated it in hope. Because the same creation will be liberated from the enslavement of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God.”

This is the assignment which the New Humanity is called to fulfill. To say the least, it is an awesome undertaking, and, as each year passes by, it seems more preposterous. Nevertheless, God will not rescue the creation unassisted. Incarnation is the instrumentality by which this objective will be achieved. All who participate in the New Humanity of the risen Christ and therefore are “life-giving spirits” are called to collaborate with God and fulfill this commission to save the creation. There is no other legitimation for Christian identity.

The undertaking is realizable only if the reign of Christ is a horizontally shared kingship. Jesus himself acknowledged that in his confession at his trial before the Sanhedrin, “You will see the Son of the Human Being (the New Humanity) seated on the right hand of power.” Christian self-understanding humbly but courageously embraces this privileged position of being co-enthroned with the resurrected Jesus and therefore also being co-enthroned with God. It is from this source that divine possibility originates and becomes actualizable in historical existence.

The Synoptic account of the Stilling of the Storm dramatizes this reality. Jesus falls asleep in the middle of a storm while sailing across the Sea of Galilee. From fear of drowning his disciples awaken him, not because they want a miracle to save them but because Jesus, who in view of his location “in the stern on the pillow” is the pilot and by falling asleep has lost control of the boat. They simply want him to get his hand back on the steering paddle and guide the boat through the storm. They are acting according to the old paradigm of Psalm 107:23-32. To quote the most pertinent verses,

“Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he brought them out from their distress; he made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed.”

Jesus delivers them, but in an unanticipated manner, namely by assuming the role of the Lord and calming the wind and the sea. But immediately afterwards he reproaches them for being cowardly and not having faith. Yet, at least according to the old paradigm they had faith. They had cried out to the Lord in their trouble. Why does Jesus reprimand them? Evidently the old

²⁵ See also Beker, *Paul*, 306-310.

paradigm of dependence is no longer valid to those who are following Jesus into a new moral order. Verticality promotes dependence and paralysis. "Having faith" now involves acting out of the empowerment of participating in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. When Jesus subsequently sends the disciples across the Sea of Galilee alone, they are hesitant to go without him because they remember how safe and secure they were when he was in the boat with them. Consequently it is necessary for him to compel them to embark into the boat (Mk.6:45). In view of the time when he will be taken away from them, they must learn how to be pioneers in his place for those who will follow them into a reordering of power. As they begin to sail across the sea, Jesus ascends "into the mountain" to pray for them; when he descends at dusk he observes that they have made little progress. Yet he does not interfere. "During the fourth watch of the night he comes to them walking on the sea, and, as the narrator informs us, he was wanting to pass them by" (6:48). Jesus is anxious about them, but he refuses to be paternalistic. They must be trained for the future, for their exercise of sovereignty and power will be essential for the fulfillment of their commission. They must learn the limits of the authority which they bear as members of the community of the Son of the Human Being.

The disciples, however, see Jesus walking on the sea and, imagining him to be a ghost, cry out in fear. He responds to their alarm immediately, "Keep on being courageous! I AM. Stop being afraid!" In his self-disclosure he employs the phrase *ego eimi*, the Septuagint translation of Yahweh's self-identification to Moses at the burning bush, and also the Septuagint translation of Yahweh's declarations of transcendence and matchlessness in Is. 41-48. In performing an act that is traditionally limited to God, as Job 9:8 indicates, Jesus by his use of "I AM" reveals the identity and destiny of the New Humanity, that community of "life-giving spirits" which is willed by God to be transformed into the image and stature of the risen Lord. When Jesus climbs into the boat the wind ceases, but his disciples are profoundly unsettled: "They went out of their minds!" They miss the significance of what they have witnessed because, as the narrator explains, "... they did not understand about the loaves, but their heart was hardened." (Mk.6:53) The sovereignty that Jesus manifested by walking on the sea is the same as that by which he fed the multitudes; it is the sovereignty of the New Human Being whom God gave birth to and who therefore is God's Offspring. The disciples, however, continue to let their society and its culture determine the limitations of possibility in historical existence.

