

## Chapter 6

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# Raised from the Dead

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The religions of the ancient world did not find the idea of being raised from the dead an unusual one. In ancient Egypt, Osiris suffered at the hands of Seth, only to be brought back to life by his consort Isis. In Canaan, the death of Baal was rectified by his wife/mother, who raised him from the dead. The tales of ancient Greece include the adventures of heroes who traveled to Hades in order to bring back the dead, though not necessarily successfully, as in the case of Orpheus. Some of the native American religions include stories similar to those of the fertility religions of the ancient Near East, corresponding to the cycle of the seasons of the year as death came in winter followed by renewed life in spring.

### BIBLICAL BACKGROUND

Despite the common occurrence of the raising of the dead in the religions of the ancient world, the Roman governor Festus responded in a startled way when he heard Paul declare that Jesus had risen from the dead: "You are out of your mind, Paul!" (Acts 26:24). The mythologies of rising from the dead all had nonhistorical qualities about them, from the hybrid animal-men to the nontemporal setting with its once-upon-a-time flavor. Paul, on the other hand, expected Festus to believe that a resurrection had actually happened to a real contemporary individual. It had not happened once upon a time, but the day after Passover, the year Caiaphas served as high priest, during the governorship of Pontius Pilate, and when Herod was tetrarch of Galilee. The death and resurrection of Jesus had not happened in a mythic or heavenly realm, but in the vicinity of Jerusalem, in the garden of Gethsemane, on the Mount of Olives, in the house of Annas, on the steps of the governor's residence, on a hill called Golgotha outside the city walls, and in a garden tomb.

## The Gospels

The idea of resurrection formed an important part of the theology of the Pharisees within first-century Judaism. But this doctrine also divided Judaism, for the Sadducees did not believe in a resurrection. The Gospels reflect the extent to which the expectation of resurrection was a living part of contemporary thought in Palestine prior to the first Easter. The debate between the religious groups is reflected in the query Jesus received from a group of Sadducees, “who say there is no resurrection” (Mark 12:18; see also Matt. 22:23; Luke 20:27; cf. Acts 23:6; 24:15; 26:6–8). By his answer, Jesus clearly identified himself with the Pharisees and their understanding of the Psalms and the Prophets. He declared that the Sadducees were in error because they did not “know the Scriptures or the power of God” (Matt. 22:29).

Jesus taught that sexuality was a phenomenon of the present age, but that in the resurrection people would be asexual. Those who take part in the resurrection will not marry or be a part of marriage. Instead, people of the resurrection will be like the angels who do not procreate. Those found worthy to take part in the resurrection never die because they have become children of God (Luke 20:34–36).

At the mourning of Lazarus, Martha expressed the popular understanding of a future resurrection at the end of time. She expected her dead brother Lazarus to “rise again in the resurrection at the last day” (John 11:24). Even Herod expressed views on resurrection that demonstrate how theological understanding can pass to popular theology and finally to superstition. When he heard of some of the wonders related to the ministry of Jesus, Herod speculated that John the Baptist had been raised from the dead (Matt. 14:1–2; Mark 6:14–16; Luke 9:7–9).

In this climate, the Gospels record that Jesus raised the dead on several occasions. He raised to life the daughter of Jairus, a synagogue leader, (Matt. 9:18–26; Mark 5:35–43; Luke 8:40–56). On another occasion, he performed the same wonder by raising the dead son of a widow (Luke 7:11–17). Finally, Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead—after he had been in the tomb for four days (John 11:1–44). John indicates that the attention these acts aroused from the people served as a principal reason why the religious authorities

wanted to stop Jesus (11:45–53). Bringing a dead person back to life, however, is a different idea from resurrection. Those brought back to life died again, whereas those who experience resurrection will never die. The act of raising the dead puts into perspective the significance of the announcements by Jesus of his own imminent resurrection. Such announcements do not appear in the Gospels until after Jesus demonstrated his power over death.

### Resurrection Announcements

The Passion predictions in the Synoptic Gospels have received considerable scholarly attention. But the four Gospels actually contain more preresurrection announcements by Jesus than prepassion announcements. On at least ten occasions, Jesus announced that he would rise from the dead.

*The sign of Jonah.* Twice when his adversaries demanded a sign identifying who Jesus was, he offered them the sign of Jonah (Matt. 12:38–42; Luke 11:29–32; and Matt. 16:1–4; Mark 8:11–13). Jesus spoke typologically of his coming burial and resurrection, for that would be like Jonah, who spent three days in the belly of the great fish. While speaking cryptically, Jesus made it clear that the resurrection would comprise the definitive statement of his identity.

