

Easter

Christian Reflection

A SERIES IN FAITH AND ETHICS



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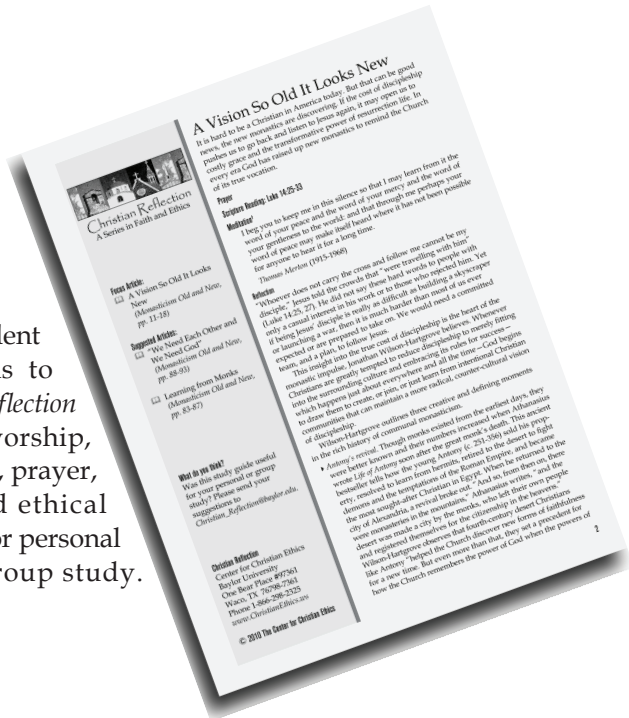
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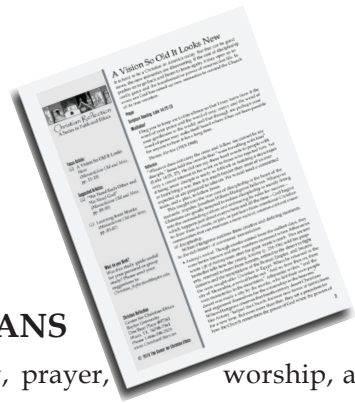
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There is no scriptural requirement for us to celebrate Easter for fifty days, or even one day, for that matter. But there is nothing in the Bible that would prohibit joyful remembrance of the resurrection for any length of time. In fact, there is much to commend the practice of celebrating Eastertide.

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The Paschal Triduum, the last three days of Holy Week, originally was geared toward catechumens being initiated into the faith on Holy Saturday night. But the customs of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday continue to hold great significance for the Church as a whole.

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Introduction

BY ROBERT B. KRUSCHWITZ

How should the Church's second cycle of preparation, celebration, and rejoicing—Lent, Easter, and Pentecost—mold our discipleship? Christ's resurrection changes everything. We explore the feast of Easter and the season of Eastertide so we can celebrate them faithfully and winsomely today.

This issue joins an earlier one, *Lent*, in exploring how the Church's second cycle of preparation, celebration, and rejoicing—Lent, Easter, and Pentecost—should mold our discipleship.

In the feast of Easter Sunday and through the season of Eastertide we celebrate Jesus Christ's resurrection. That glorious event, as Kimberlee Conway Ireton has reminded us, literally "changes everything." First and foremost, Gerald O'Collins has suggested, it causes us to ask different, probing questions about our lives and their meaning: "Who are we as baptized persons who profess faith in the resurrection? Who or what does the risen Christ want us to become?" As our contributors explore answers to these questions, they help us celebrate the Easter season faithfully and winsomely today.

