

## DOUBT AND THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

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*Debate on the resurrection of Jesus tends to focus either on the likelihood of Jesus' body rising physically from the tomb or on the form in which it appears to the witnesses. The first part of this article provides a snapshot of recent literature on Jesus' resurrection. The second part argues that there is no coming to faith in Jesus as Lord and God without accepting the necessity and reality of his death. The resurrection appearances alone are insufficient.*

THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS continues to fascinate believers and skeptics alike. The former find their latest advocate in N. T. Wright, who makes the case for the physical resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth's dead and buried body.<sup>1</sup> Without Jesus' bodily resurrection there can be no acknowledgement of him as the Christ, let alone as the Son of God. The skeptics are spearheaded by John Dominic Crossan, whose thesis is that it is improbable that Jesus was properly buried, let alone raised physically from the dead.<sup>2</sup> The important thing, for Crossan, is to see the resurrection as an inner experience that leads to both a personal transformation and world transformation. Glen Most sees both skeptics and believers coming together in John's figure of Thomas (Jn 11:16; 14:5; and 20:24–29). The one who refuses to believe unless he can touch comes to faith in Jesus as Lord upon seeing: "Doubting Thomas seems to have been devised by John largely in order to invoke, exaggerate, and then resolve doubt, and thereby to lay doubt to rest once and for all."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003) 340–74, 681–82.

<sup>2</sup> John Dominic Crossan, "Bodily-Resurrection Faith," in *The Resurrection of Jesus: John Dominic Crossan and N.T. Wright in Dialogue*, ed. Robert B. Stewart (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006) 171–86, at 177.

<sup>3</sup> Glen W. Most, *Doubting Thomas* (Cambridge: Harvard, 2005) 223. The hesitation to believe on the part of those in Matthew 28:16 finds its personification in "doubting" Thomas.

This article begins with a survey of recent literature on the resurrection of Jesus to show the importance of distinguishing the “why” of faith—the catalyst or occasion for belief in Jesus as risen Lord—from the “what” of faith—the risen, glorified transformation of Jesus’ body that appeared to the disciples. The “what” is tied to the “why,” but it alone cannot sufficiently explain the disciples’ coming to faith in Jesus as Lord. Even after seeing the glorified Lord, some doubt (Mt 28:17) and others fail to recognize him (Lk 24:13–16).

Doubt plays a major role in the empty tomb and resurrection appearance accounts. My thesis is that doubt finds its resolution more in the “why” of faith, than in the “what.” The second part of my article focuses on the postburial accounts of the four Gospels. I argue that there can be no faith in the resurrection/exaltation of Jesus that does not address the stumbling block to faith caused by Jesus’ death and burial. Accepting Jesus’ death is as important as acknowledging his resurrection from the dead. To hurdle the obstacle represented by Christ’s cross is the prerequisite for faith in Jesus as risen Lord. The story of Thomas’s encounter with the dead and risen Lord (Jn 20:24–29) highlights the dilemma facing all those who were both Jewish and followers of Jesus of Nazareth. How was it possible that the one they hoped would redeem Israel (Lk 24:21) could die and then manifest himself as one with Israel’s God?

## CURRENT THOUGHT ON THE POST-RESURRECTION APPEARANCES AND THE EMPTY TOMB

### The Analogous Character of the Resurrection

There has been a concerted effort recently to show the similarities between postdeath apparition experiences and Jesus’ resurrection appearances.<sup>4</sup> Bereavement and mystical experiences, Christic visions, apparitions, and hallucinations have been seen as legitimate interpretations of the accounts of the resurrection appearances and the empty tomb.<sup>5</sup> Whether or not one sees the encounters with the risen Jesus in Matthew, Luke, and

<sup>4</sup> Dale C. Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus* (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2005) 269–99; Keith Parsons, “Peter Kreeft and Ronald Tacelli on the Hallucination Theory,” in *The Empty Tomb: Jesus Beyond the Grave*, ed. Robert M. Price and Jeffery Jay Lowder (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus, 2005) 433–51. Gerald O’Collins, *Easter Faith* (London: Darton, Longman, & Todd, 2003) 11–24, argues for the uniqueness of the resurrection appearances, though acknowledging the similarities between them and postdeath experiences.

<sup>5</sup> Allison points out that it has been argued “that it was not the empty tomb that begot hallucinations but hallucinations that begot the empty tomb” (*Resurrecting Jesus* 204). Philip H. Wiebe (*Visions of Jesus: Direct Encounters from the New Testament to Today* [New York: Oxford, 1997] 195) holds to the central definition of hallucination—the perception of an external object (by sight or hearing) when no

John as objective visions or as mere apparitions will depend on whether or not one accepts the testimony of the Evangelists: "For the sceptic, naturalistic psychological explanations will appear perfectly adequate; for the believer, they will not."<sup>6</sup> John Barclay goes on to point out that citing the resurrection appearances as historical evidence dictates placing great weight on "the authenticity of the experiences of first-century men and women whose worldview was very different [from] our own. Judgment of this matter will inevitably rely to a great extent on a prior faith commitment."<sup>7</sup>

Gregory Riley claims that there is nothing in the physical nature of Jesus' appearances that does not mirror the Semitic or Greco-Roman understandings of the nature of the soul: "Any soul could pass through closed doors, give preternatural advice, and vanish . . . could, and often did, eat with friends and relatives in the repasts of the cult of the dead."<sup>8</sup> Even the wounds of Jesus find their precursor in Hector's ghost, which bore the spear wound made by Achilles in Virgil's *Aeneid*.<sup>9</sup> Riley goes on to admit that the first Christians did most likely doubt some or all of the various characteristics of those who survived death. Doubt was particularly strong with regard to the palpable nature of the spirits of the dead. If Luke and John included entreaties on the part of Jesus to approach and touch him, it was "to obviate the interpretation already current among Christians that Jesus had raised as a spirit."<sup>10</sup> In the Synoptic accounts, the disciples' doubt is tied to the physical reality of Jesus' appearances.<sup>11</sup>

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such object exists. He also says that it is possible that all visions, apparitions, and postdeath experiences could be purely subjective or hallucinatory (ibid. 8). Hallucinations generally accent the subjective dimension, whereas there is a more objective character to appearances. Allison sees the use of "vision" and "apparition" as a way to avoid prejudging the objectivity or subjectivity of the Christic experience (*Resurrecting Jesus* 11).

<sup>6</sup> John M. G. Barclay, "The Resurrection in Contemporary New Testament Scholarship," in *Resurrection Reconsidered*, ed. Gavin D'Costa (Oxford: Oneworld, 1996) 13–30, at 26.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. N. T. Wright and Richard Bauckham do not share Barclay's skepticism of first-century testimony (Wright, *Resurrection of the Son of God* 706–7; and Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2006] 403–6).

<sup>8</sup> Gregory J. Riley, *Resurrection Reconsidered: Thomas and John in Controversy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995) 67. There is no mention of Jesus passing through "closed doors" in John 20:19, just that the doors "were locked."

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 50–51, 117.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 68; see also 117–18, where the souls or spirits/ghosts of the dead were untouchable.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 94. Wiebe would concur with Riley. Though the explanations for the doubts of the disciples may be many, "one explanation that must be considered is that the appearances may not have been as 'historically concrete' as are those that form the normal experience of public objects and events" (*Visions of Jesus* 130).

Doubt has never been driven from the discussion of the resurrection appearances; it finds its form today in the claims of those who have been privy to postdeath apparition experiences. Dale Allison criticizes the likes of Gerald O'Collins for not taking seriously the "firsthand accounts of several people seeing at once the apparition of a person recently deceased. There are likewise innumerable accounts of various people seeing an apparition over an extended period of time."<sup>12</sup>

O'Collins did address the issue when he cited the work of W. Dewi Rees, which showed that the apparitions of recently deceased persons are all to individuals, never to groups.<sup>13</sup> O'Collins also tackles the issue of analogies to the resurrection appearances of Jesus, such as near-death experiences and the apparitions of recently deceased persons.<sup>14</sup> Though not contesting their validity, he makes a special effort to safeguard the once-and-for-all uniqueness of Jesus' resurrection.<sup>15</sup> Analogy demands not just similarity but dissimilarity.<sup>16</sup> O'Collins stresses the dissimilarity of the resurrection appearances by affirming the once-and-for-all event of Christ's transformation; and he draws on Philip Wiebe's *The Visions of Jesus* to argue for the singular nature of the Gospel accounts of Jesus' resurrection appearances.<sup>17</sup>

O'Collins sees the effect of Jesus' resurrection on the disciples as evidence of its reality, for effects have "a special relationship to, and consistently resemble, their causes."<sup>18</sup> After witnessing the risen Jesus, a noticeable change occurred in the disciples—they went out on mission, preaching a crucified and risen Lord, not only to the Jewish world but also to the

<sup>12</sup> Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus* 270, especially n. 293. See also Wiebe, *Visions of Jesus* 77–82 and 84–85.