*The Passion predictions.* Strictly speaking, the three Passion predictions of the Synoptic Gospels are not exclusively about the Passion. While they all deal with the circumstances surrounding the death of Jesus, with the exception of Luke 9:44–45 they culminate in the resurrection ([1] Matt. 16:21–23; Mark 8:31; Luke 9:22; [2] Matt. 17:22–23; Mark 9:30–32; [3] Matt. 20:17–19; Mark 10:32–34; Luke 18:31–33). In these passages, the resurrection puts death and suffering as well as vanity into proper perspective (Matt. 16:22–28).

*The rendezvous in Galilee.* Matthew and Mark record a warning from Jesus that the disciples would all fall away, but in its context he announced a rendezvous with them in Galilee after the resurrection (Matt. 26:31–32; Mark 14:27–28). Matthew and Mark both cite the fulfillment of this announcement at the empty tomb when an angel reminded the women that Jesus would meet the disciples in Galilee after the resurrection (Matt. 28:7–10; Mark 16:7). John joins Matthew in describing what happened in Galilee after

the resurrection (Matt. 28:16–20; John 21). While Luke does not mention the rendezvous announcement or that particular resurrection appearance, he does allude to an announcement of the resurrection when the disciples had been with Jesus in Galilee (Luke 24:6). This episode plays an important part in the impact of the resurrection on them, for it emphasizes how Jesus explained to the disciples things they could not comprehend until after they experienced them. The resurrection, in this sense, redefined reality for the disciples, who now remembered what Jesus had said. Everything that he had said now had to be taken seriously in a way that was not necessary prior to the resurrection.

*Transfiguration and resurrection.* Even though Peter, James, and John experienced the Transfiguration, they did not understand it. When the face of Jesus shone like the sun and Moses and Elijah appeared, Peter reacted by suggesting that they erect tents in honor of Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. In the midst of this event the disciples heard a voice from a bright cloud that enveloped them, declaring, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!” (Matt. 17:5).

The Transfiguration demonstrated the significance of the teaching by Jesus that God “is not the God of the dead but of the living” (Matt. 22:32). Moses and Elijah had been dead for centuries, but they lived in the presence of the Son of God. In this context Jesus told the three companions not to tell anyone about the experience until after his resurrection (Matt. 17:9, Mark 9:9–10). At that time the implications of that event would extend to all like Moses and Elijah, who faced death. Furthermore, the private declaration of sonship that the disciples witnessed at the Transfiguration was superseded by a public declaration, for Jesus “was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead” (Rom. 1:4).

*The good shepherd.* In John’s Gospel, Jesus describes himself as the good shepherd who knows his sheep intimately and lays down his life for them (John 10:14–15). This announcement of the coming Passion also occurs in the context of a resurrection announcement. While laying down his life demonstrates his love, taking his life up again demonstrates his power and authority. The resurrection represents his ultimate demonstration of power and authority (10:17–18). Such a demonstration is echoed by Jesus in the resur-

rection account of Matthew, where Jesus declared that “all authority in heaven and on earth” had been given to him (Matt. 28:18).

*Raising the temple.* John’s Gospel records another episode that occurred in Jerusalem, in which a group demanded a sign of Jesus to prove his authority. Jesus replied, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days” (John 2:19). Again, in cryptic, allegorical fashion, Jesus taught the significance of the resurrection in advance in terms of its proof of his authority. By speaking allegorically, however, the significance of the teaching was not clear to the disciples until after the resurrection (2:22).

*After a little while.* Finally, John’s Gospel records an exchange at the Last Supper that announced the resurrection: “In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me” (John 16:16). The disciples did not understand this cryptic remark, but Jesus explained that when he was gone, they would experience grief. When he appeared again, however, his appearance would usher in an experience of complete and unending joy. The experience of suffering is real, but the resurrection and its effect would cause suffering to be forgotten (John 16:17–24; cf. Phil. 3:7–11; Heb. 12:2). Even suffering turns to joy under the impact of the resurrection.

*Reaction to the announcements.* The disciples have often been castigated as insensitive to spiritual matters for their failure to grasp who Jesus was while he was in their midst. Actually, they behaved as perfectly rational people of any age or culture. They expressed no less spiritual sensitivity than anyone would who heard someone suggest that he was going to rise from the dead. A resurrection at the end of time was far enough away to be manageable. The resurrection of Jesus, however, was perfectly unreasonable until it happened.

The trial accounts in Matthew and Mark reflect the exchange recorded in John about destroying and raising the temple (Matt. 26:60–62; Mark 14:58–59). The testimony of the two witnesses reflects the basic misunderstanding that the disciples experienced. Christ’s statement was taken more as an insult to the temple than as the blasphemy the court hoped to uncover. The people interpreted Jesus’ statement only to mean that he could actually destroy the temple and build another one in three days. At the crucifixion, this episode was recalled again by the crowd as some cried, “You who

are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!" (Matt. 27:40).

