

RESURRECTION

Theological and Scientific Assessments

Edited by

TED PETERS
ROBERT JOHN RUSSELL
MICHAEL WELKER

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Theological Realism and Eschatological Symbol Systems

MICHAEL WELKER

There are many definitions of "theological realism." A minimalist definition states that theological claims should be compatible with possible experience. The measures for possible experience need continuous testing, and negotiation in and among truth-seeking communities.¹ Truth-seeking communities seek to interrogate and to heighten certainty and consensus without reducing truth to certainty and consensus. Truth-seeking communities can do this because they also want complex states of affairs to be made accessible in repeatable and predictable ways. Since they aim at the co-enhancement of certainty and consensus and content-loaded, shared insight, they also guard against reducing truth to the — possibly trivial — repeatable, predictable, and correct investigation of the subject under consideration.

Since truth-seeking communities concentrate on different topical areas, use different rationalities, and pursue different goals, these negotiations on what could count as possible experience are not easy; they are even loaded with conflict.² Those, however, who shy away from this burden and conflict enter the risk of working with reductionistic or even ideological notions of reality and rationality. They run the risk of reducing truth-seeking communities to communities that aim at preserving certainties and routines. The sci-

1. Cf. John Polkinghorne, *The Faith of a Physicist* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1994), 149; *Faith, Science, and Understanding* (New Haven: Yale University, 2000), 29-30; John Polkinghorne and Michael Welker, *Faith in the Living God: A Dialogue* (London: SPCK; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), esp. ch. 9.

2. A careful description of a potentially fruitful scenario in the case of a discourse between theology and the sciences on eschatological topics is given by Robert John Russell in this volume.

ence-and-theology discourse is one example of the attempt to work boldly against the segmentation of knowledge and the reduction of experience to areas of well-established routines to preserve mere certainty and security of expectations.³

Theological Realism as Ambitious Enterprise

In his famous disputation on the human person, his *Disputatio de homine* of 1536,⁴ Martin Luther states that philosophy — namely, Aristotelian philosophy — can only define the mortal and worldly human being. When philosophy speaks of the rational being, the *animal rationale*, it tries to grasp something divine in the human being by reference to the power and majesty of reason. But if one looks more closely at what this philosophy really knows about the human person and his or her destiny, one is rather disappointed. Aristotelian philosophers are quite insecure about what shapes the human being and his or her existence; they offer only vague talk about the “shaping cause” that they call “the soul.”

Luther says that, over against philosophy, theology gives us a much fuller account of the human person when it speaks of the person as God’s creature, made of flesh and a living soul, and from the beginning formed as an image of God, called to be fruitful, to multiply, and to rule the earth, destined for eternal life. Theology then talks about the fall, the subjugation of the human being to sin and death, and his or her inability to overcome the evil forces by his or her own power. Finally, theology speaks of the saving work of Christ, who freed human beings and gave them the gift of eternal life.⁵

In the light of these theological insights, Luther challenges such illusionary philosophical statements as the idea that human reason always aims at “the good” or even at “the best,” and that human beings have the power to choose between good and evil. He concludes that in this life human beings — like all the other creatures — live under the powers of sin and futility. But they are at the same time God’s material for a future life in which they will be restored and completed as the *imago Dei*, the image of God.⁶

It is clear that Luther extends the focus on human life greatly by bring-

3. This does not mean that security of expectations is not a most important good for religious communication. Cf. Michael Welker, “Security of Expectations: Reformulating the Theology of Law and Gospel,” in *Journal of Religion* 66 (1986): 237-60.

4. *Weimarer Ausgabe*, 39.1.175-77.

5. *Disputatio de homine*, theses 21-23.

6. *Ibid.*, theses 35-38.

ing in real and possible experiences of sin, death, self-endangerment, and futility. The open question is whether and how the theological symbols he evokes can honestly and convincingly disclose and illuminate these areas of experience. Does theology, indeed, give a fuller account of human reality, or does it reach out into areas of fiction and fantasy?