<sup>13</sup> W. Dewi Rees, "The Hallucinations of Widowhood," *British Medical Journal* 4.5778 (October 2, 1971) 37–44, as cited in O'Collins, *Easter Faith* 13. O'Collins cites Wiebe's study that included Christic visions of those engaged in church worship (*ibid.* 22).

<sup>14</sup> Gerald O'Collins, "The Resurrection: The State of the Questions," in *The Resurrection: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Resurrection of Jesus*, ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O'Collins (New York: Oxford University, 1997) 5–28, at 5–13. See also O'Collins's *Easter Faith* 5–24.

<sup>15</sup> O'Collins, *Easter Faith* 6.

<sup>16</sup> O'Collins, "The Resurrection: The State of the Questions" 13. Hans Urs von Balthasar has also examined the unique nature of Jesus' resurrection (*Mysterium Paschale*, trans. Aidan Nichols [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1990] 190–202).

<sup>17</sup> See O'Collins, *Easter Faith* 22–23, where he points to Wiebe's assertion that a "curious feature of Christic visions and apparitions is the confidence that the percepts generally exhibit about the identity of the figure in the apparition experience" as an argument for the uniqueness of Jesus' resurrection appearances (*Visions of Jesus* 107). Apart from the Beloved Disciple in John 21:7, the disciples of Jesus have difficulty recognizing him (O'Collins, *Easter Faith* 22).

<sup>18</sup> O'Collins, "The Resurrection" 23.

Greek world.<sup>19</sup> Even Crossan would agree with O'Collins that the risen Christ has had a worldwide effect. In a final link between the cause of Jesus' resurrection and its effects, O'Collins points to the greater scheme of things: "the future completion of all persons and things in Christ."<sup>20</sup> This addendum, however, has not yet distinguished sufficiently the "why" of the disciples' belief in the Resurrection from the "what." It is not enough to believe that in Jesus' risen body all things find their completion, just as it is not sufficient to argue, as Jürgen Moltmann does, for a new creation such as that evoked by the appearance to Mary Magdalene (Jn 20:11–18).<sup>21</sup> Neither does it suffice to argue for a qualitative difference between the way the disciples saw Jesus and the way Paul saw the Lord in the encounter on the road to Damascus.<sup>22</sup> Though Jesus' resurrection does inaugurate a new creation and a new way of seeing him and point to the establishment of faith in him as Lord, these aspects of the resurrection narratives are but signposts pointing to the uniqueness of Jesus' risen body; they shed little light on its singularity.

As mentioned in note 5 above, O'Collins draws on the work of Wiebe to distance the resurrection *appearances* from Christic *visions*.<sup>23</sup> The latter argues that those who have had visions of Christ immediately recognize the one in the vision as the glorious Jesus; such is not the case for those disciples of Jesus who received a resurrection appearance.<sup>24</sup> At first, they do not recognize Jesus; and, apart from the appearance to Paul on the road to Damascus, the absence of glory is notable in the appearances of the risen one.<sup>25</sup> O'Collins concludes that the abyss between Christic visions and the resurrection appearances of Jesus widens when one considers that the appearances "conveyed for the first time the astonishing good news that God had vindicated the victimized Jesus and in doing so had initiated the coming general resurrection and the end of all things."<sup>26</sup> Though O'Collins highlights the differences between Jesus' resurrection appearances and

<sup>19</sup> O'Collins, *Easter Faith* 13.

<sup>20</sup> O'Collins, "The Resurrection" 23.

<sup>21</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions*, 1st Fortress Press Edition, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) 220.

<sup>22</sup> See Daniel Kendall and Gerald O'Collins, "The Uniqueness of the Easter Appearances," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 54 (1992) 287–307, at 306.

<sup>23</sup> See O'Collins, *Easter Faith* 21–23.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* 22. Wiebe doubts that a real distinction exists between Christic visions and the appearances of the risen Jesus. The texts on which the distinction is based are "too sketchy to allow for a definite interpretation" (*Visions of Jesus* 146–47).

<sup>25</sup> Wiebe admits that contemporary Christic visions have more in common with the account of Jesus' transfiguration than they do with the resurrection appearances. Both speak of the radiant face of Jesus (*Visions of Jesus* 114).

<sup>26</sup> O'Collins, *Easter Faith* 23.

contemporary analogies, he does so at the expense of the “why” of faith, that is, the occasion or catalyst for the belief of the disciples. The “what” of faith, that Jesus had been vindicated and had inaugurated the coming resurrection and final age, does not answer fully the question of why the disciples came to faith in Jesus as Lord. Does the transition from disbelief to belief depend solely on the appearing of the risen Lord—those who are privy to an appearance see, whereas those who are not so lucky do not see? Accounting for this move from the “what” of faith to the “why” becomes even more problematic given that the vindicated Lord and the arrival of resurrected life and the coming age were not all that glorious. The empty tomb is seen by some as a key to making the transition from the “what” to the “why.”

### The Necessity of the Empty Tomb?

For O’Collins, the differentiation between why the disciples came to faith from what they believed had happened to Jesus after his death and burial helps guarantee the uniqueness of the resurrection appearances; the empty tomb accounts crystallize that difference.<sup>27</sup> As first witnesses to the changed presence of Jesus, the women play the major role in the “why” of faith (unlike in 1 Corinthians 15:3–5, where there is no explicit mention of the presence of women, and Cephas is listed first). They also act as a bridge for the “what” of their faith: in Matthew the women and in John Mary Magdalene come to learn what happened to Jesus’ body—they encounter the risen Lord. Their meeting the dead and risen Lord occasions their faith. If the catalyst for their faith is not to be collapsed into the substance of their belief, then the empty tomb is as necessary for comprehending the mystery as the resurrection appearance accounts. Without the empty tomb, the argument for a bodily resurrection is sapped of its force and conviction;<sup>28</sup> without the empty tomb narratives there is no link between the glorification/exaltation of Jesus and his death on Calvary. The empty tomb accounts provide the necessary transition between his death/burial and his resurrection from the dead. Dispense with the empty tomb and one can argue that after Jesus gives up his spirit on the cross (Jn 19:30), he experiences exaltation, rendering the physical resurrection of his body redundant.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> O’Collins, “The Resurrection” 6.

<sup>28</sup> Kendall and O’Collins address the issue by stressing the importance of the eleven seeing the visible manifestation of the risen Lord. In this sense, Thomas needs to see; he cannot just hear that Jesus has risen. What he believed flowed from the fact that he saw (“The Uniqueness of the Easter Appearances” 287–307).

<sup>29</sup> See also William Lane Craig, “On Doubts about the Resurrection,” *Modern Theology* 6 (1989) 53–75, at 67.

