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COURSE: MA (Theology)
UNIT NAME: **Jesus the Christ**
UNIT CODE: **THEO555-660_2003s1**
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NUMBER: _____
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GROUP: _____
ASSIGNMENT
TOPIC: How does the early Church come to experience and explain Jesus' resurrection from the dead?

LENGTH: 4500 words

DUE DATE: 12/05/03

DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

In accordance with Regulation 4.5 I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person or myself, nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other unit, degree or diploma of a university or any other institute of higher learning, except where due acknowledgment is made in the text.

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Signature of student: _____

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Brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, the gospel that you received and in which you are firmly established; because the gospel will save you only if you keep believing exactly what I preached to you — believing anything else will not lead you to anything (1 Cor 15:1-2).

So Joe Strummer isn't dead?

“He just left his body. Nobody ever dies. When Christ was crucified, he pretended to die, to demonstrate to people that you don't die. His body died, and when He woke up again, He rolled back a f-ing stone – it would take like...more than forty Irish navvies to shift it – and he started walking around the place, getting people to stick hands in His wounds if they wouldn't believe He was there.”
(Shane McGowan seeking consolation in the resurrection, after the death of his friend, Joe Strummer) ¹

Resurrection is an event that seems to recede as we approach it. It has been compared to the Big Bang ² in that our studies can never take the process back in time to the event itself. There is much that can be known, however, about what the early Church experienced as resurrection. What can be recovered speaks of an experience that is linked to Jesus' life as much as his death. Via the resurrection, the Church finds meaning in their recovery from shame and defeat after the death of their leader, and in their rituals, which recalled his compassion and reiterated their commission. The initial appeal of Jesus' message to the oppressed people in Galilee in Jesus' life time was only amplified by their understanding that the way of life he taught continued to function without his physical presence. That it could provide a universal message of hope to the poor everywhere allowed its transition beyond a local event, becoming the mystery religion that required neither high philosophy nor expensive initiation nor even literacy. The revelation of Jesus beyond his death was repeatedly experienced as a duty to bring this good news to all those who needed it.

¹ Mark Dapin 'Luck of the Irish,' *Sydney Morning Herald* 11 April 2003, Metro 21.

² John Shelby Spong, *Resurrection: Myth or Reality?* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1994), 31.

A hope in their own resurrection became a call to action with practical consequences for improving life in their communities and so the movement that became the early Church flourished in all its ragged variety. That resurrection experiences continued to occur long after Easter and in many cases were found to be outside what became the orthodox faith, both opens the possibility of resurrection continuing to break through into the present and underscores the need for the counterweight of the Holy Spirit, acting through the lived experience of tradition, to inform and guide enthusiasm and inspiration.

The very existence of the early Church is a product of the resurrection experience. Because resurrection is enmeshed in the origin of the Church, we cannot access it apart from the Church. Our knowledge of resurrection must come both from the documents left by the early Church and, because they are stretching towards the ineffable, their attempts to explain the event through ritual. The resurrected Jesus after all made the scriptures burn in the hearts of the couple on the road to Emmaus and was revealed to them in the breaking of the bread.

This exploration will be informed by the syncretistic nature of first century Jewish religion that allowed Hellenistic ideas to infiltrate the rich Jewish tradition, the effect of separation between communities prior to the solidification of tradition and an appreciation that the thought-world of the first century is an unfamiliar place for a mind formed in our present.

Paul's sermon on resurrection in 1 Cor 15 will serve as the scaffolding for this exploration. It is without dispute early, dated at about 56 CE³, authentic, and provides one trajectory into the topic from which the other sources will be accessed. Paul is also an example of a visionary who is anxious to limit the possibilities of further exploration of Jesus experiences outside what he received from the apostles and his own revelations.

³ William P. Loewe, *The College Student's Introduction to Christology*. (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 99.

Well then, in the first place, I taught you what I had been taught myself, namely that Christ died for our sins, in accordance with the scriptures; that he was buried; and that he was raised to life on the third day, in accordance with the scriptures (1 Cor 15:3-4).