In a way strikingly similar to that of Luther, the twentieth-century theologian Karl Barth, in the doctrine of creation in his *Church Dogmatics*,⁷ investigates various philosophical and scientific anthropologies. He arrives at the conclusion that naturalistic, idealistic, and existentialistic anthropologies have offered us only "phenomena of the human being." They have not shown us "the real human being." Based on his own, early thorough and penetrating interpretation of the atheistic philosophy of Ludwig Feuerbach,⁸ Barth first praises Feuerbach's anti-idealistic anthropology. He suggests that Feuerbach, with his emphasis on the sensuality and the intrinsic sociality of the human being, had at least some glimpses from afar into what Barth calls "the real human being." However, Feuerbach's great problem and error, according to Barth, is that he dismisses creaturely mortality and the dominance of the power of sin over human existence.⁹ Barth is convinced that only a christologically oriented view can focus on the profound lostness of human existence and on God's care and intention for this existence, namely, its participation in the divine glory.

When modern scientists are confronted with such statements of genius theologians like Luther and Barth, it seems quite likely that many of them react with a mixture of irony and bewilderment. What is the basis on which these theologians speak? Religious narratives of the past and lofty ideas of a future life, the image of God, and divine glory seem to be the ground of what appear to be pretentious claims to focus on "the real human being." What is

7. *Church Dogmatics* III/1-4, esp. III/2, 71ff.

8. Karl Barth, "Ludwig Feuerbach," in *Die Theologie und die Kirche: Gesammelte Vorträge* (München: Kaiser: 1928), 2:212ff.; this is a chapter in a course on theology and philosophy that Barth gave in Münster in the summer of 1926. The later, much weaker publication of this course replaced the stronger version of the original lecture on Feuerbach. Cf. K. Barth, *Die protestantische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert: Ihre Vorgeschichte und ihre Geschichte* (Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1946), 484ff. See also "Feuerbach, 1922," in K. Barth, *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten, 1922-1925*, ed. Holger Finze, Gesamtausgabe 19 (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1990), 6ff.

9. Barth, "Ludwig Feuerbach," 237, follows Hans Ehrenberg, introduction to Ludwig Feuerbach, *Philosophie der Zukunft* (Stuttgart: Frommann, 1922), 94, who states, Feuerbach sei "als 'getreues Kind seines Jahrhunderts' ein 'Nichtkenner des Todes' und ein 'Verkenner des Bösen' gewesen."

the reality status of such claims? Do they have any connection to real phenomena and real experience? Can they meet any challenges to sustain truth claims? In the following reflections I intend to affirm the theological claims. I will undertake this very difficult task by investigating several biblical eschatological symbol systems.¹⁰ According to a widespread prejudice, eschatological symbols seem to point to a realm “totally other” than the reality we can experience. As we have elaborated in a multi-year discourse between scientists and theologians, the biblical eschatological symbols and texts express an interesting relation between this creation and the “new creation”: “most eschatological symbols and texts in the classical and canonical religious traditions . . . speak of the *continuity and discontinuity* between this world and the world to come.”¹¹ Like Luther and Barth in their focus on the “real” human being, eschatological symbols and symbol systems indeed focus on possible experiences and a reality that should not be ignored or even given up by the sciences. I should like to name this reality the *reality of the fullness of life*, understood as both individual and communal life “in God.”

The Resurrection of Christ as the Presence of the Fullness of His Life and His Personhood

For a long time the general understanding of “resurrection” was dominated by a confusion of resurrection and physical reanimation and resuscitation — and great skepticism over against this. Time and again, famous and would-be-famous New Testament scholars made a splash in the media by assuring the interested public that the resurrection texts of the New Testament speak of a reanimation of the dead Jesus but that today human beings are not going to be persuaded that dead persons can be reanimated. Therefore the experience and reality of the bodily resurrection must be called into question.¹²

10. By “symbol systems” I understand connections of symbols with rationalities that can be explored and disclosingly reinvested in other realms of experience or at least fruitfully contrasted with other connections of symbols operating in different realms of experience.

11. Cf. Polkinghorne, “Introduction: Science and Theology on the End of the World and the Ends of God,” in *The End of the World and the Ends of God: Science and Theology on Eschatology*, ed. John Polkinghorne and Michael Welker (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2000), 1-13; M. Welker, “Resurrection and Eternal Life: The Canonic Memory of the Resurrected Christ, His Reality, and His Glory,” in Polkinghorne and Welker, *The End of the World and the Ends of God*, ed. Polkinghorne and Welker, 279-90; *Faith in the Living God*, 40ff., 60ff.