Wolfgang Pannenberg makes the case for the necessity of the empty tomb for any bodily resurrection of Jesus: “without the empty tomb, the Christian proclamation of Jesus’ resurrection *at Jerusalem* of all places would have been in serious trouble, because it could have been easily falsified by just pointing to the place where Jesus had been buried.”<sup>30</sup> Those who desire to debunk the resurrection of Jesus often argue for a spiritual resurrection in that it resonates with the view that the postburial apparitions of Jesus were Christic visions, bereavement experiences, events of ecstasy, or even hallucinations. Though Pannenberg sees the empty tomb as secondary to the resurrection appearances, he insists on holding on to its necessity for the following reason: “If the Christian proclamation of Jesus has to be accounted for in connection with the emptying of his tomb, the possibilities of spiritualizing interpretations of the Christian Easter message are seriously reduced.”<sup>31</sup> This spiritualizing proclivity is not the sole domain of skeptics, but applies to all who would deny the necessity of the transformation of dead and buried bodies that Paul alludes to in 1 Corinthians 15:53, where this perishable nature must put on the imperishable and the mortal immortality. The spiritualizers are those who opt for the replacement of this physical body with a spiritual one, as delineated by Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:1–4, where the earthly tent we live in is replaced by a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Unlike the transformation scenario, Pannenberg argues, the empty tomb is not needed for replacement: “It would allow for the mortal body to decay in the tomb while another one will be provided by the creator God in the future.”<sup>32</sup>

Dan Cohn-Sherbok supports Pannenberg when it comes to the physicality of Jesus’ resurrection; he dismisses the notion of a spiritual resurrection bereft of physicality: “Either Jesus was physically resurrected or he wasn’t. It’s as simple as that. The Gospel account of the empty tomb and the disciples’ recognition of the risen Christ point to such a historical conception of the resurrection event. To them it would make no sense that in some spiritual—as opposed to physical sense—Jesus’ body was revived.”<sup>33</sup> For

<sup>30</sup> Wolfgang Pannenberg, “History and the Reality of the Resurrection” *Resurrection Reconsidered* 62–72, at 69.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* 70. Michel Deneken agrees with Pannenberg. Though the empty tomb is not mentioned in the writings of Paul and Acts, Deneken suggests that it was incorporated into the kerygma of the early church. He adopts Karl Barth’s position that the empty tomb is the necessary precondition for the realization of the Risen One (*La foi paschale: Rendre compte de la résurrection de Jésus aujourd’hui* [Paris: Cerf, 1997] 303–7).

<sup>32</sup> Pannenberg, “History and the Reality of the Resurrection” 68.

<sup>33</sup> Dan Cohn-Sherbok, “The Resurrection of Jesus: A Jewish View,” in *Resurrection Reconsidered* 184–200, at 200. See also Craig, “On Doubts about the Resurrection” 59–60 and 64–7.

Michel Deneken, the empty tomb points to the resurrection of Jesus and the subsequent appearances. The empty tomb accounts must be seen in light of the resurrection narratives; they add weight to the disciples' claim that Jesus is risen from the dead.<sup>34</sup>

Rowan Williams cautions that dogmatic theology is programmed to fail if it tries to solve historical questions.<sup>35</sup> He supports the position that no one can say for sure if the empty tomb narratives or those of the resurrection appearances are historical or not. The empty tomb accounts do serve the purpose of preventing the church from collapsing God's action in raising Jesus into glory into that of the disciples coming to faith in Jesus as the divine Christ. And Williams's meditation on the empty space between the two angels in John 20:12 does convey the impression that, if Jesus is not in the tomb, it is because his presence is elsewhere—"in heaven' until the last days," as Williams puts it.<sup>36</sup> If we want to look for the body of the risen Christ we have to look to the stranger we meet, much like the disciples did on the road to Emmaus, and to the community gathered to worship in Jesus' name.<sup>37</sup> I found, however, little satisfaction in the conclusions Williams drew from the resurrection appearance accounts. His conclusions are not much more positive than his negative take on the disappearance of Jesus' body: "The central image of the gospel narratives is not any one apparition but the image of an absence, an image of the failure of images, which is also an absence that confirms the reality of a creative liberty, an agency not sealed and closed, but still obstinately engaged with a material environment and an historical process."<sup>38</sup> This interpretation looks like a prelude to Crossan's understanding of Jesus' resurrection—that it is meant to be a stimulus for the transformation of the world.<sup>39</sup> But it fails to give any hint of how the disciples (and all who followed them) made the leap between hoping that Jesus was the one to redeem Israel to believing in him as divine, one with the God of Israel. Williams does not help us move from

<sup>34</sup> Deneken, *La foi paschale* 298–308.

<sup>35</sup> Rowan Williams, "Between the Cherubim: The Empty Tomb and the Empty Throne," in *Resurrection Reconsidered* 87–101, at 100.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* 93. See also Rowan Williams, *Resurrection: Interpreting the Easter Gospel*, rev. ed. (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2002) 75–76.

<sup>37</sup> Williams, *Resurrection* 82, 108.

<sup>38</sup> Williams, "Between the Cherubim" 100. See also Williams, *Resurrection* 106–10.

<sup>39</sup> Crossan, "Bodily-Resurrection Faith" 186. Williams does insist that when the risen Christ is recognized it is "as the crucified." He goes on to warn that on Judgment Day we will not be asked whether we have "suffered well," but rather whether we have allowed Christ to transform our lives into compassion so as "to transform the world" (*Resurrection* 79).



the action of God in the ministry of Jesus, “the channel for God’s work of reconciliation,” to the confession of Jesus as Lord of heaven and earth.<sup>40</sup>

Deny the historicity of the empty tomb and a huge wedge is driven into the historicity of the resurrection appearances. Without them, as Wright insists, it is impossible to believe in Jesus’ resurrection as something historical.<sup>41</sup> Crossan’s thesis, that Jesus’ body was dumped in a common grave for thieves and brigands, becomes a satisfactory alternative. Once the question of the empty tomb is dispatched, the supernatural explanation of Jesus’ bodily resurrection crumbles; the objective dimension of Jesus’ resurrection appearances collapses into a purely subjective one. The visions remain but the bodily resurrection vanishes.

### The Form of Mediation

Gerard Loughlin draws on the insight of Hans Urs von Balthasar to offer a solution to the dilemma regarding the historicity of the empty tomb and resurrection appearance accounts.<sup>42</sup> These texts have to be analyzed within the context in which they come to us, within the framework of Christianity’s claims vis-à-vis Jesus. Deconstructing the texts so as to get behind them may lead to all sorts of conjecture, but in the conjecturing process the form will invariably fade. No matter what interpretation is given to a text, the form in which the text comes to us has to be preserved; if not, the interpretation rendered is severed from its foundation and we find ourselves in the realm of speculation. In the film *Amadeus* Emperor Franz Joseph critiques an opera written for him by Mozart. When Mozart asks him what is wrong with the piece, he responds that there are “too many notes.” When asked just what notes are “too many,” the Emperor fumbles for words, for the form suffers no critique of “too many notes.” Balthasar has hit on an important axiom—the form of mediation must be safeguarded; and any theologizing on the texts must respect the form in which they come.<sup>43</sup> This principle underpins the method for the second part of this article, which considers the cross as stumbling block.

Not one of the claims for belief in the Resurrected One is unmediated, not even that of the Beloved Disciple, who comes to faith upon seeing the

<sup>40</sup> Williams, “Between the Cherubim” 94, 97.

<sup>41</sup> Wright, *Resurrection of the Son of God* 638–42.

<sup>42</sup> Gerard Loughlin, “Living in Christ: Story, Resurrection, and Salvation,” in *Resurrection Reconsidered* 118–34, at 121–23.

<sup>43</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: Volume 1: Seeing the Form*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, ed. Joseph Fessio and John Riches (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1982) 31–32.

linen cloths and the napkin in which the body of Jesus was wrapped, lying in the tomb. This scene does not lend itself to a variety of interpretations, especially any attempt to reconstruct the psychological predisposition of the Beloved Disciple vis-à-vis his propensity for coming to faith in Jesus as Lord. We might want to go as far as Charles Talbert and rule out theft on the basis that the thief would have stolen the expensive linens along with the body.<sup>44</sup> And we can side with Richard Bauckham's interpretation of the Beloved Disciple as "the ideal witness, the especially perceptive witness."<sup>45</sup> He is the disciple whom Jesus loved (Jn 13:23–26) and has a special intimacy as the one closest to Jesus. It is as if love makes for greater vision. This is as far as we can go. The interpreter must either accept or reject John's testimony that the Beloved Disciple came to believe upon seeing that Jesus' body was no longer in the tomb. The absence of the body proves to be the catalyst for his faith.

Accounts of the resurrection appearances, along with their form, owe their existence (at least in part) to those who believe in Christ as the risen Lord. They are based in faith and flow from the faith perspective. The only constant with regard to the narratives is that the resurrected Christ fades from view the moment the disciples come to believe. And not all do believe; some doubt. As Gerald Loughlin implies, how can any of the narratives be presented as "evidence" when it is all based on faith?<sup>46</sup> Is there any basis for claiming that they provide knowledge of Jesus Christ in his risen form? The ultimate answer lies in the gospel dictum, "by their fruits you will know them" (Mt 7:20).