This is one of the liturgical formulae Paul uses in his letters. As early as Paul's letters are, the recognition of standard passages that Paul received from those before him in the Church within his letters is a vital illumination into the first community's beliefs. Those relating to the resurrection speak of a tradition that goes as far back as the first years after Jesus' death, as it is likely that Paul was taught these slogans by the Jesus followers with whom he sought reconciliation after his conversion. Hill ⁴ lists several other such formulae relating to the resurrection:

You are now waiting for Jesus, his Son, whom he raised from the dead (1 Thess 1:10).

Yes, but he was crucified through weakness, and still he lives through the power of God (2 Cor 13:4).

Jesus Christ our Lord who ... was proclaimed Son of God in all his power through his resurrection from the dead (Rom 1:4).

Another possible creedal resurrection statement in Paul's letters is:

If your lips confess that Jesus is Lord and if you believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, then you will be saved (Rom10:9).

A common thread through these early confessions is that God raises Jesus. ⁵

The power is attributed to God, not Jesus himself, and there is no attempt to endow Jesus with the characteristics of God ascribed to him later. Even the attribution

⁴ Brennan Hill, *Jesus the Christ: Contemporary Perspectives*. (Mystic, CT: Twenty-third Publications, 1991), 193-4.

⁵ Hill, *Jesus the Christ*, 194.

“Son of God” is proclaimed about him because of what has been done to him by God, rather than any agency of his own. Christological Hymns also set in Pauline texts ⁶ such as Philippians 2:6-11 and 1 Timothy 3:16 likewise predate the works into which they are embedded and similarly emphasise the action of God exalting Jesus.

The understanding passed on by the community to Paul implies that God’s action has happened to a common man, like themselves, and as such the hope is that it will be available to them all. This is in concert with a developing tradition within Hellenistic Judaism. In response to events that demonstrate that justice is not a possibility on earth, as in the Jewish experience of successive oppression under invaders of many nationalities, hope was transferred to an existence beyond death. The martyrs of the Maccabean revolt are understood to have been favoured by God in language akin to that later applied to Jesus:

With his last breath he exclaimed, “Inhuman fiend, you may discharge us from this present life, but the King of the world will raise us up, since it is for his laws that we die, to live again forever” (2 Macc 7:9).

Segal notes that while this is a characteristic of sectarian movements and as such is a precursor to the Parousia aspect of the early church, the idea of resurrection had also permeated more mainstream Judaism in association with the midrashic stories of Isaac’s ascension being linked to the Temple cult ⁷. Paul, after all, emphasises “according to the scriptures”, a reference to midrashic interpretations of Old Testament motifs such as the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53. ⁸

⁶ N. Perrin and D.C. Duling, *The New Testament: An Introduction*. 2nd ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982), 82-4.

⁷ Alan F. Segal, “Heavenly Ascent in Hellenistic Judaism, Early Christianity and their Environment,” *Aufstieg Und Niedergang Der Romischen Welt*. Band II.23 (1980), 1370.

⁸ John Dominic Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1998), 547.

Even as an understanding of the divine in Jesus developed, this recollection that Jesus was human and subject to the injustice of the world remained to ground the movement and ensure that ordinary human existence was sanctified by the Church, and hence became an area of responsibility for community action, rather than an unimportant mode of existence to be dismissed as illusory.

... that he appeared first to Cephas and secondly to the twelve. Next he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died; then he appeared to James, and then to all the apostles; and last of all he appeared to me too; it was as though I was born when no one expected it (1 Cor 15:5-8).

For Paul, the resurrection experience begins with Peter. It involves an appearance to him and a progression of that experience through Jesus' original followers through to five hundred brethren. That experience of Jesus raised to life is then experienced by Jesus' brother James, which brings in his association with the early Church in Jerusalem and those that were sent out from there, the apostles. This brings Paul to himself and his experience. While there can be no doubt that there is an element of justifying his place as an apostle, he clearly wants to equate his experience of the resurrected Christ with that of all those listed before him.

The decisive event in Paul's experience, as he saw it, was the fact that Christ had appeared to him and had designated him as the apostle to the gentiles.⁹

I am an apostle and have seen Jesus our Lord (1 Cor 9:1).

Then God... called me through his grace and chose to reveal his Son in me, so that I might preach the Good News about him to the pagans (Gal 1:15-16).