In *Celebrating Easter for Fifty Days* (p. 11), Mark Roberts commends the practice of marking the season of Eastertide. "The implications of the resurrection lavishly overflow a one-day container," he observes; we really need the extra time to explore, savor, and grow into those amazing implications. We may be innovative in doing this because Eastertide "is relatively unencumbered by beloved customs and set expectations." Milton Brasher-Cunningham, a chef and writer, shares a good idea in *On Beyond Easter* (p. 67). He observes that "Jesus started by doing something after the resurrection he had not done before: he cooked. He endured the cross and the grave,

came back from the dead, and made breakfast." This suggests that our eating together is no small matter. Indeed, "the power of Christ's resurrection is realized most...in the breaking of the bread, the quotidian collecting of those whom we love around a table that nourishes us all, and praying God would give us new eyes to see those who belong alongside us." Finally, sharing the meaning of Christ's resurrection with children can be difficult, especially "amidst the glitter and gluttony" that adorn the secular holiday. Mark McClintock's *Between Easter Eggs and the Empty Tomb* (p. 77) shows how crafting Easter worship with children in mind can give everyone, including "adults steeped in church tradition, the opportunity to regain a childlike wonder at the miraculous life, death, and new life of Jesus."

The resurrection of Jesus is the surprise culmination of events that were set in motion at his last supper with the disciples and through his betrayal by Judas. Traditionally this narrative arc was honored in the Easter Triduum, a period of three days from Maundy Thursday to Easter vespers. "In some respects the Triduum was primarily geared towards catechumens, those being initiated into the faith on Holy Saturday night," Michael Foley writes in *The Paschal Triduum* (p. 19). But he shows how the distinctive "ceremonies and customs of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday also held great significance for the Church as a whole." For example, the early catechumens imitated Jesus by washing twelve men's feet during the Mass on Maundy Thursday night. A ceremony of footwashing survives today among certain Baptist groups, Bill Leonard explains in *The "Real Presence" in Footwashing* (p. 74). In his experience, "The sheer vulnerability of this ceremony carries participants beyond its anticipated logistical awkwardness to a palpable expression of servanthood." Perhaps Holy Saturday is the most misunderstood element of the Triduum. In *"He Descended into Hell"* (p. 27), Keith Johnson examines three theological interpretations of the events between Jesus' death and resurrection. "Our limited information leaves us speculating about what it truly means to say that Christ 'descended into hell,'" he concludes. But "we can say this much with confidence: to confess these creedal words is to declare that we can face outward into the world, toward the sometimes brutal and terrifying edges of human life, without fear."

In *Raised to Walk in Newness of Life* (p. 35), I explore how the resurrection of Jesus reorders our moral lives. The power of Christ's resurrection not only breaks our entrenchment in a rebellious way of life, it also instructs us in a Christlike way of living, which the Apostle Paul calls "newness of life" or "new creation." We begin to "examine everything we feel, think, and do from a new perspective that takes our present bodies, our resurrectional bodies, and Christ's body (which is the Church) ever more seriously."

A long tradition in Christian art avoids depicting the moment of Christ's resurrection, since this event is not described in Scripture. Instead there developed iconographic traditions around the biblical stories about disciples discovering the empty tomb or seeing the risen Christ. In *Anticipation* (p. 46), Heidi Hornik explores two treatments of the apostles Peter and John racing to the empty tomb: a beautiful illumination from

the fifteenth-century *Codex de Predis* and the nineteenth-century realist Eugène Burnand's *Les Disciples* (on the cover). Piero della Francesca's *The Resurrection of Christ* is one of the most famous images that takes the opposite tack of imagining the triumphant moment of resurrection itself. The cosmic significance of the event is clear in this important work, as she explains in *The Power of the Resurrection* (p. 44). "On the left side of Christ the trees in the background are stark and dead, awaiting rebirth, while those on the right are flourishing, symbolizing the rebirth of humanity."

In his worship service (p. 56) for the dawning light of Easter morning, David Music follows early Christian preaching in comparing Christ's resurrection to God's creation of light on the first day. In his new hymn, "The First Day of Creation" (p. 53), Music reminds us that in "The day of resurrection / God once again turned night / to joyful adoration / and anthems of delight."