### The Role of the Spirit

The faith of the disciples in Jesus' resurrection is in a very real sense the work of the Holy Spirit. Gavin D'Costa interprets John's account of the passion, death, resurrection, and sending of the Holy Spirit as a sign of "Jesus' presence to his disciples in the Spirit."<sup>47</sup> The reality of the Christ event cannot be understood or received apart from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Ignace de la Potterie sees the Holy Spirit as the catalyst for the faith of the ten in John 20:19–25. The gift of the Spirit acts as the bridge between the disciples seeing the soteriological significance of Jesus' death—"he showed them his hands and his side"—and the commission to

<sup>44</sup> Charles H. Talbert, "The Place of the Resurrection in the Theology of Luke," *Interpretation* 46 (1992) 19–30, at 24.

<sup>45</sup> Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* 128, 399.

<sup>46</sup> Loughlin, "Living in Christ" 124.

<sup>47</sup> Gavin D'Costa, "The Resurrection, the Holy Spirit, and the World Religions," in *Resurrection Reconsidered* 150–67, at 150.

go in mission to the world—"the other disciples told him (Thomas), 'We have seen the Lord.'"<sup>48</sup>

Peter Carnley protests that O'Collins has misunderstood his emphasis on the Holy Spirit as "the living Spirit of the remembered Jesus, the crucified one," and though he does not "wish to *confine* the Easter event to an experience of the raised Christ as Spirit," he nevertheless seems to look to the experience of the Holy Spirit as the source of the resurrection appearance narratives.<sup>49</sup> O'Collins questions placing such a burden on this experience of the disciples; notwithstanding its testimony to the working of the Holy Spirit, such an emphasis runs contrary to the "initial apostolic encounters with the risen Christ himself."<sup>50</sup> To offload the power at the source of the experiences from Christ to the Holy Spirit downplays the role of all resurrection appearances as events that effect a change in the disciples' reaction to Jesus' death and burial. The emphasis would then be on the outcome of the change—the disciples go out to witness to their faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior of the world.

### The "Why," or Catalyst for Faith as the Key

My goal is not to fall into the quagmire of the historical/nonhistorical, objectivity/subjectivity, faith/knowledge debates. For the writers of the four Gospels, the issue is not just one of Jesus rising from the dead, be it physically or spiritually, really or virtually. That Jesus rose from the dead is a belief held by every contributor to the New Testament. The question I want to address is: why did the followers of Jesus suddenly believe in him as Lord and God? What was it that moved them from men and women cowering in fear to courageous advocates of Jesus as Lord and God? This question has been addressed before, most recently by Carey Newman.<sup>51</sup> He links the image of the Son of Man as the presence of God's glory in Daniel

<sup>48</sup> Ignace de la Potterie, *The Hour of Jesus: The Passion and the Resurrection of Jesus according to John: Text and Spirit*, trans. Gregory Murray (New York: Alba House, 1989) 180. Dorothy Lee sees the gift of the Spirit in John 20:19–23 as the center uniting the scenes of Mary (20:1–18) and Thomas (20:24–29) coming to faith ("Partnership in Easter Faith: The Role of Mary Magdalene and Thomas in John 20," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 58 [1995] 37–49).

<sup>49</sup> Peter Carnley, "Response by Peter F. Carnley," in *Resurrection: An Interdisciplinary Symposium* 29–40, at 39.

<sup>50</sup> O'Collins, "The Resurrection: The State of the Question" 18.

<sup>51</sup> Carey C. Newman, "Resurrection as Glory: Divine Presence and Christian Origins," in *Resurrection* 59–89. Craig also tackles the issue and concludes that the "why" is twofold: first, that Jesus' resurrection is not just eschatological, but that it is a resurrection into history; and second, that it is not a general resurrection of the people, but the resurrection of an individual ("On Doubts about the Resurrection" 68–69).

7 to Jesus' retort to the high priest in Mark 14:62, that he "will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven."<sup>52</sup> Newman claims that for the first time God's eschatological agent, the Son of Man, is tied to God's glory so that "*the two can no longer be separated.*"<sup>53</sup> Newman thinks it is this tie that most likely led to Jesus' death. With his resurrection, however, his disciples see that glory really was one with Jesus, the Son of Man. It is the resurrection appearances that show once and for all that Jesus was the glory of God, the embodiment of God's presence.<sup>54</sup> I believe that Newman has it right with regard to the resurrection appearances and their import for faith in Jesus as Lord and God. What he fails to show is that the coming to faith in Jesus as the locus of God's glory was not all that easy. The fact of the glory does not necessarily act as the catalyst for the disciples coming to faith.

The question of the occasion for the disciples' faith manifests its urgency in the conclusion Moltmann draws after he has probed the issue of the transition from seeing to believing. The resurrection appearances to the apostles were so overpowering that they were left with no choice—they were forced to believe on the basis of their sight.<sup>55</sup> Apart from the issue of whether this interpretation of the resurrection appearances constitutes knowledge rather than faith, Moltmann is correct about the need for the appearances in order to come to faith, that is, faith does not precede the appearances. Paul, for instance, was not a believer when he encountered the risen Lord on the road to Damascus. And the argument can be made that the women in Matthew, who flee the tomb, are not believers when they meet Jesus along the way. Though the resurrection appearances are necessary, the glory of the appearing Lord cannot be the sole reason for the birth of faith. O'Collins is closer to the mark than Moltmann when he points out "that 'only those who *become* believers' see the one who appears."<sup>56</sup> In other words, faith in the risen Lord is not just a question of witnessing a resurrection appearance, no matter how glorious it may be.

The manifestation of the Lord's glory as he appeared to the disciples did

<sup>52</sup> Scriptural quotations are taken from *The HarperCollins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version*.

<sup>53</sup> Newman, "Resurrection as Glory" 73; italics original.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. 88. Wright points out that "John does not have Jesus shining with visible 'glory'; the fact of being raised from the dead is quite sufficient" (*Resurrection of the Son of God* 674).

<sup>55</sup> Moltmann, *Way of Jesus Christ* 226.

<sup>56</sup> Gerald O'Collins, *Interpreting Jesus* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1983) 124. O'Collins reformulates Edward Schillebeeckx's assertion that "only *believers* see the one who appears" (*Jesus: An Experiment in Christology* [New York: Seabury, 1979] 710 n. 119). Paul Bony remarks that those who take the necessary step toward faith see the risen Lord (*La résurrection de Jésus* [Paris: L'Atelier, 2000] 60).

not immediately convince them. Sarah Coakley exposed the problem in her response to William Alston:<sup>57</sup> “In his defence of the Matthean, Lucan, and Johannine resurrection accounts, Alston glosses over two features of the narratives that I have always regarded as highly revealing and theologically telling: namely (i) the problem of recognizing the risen Christ for who he was (see especially Luke 24:13ff., but also John 20:15b, 21:4), and (ii) the possibility of even being present at an appearance but still ‘doubting’ (Matt. 28:17b).”<sup>58</sup> She suggests probing the notion of the spiritual senses as developed by Origen and Gregory of Nyssa as the solution to the dilemma.<sup>59</sup> I argue that we need not go there; Mark 15:39 and 16:1–8 and Paul’s 1 Corinthians 1 show us where to look.

The resurrection appearance narratives cry out that the coming to faith was not easy; both Mark and 1 Corinthians 1:18–25 indicate that the difficulty lies in the cross, the major stumbling block to belief. I hope to show that there is no such thing as an inner transforming experience tied to Jesus’ resurrection—no matter how attuned the senses may be to it—that does not flow from reconciling his death and burial with the appearances that his disciples took as evidence of his exaltation into glory. I argue that the glory of the resurrection must be reconciled with the scandal of the cross. There was no belief in Jesus as Lord and God, the one who has the words of eternal life (Jn 6:68), without the simultaneous recognition that this Lord and God is the Crucified One. To preach the kerygma is to have reconciled the necessity of the death of Christ with the appearance of the glorified Lord, who appears as the Crucified One. The “what” of the kerygma flows from the “why” of the sudden belief in Jesus as Lord. The occasion for their transformation from doubters to believers, from their dashed hope that Jesus of Nazareth might be the Messiah to their declaration that he is Lord of heaven and earth, underpins the substance of what the disciples experienced of the risen Lord. This transformation cannot be due solely to the “appearing” of the Glorified One and the “seeing” of those to whom he appeared. Something more is needed.

<sup>57</sup> William P. Alston, “Biblical Criticism and the Resurrection,” in *Resurrection: An Interdisciplinary Symposium* 148–83.