Marianne Sawicki is right when she states, "The first evangelists find that they cannot bring anyone to the possibility of resurrection through the mere telling of a story." (p.84) Her insistence, however, is on the teaching that succeeds the wonder-working of the early prophets, teaching that will enable the disciples "to reach and recognize the risen Lord," to see "what they literally cannot see: Jesus in the hungry, the thirsty, the strange, the naked, the sick, and the imprisoned."²⁶ But the possibility of resurrection is not established simply and only on the basis of "seeing the Lord" in the communities of the poor and the oppressed. Personal participation in Jesus' resurrection and its entry into a reordering of power is paramount. If the disciples and Peter follow the risen Jesus to Galilee where he is initiating a second career, they will not only "see the Lord" as he continues his ministry among the marginalized masses. They will also participate in his resurrection, even as they participated in his death; and consequently, like him at the beginning of his career in the narrative world of Mark's gospel, they will be called into being as God's beloved daughters and sons and simultaneously be empowered to actualize the possibilities of the reign of Christ.

²⁶ Sawicki, *Seeing the Lord*, 87.

At the conclusion of Matthew's narrative world the eleven representatives of the New Israel "see the Lord" on the Sinai-like mountain of Galilee where the risen Jesus appears to them. "But some doubted" (28:17). What they doubt is not clarified, but most likely the reader is to assume that it is the reality of Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Nothing is said or done to resolve their doubts. The risen Jesus claims to have received "all authority in heaven and on earth," thereby intimating the fulfillment of Dan.7:13-14 and the confirmation of his identity in resurrection as the *bar nasha* or the New Human Being. He issues the so-called Great Commission and at the same time insinuates the means by which their doubts will be resolved. By fulfilling their authorization to make disciples of all ethnic communities in the same way Jesus disciplines them, any doubts of the reality of his resurrection which might persist will be dispelled.

But there is more than the teacher's teaching which is to be taught to disciple others. Eleven ascended the cosmic navel of the mountain in Galilee, twelve descend. The teacher joins the eleven, and as the twelfth constitutes the New Israel, imparts equal participation in his identity as the *bar nasha*, the New Human Being, and equal participation in the fullness of his authority in heaven and on earth. The "I AM" with which he identified himself to his disciples while walking on the Sea of Galilee (14:27) now encloses them - and us! "See, I with you AM (*ego meth hymon eimi*) even to the consummation of the age." Drawn into the I AM of Emmanuel, "God with us," the community of the New Human being which the risen Lord constitutes on this Sinai-like navel in Galilee is empowered to continue the world-transforming ministry of Jesus,

In the Acts of the Apostles the Evangelist Luke draws his readers into the Pentecostal experience of the disciples, after Matthias has been chosen as the twelfth representative of the New Israel to replace Judas.

"All were together in one place; and suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them." (2:1-3)

All of them, both the women and the men, receive empowerment through the same gift of God's Spirit that had descended upon Jesus at his baptism. While Jesus was anointed by the Spirit settling upon him in the physical appearance of a dove, signaling that he was being sanctioned by heaven, his disciples are ratified by a supracephalic flame that signified the dawn of the new age and their participation in the apotheosis of the risen Lord.²⁷

In the Fourth Gospel Jesus breathes the Spirit on his disciples on Easter evening (20:22), and as a result his earlier promise of 14:1-3 is fulfilled,

"In my Father's house are many rooms; and if not, I would tell you because I am going to prepare a place for you. Again I am coming and I will receive you to myself so that where I AM (*ego eimi*) you also are."

As bearers of God's presence they become "rooms" in "the Father's house," rooms that Jesus prepared by going away into death and resurrection. Accordingly empowered, they will begin to

²⁷ For the significance of the "tongue of fire," see Richard Oster, "Numismatic Windows into the Social World of Early Christianity: A Methodological Inquiry," *JBL* 101 (June 1982) 212-214.

fulfill Jesus' promise, "... the works that I do you will do and greater works than these because I am going to the Father."