One popular form of Good Friday service since the late eighteenth century has been meditation on the "seven last words" uttered by Jesus. Arthur Boers reviews five contemporary takes on this tradition in *Christ's Last Words from the Cross* (p. 82). *Echoes from Calvary: Meditations on Franz Joseph Haydn's THE SEVEN LAST WORDS OF CHRIST*, edited by Richard Young, collects the brief reflections on the "words" offered by various preachers and noteworthies to accompany performances of Haydn's work by the Vermeer String Quartet. William Willimon's *Thank God It's Friday: Encountering the Seven Last Words from the Cross*, Stanley Hauerwas's *Cross-Shattered Christ: Meditations on the Seven Last Words*, and Peter Storey's *Listening to Golgotha: Jesus' Words from the Cross* draw from the authors' homilies. Richard John Neuhaus's *Death on a Friday Afternoon: Meditations on the Last Words of Jesus from the Cross* offers more sustained theological reflection. "Though the Seven Words practice constructs a coherent plot that none of the Gospel writers intended, it has proven rich for Christians these last centuries," Boers notes. "The Seven Last Words of Christ, like the Lord's Prayer, ably condense and collapse into one set of short passages the essentials of our faith."

"While modern spiritual sensibilities have led both Christians and Jews to conceive of the afterlife in wholly ethereal terms, the radical claim of both traditions is that at the end of history the dead will be raised in bodily form," Cameron Jorgenson explains in *Charting the Christian Hope* (p. 88). He reviews Kevin J. Madigan and Jon D. Levenson's *Resurrection: The Power of God for Christians and Jews*, N. T. Wright's *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, and Matthew Levering's *Jesus and the Demise of Death: Resurrection, Afterlife, and the Fate of the Christian*. "Bodies renewed and transformed by the power of Jesus' resurrection – this is the news the Church has claimed as its gospel," Jorgenson concludes. "The structure of the Church's hope is firmly fixed on the promise of the risen Lord who comforts his people by saying, 'See, I am making all things new.'" ✚

Celebrating Easter for Fifty Days

BY MARK D. ROBERTS

There is no scriptural requirement for us to celebrate Easter for fifty days, or even one day, for that matter. But there is also nothing in the Bible that would prohibit joyful remembrance of the resurrection for any length of time. In fact, there is much to commend the practice of celebrating Eastertide.

Let me invite you to celebrate Easter for fifty days this year. If you already swim in a stream of the Christian tradition that does this, then my invitation is unnecessary; but I hope you will find something of value below, perhaps a fresh perspective on why Christians do this or new inspiration for your Easter celebrations.

However, if you are like most Christians I know, the idea of a fifty-day Easter seems rather strange. I grew up in a church-going Protestant family. I never once heard that Easter could be more than a one-day experience. I did not feel any need to stretch out the holiday, either. As a young Christian, I had no idea that some believers structured their year according to a calendar based on the life of Jesus and the faith of the Church. I did not know about something called the liturgical year, the church year, or the Christian year. I knew of two major Christian holidays: Christmas and Easter. There were minor holidays recognized in my congregation, including Palm Sunday, Good Friday, Mother's Day, Independence Day, and Thanksgiving. I had some vague idea that my Catholic friends had to give something up during the season of Lent. That always seemed to me like one more good reason to remain a Protestant.

As a young adult, I sensed a call to ordained ministry in my Presbyterian denomination. In preparation for ordination, I took a course in church polity at Fuller Theological Seminary. There I learned, much to my surprise, that many Presbyterians were guided in their worship by the liturgical year. In fact, our official denominational guide to worship included it as standard fare for all congregations. My professor was enthusiastic about the richness and variety that come from structuring worship according to the seasons of the church year. I was not convinced, however. But I did learn for the first time that Easter was actually considered to be a fifty-day season rather than just a special Sunday in the spring. I considered this fact to be curious, but otherwise irrelevant to my life and worship.

Things changed in 1991 when I was called to be the senior pastor of Irvine Presbyterian Church in Southern California. Soon after I arrived, my worship director, a godly man named Loren, explained to me that he ordered the worship of our church according to the liturgical year. Because of my seminary class in church polity, at least I knew what he was talking about. Included in Loren's vision for our church's worship was celebrating Easter for fifty days, beginning on Easter Sunday and ending the day before Pentecost. During this season of Easter, which Loren called Eastertide, the congregation would continue to use the greeting we used on Easter Sunday: "Christ is risen! / He is risen, indeed!" We would sing Easter hymns. Our worship would glorify God in light of the resurrection of Jesus. Loren said he preferred that some of my preaching during the season of Easter focus on resurrection themes, but he understood if I had other priorities.