Finally, the authorities responded to the resurrection announcements of Jesus with caution. While they did not believe that he would rise from the dead, they had heard of the cryptic announcements and did not want any trouble coming from them. Matthew records the request of the chief priests and Pharisees that Pilate place a guard at the tomb to ensure that no one could steal the body of Jesus and then claim that he had risen (Matt. 27:62–66).

### **The Resurrection Accounts**

While few events in ancient times had careful "dating" in the accounts written about them, all four of the Gospels specify that Jesus rose on the first day of the week following Passover. They also agree that the first people who went to the tomb at daybreak and found it empty were women. An angel announced the resurrection as the fulfillment of what Jesus had declared earlier. The women then ran to tell the disciples what had happened. Peter and John ran to the tomb to verify the report. In the meantime, Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene and to other women. The reports began to spread among the disciples, and Jesus appeared to two others on the road to Emmaus before appearing to a gathering of the disciples that evening (Matt. 28:1–10; Mark 16:1–8; Luke 24:1–49; John 20:1–23). The fact that the longer ending of Mark and the Gospel of John support the account of Luke adds credibility to the record of the disciples' experience of the resurrection.

The agreement of the Gospels regarding the essential events of the first Easter is remarkable, considering the diverse recollection of details they record in both the story of the death of Christ and of his resurrection. While John's Gospel primarily tells stories that the Synoptic Gospels had not included, his account of the resurrection has a striking similarity to the basic occurrences found in the other Gospels. While the different writers agree about the events, John disagrees with the others over whether Mary Magdalene met the risen Jesus before or after Peter and John went to the tomb. The writers also reflect different impressions of exactly how many angelic beings appeared, though this issue reflects the thorny prob-

lem of knowing people from angels (Gen. 18:1–19:29; Dan. 3:24–25; Heb. 13:2) and of knowing exactly how many angels might be at a given location at a given time (Luke 2:9–15; cf. Num. 22:21–35). In similar fashion with the medieval debate over how many angels can dance on the head of a pin, twentieth-century Christian scholarship has focused attention on the inconsequential variations in the resurrection accounts rather than on the significance of the unanimous testimony of the Evangelists to the resurrection.

### **Implications**

The resurrection firmly established the identity of Jesus as Lord for his disciples. Executed for identifying himself with God, the resurrection justified Jesus as innocent of blasphemy and created a basis for the disciples to understand finally his true identity (John 20:24–29). The resurrection also demonstrated the authority and power of Jesus over life and death. By extension, Jesus will share the resurrection with his followers (John 5:21, 28; 6:25–59).

### **General Apostolic Writings**

The apostles pursued at least five major themes related to the resurrection that have significant implications for faith. They regarded the declaration of the resurrection as central to their faith and calling. Apart from the resurrection they had no faith, for faith had died for them with Jesus on Good Friday. Thus, it was crucial that their leadership be able to declare the resurrection with confidence from their own experience (Acts 1:22). Their preaching culminated in the announcement of the resurrection of Jesus (4:33; 17:18), and participation in salvation required that people believe God had raised Jesus from the dead (Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 15:1–11).

*Vindication.* The sermons in Acts have the resurrection at their core, though they nuance the implications of the resurrection in a variety of ways consistent with the teaching reflected in the letters. Regardless of the nuance the sermons follow, however, most make the point that God vindicated Christ by the resurrection and clearly established his authority (Acts 2:23–24, 32; 3:15; 4:10; 5:30; 10:39–40; 13:27–30). The same thought pattern appears in each of these sermons. Though they do not have a formulaic phrase, they all express the idea that people killed Jesus, but God raised him from

the dead. Jesus was right after all. By raising him, God affirmed all of the teachings and claims of his Son. Thus, the resurrection has a variety of applications based on the ministry of Jesus.

*Hope.* If “faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1, KJV), then faith in the resurrection supplies a substantial reason for hope and represents evidence of the transcendent realities that are not seen. The apostles certainly stressed the resurrection as a concrete basis for hope. In his Pentecostal sermon, Peter quoted from the book of Psalms to indicate that David had a hope based on the expectation of the resurrection (Acts 2:25–28). This theme appears also in 1 Peter, where believers are said to have a “living hope” as a result of the resurrection of Jesus (1 Peter 1:3). The resurrection of Jesus created a basis for faith and hope in God (1:21).

This theme of the resurrection also appears throughout Paul’s sermons and writings. In his comments in Jerusalem and in Caesarea, Paul associated hope with the anticipation of the resurrection. He declared that he stood accused because of his “hope in the resurrection of the dead” (Acts 23:6; 24:21), the same hope that was a central tenant of faith for the Pharisees (24:14–15; cf. 23:6–8). Before Agrippa, Paul declared that the hope of Israel for the fulfillment of God’s promises to the prophets for resurrection of the dead had been fulfilled in Christ (26:6–8, 22–23).