I will move on to the visions and revelations I have had from the Lord. I know a man in Christ who, fourteen years ago, was caught up ...right into the third heaven. I do know, however, that this same person...was caught up into paradise and heard things which must not and cannot be put into human language (2 Cor 12:1-4).

This agrees with the account as recalled in Acts 9:3-6, 22:6-7 and 26:12-20 where Paul has a visionary experience with visual and auditory components which

⁹ Helmut Koester, *History and Literature of Earliest Christianity Vol 2: Introduction to the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 100.

leads to his mission to the gentiles. Crossan insists that these are dissociative experiences akin to trance.¹⁰ Borg notes that they are “visions, vivid and subjective experiences of momentarily seeing the risen Jesus.”¹¹ It is clear that there is no simple way for Paul to describe this experience and yet it moves him to action as an apostle. There is no hint that Paul regards the other experiences as any different to his own.

Paul’s list of appearances includes between Peter and the disciples and those to James, an appearance to a large number in one place. It is certainly likely from a chronological perspective that Paul is recalling the same event memorialised in Acts 2 as Pentecost. It is reasonable then to look at this description as an example of a preserved recollection of a mass resurrection experience. It is auditory (2:1), visual (2:3), provoked a mission to preach to gentiles (2:4-12), and was an experience which gave the outward appearance of drunkenness (2:13) and so was trance like and restricted to participants.

Despite recapitulating the formulae of the embryonic Church for the Church at Corinth, Paul has nothing more to tell them of the appearances. If there were other matters of importance, such as walking corpses, this is the natural time to mention them to the Corinthians. Later in the missive (15:35) he counsels against looking for their own bodies to be resurrected in their current form, which certainly implies that from Paul’s perspective, Jesus had no need to return in his old body.

Later traditions have more to say about appearances bodily and otherwise, but it is clear that even from those that include more prosaic resuscitated corpses,

¹⁰ John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1994), 168-9.

¹¹ Marcus J. Borg, “From Galilean Jew to the Face of God: The Pre-Easter and Post-Easter Jesus,” *Jesus at 2000* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1997), 16.

there was nothing straightforward about the nature of the appearances. As Loewe says, “the origin of the Easter faith lay in a religious experience on the part of the disciples, a gift of God’s grace, not in some brute fact that physically imposed itself upon them.”¹²

Mark has no resurrection appearances but implies an appearance to Peter in Galilee (14:28,16:7), as does the Gospel of Peter (14:3). In Matthew the angelic message to the women to tell the disciples to go to Galilee is augmented by Jesus himself, but this appearance lacks a commission to evangelise; this waits until Galilee (28:5-10, 19). Luke omits any Galilee tradition but acknowledges an off stage appearance to Peter (24:35) after the Emmaus pericope. Both the Emmaus story and John 20:15 and 21:4 demonstrate a tradition that his followers did not recognize the risen Jesus. Doubt even amongst Jesus’ closest followers is acknowledged in John 20:25 and Matthew 28:17.¹³

The fluidity of the tradition, the memory of Christ’s appearances to followers both in Jerusalem and Galilee and the questions over what people were actually seeing, strongly suggest visionary experiences and that Paul’s view that his revelation was a resurrection experience is correct.

Crossan makes the point that in the Hellenised Mediterranean world of the first century “visions and apparitions [were] an accepted and even commonplace possibility”.¹⁴ Indeed, many of the resurrection accounts we have, especially in the

¹² Loewe, *Introduction to Christology*, 138.

¹³ Loewe, *Introduction to Christology*, 113.

¹⁴ Crossan, *Birth of Christianity*, xvi.

Gospels and later texts such as the Shepherd of Hermas and the Apocalypse of John are not out of place as Hellenised dream vision writings.¹⁵

Widening the frame to visionary and revelatory experiences in the early traditions it becomes possible to look at other revelations as resurrection experiences. John of Patmos has a vision with auditory and visual elements that heavily relies on motifs from Daniel (Rev 1:10-16.) The appearance here of the Son of Man resembles that of the transfiguration that may well be a retrojected resurrection story from the experience of the early Church. Luke (9:28-36) assembles Jesus with Elijah, who was taken up into heaven, and Moses, who ascended the mountain to the presence of God.¹⁶ In this context of personalities taken up into God's presence, Peter, James and John have an auditory revelation containing a command.