As I imagined stretching out Easter for seven Sundays, I felt somewhat uncomfortable. It just seemed wrong to sing "Christ the Lord is risen today" on any Sunday other than on Easter Sunday, even though I knew that the "today" of this beloved hymn was just as true on the Sunday after Easter as it was on Easter Sunday itself. Nevertheless, in spite of my personal reservations I consented to Loren's plan. So, in the spring of 1992, I experienced my first seven-week Eastertide. I did not preach Easter sermons that year beyond Easter Sunday. But we did sing Easter hymns and use resurrection-themed Scripture readings in worship. I did greet the congregation with "Christ is risen!" and they responded "He is risen, indeed!" well into the month of May.

All of this felt peculiar to me. Yet it also felt surprisingly right. I appreciated the chance to focus in worship on the resurrection for more than just one Sunday a year. As I stood in front of my congregation and proclaimed, "Christ is risen!" I was glad to remind them of this truth and to be encouraged by their response, "He is risen, indeed!" I began to sense unexpected value in having our Easter worship spill over into the weeks after Easter. I wondered how this elongated celebration might influence the soul of my church and even my own relationship with the Lord.

In my remaining fifteen years at Irvine Presbyterian Church, we always extended the celebration of Easter beyond Easter Sunday itself. We did not feel bound to shape every service until Pentecost with strong Easter themes, however. We were free to vary the menu because, in a sense, every Christian gathering *on Sunday* celebrates the resurrection of Jesus. Besides, we did not feel bound by the church year, as if we had put on a liturgical straitjacket. The Christian calendar was more of a guide and inspiration. Yet, we regularly sang Easter hymns during Eastertide, even as our readings and prayers highlighted the resurrection and its implications. I believe our recognition of the season of Easter enriched our worship. More importantly, it helped my congregation and me to “know Christ and the power of his resurrection” (Philippians 3:10) in new and deeper ways.

My experience and that of my church testifies to the value of a fifty-day celebration of Easter. This story may be enough to convince you to give it a try in your church or in your personal devotions. Or, perhaps my story intrigues you, but leaves you with questions, such as: What reasons are there for celebrating Easter for fifty days? What might we actually do during the fifty days of Easter? In the rest of this article, I will try to answer these questions.

SOME REASONS TO CELEBRATE EASTER FOR FIFTY DAYS

Let me begin with what is *not* a reason for a fifty-day Easter. Scripture does not instruct us to celebrate Easter for fifty days. (In fact, we do not find a biblical imperative for any of our Christian feasts, fasts, or seasons, though, of course, Scrip-

ture narrates the stories we celebrate in these special times.) Moreover, we do not observe the first followers of Jesus choosing one Sunday of the year to remember the resurrection of Jesus. The fact that the earliest Jewish Christians gathered on Sunday, in addition to Saturday, was by itself a strong testimony to and remembrance of the

resurrection. In a sense, every Sunday was Easter for the first-century believers, as well as for Christians throughout the centuries.

If you look to Scripture as your primary guide for Christian faith and practice, then there is no requirement for you to celebrate Easter for fifty days, or even one day, for that matter. Conversely, there is also nothing in the Bible that would prohibit joyful remembrance of the resurrection for

Our recognition of the season of Easter enriched our worship. More importantly, it helped my congregation and me to “know Christ and the power of his resurrection” (Philippians 3:10) in new and deeper ways.

any length of time. In fact, there is much to commend this practice. Thus, with respect to Easter worship, Christians are free to follow the dictates of their consciences as we participate in the traditions of our churches. Or we can worship creatively on the basis of Scripture, informed by the traditions of other believers.

When it comes to church traditions, the last thirty years have inaugurated an unprecedented sharing of Christian practices from throughout history and throughout the world. As technology shrinks the world, it is not unusual for believers in one country to use worship resources developed on the other side of the world. Moreover, church leaders like Robert E. Webber have encouraged us to worship in ways that are both “ancient” and “future.”¹ Even in the United States, Christians have begun to realize that doing whatever is *new* is not necessarily *best* when it comes to worship. We have learned that our brothers and sisters from earlier centuries still have much to offer to us today, both in their teachings and in their practices.