Paul’s letters expand on the theme of hope that proceeds from the resurrection. Those who have faith in Christ have been called to live a life of hope because the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is at work in all who believe (Eph. 1:18–20). In the face of suffering, hardship, and adversity, the resurrection provides hope for those who trust God (2 Cor. 1:8–10; cf. 2 Tim. 2:8). Hope is not limited to this life, but it extends beyond the grave; otherwise it would not truly be hope (1 Cor. 15:12–19; 1 Thess. 1:9–10; 4:13–14). Without the resurrection, Paul reasoned that Christians had no hope and were to be pitied (1 Cor. 15:18).

*Eternal life.* Hope beyond the grave focuses on the gift of eternal life that comes through participation in the resurrection of Christ. The apostles proclaimed that the resurrection of the dead would occur for those in Jesus (Acts 4:2). The resurrection of Jesus served as the prelude to the resurrection of all who “belong” to Jesus (1 Cor.

15:20–23; cf. John 10:26–30; 17:2, 6, 24). Just as God raised Jesus from the dead, he will also raise those who have faith in Christ (Rom. 10:9–10; 2 Cor. 4:13–14). By the believer's relationship with Christ through faith, they share in his resurrection as God makes them alive with Christ (Eph. 2:4–9). The nature of this relationship finds description variously as "remaining in" Christ, as being "in Christ," as Christ being "in" us, as the Holy Spirit being in us, or as the Spirit of Christ being in us. This concept, though described in a variety of ways, is crucially important, for it explains how the resurrection of Jesus extends to those who have faith in him:

But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you. (Rom. 8:10–11)

Baptism represented for the early church both participation in the death and resurrection of Jesus and incorporation into his Spirit (the discussion of the Spirit must wait for a later chapter). New believers went under the water as a corpse into the grave, but they came up out of the water as Christ emerged from the tomb, "having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead" (Col. 2:12; cf. Rom. 6:4–5). Unlike the mystery religions, which had initiation rites that were thought to save the new convert, Peter stressed that baptism served as a pledge of "good conscience" to God and that the resurrection it represented brought salvation (1 Peter 3:21).

*Justification and righteousness.* While the doctrine of justification is normally thought of in relation to the death of Christ, Paul also spoke of justification and its cognate idea, the forgiveness of sins, in relation to the resurrection. In Pisidian Antioch, Paul discussed the resurrection at length in terms of the fulfillment of promises made by God to King David (Acts 13:26–39). After elaborating the significance of the resurrection and the fulfillment of the prophecy that the "Holy One" would not see decay, Paul drew his overall conclusion:

Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him

everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses. (Acts 13:38–39)

This correlation between resurrection and justification also appears in Romans 10:9–10, where belief in the resurrection leads to justification. Christ died for our sins, but he rose to justify those who have faith in the God who raised him. God credits such people as righteous (4:24–25).

*Character of life.* The resurrection has profound implications about how a person lives his or her life. Because the resurrection puts death and eternity in perspective, it also puts life in perspective. If a person has faith that God has raised Jesus from the dead, then it ought to have an impact on how he or she lives. Those who share in the resurrection of Christ have been set free from slavery to sin, but they have become slaves to righteousness (Rom. 6:13–14). God has made the resurrection of Christ available to people in order that they “might bear fruit to God” (7:4; cf. Gal. 5:16–23). Since by the resurrection Christ has been made Lord of the living and the dead, we ought to live our lives for him (Rom. 14:7–9). Because of the resurrection, the bodies of those who have faith in Christ belong to Christ; therefore, Christians ought to keep their bodies pure (1 Cor. 6:13–15). Accepting the resurrection of Christ creates an obligation for how one lives. Paul suggested that the resurrection gives a motivation for moral behavior that human reasons lack (1 Cor. 15:29–34). This motivation emerges from the love of Christ who died and rose in order that people might have a new basis for living their lives (2 Cor. 5:14–15).

### **HISTORICAL/THEOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT**

The resurrection has held a different place in the history of the church than other elements of the gospel. It has never served as the focal point of theology around which other elements of the gospel revolved, though it does serve as the perspective of worship in the Orthodox Church. Neither has it served as the center of controversy in a major way. When it has been a part of controversy, its part has tended to be secondary to another issue, as in the Gnostic controversy of the second century. Certainly an occasional theologian like Oscar Cullmann has made it central, or others like Bultmann have

seen it as mythical, but for the whole church in a major epoch, these have been minor incidents, not to be compared with major theologies or movements.