Paul's insistence on commissioning as a resurrection motif suggests looking at commissioning stories for resurrection motifs, and indeed Funk notes Luke 5 as a parallel of the resurrection and commission story of John 21.¹⁷ This idea is reinforced by the presence of a remorseful and shamed Peter, which is out of place in the Luke story. The call of the disciples in Mark (1:16-20) has more of the certainty of the post resurrection scene than the uncertain beginnings of a campaign. Peter's revelation that Jesus is God's Son (Matt16:16) becomes both the commissioning of the Church and a resurrection experience. It is after all noted by Jesus that this is a revelation from his Father in heaven. Conzelmann notes that it is

¹⁵ John S. Hanson, "Dreams and Visions in the Graeco-Roman World and Earliest Christianity," *Aufstieg Und Niedergang Der Romischen Welt*. Band II.23 (1980), 1421-2.

¹⁶ Alan F. Segal, "Heavenly Ascent in Hellenistic Judaism, Early Christianity and their Environment," *Aufstieg Und Niedergang Der Romischen Welt*. Band II.23 (1980), 1372.

¹⁷ Robert W. Funk, *Honest to Jesus: Jesus for a New Millenium* (Rydalmere, NSW: Hodder and Stoughton, 1996), 268.

likely that Peter is pre-eminent because he has the first appearance and this is retrojected into this pre-Easter circumstance.¹⁸ Matthew's description of Jesus' baptism with its auditory revelation (3:13-17) marks the beginning of his ministry and as an ultimate act of commission may well indicate a resurrection experience for Jesus himself. There is repeated evidence that resurrection means commission and within apparently unremarkable commissioning stories there are resurrection motifs.

That this is possible creates the problem of how to know if a revelation is a true resurrection experience or not. At some point these visions are going to become the source of what would be regarded as Gnostic heresies. This was combated both by literalising the dream vision accounts of the resurrection to include empty tomb stories and tying them, Paul excluded, to those whose pre-Easter knowledge of Jesus could act as a brake on speculation.¹⁹ Pagels notes the political imperative to control the source of authority²⁰. The resurrection appearances she notes from later works, such as the Apocalypse of Peter and the Gospel of Mary²¹, are in concert with resurrection as a visionary experience as noted by Paul. Depending on your perspective these are either an authentic voice silenced by the growing strength of orthodoxy, or works excluded by the apostolic tradition because they were outside the transmitted experience of the earthly life of Jesus. Repeatedly from Gnostic texts there are accusations that the literalised memorial stories are in error and that secret knowledge was transmitted to their particular sect²². That it was characteristic of Gnostic groups to tend towards Docetism

¹⁸ Hans Conzelmann, *History of Primitive Christianity* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1973), 40-2.

¹⁹ Funk, *Honest to Jesus*, 270.

²⁰ Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 27.

²¹ Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, 11.

²² Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, 12.

emphasised the need for the apostolic tradition to reiterate the human side of Jesus and concern for the here and now.

Someone may ask, 'How are dead people raised, and what sort of body do they have when they come back?' They are stupid questions...flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God: and the perishable cannot inherit what lasts forever...our present perishable nature must put on imperishability and this mortal nature must put on immortality (1 Cor 15:35,50,53).

Paul is careful to distinguish between an earthly body that dies and Jesus' new imperishable form to which Paul and his followers aspire. Loewe usefully summarises Paul's argument:

God rescues Jesus from death and brought him to a way of being with God as a *soma pneumatikon*, one who is filled with God's Spirit, in a way that fulfills Jesus in his humanity, liberates him from all that in this life works to make human beings unfree, heals all that makes human beings less than whole. This real though literally unimaginable event transforms Jesus in a final and definitive way.²³

This discussion belies any talk of resurrection to an ordinary life to which death will return. Empty tombs and traditions emphasising an ordinary bodily resurrection, like hands in wounds, serve purposes other than an expression of any resurrection recognisable to Paul.

Within the Gospel tradition, Mark has no bodily appearances of Jesus but does have Jesus saying that the resurrected do not behave like they did before death, as they don't marry and they are like angels in heaven (12:25).