Though we are not bound to celebrate Easter for fifty days just because millions of Christians throughout history have done so and because millions of Christians throughout the world continue to do so, we may be more inclined today to be open to the possibility that others have something to teach us. Our openness to learning from other believers may extend across formerly sacrosanct lines in the sand. Protestants are discovering riches in traditional Catholic practices, and vice versa. Some of us are even examining the treasures of Eastern Orthodoxy.

Thus, one reason for a fifty-day season of Easter is the fact that this practice is both ancient and widespread. (Eastern Orthodox Easter lasts for forty days, ending with the celebration of the ascension of Jesus. Roman Catholics and many Protestants throughout the world honor a fifty-day Easter.) The roots of the Christian custom grow back into Jewish soil. The first day of the Jewish Passover came seven weeks before the holiday of *Shavuoth*, which is also known as the Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost. (“Pentecost” comes from the Greek word meaning “fiftieth day.”) So, even as Jews connected Passover and Pentecost and gave special meaning to the days in between, so did some Christians when it came to Easter and Pentecost. A fifty-day celebration of Easter emerged in the first few centuries of the Church’s existence.²

Another reason for celebrating Easter on the seven Sundays of Eastertide points to the enriching potential of the liturgical calendar. Though at first I was skeptical of my seminary professor’s enthusiasm for the church year, I have come to agree with him. As a pastor and worship leader, I know how easy it is for the worship of a congregation to become stale. The themes of our worship can reflect the narrowness of our own faith rather than the breadth of biblical truth and the richness of Christian practice through the ages.

If we follow the contours of the Christian year, however, it is likely that our worship will be richer and truer than when we are left to our own devices. For example, in Advent, our worship will be saturated with hope, even if we tend not to be naturally hopeful people. Or, in the season of Christmas (Christmas Day and the following eleven days), we will reflect deeply upon the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word of God. When it comes to the season of Easter, we will have the time and the encouragement to probe the depths of the resurrection.

In my experience, one-day Easter celebrations usually focus on the story of the empty tomb and the appearances of Jesus. Sermons try to instill awe and wonder, as well as to invite unbelieving visitors to receive Christ as their Lord and Savior. I am not criticizing such practices. In fact, I have described Easter Sunday worship and preaching in the church where I was senior pastor for sixteen years. But, as important as it is to remember the Easter narratives, this only begins to scratch the surface.

To be sure, the resurrection supplies a powerful rationale for accepting the truth of the gospel. This truth often finds its way into Easter Sunday preaching and rightly so. But, it turns out to be much more than simply persuasive evidence for the truth of Christianity. Through the resurrection, God “has given us new birth into a living hope,” a hope that sustains us even in the midst of suffering (1 Peter 1:3-9). It was not just an event in the past, but also the preface to a glorious future, *our* glorious future (see 1 Corinthians 15) – something that reminds us embodied life matters. It reveals the victory of God through Jesus and offers the promise of our participation in that victory (Ephesians 1:17-23).³

From experience, I know that you simply cannot squeeze all of this into an Easter Sunday worship service. The implications of the resurrection lavishly overflow a one-day container. Thus, one of the most persuasive reasons for devoting fifty days to its celebration is the

fact that it deserves such extensive attention. Or, perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the God who raised Jesus from the dead deserves our attention. Moreover, we deserve to have our faith stretched, deepened, and renewed through a season of reflection upon and celebration of the resurrection of our Lord.

The implications of the resurrection lavishly overflow a one-day container. We devote fifty days to celebrating Easter because the God who raised Jesus from the dead deserves such extensive attention.

EASTERTIDE AND EPHESIANS: AN EXAMPLE

Let me provide an example from the letter to the Ephesians, which I take to be written by the Apostle Paul. In the first chapter, Paul prays that the readers might know

the immeasurable greatness of [God's] power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come.