12. Cf. Rudolf Bultmann, “Neues Testament und Mythologie: Das Problem der Ent-

A theology concerned about its academic reputation avoided this topic or at best gave it a niche under the cloak of existentialist and supernaturalist figures of thought. In this situation, Wolfhart Pannenberg and others proposed that we take account only of the appearances of light attested in the New Testament's resurrection witnesses, not the reports of personal encounters with the resurrected Christ and the empty-tomb traditions.¹³ On this view appearances of light and visions, to which historicity can be attributed, are the foundation of the testimonies to the resurrection. This proposal, though, remained unsatisfying. It had to leave out most of the Synoptic resurrection accounts. It also left open the question of how precisely the pre-Easter Jesus could be perceived in a new form in the appearances of light.

Ironically, the calm awareness of several disturbing complexities in the New Testament resurrection accounts led us out of the two dead-end streets: the disputes about the pros and cons of resurrection understood as resuscitation, and the dispute about the either-or of resurrection as historical or subjective or even psychopathic visions.

1. The New Testament accounts present us with a *strange tension between palpability and appearance*.¹⁴ The resurrection of Christ is clearly not a physical reanimation and resuscitation. Only if we isolate a few biblical verses from their contexts in a biblicistic manner can we be led to think that the resurrection of Christ was a mere reanimation of the pre-Easter Jesus. The most graphic of all affirmations that the presence of the resurrected

mythologisierung der neutestamentlichen Verkündigung," in *Kerygma und Mythos*, Bd. 1 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 3. Aufl. 1988); Gerd Lüdemann, *Die Auferstehung Jesu: Historie, Erfahrung, Theologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994); "Zwischen Karfreitag und Ostern," in *Osterglaube ohne Auferstehung? Diskussion mit Gerd Lüdemann*, ed. Hansjürgen Verweyen (Freiburg/Basel/Wien: Herder, 1995), 13ff.

13. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Grundzüge der Christologie* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 6. Aufl. 1982), 85ff.

14. I have elaborated this in "Resurrection and the Reign of God," in *The 1993 Frederick Neumann Symposium on the Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Hope for the Kingdom and Responsibility for the World*, *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin*, supplementary issue, no. 3, ed. Daniel Migliore (Princeton: Princeton Seminary, 1994), 3-16; and in "Auferstehung: Dietrich Ritschl zum 65. Geburtstag," *Glauben und Lernen* 9 (1994): 39-49; similar results are offered by Joachim Ringleben, *Wahrhaft auferstanden: Zur Begründung der Theologie des lebendigen Gottes* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1998); more recently, Bernd Oberdorfer, "Was sucht ihr den Lebendigen bei den Toten?' Überlegungen zur Realität der Auferstehung in Auseinandersetzung mit Gerd Lüdemann," and Günter Thomas, "'Er ist nicht hier': Die Rede vom leeren Grab als Zeichen der neuen Schöpfung," both in Hans-Joachim Eckstein and Michael Welker, *Die Wirklichkeit der Auferstehung* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener, 2002).

rected. "My Lord and my God!" exclaims the disbelieving Thomas. Not: "How good to see you among us again, Jesus!"

3. It is consistent with this complicated picture that the discovery of the empty tomb and the more or less spectacular appearances of heavenly messengers do not yet generate resurrection belief. The first reactions to the empty tomb are fear and silence (Mark 16), the worry or the public rumor that a theft of the corpse has taken place (Matthew 28; John 20), or the belief that the claim of the resurrection was mere talk of women (Luke 24).

4. It is important to see that the encounters with the resurrected Christ as witnessed by the Scriptures take very different forms, from visions of light to the appearance of a person with all the impressions of palpability. It is not the case that just one spectacular experience leads to the belief in the resurrection. Not from a single appearance, but rather from *a variety of appearances* arises the firm conviction: the resurrected Christ was and is with us.¹⁵ These appearances are connected with symbolic, liturgical, or missionary acts that will all be constitutive for the life and the worship of the early church: for instance, the greeting, "Peace be with you!" the breaking of the bread, the opening of the Scriptures, the disclosure of the secret of the Messiah, the blessing and sending of the disciples, and other ritualized actions and signs. The biblical texts do not try to smooth over the problems connected with this presence. They describe the fear, the doubt, the derision, and the disbelief connected with this reality. On the whole, the resurrection witnesses very calmly acknowledge that this presence is not a simple empirical reality, although it bears several characteristics of such a reality.