The gospels are not "about" access to one who died. Their generic content is not to communicate the means of approaching someone dead.²⁸ All of them in their own distinctive mode end without closure indicating or intimating where and by what means the reality of the Easter event can be experienced. The "seeing" that is required results from a personal entry into death and resurrection with Jesus and concomitantly actualizing the divine possibilities which belong to the legacy of the New Humanity. Seeing clearly is a divine gift, but sometimes, as in the story of Jesus opening the eyes of a blind human being in two stages, the sight that is gained is imperfect, and a second remedial touch is necessary (Mk.8:22-26).

Lazarus as the Beloved Disciple of the Fourth Gospel offers an apposite epistemological model. Although he is not identified by the narrator as the Beloved Disciple, we as the readers can make that identification on the basis of the first of the Easter episodes in the Fourth Gospel. When Mary Magdalene reports her discovery of an empty tomb, two disciples, Simon Peter and "the one whom Jesus loved," scramble to investigate. The details which the narrator gives are crucial for the identification of the Beloved Disciple.

"The two were running together, and the other disciple ran ahead faster than Peter and came to the tomb first and bending over he sees the strips of linen, but he did not enter. Then Simon Peter comes following him and he entered the tomb. And he views the strips of linen and the face cloth which was on his head, not lying with the linen strips but folded up into one place. Then the other disciple entered, the one coming to the tomb first, and he saw and believed." (20:4-8)

There is no way to account for the strange conduct of the Beloved Disciple except to identify him with Lazarus. He outruns Peter but does not enter the tomb. He has surmised what has happened, but he is hesitant to enter the tomb because he himself came out of a tomb. Nevertheless, he eventually enters, stands beside Peter, eyeballs the same empirical objects of Jesus' burial garments and believes. His faith is not simply a leap into the dark, nor is it based on scriptural proof. "For," as the narrator observes, "they did not yet know the Scripture that he must rise from the dead." He believes because of his own experience of resurrection. When he sees the strips of linen folded up into one place, he remembers that he himself came out of his tomb, bound hands and feet, and had to be set free. Jesus in his resurrection from the dead had the authority of the New Human Being "to lay down his life and to take it up again." The seeing and believing of the Beloved Disciple are determined by his own experience of resurrection as Lazarus. That is the epistemological foundation of his faith.

Marianne Sawicki ends her inquiry into Christian origins by contending for a postmodern theology that does not "insist on a God beyond text or on causality from beyond the textual world."²⁹

"As modern theology worked out a place for God in the 'depth dimension,' postmodern theology must work out a place for God in/as some dimension of textuality."³⁰

²⁸ Against Sawicki, *Seeing the Lord*, 302.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 332.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 333.

But the Easter event is not simply Jesus rising into the texts of hungry and naked bodies. Those are texts that belong to the old moral order. Certainly Jesus is alive and active in these texts. As the youth in Mark's Easter story declares, "He is going before you into Galilee." However, Jesus enters those texts from the new text of the Rule of God which he established and which God constituted ontologically by raising Jesus from the dead.

Is Jesus alive? Did he really rise from the dead? Or to phrase the question as Sawicki does at the end of the second-to-last paragraph of her book:

"... could he recognize himself. Did his personal awareness continue; was *he himself* still around to enjoy whatever happened after Calvary? Did he come out of the tomb laughing? *Will I?*"³¹

Sawicki considers these questions important but does not answer them. Those who, like Lazarus, have responded to the call to exit from the cave of non-being and follow Jesus into the metamorphosis of resurrection can answer with a joyful affirmation.