Ephesians 1:19-21

Notice that, in this text, the resurrection does not prove something about Jesus himself. Rather, it illustrates the "immeasurable greatness of [God's] power for us who believe" (1:19). It would serve us well to spend the time needed to understand this truth and experience it in our daily lives. In a time when so many of us feel powerless, it would be wonderful to rediscover the power of the resurrection. A fifty-day celebration of Easter encourages us to discover how the truth of Easter can touch our lives today.

Another feature of Paul's prayer is the close connection between the resurrection and the ascension of Jesus. They are portrayed here as two parts of one sweeping action of God. As a result of the resurrection-ascension, Jesus now reigns above all cosmic authorities. It would be hard to develop this theme in one Easter Sunday sermon and is worth examining during the whole of Eastertide. In fact, the ascension of Jesus is part and parcel of Eastertide traditions. In some streams it is celebrated on Ascension Day (the fortieth day after Easter, always a Thursday). In others, it is celebrated on the following Sunday.

In the next passage of Ephesians, the theme of resurrection appears once again, this time in a most unexpected manner. According to the first verses of Ephesians 2, we are dead through our trespasses and sins, and living in bondage to worldly and demonic powers, not to mention our sinful passions (2:1-3). Yet, the bad news of our present death introduces good news:

But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 2:4-7

In a stunning use of the metaphor of resurrection, this passage envisions us as already having been raised with Christ and exalted with him to heaven. Yet, we still look forward to “the immeasurable riches” of God’s grace that will be showered upon us in the future.

Ephesians 2 is rarely used for Easter Sunday preaching. I never used it during my tenure as a preaching pastor. Yet, if preachers and teachers had the time to exposit this text and spell out its amazing implications, to craft a worship service that begins with our death-like state and ends by celebrating our resurrection with Christ, they could provide a wonderful opportunity for renewed worship. A fifty-day season of Easter welcomes this kind of preaching and worship.

AN INVITATION TO CREATIVITY DURING EASTERTIDE

What might we actually do during the fifty days of Easter? I assume that we have the freedom to be creative in the worship of Eastertide, based on biblical themes associated with resurrection. Certain days and seasons of the Christian year are already laden with traditions. Eastertide, on the contrary, is relatively unencumbered by beloved customs and set expectations for many Christians, though some possible practices are obvious. A fifty-day Easter would allow your church to sing a wider variety of Easter hymns than can be jammed into one Sunday. If you use the standard liturgical colors, Easter white and gold will represent hope, purity, light, and glory. You could certainly join millions of Christians throughout the world by celebrating the ascension of Jesus during the Easter season.

But, Eastertide invites us to be creative, both in personal devotions and corporate worship. Church teachers, musicians, evangelists, children’s workers, and artists can work together on questions like: How can we lead our people to worship God in light of the resurrection? How can we teach our people its broader and deeper implications? How can we craft worship services so that our people might know the power of the resurrection in their lives? How might they experience the reality of their own resurrection from death to life through the grace of God in Christ? How might we live for fifty days – and beyond – as resurrection people?

What might we actually do during the fifty days of Easter? Certain days and seasons of the Christian year are already laden with traditions. Eastertide, on the contrary, is relatively unencumbered by beloved customs and set expectations.

NOTES

1 See, for example, Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Worship: Proclaiming and Enacting God's Narrative* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008). This is part of the Ancient-Future Series of writings by Webber that began with his influential *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999).

2 For more on the origins of Easter, see Paul F. Bradshaw and Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Origins of Feasts, Fasts, and Seasons in Early Christianity* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011).

3 For more on the meaning of the resurrection, I recommend two books by N. T. Wright. The first is his massive study, *The Resurrection of the Son of God, Christian Origins and the Question of God*, volume 3 (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003). If you are not ready for 740 scholarly pages, I would recommend Wright's much shorter volume, *The Challenge of Easter* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009).

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The Paschal Triduum

BY MICHAEL P. FOLEY

The Paschal Triduum, the last three days of Holy Week, originally was geared towards catechumens, those being initiated into the faith on Holy Saturday night. But the customs of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday continue to hold great significance for the Church as a whole.