The connection with the risen Christ grows out of different experiences that can accurately be termed "testimonies." This term points, on the one hand, to the personal authenticity and certainty of the experience and, on the other hand, to its fragmentary and perspectival character. Francis Fiorenza has emphasized that this character of testimony is indispensable. He has

15. I made this point in "Die Gegenwart des auferstandenen Christus als das Wesentliche des Christentums," in *Das ist christlich: Nachdenken über das Wesen des Christentums*, ed. W. Härle, H. Schmidt, and M. Welker (Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 2000), 91-103. Sarah Coakley, "The Resurrection and the 'Spiritual Senses': On Wittgenstein, Epistemology and the Risen Christ," in *Powers and Submission: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), has recently called attention to the fact that an epistemology of the resurrection testimonies must take note of the polyphony of senses addressed by the resurrection: "Our continuing difficulties in expressing the reality of a risen Christ who cannot finally be grasped, but rather 'seen' — 'not with the eyes only'" are to be traced back to the richness of knowledge that comes with the presence of the resurrected. See also the contribution of Nancey Murphy in this volume.

shown that these necessarily multiple testimonies push toward metaphorical speech when they point to each other and also seek to thematize the complex reality to which they point perspectively.¹⁶

To indicate the continuity between the pre-Easter and the post-Easter Christ, the biblical traditions use the term "body." The biblical texts clearly state that the stories of the empty tomb allow for different interpretations. Very realistic and extreme supernaturalistic versions are possible. However, they all have in common that Jesus Christ's pre-Easter body is not available for an autopsy or for physical inspection.¹⁷ A transformed body, a transfigured body, a body that is also called "spiritual" or "glorified" (cf. Rom. 15:46; Phil. 3:21) is the body of the resurrected. This body represents the essential marks of personal identity in such complexity and fullness that, on one hand, its recognition can become much more complicated than the recognition of a merely biological body. On the other hand, this transfigured body can open many more routes of recognition, community, and identification than a merely natural body.

By insisting on the aspect of palpability in the midst of appearances the biblical texts indicate and even emphasize that the resurrected body is not the product of mere imagination or fantasy. Grounded in the life and person of the pre-Easter Jesus, the resurrected body generates memories and imaginations. It produces a living cultural and canonic memory¹⁸ shaped by the life of the pre-Easter Jesus and the revelation of the resurrected Lord. This fact — that the cultural and canonic memory is shaped by Jesus' pre-Easter life — allows us to affirm the objectivity of the transfigured body. It is indeed not the product of fantasy. It is also not just a poly-individual and communal recollection. A living cultural and canonic memory not only shapes individual and communal modes of experience and expectation. The very lives and bodies of

16. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, "The Resurrection of Jesus and Roman Catholic Fundamental Theology," in *The Resurrection: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Resurrection of Jesus*, ed. S. T. Davis, D. Kendall, and G. O'Collins (Oxford: Oxford University, 1997), 213-48, 238ff.

17. Cf. Hans-Joachim Eckstein's contribution to this volume. Gerd Lüdemann's remark, "The factual statement of Jesus' decomposition is to me the starting point of all further work on questions in the context of his 'resurrection,'" thus shows poor exegetical and theological perception. "Zwischen Karfreitag und Ostern," in *Osterglaube ohne Auferstehung? Diskussion mit Gerd Lüdemann*, ed. Hansjürgen Verweyen (Freiburg/Basel/Wien: Herder, 1995), 13ff., 27 (translation M. W.).

18. Cf. *The End of the World and the Ends of God*, ed. Polkinghorne and Welker, 284ff., with references to Jan Assmann's concept of "cultural memory" (Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis* [Munich: Beck, 1992]) and the difference between communal, cultural, and canonic memory.

the bearers of this memory are *shaped by the very person and life who constitutes and sustains this memory*.¹⁹ On the basis of the cultural and historical objectivity of the transfigured body, we can acknowledge that the appearances characteristic of this body become present together with Christ's witnesses. As Luther and Barth rightly state: "Der auferstandene Christus ist nicht ohne die Seinen,"²⁰ the resurrected Christ is not without his witnesses. The participation of the witnesses in this presence is of the utmost soteriological importance.