Martin Luther designated the papacy of his time as "the kingdom of Babylon and the power of Nimrod the mighty hunter."³² In his treatise, "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church," he identified the configurations of bondage in the seven ecclesiastically constituted sacraments which controlled Christians from birth to the grave and prevented them from realizing their freedom in Christ. The biblical scholarship of modernity in as far as it continues to be captive to the dualism of Kantian epistemology is another kind of Babylonian Captivity which debar the signs of identification and recognition by which the risen Jesus made himself known as categories of history.³³ Instead it substitutes a reconstructed historical Jesus "as the clue to God in our life" and closes the door to participation in the new moral order of the resurrection and its inherent possibilities. The ecclesiastical promulgation of transcendent christologies which are informed by ancient creeds torn out of their historical contexts is another kind of Babylonian Captivity which restrains Christians from entering into a horizontal relationship with the risen Lord and enjoying the ecstatic sense of self-worth that he wills to share by drawing them into his I AM. Postmodernity's intertextuality into which the risen Jesus disappears without the perspective of the new creation is yet another kind of Babylonian Captivity. Although it acknowledges the identification of the risen Jesus with the hungry and the homeless, the sick and the diseased, the immigrant and the imprisoned, its efficacy is limited by its denial of the gospel's referent of the text of a New Humanity.

The Apostle Paul acknowledges the empirical reality of this text in 2 Cor.3:2-3 when he identifies the Corinthian Christians as a "letter."

"You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all human beings, and thereby made visible that you are a letter of Christ being ministered to by us, not written with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on stone tablets but on the physical tablets of the heart."

³¹ *Ibid.*, 336.

³² Trans. by A.T.W. Steinhäuser, *Works of Luther, The Philadelphia Edition* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1943) II, 171.

³³ R.R. Niebuhr, *Resurrection and Historical Reason*, 175.

The Old Covenant was inscribed on stone tablets and issued to Moses in an ambiance of glory for transmission to the people of Israel. Its splendor, however, which was reflected in the face of Moses, was temporary; and to conceal its fading character Moses covered his face with a veil. The New Covenant, in contrast, is a text inscribed on the tablets of the human heart. Accordingly it is a text within a text, for in as far as it is inscribed on the tablets of the human heart, it may remain concealed and invisible. The text of the New Covenant becomes legible only when it is expressed externally through the text of the physical body in terms of deeds and words. The Word, God's speech activity, must become flesh. Incarnation is the medium of the textuality that discloses the ontological reality of the new moral order that was constituted by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Those who embody the New Humanity are letters of God addressed to the world. They are texts which make the reality of the new creation readable; they are texts which glow with an ambiance of glory. To quote Paul again:

“Now if the ministry of death, chiseled in letters on stone tablets, came in glory so that the people of Israel could not gaze at Moses' face because of the glory of his face, a glory now set aside, how much more will the ministry of the Spirit come in glory? ... What once had glory has lost its glory because of the greater glory.”³⁴

But where is that “greater glory?” If the text of the New Covenant supposedly manifests itself with a greater glory than that of the Old Covenant, in what ways does it make that glory visible? How is it disclosed in the lives of human beings? Somehow the effects of participation in the new creation must shimmer in and through the life-style of those who are “life-giving spirits.” That kind of life-style would radiate the supremacy of life in the face of all the forms and forces of death that tend to dominate the socio-cultural order. That kind of life-style would reflect an increasing diminishment of alienation and conversely a flowering reconciliation with God and fellow human beings. That kind of life-style would exhibit a freedom that struggles to remain outside of the vicious cycle of exchanging rejection for rejection, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. That kind of life-style would display the integrity of the five wise virgins of Jesus' parable who expressed their identity of being light-bearers by their vocational activity of bearing light. That kind of life-style would reveal a dedication to the subversion of any and every pollution system that divides the world into the realms of the clean and the unclean and disadvantages and dehumanizes those who are identified as the unclean. Accordingly that life-style would be engaged in service and ministry to, with, and for all humankind, but always out of the freedom and unobligedness of participating in the lordship of Jesus Christ.

Involvement in this kind of a life-style is not a journey into diminishment but an odyssey into the fullness of life and simultaneously a transfiguration into the glory of God. As Irenaeus articulated it, “The glory of God is the human being fully alive.” Yet as the Apostle reminds the Corinthians,

“We have this treasure in clay pots, so that it may be made clear that the immensity of power belongs to God and does not come from us. Oppressed in every way but not crushed, uncertain but not despairing, persecuted but not abandoned, thrown down but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus is made *visible* in our bodies.” (2 Cor.4:7-10)

³⁴ 2 Cor.3:7-8, 10.