The empty tomb traditions are so variable in their expression that they provide no reassurance that Jesus had a known tomb at all. While there were occasional exceptions, executed Jews were not generally provided with more than a tip for a grave if they were taken down at all.²⁴ It would take "patronage or mercy, bribery or indifference",²⁵ to achieve this and it seems unlikely those factors are

²³ Loewe, *Introduction to Christology*, 104.

²⁴ Crossan, *Jesus*, 127.

²⁵ Crossan, *Birth of Christianity*, 545.

going to come into play for an impoverished Galilean whose closest followers have fled. In the chaos and shame of the aftermath of the crucifixion the thought that any of the scattered followers had any knowledge of a burial site is not corroborated by the wide variation in the circumstances of the discovery of the tomb noted by the Gospels. Evidence of this despair survives into the fear of the women fleeing the white robed man in Mark 16:8 and Mary Magdalene's cry of "I don't where they have put him" (John 20:13). The need for a resting place for their lost leader lends credence to Schillebeeckx's proposal of the empty tomb arising from a memorial that fulfilled cultic needs in the early Jerusalem Church.²⁶

Rather than a reflection of an actual tomb found to be empty, these stories fulfill purposes vital to the theology and life of communities with particular apostolic allegiances. There is evidence of promotion of one leader over another in these stories (eg John 20:3) such that once the Jerusalem empty tomb tradition emerges it is elaborated by separated communities into its flavours and favourites prior to the gospel attributions. Loewe explains the differences between the Lukan, Matthean and Johannine empty tomb stories on the basis of the different theological needs of the target community.²⁷ The emphasis Luke places on appearances with more corporeality is seen as a counter to Gnostic traditions.²⁸ In John, Thomas instigates a Beatitude from the risen Jesus to "those who have not seen and yet believe" (20:29). This suggests a community having problems with visions that continue and people who keep "seeing". Those content with the coalescing authority are being described as a blessing to the early Church.

²⁶ Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology* (London: Collins, 1979), 336.

²⁷ Loewe, *Introduction to Christology*, 117-22.

²⁸ Loewe, *Introduction to Christology*, 124.

If there is no resurrection of the dead, Christ himself cannot have been raised and if Christ has not been raised then our preaching is useless and your believing it is useless...But Christ has in fact been raised from the dead, the first fruits of all who have fallen asleep (1 Cor 15:13-4,20).

Maranatha (1 Cor 16:22)

For Jews the resurrection was a hope for a whole people at the end of time, not for an individual now.²⁹ That Jesus is raised changes the world in a vital way. It provides an alternative Jewish way of seeing the covenant and even opens up the possibility of God's activity outside the Jewish community. It is such a change in modes of thinking that it swept up a Jewish sectarian apocalyptic strand that had the early Church waiting for Jesus' return as part of the end times.³⁰ The destruction of the Jerusalem temple was further proof that the world was coming to an end and that God's direct intervention through Jesus' Parousia was imminent. Yet as this expectation faded, there was lived evidence that the way propounded by Jesus required no divine intervention beyond the aspect of God found in the example of love that Jesus prescribed.

Paul preserves this Aramaic prayer, "Our Lord, come," which is also found in Rev 22:20³¹. While more concerned with what God has already done in Jesus, Paul inherits the difficulties of the imminent Parousia and is forced to mechanical speculation to encompass it (1 Cor 15:51). There is no doubt that the fact that this is bound up in his resurrection discourse ties it to the fact of the resurrection, not only to being lifted by God after death, but to the hope of a return by Christ. Jesus' new

²⁹ Margaret Barker, *The Risen Lord: The Jesus of History as the Christ of Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 2.

³⁰ Delbert Burkett, *An Introduction to the New Testament and the Origins of Christianity* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2002), 69.

³¹ Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994), 111.

state allows his identification by the early Church with the stories of Jewish apocalyptic from Daniel 7. The strength of the Jesus movement was that, while this eschatological strand was an authentic and early response to Jesus, it was ultimately unnecessary and the Church survived the disappointment at its delay. Apocalyptic expectations are, after all, more at home in an exclusive purity sect like the Qumran community, rather than the early Church which was advocating freedom and broad acceptance. History of course showed that instead of Christ returning to fight the oppressing Romans, the Romans become Christians, led by the urban poor and then, over the centuries, followed by the ruling class.