The transfigured body of the resurrected calls for the participation of the witnesses in the glorified life, a participation that in turn transforms the lives of the witnesses. They become "one with Christ," they take part in the divine life, they become transformed by God's own creativity²¹ "from glory to glory." The explanation of this process within the realms of the symbol system of the resurrection is difficult. We see tensions in the canonical traditions that deal with participation in the life of the resurrected Christ. 2 Timothy, for instance, warns against those "who have swerved from the truth by claiming that the resurrection has already taken place" (2 Tim. 2:18). Other texts, such as Colossians 3:1, exhort believers, "So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is. . . ." Do we participate already in the resurrection — or is it a future event? Or is it both? What experiences are connected with the presence of the fullness of life of the resurrected Christ in canonic memory? It is helpful to turn to other eschatological symbols to find a way out of this difficulty.

Resurrection Explained with the Assistance of Other Eschatological Symbol Systems

Eschatological symbols such as "the reign of God" offer us considerable assistance in the difficult disclosure of both the continuity and the discontinuity of this life and life in the "world to come." The claim that all the eschatological symbols just mean "the same" cannot be maintained. They do not point at a vague or even miraculous "transformation" that should be left to pious

19. With Jeffrey Schloss, "Evolutionary Eschatology," one could speak of an eschatological "intensification" of our life, not just a continuation.

20. Cf. *Kirchliche Dogmatik* IV/2, 63.

21. Cf. John Polkinghorne, *The Faith of a Physicist*, 162ff. and the conclusion of Ted Peter's contribution in this volume. See also Andreas Schuele, "Gottes Handeln als Gedächtnis. Auferstehung in kulturtheoretischer und biblisch-theologischer Perspektive," in H.-J. Eckstein and M. Welker, *Die Wirklichkeit der Auferstehung*.

guesswork. However, *if we want to profit from this offer we have to respect the inner consistencies and rationalities of the different symbol systems.* This does not mean that the different symbol systems cannot illuminate each other. I would like to show that the symbol system connected with the "reign of God," which seems to focus more on communal transformation than on individual bodily existence, can help us to understand the connection between the resurrection of Christ (as a past event), the participation of humans in this resurrection in faith and through the working of the Holy Spirit (a present event), and the resurrection on the "last day" (a future event) of which, for instance, the Apostles' Creed speaks.

It is Luke who occasionally connects the two different symbol systems explicitly, the symbol system of the reign of God and that of the resurrection: when Jesus says that those who have shown mercy to the poor, the crippled, and the blind will be "repaid at the resurrection of the righteous," one of the "dinner guests" responds with the formula, "Blessed is the one who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!" (Luke 14:14, 15; cf. Luke 20:35).

The symbol system of the reign of God in itself exhibits a very important *eschatological complementarity*,²² and it does so in a much clearer way than the symbol system of the resurrection. What does this *eschatological complementarity* mean? On the one hand, the reign of God is pictured as an emergent reality in which — in multifarious experiences and acts of love, care and forgiveness — a new reality latently breaks through, endangered and clouded from all sides, visible only to eyes of faith. On the other hand, the reign of God comes fully only at the complete theophany at the end of time.²³ This theophany at the end of time must not be located in just one specific temporal slot in world history. It is the "last day" of *all times*, equally close to and distant from all parts of history. In this respect the full theophany of the end of time is a (co-)present reality with all times, which necessarily cannot be adequately expressed by any specific development in world history.

22. I am aware of the risks that come with the transport of a technical term from one area of knowledge into another. The strong analogies of the necessary disclosure of one reality in two different forms with different epistemological complexities and gains encouraged me to take this risk. I am grateful to Robert John Russell for supporting me with insights and literature on this topic. The technical and methodological discussion of my transfer requires a chapter of its own.

23. Cf. John Polkinghorne, "Eschatological Credibility: Emergent and Teleological Process," in this volume. See also Michael Welker, "The 'Reign' of God," *Theology Today* 49 (1992): 500-515; Michael Welker and Michael Wolter, "Die Unscheinbarkeit des Reiches Gottes," in *Marburger Jahrbuch Theologie*, 11, ed. W. Härle and R. Preul (Marburg: Elwert, 1999), 103-16.

The texture of emergence, necessarily accompanied by doubt and the unavoidable inability to clearly locate the reality of the general resurrection, corresponds on the level of historical time to the eschatological reality of the theophany of the end of time (cf. Matt. 24:23; Mark 13:21; Luke 17:21, 23). In the New Testament traditions the eschatological complementarity of the emergent reality of the reign of God and of its full eschatological disclosure are expressed in the notion of the "coming reign" and its "nearness." These expressions reflect the necessary inability of specific historical settings to encompass the fullness of life, the fullness of reality.

