

THEOLOGICAL REALISM AND ESCHATOLOGICAL SYMBOL SYSTEMS: RESURRECTION, THE REIGN OF GOD, AND THE PRESENCE IN FAITH AND IN THE SPIRIT

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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 toward 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 to work with reductionistic or even ideological notions of reality and rationality. They run the risk to reduce truth seeking communities to communities which aim at preserving certainties and routines. The science-and-theology discourse is one example of the attempt to boldly work 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

1 Cf. John Polkinghorne, *The Faith of a Physicist*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1994, 149; Faith, Science and Understanding, 29-30; John Polkinghorne and Michael Welker, *Faith in the Living God: A Dialogue* (London: SPCK / Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), esp. chap. 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 Russell in this volume.

3 This does not mean that security of expectations is not a most important good also for religious communication. Cf. Michael Welker, *Security of Expectations. Reformulating the Theology of Law and Gospel*.

In his famous disputation on the human person, his *disputatio de homine* of 1536⁴, 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 closer at what this philosophy really knows about the human person and his/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" which 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 and to multiply and to rule the earth and destined for eternal life. Theology then talks about the fall, the subjugation of the human being to sin and death, about his or her inability to overcome the evil forces by own power. Finally, theology speaks of the saving work of Christ who freed the human beings and gave 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 bringing 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?

Journal of Religion 66, 1986, 237-260.

4 WA 39,1; 175-177.

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

6 *Ibid.*, theses 35-38.

In a way strikingly similar to 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 only offered us "phenomena of the human being." They have not shown us "the real human being." Based on his own and early thorough and penetrating interpretation of the atheistic philosophy of Ludwig Feuerbach⁸ 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 on 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 the human existence.⁹ Barth is convinced that only a christologically oriented view can focus on the profound lostness of the 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 that these theologians speak from? 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 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 concentrate on a very difficult task by an investigation of several biblical eschatological symbol systems.¹⁰ According to a widespread prejudice, eschatological symbols seem to point to a realm "totally other" over against the

7 KD III/1-4; esp. III/1, 82ff.

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

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

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.

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 scepticism over against this. Famous and would-be famous New Testament scholars made time and again 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 the reality of the bodily resurrection must be called into question.¹²

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 the proposal was made by Wolfhart Pannenberg and others that we take account only of the appearances of light attested in the New Testament's resurrection witnesses, not the reports of

11 Cf. John Polkinghorne / Michael Welker (eds.), *The End of the World and the Ends of God: Science and Theology on Eschatology*, Trinity Press: Harrisburg 2000, second printing 2000, Introduction: *Science and Theology on the End of the World and the Ends of God*, 1-13; M. Welker, *Resurrection and Eternal Life. The Canonic Memory of the Resurrected Christ, His Reality, and His Glory*, in *ibid.*, 279-290; J. Polkinghorne and M. Welker, *Faith in the Living God*, 40ff, 60ff.

12 Cf. Rudolf Bultmann, "Neues Testament und Mythologie. Das Problem der Entmythologisierung der neutestamentlichen Verkuendigung", *Kerygma und Mythos*, Bd. 1, 1941 = Guetersloher Verlagshaus: Guetersloh, 3. Aufl. 1988; Gerd Luedemann, *Die Auferstehung Jesu. Historie, Erfahrung, Theologie*, Vandenhoeck: Goettingen 1994; "Zwischen Karfreitag und Ostern", in: *Osterglaube ohne Auferstehung? Diskussion mit Gerd Luedemann*, ed. Hansjuergen Verwey, Herder: Freiburg/Basel/Wien 1995, 13ff.

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 psychopatic 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 had all the signs of palpability and physicality is found in Luke 24: When the disciples and their companions think "they were seeing a ghost" the resurrected points at his flesh and bones and even eats a piece of fish before them. He then "opens their minds to understand the scriptures" and tells them to wait for the pouring of the spirit in order to begin the proclamation of the gospel throughout the world. Finally it says: "While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven" (Luke 24:51).

A similar connection of palpable presence and withdrawal, of palpability and appearance is expressed in the Emmaus story, also Luke 24. It states that the eyes of the disciples who encounter the resurrected Christ were kept from recognizing him (24:16). This speaks even

13 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Grundzuege der Christologie*, Guetersloher Verlag: Guetersloh, 6. Aufl. 1982, 85ff.

14 I have elaborated this in: "Resurrection and the Reign of God," in Daniel Migliore, ed., *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 (Princeton: 1994), 3-16; and: *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*, Mohr-Siebeck: Tübingen 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*, Neukirchener: Neukirchen 2002.

more clearly against a resuscitation than the impression that they see a ghost. The disciples' eyes are opened and they recognize the resurrected when the resurrected Christ takes bread, blesses it and breaks it and gives it to them. But already in the next sentence the text explicitly states: "And he vanished from their sight" (24:31). After the opening of their eyes to the presence of the resurrected Christ, he vanishes from visibility. Instead of bemoaning this and complaining about a spooky event, the disciples now retrospectively recognize that they had a feeling for the presence of the resurrected even before their eyes were opened in the ritual act in table fellowship. "They said to each other: Were not our hearts burning within us, while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" (24:32) And then they bear witness to the resurrection before others.