If this were not true, what do people hope to gain by being baptised for the dead? If the dead are never going to be raised, why be baptised on their behalf (1 Cor 15:29-30)?

Ritual is a means by which ideas beyond language can be lived and experienced. Faced with recapitulating the resurrection experience in the life of the Church, it became expressed in the key rituals of the Church. Cullman notes “the great miracle of the redemptive death and resurrection of Christ is given to the Church in the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.”³² Baptism always had elements of death and rebirth in its Babylonian roots.³³ The appropriation of the baptism ritual by the early Church is closely linked to the participation in Jesus death and resurrection.

When we were baptised we went into the tomb with him and joined him in death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father’s glory, we too might live a new life. If in union with Christ we have imitated his death, we shall also imitate him in his resurrection (Rom 6:4-5).

The early Churches adapt the baptism ritual to personally join in benefiting from God’s raising activity.³⁴ This is underlined in a later tradition:

That water is a type of the baptism which saves you now, and is not the washing off of physical dirt but a pledge made to God from a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has entered heaven and is at God’s right hand, now that he has made the angels and Dominions and Powers his subjects (1 Peter 3:21-2).

What for the Jewish Christians is an adaptation of rites used by John the Baptist and Essene communities, would be recognizable as an initiation into a

³² Oscar Cullmann, *The Early Church* (London: SCM Press, 1966), 82.

³³ Andrew Welburn, *Gnosis, the Mysteries and Christianity: An Anthology of Essene, Gnostic and Christian Writings* (Edinburgh: Floris Books, 1994), 33.

³⁴ Gerald O’Collins, *Christology: A Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Study of Jesus* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995), 85.

mystery religion, sharing the Persian influence, by a Hellenised audience.³⁵ For both groups, baptism allows the initiate to participate in a resurrection activity without a direct visionary experience.

³⁵ Gregory J. Riley, *One Jesus, Many Christs* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1997), 149.

You say; *Let us eat and drink today; tomorrow we shall be dead.* You must stop being led astray: 'Bad friends ruin the noblest people' (1 Cor 15:33).

Another rite of the early Church with Jewish and Hellenistic resonances is the Eucharist. Having already passed on what he was instructed about the institution of Eucharist (11:23-27) and addressed some deficiencies in their celebrations (11:17-22), Paul brings the topic into the realm of his resurrection discussion. Using Isaiah's oracle (22:13) against the complacent people of Jerusalem who have put too much store in their own defences, he warns the Corinthians against having the confidence to sin in the context of the Eucharistic meal and coming resurrection. For Paul, resurrection and Eucharist are intertwined concepts. Again, as with baptism, there are Jewish elements in the ritual derived from Passover and Hellenistic elements similar to those of a mystery religion.

The appearance stories have repeated instances in which the recognition of Jesus occurs only in the context of the common meal. In the Emmaus story it is only in the breaking of the bread that Christ is revealed. In Luke's appearance to the disciples (23:39), Jesus appears in the context of a primitive Eucharist of fish and this is also found in John 21. The common meal is linked to Jesus' resurrection in Peter's address to Cornelius's family (Acts 10:41). Essentially to recapitulate the last supper in a Eucharist in which the bread and wine are Jesus' flesh and blood, speaks of a ritual that says Jesus continues to exist as a mystery that is participated in by the Church.

For the early Church, Eucharist not only recapitulates Jesus' death and resurrection, but also speaks of the continuation of what Jesus was doing in his life.

Jesus takes that ancient ritual of unleavened bread and repoints it with meanings taken from his covenanted life. He had lived the Passover

journey of loving fidelity to the covenant...His life fully embodied what these complex rituals of bread and wine has expressed symbolically all those years – Jesus' lived faith is bread for a full life.³⁶

Eucharist connects as an expression of what Jesus did when he was alive.