The virtual absence of the resurrection as the integrating factor of a major movement, theological controversy, or school of theology seems surprising. It has been a part of all orthodox theological schools of thought, and Easter represents the central moment in the Christian year. Its absence from debate may actually heighten its significance for the many groups that make up Christianity. Since the Gnostic debates of the second century, the church has not had a significant dispute about the resurrection of Christ, and even the Gnostic dispute had more to do with creation and the role of matter in the divine scheme of things. Even the furor over Bultmann's demythologizing did not result in a significant shift to the resurrection as the organizing principle of evangelical theology. Evangelicals viewed the resurrection as only one of many issues related to one's view of Scripture.

The resurrection has remained the great article of faith that requires neither theories, interpretations, nor exposition. One either believes or disbelieves that Jesus came out of the tomb. As the one great undisputed article of faith, however, it has never played the central role of defining an epoch, school of thought, or movement.

### **The Patristic Period**

While disputes with the Gnostics over the fact of the resurrection or the nature of the resurrection formed a minor theme for the church fathers, the emphasis of the debates lay on what would be the nature of the future resurrection of all the dead rather than on the resurrection of Christ. Even this generalization, however, requires some qualification. The early fathers laid their stress on the resurrection of Christ and the necessity of a "real" suffering, death, and resurrection for salvation.

Ignatius stressed that the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ were fleshly and spiritual, but not Docetic. A real resurrection requires a real death, otherwise they would not result in salvation.<sup>1</sup> He insisted that Christ underwent real suffering while "heavenly, earthly, and subterranean beings looked on."<sup>2</sup> Refuting a Docetic understanding of the Incarnation, Ignatius declared that because of

his true incarnation Christ experienced a true resurrection in which those who believe in him will share. Polycarp joined Ignatius in his attack of Docetism, arguing that resurrection and judgment are as crucial to the faith as are incarnation and passion.<sup>3</sup>

A treatise on the resurrection attributed to Justin refutes the views of those who argued that the flesh is the cause of sin and that Jesus only appeared to have a body of flesh.<sup>4</sup> This treatise appears to have been written to elicit faith in unbelievers, but not on the basis of the fulfillment of Scripture, as in the *Dialogue with Trypho*. Instead, *On the Resurrection* relies exclusively on philosophical argument from Plato, Epicurus, and the Stoics. In his *Second Apology*, however, Justin discussed resurrection in terms of the judgment of the wicked, a thoroughly biblical theme.<sup>5</sup> In *To Autolycus*, Theophilus of Antioch used arguments from the experience of the pagan world rather than from Scripture to demonstrate the reasonableness of the resurrection of the dead.<sup>6</sup>

In his treatise *On the Resurrection*, Athenagoras made a case for the reasonableness of the idea of resurrection without specific reference to Christ.<sup>7</sup> In his argument, however, resurrection proceeds from an understanding of God as Creator who has an ultimate plan for his creation, and from an understanding of a final judgment that will give a suitable end to life.<sup>8</sup> In this treatise, Athenagoras began by addressing "scholastic" arguments that raise the issue of a person who drowned and was eaten by a fish. If someone then caught the fish and ate it, what would happen in the resurrection when the same material particles had occupied a place in two different people at different times? To this challenge, Athenagoras developed a theory that excluded the possibility of human flesh ever being digested by another human to the extent that it would become an essential part of the flesh of another.<sup>9</sup>

References to the resurrection occur in the work of Irenaeus in the context of arguments with the Gnostics. The primary arguments relate to the creation of the physical world, the coming of Christ into the world in true physical, human fashion, and the implications of the resurrection of Christ for those who have faith in him. Irenaeus had a clear millenarian position, and the coming of the kingdom at the return of Christ composed the focal point of his discussion of resurrection in *Against Heresies*.<sup>10</sup> The resurrection of

Christ, however, is the assumption that makes all of the arguments necessary.

Tertullian's treatise *On the Resurrection of the Flesh* also discusses resurrection in relation to the Gnostic teaching of a Docetic Christ and the essential wickedness of the physical human body. Like Irenaeus, Tertullian stressed that the resurrection provides for the judgment of the total person before God.<sup>11</sup> In the debate with the Gnostics, who denied the goodness of creation, Tertullian affirmed that the Christian hope lies in the "resurrection of the dead," which means that the fallen body of flesh will rise because the fleshly body represents the aspect of people that dies, since the soul does not die.<sup>12</sup> He emphatically rejected the notion that the resurrection of believers refers to the experience in this life of putting on Christ in baptism.<sup>13</sup> The Gnostics tended to speak of resurrection as though it corresponded to the Christian experience of regeneration. Because they understood the human spirit to be a part of the divine, however, they could not speak of regeneration, which involved the Holy Spirit's coming. Instead, they spoke of the experience of God in this life as a resurrection or "restoration to the Pleroma," which for them meant a return to a preexistent state.<sup>14</sup> Whereas the Apologists had appealed to the Old Testament and its fulfillment for their authority, the Valentinians and other Gnostics appealed to the writings of the apostles, but with a mystical or esoteric interpretation.<sup>15</sup> While they may have affirmed resurrection, they meant something quite different, which might be confused for what a later generation would call "realized eschatology."