This tension between palpability and appearance is characteristic of most of the resurrection accounts of the canonic traditions. The so-called longer ending of Mark speaks of an appearance of the resurrected "in another form" (Mark 16:12). Paul encounters the resurrected Christ in light appearances, which in themselves clearly speak against a mere physical reanimation. John speaks of a sudden appearance of the resurrected "when the doors of the house were locked" (John 20:19). In no case do the biblical witnesses give the impression that the post-Easter Christ lived together with his disciples or with other persons in the same way as the pre-Easter Jesus. Although they claim that there is both identity and continuity between the pre-Easter and the post-Easter Jesus Christ, they point to a complex identity and continuity that needs to be unfolded.

2. Connected with this tension between palpability and appearance is the double reaction of worship and doubt to the presence of the resurrected (Matthew 28:17). The touch of the resurrected is experienced as a revelation of God, as a theophany. The disciples and the women fall down before the resurrected. "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 the resurrection-belief. The first reactions to the empty tomb are fear and silence (Mark 16), the worry or the public rumour that a theft of the corpse has taken place (Matth. 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 one 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 which 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 the sending of the disciples, and in other ritualizable 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 to, on the one hand, the personal authenticity and certainty of the experience and, on the other hand, its fragmentary and perspectival character. Francis Fiorenza has emphasized that this character of testimony is indispensable. He has 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

15 I made this point in: Die Gegenwart des auferstandenen Christus als das Wesentliche des Christentums, in: W. Härle, H. Schmidt, M. Welker (ed.s), *Das ist christlich: Nachdenken über das Wesen des Christentums*, Gütersloh 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.

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

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 the personal identity in a complexity and fullness that on the 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 phantasy. Grounded in the life and person of the pre-Easter Jesus, the resurrected body generates memories and imaginations. It generates a living cultural and canonic memory¹⁸ shaped by the life of the pre-Easter Jesus and the revelation of the resurrected *kyrios*. 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 phantasy. It is also not just a poly-individual and communal recollection. A living cultural and canonic memory does not only shape individual and communal modes of experience and expectation. The very lives and bodies of the bearers of this memory are *shaped by the very person and life which constitutes and sustains this memory*.¹⁹ Based on 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.

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 the questions in the context of his 'resurrection'," thus shows a poor exegetical and theological perception. ("Zwischen Karfreitag und Ostern," in Hansjürgen Verweyen (ed.), *Osterglaube ohne Auferstehung? Diskussion mit Gerd Lüdemann*, Herder: Freiburg/Basel/Wien 1995, 13ff, 27 [translation M.W].)

18 Cf. *The End of the World and the Ends of God*, 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.

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

The transfigured body of the resurrected calls for the participation of the witnesses in the glorified life, a participation which 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 which deal with the 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, like Col. 3:1, can adhort the 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 a considerable assistance in the difficult disclosure of both the continuity and the discontinuity of this life and the life in the "world to come." The claim that all the eschatological symbols just mean "the same" can not be maintained. They do not point at a vague or even miraculous "transformation" which should be left to pious 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 can not illuminate each other. I would like to show that the symbol system connected with the "reign of God," which seems to focus more on the communal transformation than on the 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 Apostolic Creed speaks.

20 Cf. KD 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 Schüle: *Gottes Handeln als Gedächtnis. Auferstehung in kulturtheoretischer und biblisch-theologischer Perspektive*, in: H.-J. Eckstein and M. Welker, *die Wirklichkeit der Auferstehung*.

It is Luke who occasionally explicitly connects the two different symbol systems, 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 anyone 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 for the 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 or distant to all parts of history. In this respect the full theophany of the end of time is a (co-)present reality with all the times which necessarily can not be adequately expressed by any specific development in world-history.

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. Luke 17:21.23; Mark 13:21; Matthew 24:23). 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.

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

23 Cf. John Polkinghorne, Emergent and Teleological Process, in this volume. See also Michael Welker, "The 'Reign' of God, *Theology Today* 49, 1992, 500-515; Michael Welker / Michael Wolter, *Die Unscheinbarkeit des Reiches Gottes*, Marburger Jahrbuch Theologie XI, hg. W. Härle / R. Preul, Elwert Verlag:

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 the 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 which 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 mode of an engaging and transforming *incorporated word or message: the gospel*. It allows for a participation in this reality--that is a reality of what the sciences would call a "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 clearly see that here again we focus on an emergent reality. For good reasons we have to acknowledge the necessary inability to clearly locate the reality, which historically corresponds to the

Marburg 1999, 103-116.

24 Friedrich Schiller, *Sämtliche Gedichte*. Zweiter Teil, dtv GA 2, 171f, 172.

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 topic of the resurrection seems to be connected with the replacement of an "archaeologicistic" understanding of history (with an enthusiasm about "excavating Jesus") by 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 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 which opens a specific space for images of Jesus that stand in tension, even in conflict with one another. This refined view of that which is historical

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 with Christ, mediated by faith, by participation in the sacraments, and by the *imitatio Christi*, the believers at least move toward the resurrection and the life to come or even already participate in it (cf. John 11:25; Romans 6:5; Col. 2:12; Phil. 3:10f). 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" (Romans 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 the 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 which are physically embodied human persons. In this process the 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 gain part in the divine power and life which sustains, rescues and ennobles the creation and will never perish.

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