<sup>58</sup> Sarah Coakley, “Response by Sarah Coakley,” in *Resurrection: An Interdisciplinary Symposium* 184–90, at 188.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* 189. Balthasar presents a long discourse on the necessity of the spiritual senses as part of the subjective evidence pointing to the form of faith. Not only are the spiritual senses necessary; they must also be emphasized (*Seeing the Form* 365). All is predicated on the form of Christ, “which imparts to the things of this world the right distance (from him and each other) and the right proximity (to him and each other). The believer does not *believe* all of this; he *sees* it” (*ibid.* 419).

## THE CROSS AS STUMBLING BLOCK TO BELIEF IN JESUS' DIVINITY

### Mark

Mark places the way Jesus died, not his postresurrection appearances, at the heart of his Gospel. The key to recognizing Jesus of Nazareth as the Son of God lies in accepting how he died. The Twelve never do understand his predictions that the Messiah would be delivered into the hands of those who would kill him and that he would rise after three days (9:31). They questioned what rising from the dead meant (9:10). Just before the final prediction of his death, Mark says that the disciples were following Jesus on the road up to Jerusalem and that they were both amazed and afraid (10:32).

Fear has the last word in Mark's Gospel. It grips the women so much that they default on their task to tell the disciples that Jesus would go before them into Galilee; they said nothing to anyone (16:8). Fear takes root in the disciples as they go up to Jerusalem and the impending crisis of the cross. Their fear is a by-product of their failure to understand the essence of Jesus' mission—that the Christ must suffer and die so that the world may have life. Such is the fear of the women that not even the epiphany of an angel announcing that Jesus had risen could induce them to bring the good news to the disciples.

Timothy Dwyer sees the silence of the women in function of the awe or wonder at the news that Jesus has risen and that creation has been restored: "When one leaves aside the questionable assumption that the women never told to anyone the message from the angel, one is then free to see the amazement of 16.8 as not necessarily negative or positive, but simply a function of the marvelous act of God. This intervention is more important than the silence."<sup>60</sup> The importance of the women's silence, however, cannot be so easily dispelled, especially when 16:5–8 is seen alongside the account of the transfiguration (9:2–9). The wonder of the transfiguration was met by James and John's silence and Peter's awkward attempt at a response. Unlike the young man in white, who told the women to tell the disciples that Jesus has risen (16:6–7), Jesus expressly told the three to mention to no one what they had seen "until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead" (9:9). That Mark's Gospel ends with the women saying "nothing to anyone, for they were afraid" underscores the role fear plays in their refusal to carry out the command of the young man. They fled the tomb for fear and amazement and said not a word to anyone out of fear.

For Mark, the message that Jesus has risen creates fear; it does not dispel

<sup>60</sup> Timothy Dwyer, *The Motif of Wonder in the Gospel of Mark* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic, 1996) 193.

it. For faith to happen, the women and all others who come to faith in Jesus will have to accept the necessity of his death.

Hansjürgen Verweyen argues that in Mark the grounds for faith in the dead and risen Lord are shifted, ever so subtly, from the resurrection appearance accounts to the account of Jesus' death. He draws on 15:39 to argue that the centurion who witnesses the death of Jesus marks out the way to faith in Jesus as Lord.<sup>61</sup> Either he is recognized as the Crucified One or he is not recognized at all. Adopting Verweyen's thesis, let us turn our attention to the resurrection appearances of the other three Gospels, where doubt is either explicitly or implicitly present.

### Matthew

Whereas in Mark's Gospel the women flee in fear and astonishment after receiving the commission from the young man in white, Matthew inserts a resurrection appearance of Jesus to the women who were on their way to carry out the command to tell Jesus' disciples that he would go before them into Galilee. Perhaps one could argue that the women in Matthew's account came to believe the message of the angel. The case could be made that they did not need a resurrection appearance on the part of the risen Jesus (in contrast to the women in Mark, who say nothing because they were afraid, the women in Matthew run to tell the disciples), but a resurrection appearance was what they got. As a response, they fall on their knees, take hold of Jesus' feet and worship him (28:9). This is not the first time that Matthew has used the verb "to worship" (*proskunein*) to express a person's faith in Jesus;<sup>62</sup> in 2:2, the wise men desire to worship the "king of the Jews"; in 2:8 the verb appears under the guise of Herod wanting to worship the (Christ) "child," and in 14:33 the ones in the boat worship Jesus as the "Son of God." In 8:2, 9:18, 15:25, and 20:20, the verb expresses the entreaty of one who has faith in Jesus. Here, in 28:9, it is not supplication that the women express, but adoration. Only when they come to faith in Jesus (see him) as the one who was dead but is now risen do they approach him, take hold of his feet, and worship him. What Thomas will proclaim to the world in John 20:28, the women imply in 28:9. They have surrendered themselves in trust to Jesus.

When the eleven depart for Galilee, "to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them" (28:16), it may be presumed that they were going there to see the glorified Jesus, the one the women worshiped. Why then does

<sup>61</sup> Hansjürgen Verweyen, *Gottes letztes Wort* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1991) 458. See also Deneken, *La foi paschale* 206–7.

<sup>62</sup> See Richard Swinburne, *The Resurrection of God Incarnate* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2003) 101–2, 113.

Matthew record the encounter with the exalted Jesus as follows: “When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted” (28:17)?<sup>63</sup> He offers no explicit cause for the doubt. The disciples were on a mountain, symbolic of the place for theophanies. Why the hesitation to believe? Is it, as PHEME PERKINS suggests, simply a question of nonrecognition—as puzzling in its insertion here as it is glaring in its absence in 28:9?<sup>64</sup> Or is it a question of the appearing one not being glorious enough (Jn 20:14)?<sup>65</sup> Or is it, as WIEBE suggests, that the failure to recognize the risen Jesus may be due to the different forms in which he appeared; only in Luke and John are we told that he showed himself in his crucified form.<sup>66</sup> Or is it, as HERMAN HENDRICKX claims, a question of the disciples’ “little faith” that will be transformed into full faith by listening obediently to the word of the risen Christ?<sup>67</sup>

The issue is definitely one of insufficient faith. The problem of nonrecognition lies with the eleven, with their fixed ideas of God, of the coming Messiah, and of Jesus (Lk 24:16–26). Just as the Jews and Greeks of Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians (1:17) and the disciples in Luke and John (especially Thomas) have problems with a crucified Lord, so do the eleven of Matthew’s Gospel. The issue is one of faith. Jesus defied their concept of God during his ministry, and his resurrection appearances issue the ultimate challenge. They are called to believe in him as the Son who is equal to God.<sup>68</sup> It is through the resurrection appearances that the disciples claim to have seen the Lord of glory. Those appearances only solve the riddle when they are seen in conjunction with Jesus’ death: for, if Jesus is equal to God, how is it possible that he suffer death? The appearances do

<sup>63</sup> Riley argues that “some” (*hoi*) can be deleted; all of them doubted (*Resurrection Reconsidered* 93 n. 78). Herman Hendrickx translates *hoi de edistanan* as “but they doubted,” meaning all of the eleven (*The Resurrection Narratives of the Synoptic Gospels*, rev. ed. [London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1984] 51). The Greek has “some,” not “all.”

<sup>64</sup> PHEME PERKINS, *Resurrection: New Testament Witness and Contemporary Reflection* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1984) 130.

<sup>65</sup> See also MOST, *Doubting Thomas* 26–27.

<sup>66</sup> WIEBE, *Visions of Jesus* 131–33.

<sup>67</sup> Hendrickx, *Resurrection Narratives* 52. A colleague of mine, Stephane Saulnier, shared the following insight: the difficulty in taking to heart the message of Christ and the announcement that he is risen finds its precursor in Luke’s parable of the rich man and Lazarus: “If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead” (Lk 16:31).

<sup>68</sup> See Raymond Moloney, *The Knowledge of Christ* (New York: Continuum, 1999) 26–27. Moloney adds that the success of the disciples’ mission in spreading the good news is itself one of the strongest arguments for the reality of the claim that the risen Jesus is himself equal to God (*ibid.* 26).



not make it any easier to believe; had they made it easier, none would have doubted.<sup>69</sup>

### Luke

Luke shows a similar concern for this major obstacle to faith. He alone mentions that the women search for the body of Jesus once they are in the tomb (24:3). Not expecting Jesus to rise from the dead, the women were perplexed not to find the body. They see instead, “two men in dazzling clothes” (24:4) and, as Israelites in the midst of God’s presence, they bow their faces to the ground (24:5). Then the two men proceed to refresh the women’s memories by telling them that “the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again” (24:7). The women run to tell all this “to the eleven and to all the rest” (24:9). Their efforts are to no avail. As Pierre Grelot points out, it is only Luke who mentions the difficulty to believe.<sup>70</sup> The women carry out their mission and deliver their message, but it “seemed to them (the eleven and all the others) an idle tale, and they did not believe them” (24:11). To believe in a dead Messiah or dead Lord seems to be asking too much. Jesus’ death proved to be too much of a barrier; they could not hurdle it on their own.