Origen's view of the future resurrection crossed the boundary of accepted orthodoxy because of his theory of spiritual bodies as opposed to material bodies. He derived his notion of spiritual bodies largely from his conception of the preexistent state of all rational beings. To Origen, God had given bodies as a punishment to the spirits who turned their wills away from him. Thus, material existence came as the result of the Fall. Having devoted his life to the exposition of Scripture, Origen could arrive at such a conclusion only because his allegorical method allowed him the freedom to accommodate his view of Scripture to his philosophical understanding. He viewed the coming resurrection as a restoration of the spiritual universe without particular concern for the material universe. In terms

of how this understanding of body affected personhood, Origen held that the "body" has a variety of expressions for preserving the individual, matter being only one of these.<sup>16</sup> Origen advocated an "organic view" of resurrection, following Paul's metaphor in 1 Corinthians 15 of the seed, which allows something to change while remaining the same.<sup>17</sup>

In contrast to Origen's view, Caroline Walker Bynum has identified a Western tradition, emerging from Athenagoras and the early fathers, which viewed resurrection as essentially a reassemblage of the material parts of the body, without which people could only experience a partial or incomplete continuity beyond death.<sup>18</sup> Augustine followed Athenagoras, insisting that in the resurrection to come, the saints must have a resurrection like the resurrection of Christ. In affirming the resurrection of the flesh, however, Augustine also affirmed a transformation of the flesh, just as water may change to air while retaining the same material particles.<sup>19</sup> Augustine's understanding of resurrection followed his primary concern for creation and its redemption. The resurrection expresses the divine concern for the total person. The resurrection frees the body from the consequences of sin. It also preserves the uniqueness of a person, which makes them recognizable by preserving the body.<sup>20</sup>

Neoplatonists, Gnostics, and Manichaeans viewed the body as a vulgar prison that held the soul captive. The body caused immorality for the soul; thus, the soul longed to escape its prison to achieve reunion with the divine. To these thinkers, the idea of the resurrection of the body constituted punishment rather than salvation. The issue for Augustine and his adversaries was not the resurrection that came as a conclusion, but the initial primacy of the nature of humanity in relation to God. If people are a spark of God, then the body and resurrection constitute base ideas. If, on the other hand, people are created by God, then the body and resurrection are good.<sup>21</sup> In Augustine's thought, therefore, the resurrection takes on less significance in terms of metaphysical priority because of the worldview he strove to affirm. Resurrection assures the survival of the created person.

In the thirteenth century, several groups emerged that revisited the old Gnostic and Manichaean views of creation and resurrection. The Amauricians, a group in Paris, insisted that the indwelling of the

Holy Spirit was the resurrection.<sup>22</sup> The Cathari denied the resurrection because they denied the Incarnation and repudiated the physical world.<sup>23</sup> In 1215, the Fourth Lateran Council required the Cathari to agree that “all rise with their own individual bodies, that is, the bodies which they now wear.”<sup>24</sup> At the same time, however, the idea of God’s ability to reassemble the human body parts at the resurrection correlates with the growing practice of the mutilation of the bodies of dead saints to disperse the benefits of proximity to their bodies.<sup>25</sup>

### Eastern Orthodoxy

One of the great generalizations of Christianity rests in the notion that the Western church emphasizes the crucifixion of Christ while the Eastern church emphasizes the resurrection. Both branches of the church emphasize both. Nonetheless, one may note certain nuances in how they emphasize these elements of the gospel they both affirm.

The Eastern church celebrates the Eucharist from the perspective of its fulfillment after the resurrection rather than its anticipation of the crucifixion. Thus, the Eastern church observes the meal with a mood of rejoicing over the victory rather than with a somber mood over the suffering—as would be reflected in a text like Acts 2:46, where the church “broke bread . . . with glad and generous hearts.”<sup>26</sup> Unlike the Roman Catholic understanding of transubstantiation, whereby the elements of the supper become the body and blood of Christ as the priest speaks the words of the liturgy, the Orthodox believe that the presence of the resurrected Christ in the service causes the change in the elements.<sup>27</sup> For them, the Eucharist does not so much plead the sacrifice of the cross, as the Roman mass does. Instead, it opens the door of eternity beyond space and time where one communes with the resurrected Christ.<sup>28</sup>

The recurring motif of joy in Orthodox worship relates to the central reality of the resurrection for the church: “The light of the resurrection of Christ lights the church, and the joy of the resurrection, of the triumph over death, fills it.”<sup>29</sup> Easter is the heart of Orthodoxy, which is characterized by joy over the resurrection that puts all other experience into perspective.<sup>30</sup> Thus, Orthodoxy as a whole is not a world-renouncing faith. With its stress on the light of the transfiguration and resurrection, it presents an optimistic faith.