The symbol of the resurrection, as a symbol of the defeat of death and sin, is not easily compatible with the rationality of emergence. The gradual and partial transformation of bodily existence can hardly be expressed in the language of the symbolism of the resurrection. It is difficult to think of resurrection "in the making." Resurrection and the theophany of the end of time seem to coincide. But if this was all that could be said, we would be left with an abstract eschatological transcendence, which the poet Friedrich Schiller grasped in his poem *The Pilgrim* with the words: "Ach, der Himmel über mir/ Will die Erde nie berühren,/Und das Dort ist niemals Hier." (Alas, heaven above me/Will never touch the earth,/And what's there is never here.)²⁴

It is the resurrection of the pre-Easter Jesus Christ that opens a salvific perspective in this painful situation. His resurrection *did take place in a certain spatio-temporal slot in history*. And the reality of his resurrection is shaped by a specific bodily existence in space and time. The resurrection brings forth this bodily existence in its fullness.²⁵ It becomes a reality in the

24. Friedrich Schiller, *Sämtliche Gedichte: Zweiter Teil*, Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, Gesamtausgabe 2:171-72.

25. In "Who Is Jesus Christ for Us Today?" *Harvard Theological Review* (2002), I have argued that this has an impact on a deeper understanding of "history." The new interest in the resurrection seems to be connected with the replacement of an "archeological" understanding of history (with an enthusiasm about "excavating Jesus") with a new paradigm. "In this new paradigm of that which is historical we start with the assumption that at any and every point in time and space we can in principle open a continuum of memory and expectation. At every point both past and present we can in principle draw out a horizon constituted by past, present, and future. Historians must give account for their choice of both primary contexts of memory and expectation and bearers of those contexts, who in turn must be historically accessible. Historians must also reckon with the possibility of other contexts of memory and expectation which stand in temporal and spatial proximity to their chosen contexts, but which entail divergent presentations of historical persons and events. Concretely, we must consider the likelihood that Jesus had a different impact on the rural population of Galilee than on the urban population of Jerusalem. We must consider the likelihood that those who wished to hold high the Mosaic law or the Temple cult in the face of the Roman

mode of an engaging and transforming *incorporated word or message: the gospel*. It allows for participation in this reality — that is, a reality of what the sciences would call “transforming information.” And this participation involves those who participate in it in “the life and world to come.” Learning from the symbolism of the reign of God, we can see clearly that here again we focus on an emergent reality. For good reasons we have to acknowledge the necessary inability to locate clearly the reality, which historically corresponds to the eschatological reality. Nobody can say: this part of my life and body already lives the life of the resurrection.

With a third set of symbol systems the New Testament traditions find ways to help us and give us orientation in this vexing situation. In the community of Christ, mediated by faith, by participation in the sacraments, and by the *imitatio Christi*, believers at least move toward the resurrection and the life to come or even already participate in it (cf. John 11:25; Rom. 6:5; Phil. 3:10-11; Col. 2:12). Paul speaks of the rescuing Spirit by which God, “who raised Christ from the dead, will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you” (Rom. 8:11). The Spirit is the divine power by which the fullness of the divine and eternal life — revealed in the life of Christ — permeates human souls and bodies. The powers of love, justice, mercy, and truth permeate the creation mediated through the body of Christ and through the members of this body that are physically embodied human persons. In this process human beings become part of “the Word,” bearers and mediators of “the gospel.”²⁶ They incorporate God’s message for God’s creation, and they participate in the divine power and life that sustains, rescues, and ennobles the creation and will never perish.

occupation perceived Jesus differently than those who wanted to embrace Roman culture. We must consider the likelihood that those whom Jesus met with healing and acceptance must give a different testimony about him than those whose main impression of Jesus came in the conflicts with Rome and Jerusalem.” The life of the resurrected integrates and unfolds this polycontextual existence in an indefinite richness and intensity. It is the life of the historical Jesus itself that gives rise to and nourishes a specific multiplicity of expectations and experiences. It is this life that opens a specific space for images of Jesus that stand in tension, even in conflict with one another. The refined view of that which is historical challenges us to reconstruct a reality that requires forms of symbolic representation that can no longer be dismissed as products of fantasy by an archeologicist mind-set.

26. Cf. the contribution of Peter Lampe in this volume.