From the unbelief of the eleven and all the rest, we move to the flight of Cleopas and an unnamed disciple from Jerusalem to Emmaus. They are fully aware of the proclamation by the women of Jesus’ resurrection, for the one who had been delivered up to death by crucifixion was the one they had hoped would redeem Israel (24:20–23). But even in the light of the women’s testimony, they fail to understand. They are like those who went to the tomb and found it just as the women had reported—“but him they did not see” (24:24). The image conveyed here is of a group of disciples who long to believe the good news but who are short on evidence—they do not yet see him.<sup>71</sup> It cannot be, as Stephen Davis suggests, that their eyes were supernaturally kept from recognizing him.<sup>72</sup> Such an interpretation of

<sup>69</sup> Deneken offers no satisfactory explanation for the doubt, even though he equates Jesus’ resurrection appearance to the eleven with the presence of the divine. To see Jesus risen is to recognize his divinity (*La foi paschale* 317). Matthew’s audience is left with the contrast between the glory of the risen Lord and the doubt of the eleven (ibid. 318).

<sup>70</sup> Pierre Grelot, *Jésus de Nazareth, Christ et Seigneur: Une lecture de l’évangile*, 2 vols. (Paris: Cerf, 1998) 2:361. For Grelot, why those who receive a resurrection appearance find it difficult to believe is tied to the eschatological dimension of Jesus’ resurrection (ibid. 381).

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. 384–86.

<sup>72</sup> Stephen T. Davis, “Seeing’ the Risen Jesus,” in *Resurrection: An Interdisciplinary Symposium* 126–48, at 136–37.

24:16 ignores the effort Jesus makes to get the disciples to accept what the prophets had said about the Christ: “Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory” (24:26)? The necessary prerequisite for Christ’s glorified existence was his suffering and death, but even this rousing rebuke was not enough to prompt the two to recognize him. Only with the breaking of the bread was the abyss of Jesus’ death breached; they finally come to see him for who he is.

The Emmaus story is Luke’s not so subtle way of insisting that there can be no faith in a dead and risen Lord that does not begin with Jesus peeling away the scales from the disciples’ eyes so that they can “see.” Part of the process is to convince the disciples that the Messiah had to die. The death of Jesus is such an obstacle that, even after the two from Emmaus and Peter himself see the risen Lord, questions still rise in their hearts (24:38). So in the closed room Jesus tries once again to open their eyes—he shows them his hands and his feet (in John it is his hands and his side), but in their joy “they were disbelieving and still wondering” (24:41). The one constant in all the resurrection appearance accounts is the impediment to faith that Jesus’ death represents (only Luke and John recount Jesus showing his wounds as a goad to faith). No amount of proclaiming Jesus’ resurrection or unpacking the Scriptures pointing to his death is enough to convince the disciples that the one who ate and drank with them is the Lord of heaven and earth.<sup>73</sup> Not even a resurrected body, so physical that it eats a piece of broiled fish, can dissipate their doubts. Where Matthew presents the women and the disciples on the mountain worshipping Jesus, in Luke the disciples worship him only when he parts from them, as he is carried up into heaven (Lk 24:51–52).

### John

John’s Gospel underscores the obstacle that a dead Messiah/Lord represents to those who would believe in him as the Risen One. John 20, beginning with the account of Mary Magdalene’s confusion upon finding the tomb empty, becomes the occasion to demonstrate the eschatological dimension of Christ’s resurrection. Jesus rises to a new state. As Thomas is John’s foil to prove Jesus’ divinity, Mary acts as the vehicle that establishes Jesus’ glorified state as creation’s new reality.<sup>74</sup> Three times she cries out that someone has taken her Lord away. Before the two angels can tell her that Jesus has risen, Mary sees Jesus and mistakes him for the gardener. Just as Adam in the Garden of Eden symbolizes the first creation, so Jesus

<sup>73</sup> O’Collins, *Interpreting Jesus* 116–19.

<sup>74</sup> See also Hans Schwarz, *Eschatology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000) 285–87, esp. n. 112.

represents the new creation in his death and resurrection.<sup>75</sup> If Mary does not recognize Jesus, it is because she cannot see the significance of his death (and resurrection).<sup>76</sup> It has not yet dawned on her that it is only through his death that the new creation, along with the concomitant kingdom, can come. So she clings to Jesus as if he were back in his old state.<sup>77</sup> Though Jesus appears to her and she recognizes him, her initial response fails to grasp the inbreaking of the new state. Nor is she alone in not seeing the full significance of Jesus' death and resurrection into glory. Thomas refuses to believe the ten when they tell him they have seen the Lord (Jn 20:25); his failure to see the truth of their testimony, however, will become the occasion to explain once and for all the significance of Jesus' death for belief in him as the divine Lord and Savior.

Thomas refused to believe the proclamation of the ten, even though the Law required the word of only two or three witnesses to condemn someone or to establish the credibility of any testimony (Deut 19:15). On Easter evening, ten of the Twelve saw the risen Lord. By the Law Thomas was obliged to accept their testimony. He refused.<sup>78</sup> De la Potterie notes that with the "formal witness" of the ten "Thomas himself ought already to believe," even without the privilege of a resurrection appearance.<sup>79</sup> The issue, therefore, cannot be that those who behold the risen Lord "see" and those who do not behold "believe" (Moltmann). Nor can it be that Thomas was granted an appearance on the basis of his being one of the Twelve.<sup>80</sup> That would misread the appearance that Thomas receives seven days hence.

Glen Most sees Thomas's refusal to believe the ten as a prime example of those Jesus castigated for not believing unless they have seen signs.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>75</sup> See Wright, *Resurrection of the Son of God* 667–68.

<sup>76</sup> Grelot, *Jésus de Nazareth* 369. Lee's interpretation focuses on Mary's tears, which blind her to the reality of Jesus ("Partnership in Easter Faith" 41).

<sup>77</sup> Raymond Brown interprets Mary's clinging to Jesus as possibly pointing to a truth about Jesus' glorified body that, having returned to the Father, is beyond ordinary existence (*The Virginal Conception and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus* [New York: Paulist, 1973] 89 n. 152). Most argues that Jesus' imperative to Mary not to touch him has to be seen in conjunction with Jesus' invitation to Thomas to do the contrary (*Doubting Thomas* 41). For Mary, to see is to believe, but not for Thomas—he demands to touch (ibid. 47).

<sup>78</sup> Lee understands Thomas's reaction as a misunderstanding that is compounded by his desire to touch Jesus' wounds. He has misunderstood the nature of Jesus' presence, which is now on the level of *pneuma* ("Partnership in Easter Faith" 43).

<sup>79</sup> De la Potterie, *Hour of Jesus* 185; Bony, *La résurrection de Jésus* 174; and Williams, *Resurrection* 94.

<sup>80</sup> See Williams, *Resurrection* 94.

<sup>81</sup> Most, *Doubting Thomas* 59. Most adopts Raymond Brown's interpretation of this scene (*The Gospel according to John: xiii–xxi*, Anchor Bible [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970] 1045–46).