The Orthodox continue to practice baptism by immersion, which represents the death of a sinner and his or her resurrection as a redeemed Christian.<sup>31</sup> It involves a spiritual birth whereby the "natural man," and the original sin that afflicts, dies through putting on Christ.<sup>32</sup>

### **Observations**

The centrality of the resurrection can be seen in the decision of the church to move its principal day of worship from the Sabbath to the first day of the week, when Jesus rose from the dead.<sup>33</sup> While the church has steadfastly held to the resurrection of Christ as a basic assumption, her discussions of this doctrine have often actually been about creation, the Incarnation, the final judgment, or the coming of the Holy Spirit. Among current theologians, though, concern over the resurrection has received particular attention from Moltmann and Pannenberg. The resurrection of Christ has both present implications (as the Eastern church has stressed) and future implications (as the Western church has stressed). These implications include hope beyond this life and hope for living in this life based on the victory of Christ, the affirmation of creation, and the affirmation of the individual person.

### **THE RESURRECTION AS GOOD NEWS**

The resurrection appeals to an entirely different set of spiritual concerns than the death of Jesus. Spiritual concerns do not necessarily mean otherworldly concerns. The spiritual issues that the resurrection answers speak both to the challenges of living and dying.

### **Hope**

The resurrection offers a concrete basis for hope to people who have no reason for hope. Hopelessness has become a pervasive problem of late twentieth-century life, whether in the shanty towns of Mexico City, the slums of South Chicago, the dull block apartments of Moscow, or the exclusive neighborhoods of Orange County. People without hope have little reason to live, as the death rate among children and youth in inner-city gangs suggests. They live dangerously, and they treat one another with the same despair they have for their own future.

The woman who called my study ten minutes before the Christmas Sunday morning worship service to inquire if she could still go to heaven if she killed herself was not asking a question about the perseverance of the saints or about the extent of the efficacy of Christ's atonement. She wanted hope for living. The resurrection supplies that hope. If Christ could go through the darkness of death and the grave to emerge on the other side in a glorious new life, then he offers hope that on the other side of our immediate experience of darkness lies a new life that does not need to wait until heaven. For people who live in despair and depression, Christ's resurrection offers a concrete basis of hope for those who share in the power of his resurrection.

### **Victory**

The resurrection powerfully demonstrates Christ's victory over all the adverse forces of the universe, from the prejudice that condemned him to the spiritual powers in opposition to him. Defeat and failure characterize many lives in the West as well as other parts of the world, but with the success culture of the West, failure can be an even greater source of agony. The resurrection speaks of the victory people may experience in spite of the circumstances of life, a victory that allows them to see the vanity of life from a different perspective. The resurrection victory provides a basis for moving out of the self-categorization of victim to the experience of victor with Christ. For people who live defeated lives, the resurrection of Jesus offers good news for living victoriously above the defeats of life. It does not deny the defeats any more than the resurrection denied the crucifixion, but it puts the most miserable defeat in perspective.

### **Freedom**

The resurrection offers freedom from bondage. Ultimately this freedom extends to freedom from death and the grave. In the meantime, however, the resurrection offers freedom from the bondage of sin. For the person bound by physical or psychological addiction, the resurrection offers freedom from the bondage that controls one's life. Freedom from the slavery of sin, whether compulsion, obsession, or mere habit, is held out as an offer from Christ to those who share his resurrection. The shared resurrection presupposes the

shared death wherein a person dies with Christ to sin. In contrast to suicide, however, which represents vain escapism without hope of anything better, death with Christ opens the door to the resurrection and freedom from what lies in the past. For those who languish in bondage to things they cannot overcome, the resurrection of Jesus offers the good news of freedom.

This freedom also extends to the spiritual realm. Cher Moua, a member of the Hmong ethnic group of Laos, describes how the resurrection freed him from the dread of an almost endless cycle of reincarnations that his tribal religion offered. Sharing in the resurrection of Jesus breaks that cycle and allows him spiritual freedom. This experience of freedom also has its implication for the significance of personhood.