While this method of living is a threat to the established order and therefore a contributor to Jesus' death, its success as a way of life for the poor can be continued without his physical presence. One of the suggested triggers for resurrection experience has been the insight that the signs of the Kingdom continued, that is, healings and communal feeding were still going on, despite the crucifixion. The open commensality of the table as a successful way of life was very likely still occurring in Galilee in the weeks after Jesus' death, when that death was not yet known to the remnant of Jesus' followers in Galilee.³⁷ In one sense resurrection meant that for the early Church, the demonstrable ongoing functional utility of the ideas Jesus initiated, indicated that he could be active amongst them beyond the shame of his death and the shame of their failures. Jesus' existence continues in the actions of the Church and Eucharist embodied these accomplishments.

³⁶ Frank Andersen, *Eucharist: Participating in the Mystery* (Mulgrave, Vic: John Garratt Publishing, 1998), 63.

³⁷ John Dominic Crossan in Borg, "From Galilean Jew," 16.

I am the least of the apostles; in fact since I persecuted the Church of God, I hardly deserve the name apostle; but by God's grace that it is what I am, and the grace that he gave me has not been fruitless (1 Cor 15:9-10).

Resurrection as a reaction to guilt and grief is not limited to Paul. The three women bringing ointment to anoint Jesus body (Mark 16:1) are several days late compared to their colleague in Bethany (14:9) and for Mark are a contrasting image of failure.³⁸ Peter's appearance story in John 21 has a threefold commissioning to annul his threefold denial. Shame is turned to revelation is turned to commission as Peter is told to "feed my sheep" (21:17), to continue the work with the support of the risen Christ.

Schillebeeckx³⁹ suggests that within the psychology of shame and forgiveness lies a clue to the dynamic of resurrection experience. When Peter experiences forgiveness he knows Jesus lives. A likely scenario places this as the wellspring of the Galilee appearances, which allow the group of Jesus followers to regroup around Peter and return to Jerusalem with an understanding of a change in their way of viewing the world. If Jesus is experienced as having an ongoing existence there is urgency in continuing his work, hope for those who suffer and a freedom to subvert barriers of race and economics. This resurrection tradition meets a concomitant tradition out of Jerusalem arising out of the mourning of the women followers⁴⁰ that will be amplified and literalised from a site of memorial into the empty tomb stories.⁴¹

³⁸ John Dominic Crossan, "Jesus and the Kingdom: Itinerants and Householders in Earliest Christianity," *Jesus at 2000* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1997), 51.

³⁹ Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 390.

⁴⁰ Crossan, *Birth of Christianity*, 573.

⁴¹ Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 336.

Significantly, Crossan⁴² sees the mission of Jesus as cutting across the honour and shame mode of existence in peasant society. As Peter applies this liberation to his situation he is healed of his guilt and experiences the working of the Jesus method beyond Calvary.

Jesus' program was one of empowerment, and it meant that one could not destroy it by executing its founder.⁴³

⁴² Crossan, "Jesus and the Kingdom," 37.

⁴³ Crossan, "Jesus and the Kingdom," 42.

The early Church experienced resurrection as a visionary experience of grace, which initiated an expectation of a new mode of hopeful living available to even the most humble. It was an idea that not only resonated within the Jewish community of the time but also survived because it found a home in the Hellenised world of the Roman Empire. This was due to the prior influence of Hellenistic ideas on Jewish thought, the shared background with familiar mystery traditions and the shared experience of powerlessness of the mass of people. The power of the resurrection experience is obvious from the rapid reconstitution of the Jesus community when it was leaderless and seemingly without hope. It was also an experience beyond description that nonetheless evinced the need for commitment, which was reinforced by ritual and which created a new lifestyle. It was easier to live and die for it than to describe it.

Because the movement spread away from the original communities, the vision became less rooted in the human life of Jesus, such that a reaction that reified the apostolic memory occurred, resisting Gnostic innovation. One consequence of this reaction was the process of making the Church “safe” through such courses of action as the literalisation of the empty tomb stories. This could only ever be partially successful, as the initial resurrection impulse was itself mystical and visionary. In its response to the resurrection, the early Church was already dealing with the problem of balancing the vital energy of the individual experience that invigorates the Church against the surer anchor of lived tradition. This insight into the way the early Church experienced resurrection is crucial, because it means that it is no less available today, with all its danger, through our precious shared rituals and ongoing revelation of new ways of continuing Jesus’ liberating spirit.

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