The demand to touch on the part of Thomas in 20:25—"Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put . . . my hand in his side, I will not believe"—replicates the attitude of the Capernaum official who was rebuked by Jesus in 4:48—"Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe."<sup>82</sup> Thomas not only wants to see; he wants to touch, and because he does, he represents for Most a faith character not quite on a par with Mary Magdalene, who believed when she saw and accepted Jesus' command not to touch.<sup>83</sup> Thomas's faith is one that is "potentially inferior" to ours; we are called to believe without seeing.<sup>84</sup> For Most, Thomas is the doubter par excellence.<sup>85</sup> Only the miracle of a divine appearance pulls Thomas from the abyss of unbelief, when he responds with "my Lord and my God."<sup>86</sup> In the end, Most's Thomas is like the rest who have trouble believing—he needs miracles.<sup>87</sup>

Thomas has gone down in history as the doubter and yet he comes to faith in the same way that the other ten do.<sup>88</sup> The occasion of his coming to faith is but a repeat performance of the appearance to the ten on Easter Sunday. If John includes this episode of Thomas's doubt, it is not primarily to show the importance of believing without the privilege of seeing. It is that doubt itself is the necessary prerequisite to faith, at least for all those who were Jewish followers of Jesus and who "had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel" (Lk 24:21). Even the Beloved Disciple of 20:8 doubts before entering the tomb. That the body is no longer in the tomb becomes the occasion for belief in Jesus risen from the dead. In that sense he

<sup>82</sup> Most, *Doubting Thomas* 59–60. See also de la Potterie, *Hour of Jesus* 184. Brown interprets Thomas's demand as a sign that he is too concerned with "establishing the marvelous or miraculous aspect of Jesus' appearance" (*Gospel of John* 1045–46).

<sup>83</sup> The command "not to touch" can include the notion of not to grasp or hold on to, though Francis Moloney cautions not to make too much of the relationship between Jesus' instruction to Mary that she not touch (*haptomai*) and his encouragement to Thomas to touch (*pherein* and *ballein*)—different verbs are employed. See Francis J. Moloney, *Gospel of John*, Sacra Pagina 4, ed. Daniel J. Harrington, (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 1998) 528 n. 17.

<sup>84</sup> Most, *Doubting Thomas* 63. Wright implies the same (*Resurrection of the Son of God* 668, 674).

<sup>85</sup> Riley goes even further than Most in the condemnation of Thomas. In his interpretation, John has portrayed Thomas as "one who is wrong, ignorant and unbelieving" (*Resurrection Reconsidered* 79).

<sup>86</sup> Most, *Doubting Thomas* 71.

<sup>87</sup> Most has forgotten that the other disciple of John 20:8 comes to faith on the evidence of the linen cloths lying in the empty tomb (*Doubting Thomas* 32). Lee provides a list of those exegetes who consider Thomas to be the standard bearer of doubt ("Partnership in Easter Faith" 3 n. 3).

<sup>88</sup> Thomas has been misrepresented; see Lee, "Partnership in Easter Faith" 43.

believed without seeing,<sup>89</sup> but did not do so until the obstacle that Jesus' death and burial posed to faith had been overcome.<sup>90</sup> That Jesus' death had been vanquished required evidence, no matter how circumstantial the signs were.<sup>91</sup>

John's Gospel makes it apparent that Thomas understood the precariousness of Jesus' mission. He is first mentioned in John 11:16, at the moment when the other disciples had a crisis of courage. The Jewish authorities have sought to put Jesus to death (the raising of Lazarus gives rise to Jesus' arrest and crucifixion).<sup>92</sup> While the others recoil in fear of going to visit Lazarus in Bethany, Thomas proposes that they go and die with Jesus.<sup>93</sup> This is the first time that the verb "to die" (*apothneskein*) is linked to Jesus.<sup>94</sup> With John 11 the arrest, crucifixion, and death of Jesus take center stage.<sup>95</sup> Most sees Thomas's suggestion as the first example of Thomas's misunderstanding of Jesus' intention: "If Thomas does not understand here that Jesus is going to Bethany, not in order to die, and not in order to visit a dead man, but in order to bring that dead man back to life, then we shall not be surprised later when Thomas doubts that Jesus himself has died and then is risen once again."<sup>96</sup> Moloney interprets Thomas's readiness to die as a misreading of "Jesus' decision to go to Judea."<sup>97</sup> Jesus seeks faith from his disciples, not death. For Riley, Thomas is a fatalist.<sup>98</sup> Meier argues for an "inclusion" with regard to the raising of Lazarus, in that for the first time

<sup>89</sup> Riley understands the believing without seeing of the Beloved Disciple as the model for all who would come after Thomas. They would willingly believe without seeing, in contrast to "the 'forced' faith of Thomas" (*Resurrection Reconsidered* 125).

<sup>90</sup> De la Potterie follows the exegesis of Rudolf Schnackenburg: the beloved disciple begins to believe, but does not come to full faith in Jesus as Lord until he has seen the risen Lord and received the gift of the Holy Spirit. The "believed" (*episteusen*) of John 20:8 does not have the same weight as the "have believed" (*pepisteukas*) in 20:29 (*Hour of Jesus* 167).

<sup>91</sup> See as well Moloney, *Gospel of John* 520, and Riley, *Resurrection Reconsidered* 98.

<sup>92</sup> John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, vol. 2, *Mentor, Message, and Miracles* (New York: Doubleday, 1994) 799; see also 799–832.

<sup>93</sup> Meier considers John 11:16 to be from the evangelist, part of his redaction of the original story. It is not clear that the phrase "let us also go, that we may die with him" refers to Jesus. The "him" of verses 15 and 17 refers to Lazarus (*A Marginal Jew* 807). See also Riley, *Resurrection Reconsidered* 118.

<sup>94</sup> Moloney, *Gospel of John* 322.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> Most, *Doubting Thomas* 64. For Riley, Thomas doubts the possibility of Lazarus's resurrection; this foreshadows his later doubt of Jesus' bodily resurrection (*Resurrection Reconsidered* 118–19).

<sup>97</sup> Moloney, *Gospel of John* 327.

<sup>98</sup> Riley, *Resurrection Reconsidered* 109.

since the first miracle at Cana “belief and glory are brought together in a single sentence within the context of one of Jesus’ signs.”<sup>99</sup> Belief and glory come together again in 20:28. The mention of Thomas within the context of John 11 cannot just point back to Cana, but has to be read within the context of what follows in 14:5 and 20:24–29.<sup>100</sup>

In John 14:1–4, Jesus tells the disciples that he is going to the Father to prepare a place for them, and that they know the way. In hindsight it is obvious that the way leads through crucifixion and death to resurrection and eternal life, but Thomas and the other disciples see only the prospect of Jesus’ death. Not even previous instruction on the part of Jesus can bring Thomas and the others to see that Jesus’ going to the Father will be preceded by a lifting up.<sup>101</sup> Jesus’ death is the way to the revelation of God’s glory and to his own glorification.<sup>102</sup> Thomas, who has already shown that he understands the death part, insists that Jesus be more specific: “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way” (14:5)? Moloney sees this question as “a rhetorical device that allows Jesus to reveal himself by means of an *ego eimi* statement with a predicate: Jesus is the way leading to the Father.”<sup>103</sup> He also sees the question as an example of the disciples’ “ongoing unwillingness to face all the implications of the end of Jesus’ story.”<sup>104</sup> The nub of the issue is that the necessary understanding will come only when Jesus appears to his disciples in his glorified form; the revelation of it can come only through the cross, even for John. To see Jesus as the Way, the Truth, and the Life requires faith that will not be engendered until after the death and resurrection. Meier puts it most succinctly: “Passing through death on the cross, Jesus will not come *back* but will rather move forward and ascend into the fullness of divine life, a life that he will then bestow on those who believe in him.”<sup>105</sup> Most, following Moloney’s lead, sees this episode as another indicator that Thomas is somewhat akin to Socrates’ Crito, a “disciple who loves his master with absolute dedication but does not really have the foggiest idea of what his message is all about.”<sup>106</sup> Neither Most nor Moloney exposes the underlying issue—what prevents the disciples from understanding? What hinders them from believing?

<sup>99</sup> Meier, *A Marginal Jew* 813. Meier sees John 11:40 recapitulating John 2:11. Verse 40 ties back to verse 15 in that the raising of Lazarus will become an occasion for belief through the revelation of God’s glory (ibid. 812–13).

<sup>100</sup> Moloney (*Gospel of John* 334–35) cites John 11:4 as an example of how the death of Jesus leads to the glorification of the Son of God. What he does not do is address the question of why Thomas plays the role he does, apart from representing “the ongoing misunderstanding of the disciples” (ibid. 337 n. 16).

<sup>101</sup> Ibid. 395.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid. 394.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid. 393.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid. 394.

<sup>105</sup> Meier, *A Marginal Jew* 800.

<sup>106</sup> Most, *Doubting Thomas* 65.