### **Affirmation of Personhood**

Resurrection stands in stark contrast to the idea of the immortality of a soul that will eventually remerge with the divine essence from which it has become disengaged, there to lose its individual existence like a drop of rain that falls in the ocean. Instead of a cycle of reincarnations required to allow this immortal soul to ascend to a higher spiritual plane, resurrection teaches that people have one life to live and have a personal identity created by God. Resurrection affirms each individual person and what they choose to make of their lives. Instead of souls that are a part of the divine immortal essence, people are creatures whom God preserves through resurrection. For the person who longs for personal acceptance and fulfillment, who longs for an experience in eternity characterized by meaningful relationship rather than unconscious oblivion, then the resurrection of Jesus Christ offers good news that God has created that kind of present and future.

### **Eternal Life**

Earlier we observed that existentialism is concerned both with the dread of meaninglessness and with the dread of isolation. The existentialists mention a third dread related to human existence. To be aware of my existence is to be aware of my coming nonexistence. People everywhere dread death. Perhaps not *all* people dread death, but certainly most people do. The resurrection provides a basis for

expecting life beyond the grave, and it gives some veiled understanding of what that life may be like. The resurrection of Jesus provides the grounds for belief in the general resurrection to come.

American culture has a pervasive dread of death and the aging that leads to death. Entire industries exist to help people deny their mortality. I once knew a man who was consumed with his regimen of physical fitness and nutrition. The crisis of his life came when he had a heart attack; it was not supposed to happen. Other people deny death by the clothes they wear, the cosmetics they apply, and the recreation they pursue. In an increasingly mobile society, children grow up not knowing old people. In such a society devoted to medical technology, old people who are dying are segregated from the rest of society in nursing homes. The society has structured itself not to deal with death, because it does not know how. For people who long to live but have no reason to expect anything but the grave, the resurrection of Jesus Christ offers good news that God has power to give life.

## NOTES

1. Ignatius, *To the Smyrnaeans*, 7:2; 12:2. References to Ignatius and Polycarp come from *The Apostolic Fathers*, ed. Jack N. Sparks (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1978).

2. Ignatius, *To the Trallians*, 9:1–11:2.

3. Polycarp, *To the Philippians*, 7:1.

4. Justin Martyr, *On The Resurrection*, 1–2.

5. Joanne E. McWilliam Dewart, *Death and Resurrection* (Message of the Fathers of the Church 22; Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1986), 69.

6. *Ibid.*, 70.

7. *Ibid.*, 73. Some dispute the authenticity of this treatise; see *Tertullian's Treatise on the Resurrection*, ed. Ernest Evans (London: SPCK, 1960), xxviii, n.1.

8. Athenagoras, *On The Resurrection*, chaps. 12–25.

9. Lynn Boliek, *The Resurrection of the Flesh* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 43–44.

10. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 5.24–36; see also Dewart, *Death and Resurrection*, 97.
11. *Tertullian's Treatise on the Resurrection*, 39.
12. *Ibid.*, 49–50.
13. *Ibid.*, 51.
14. Malcolm Lee Peel, *The Epistle to Rheginos: A Valentinian Letter on the Resurrection* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), 30.
15. *Ibid.*, 17.
16. Boliek, *The Resurrection of the Flesh*, 60–66.
17. Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1995), 159. Bynum argues persuasively that well into the late Middle Ages, Origen stands virtually alone in his view that dismissed the participation of the physical in the resurrection: “The idea of person, bequeathed by the Middle Ages to the modern world, was not a concept of soul escaping body or soul using body; it was a concept of self in which physicality was integrally bound to sensation, emotion, reasoning, identity—and therefore finally to whatever one means by salvation” (p. 11).
18. *Ibid.*, 63. Within this tradition Bynum includes Irenaeus, Tertullian, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, Jerome, Cyril of Jerusalem, Methodius, Ephraim the Syriac, Macarius Magnes, Hilary of Poitiers, Honorius Augustodunensis, Hugh of St. Victor, Anselm of Laon, William of Champeaux, Hildegard of Bingen, Herrad of Hohenbourg, Bernard, William of St. Thierry, and Herman of Reun.
19. Boliek, *The Resurrection of the Flesh*, 69–73.
20. Henri Irenee Marrou, *The Resurrection and Saint Augustine's Theology of Values*, trans. Maria Consolata (Villanova, Pa.: Villanova, 1966), 16, 19–22, 26.
21. *Ibid.*, 8–13.
22. Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, 154.
23. *Ibid.*, 215–16.
24. *Ibid.*, 154–55.
25. *Ibid.*, 201–3.
26. Ernest Benz, *The Eastern Orthodox Church: Its Thought and Life*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (Chicago: Aldine, 1963), 22–23.
27. Sergius Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church* (London: Century, 1935), 37.
28. Nicholas Zernov, *Eastern Christendom* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1961), 244.

29. Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, 9.
30. *Ibid.*, 153–54.
31. Zernov, *Eastern Christendom*, 249.
32. Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, 132.
33. J. G. Davies, *The Early Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 104, 154.