We come finally to 20:24–29 and the “why” or catalyst for Thomas’s faith. But first, what lay behind Thomas’s steadfast refusal to believe his friends’ claim that they had seen the risen Lord?<sup>107</sup> Just as a dead Messiah led to a dead end, in the same way, Thomas could not worship a dead Christ until he had experienced firsthand the Exalted One the other disciples called Lord.<sup>108</sup> Until then Thomas’s dilemma was identical to that of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus: he could not comprehend how it could be that the Messiah had to suffer and die (Lk 24:26). How was it that Christ could become a curse so as to redeem humanity from the curse of the Law, or that the Living One undergo death? We are not privy to what lay behind the Evangelist’s inclusion of Thomas in his resurrection narrative, but we do know that he depicts Thomas demanding to see the nail prints in Jesus’ hands, to place his finger in the mark of the nails, and to put his hand in his side.<sup>109</sup> Thomas has a dilemma. The one who held out the promise of eternal life died and was buried, and even though Jesus’ death seems to have been reversed and the Holy Spirit poured out on the ten, Thomas is faced with the issue of God undergoing death in Jesus.<sup>110</sup> Only a resurrection appearance could show that Jesus’ death had been subsumed into everlasting life and that God was now in Jesus.<sup>111</sup>

Thomas’s journey to faith in Jesus as the Lord of heaven and earth climaxed with the revelation of Jesus’ divinity.<sup>112</sup> If the cross is the stumbling block to faith in Jesus as Lord, its substance lies in the Jewish belief that God is one. When Jesus appeared to Thomas, the Crucified One became in Thomas’s eyes one with the Father, Jesus’ Abba. What was mutually exclusive has become inclusive—Israel’s God includes both Jesus and the one Jesus called Abba. It was up to Jesus to elicit the faith response

<sup>107</sup> Most sees Thomas’s genesis of faith as the third in a series of faith-encounters where Jesus takes the initiative. The first was with Nathaniel (Jn 1:47–49); the second was with Mary Magdalene (20:16–18) (*Doubting Thomas* 53–55). There are other encounters that Most does not mention, e.g., the encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well (4:4–42).

<sup>108</sup> Moloney (*Gospel of John* 531, 537) stresses this point.

<sup>109</sup> Riley sees such a demand as uncultured, even insane. It would have been considered unacceptable behavior (*Resurrection Reconsidered* 115).

<sup>110</sup> De la Potterie argues that Thomas, like the other ten, must have an encounter with the risen Lord. What de la Potterie does not do is continue to draw the parallel, that is, that Thomas too needed evidence of the soteriological significance of Jesus’ death; he needed to see that the one the ten called Lord was the Crucified One (*Hour of Jesus* 183–84).

<sup>111</sup> See as well Grelot, *Jésus de Nazareth* 367–68, esp. 368 n. 1. Deneken also insists on the necessity of a divine revelation in order to come to full paschal faith (*La foi paschale* 340).

<sup>112</sup> Bony notes that Thomas does not get the opportunity to express his doubts before the Lord overcomes them with his appearing (*La résurrection de Jésus* 173).

that comes with the recognition of his lordship. But there could be no recognition without a concomitant altering of the Jewish image of God. This was Thomas's task, as it was for the ten a week before. The problem was that he, like they, could not do it alone. If he had, he would have blasphemed the God of his ancestors. He needed Jesus to act as the catalyst for this new understanding of God. Once God had raised Jesus from the dead, it was up to Jesus to show himself in both his crucified and glorified form. Jesus' appearance in glory, along with his exposition of the wounds in his hands and side, gave Thomas the evidence necessary to proclaim his faith. To claim, as Most does, that it was the divine, transcendent dimension of the appearing Lord that was the catalyst for Thomas's faith misses a key component of that catalyst. The faith of Thomas in Jesus as Lord owes as much to his appearing with his wounds as it does to his appearing in the glory of his Father, in the glory of God.<sup>113</sup>

Thomas's stumbling block was his Judaic concept of God. It prevented him from believing the ten when they told him that they had seen the Lord. If Thomas could not reconcile Jesus' death with his resurrection into glory, the fault was not his; nor could he be chastised for his refusal to believe (20:25–27). There was no evidence upon which to ground faith in an incarnate God who died and rose into glory. Without evidence that the Glorified One was the same person who was crucified, Thomas faced a dilemma: to continue to believe in the God of Israel despite what the ten had testified about the crucified Jesus of Nazareth, or to believe in a dead god. For if God is somehow one with Jesus of Nazareth, how could God die? This was Thomas's dilemma. All who had been with Jesus throughout his ministry, saw him crucified and buried, and then saw him in his risen and glorified body shared it.

## CONCLUSION

Thomas represents the dovetailing of the "why" of faith with the "what." He who was prepared to die with Jesus (Jn 11:16) and who had just enough inquisitiveness to challenge Jesus' teaching on the way to the Father (Jn 14:5) becomes the paradigm for the way one comes to faith in Jesus, the Christ. No one circumvents the hurdle that is Jesus' death (not even the Beloved Disciple of John 20:8); no one removes the impediment that it

<sup>113</sup> Most, *Doubting Thomas* 56. De la Potterie misses this point as well. For him, the wounds of Jesus represent a challenge to pass from "an exclusively sensible view . . . to the *vision of faith* of the glorified Lord" (*Hour of Jesus* 184–85). It is this latter vision that inspired Thomas's confession of faith (*ibid.* 185). Hans Kessler includes the revelation of the trinitarian God along with the appearance of Jesus as the Crucified and Risen One as the basis for faith in him as Lord and God (*Sucht den Lebenden nicht bei den Toten*, rev. ed. [Würzburg: Echter, 2002] 239–45).



poses. Only God can provide the evidence necessary to believe in Jesus as the risen Lord. To believe that the carpenter's son shares in the life of God and is free to manifest the glory of God, as he did to the ten on Easter Sunday, demanded that he show himself to them. And as is evident in Luke and John, Jesus had to show himself as the Crucified One. Even in Mark and Matthew, however, the implication is that there is no coming to faith in Jesus without the paradox of the cross.

Thomas doubted the truth conveyed by the cross and the resurrection. If he had not been so importunate, then his faith truly could have been counted as folly. Though it would appear that Thomas insists on proof, that he see, the object of his doubt cannot be the truth of the appearing of God to the ten; he doubts that the theophany has Jesus of Nazareth as its subject. Thomas refuses to believe until he can certify that the appearing one is the one who was crucified. The evidence for belief in a crucified Lord is insufficient if it is merely a question of the appearing of the Glorified and Exalted One. For Thomas to change his Jewish concept of God—to believe that the crucified Jesus of Nazareth is one with the God of Israel—he needs to “see,” to verify that the Glorified One is the Crucified One. To give him his credit, he would have garnered the moniker “gullible” if he had demanded anything less. Instead, his intellectual honesty earned him the misnomer “doubter.”

Jesus does not reprimand Thomas for his importunity. On the contrary, he grants Thomas's request. In that moment, sight becomes the occasion for faith and Thomas responds with “My Lord and my God.” So when Christ says, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe” (Jn 20:29), he is not necessarily casting aspersions on Thomas's response; nor is he reproaching him for his doubt as de la Potterie insists.<sup>114</sup> No, Jesus foresees the time when all those who come to believe in him will see him as Thomas did—the crucified and risen Lord. Those who, through the power of Christ's Spirit, surmount the hurdle that Jesus' death poses tread in Thomas's footsteps.<sup>115</sup>

From this examination of the accounts of the empty tomb and the resurrection appearances, we can conclude that both the death and resurrection of Jesus were the *sine qua non* for a post-Good Friday faith in him as

<sup>114</sup> De la Potterie, *Hour of Jesus* 183. Lee argues that Jesus' beatitude does not have to be interpreted as a denigration of Thomas (“Partnership in Easter Faith” 47–48).

<sup>115</sup> Luc Devillers points out that Thomas represents two groups—the Twelve and those who come to believe because of the witness of the Twelve (“Thomas, appelé Didyme [Jn 11,16; 20,24; 21,2] pour une nouvelle approche du prétendu jumeau,” *Revue biblique* 113 [2006] 65–77, at 71 and 73–75). In other words, he represents what it means to come to faith in Jesus as Lord and God, whether one gets a resurrection appearance (as the ten do) or not.

Lord and Savior of the world. Only the transformation of the dead body of Jesus of Nazareth into a risen body would convince his disciples that the one they saw crucified and laid in the tomb is the same one who appeared to them as Lord of heaven and earth. The “what” of their faith finds its source in the “why” of it—the necessity of Christ suffering these things so as to enter into his glory (Lk 24:26). Or, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:18, 22–24: “For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. . . . For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”