At the heart of the Christian gospel is what came to be known as the *Paschale sacramentum* or “Paschal Mystery” — the saving passion, death, resurrection, and ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ. Pope St. Leo the Great (d. 461) was not alone in thinking of the Paschal Mystery as that in which “all the mysteries of our religion come together.”¹ This *sacramentum* is no mere series of past historical events but an ongoing, life-giving reality into which we are called to enter every day of our lives and especially during its annual commemoration. In one of his Lenten sermons, Leo admonished the congregation: “Because the entire Paschal Mystery was instituted for the remission of sins, let us imitate what we hope to celebrate.”²

A key part of what Leo and his flock were hoping to celebrate was the Triduum, the last three days of Holy Week, from Thursday evening to Sunday evening, which mark what the early church called (and what the Eastern churches continue to call) the Passover or Pasch of the Crucifixion and the Pasch of the Resurrection. In some respects the Triduum was primarily geared towards catechumens, those being initiated into the faith on Holy Saturday night. But as we shall see, the ceremonies and customs of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday also held great significance for the Church as a whole.

LENTEN BACKDROP

The Triduum is best seen against the backdrop of the season of Lent, and Lent is best seen through the eyes of an early Christian catechumen. For someone entering the Church in the fourth century, Lent was an extraordinary boot camp for the soul. Catechumens were frequently interrogated about their knowledge of the faith at events called “Scrutinies,” often during all-

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night vigils that left them exhausted. At one Scrutiny (at least in St. Augustine’s diocese of Hippo), they had to stand on a goatskin, symbolizing sin and the animal clothing of Adam and Eve, while the bishop or an exorcist would breathe and hiss into their face, adjuring the Devil to depart. It was also during Lent that catechumens learned the Apostles’ Creed and the Lord’s Prayer, which they

had to memorize and publicly recite on Holy Saturday afternoon (see below).³

In addition to fasting from sunrise to sunset, candidates for baptism had to abstain from conjugal relations and from bathing for the whole of Lent. They were finally able to visit a Roman bathhouse in preparation for the Triduum on the Thursday of Holy Week. On the same day, the bishop would prepare for the catechumens’ reception into the Church with a special “Chrism Mass” during which he would bless the holy oils to be used for their initiation on Holy Saturday night.

Another group that bears mention is the public penitents – those Christian sinners whose notorious or especially scandalous trespasses elicited conspicuous penance. Like the catechumens, the penitents fasted, abstained from bathing, and did penance for forty days. Dressed in sackcloth and ash, they were also forbidden from shaving, wearing shoes, or sleeping in their own beds. The public penitents’ ordeal ended on Maundy Thursday during a “Mass of Remission.” The bishop would take the unwashed, unshod, sackcloth-wearing penitents into the church where, after the reading of the Gospel, he would absolve them of their sins. After Mass, they would hurry home to bathe, shave, and return to their normal lives. This practice ended centuries ago, but it has left one mark on our language: the period of the penitents’ exclusion was sometimes called a “quarantine,” from the medieval French word for forty days.⁴

Over time, as the faithful reflected on their own need for repentance in preparation for the Paschal Mystery, they came to adopt some of these

ascetical practices. The forty-day fast of Lent (known in the East as the Great Fast) may, as the Orthodox churches claim, be a practice of apostolic origin, but it may also be the application of the catechumenal fast to the already-baptized flock. Similarly, some Christians began to abstain from certain forms of carnal pleasure and bodily hygiene in imitation of the penitents and catechumens, leaving behind a curious linguistic imprint. In English, Maundy Thursday was originally called “Shere Thursday” (meaning sheer or clean), and in Scandinavian it is still called *Skaertorsdag*,⁵ presumably because the Thursday of Holy Week was the appointed day to shave and bathe. Even the Lenten fast was relaxed on this day to give the faithful the strength to freshen up.⁶ And, of course, the ashes worn by public penitents survive today in the customs of Ash Wednesday.

MAUNDY THURSDAY

The Mass of Remission is a memory of the distant past, but the Chrism Mass is still celebrated the morning of Holy Thursday in the Catholic Church and in the Anglican communion, and so too is the third service handed down from antiquity, the Mass of the Lord’s Supper. Celebrated in the evening, it consists of several memorable ceremonies, including the washing of twelve men’s feet by the celebrant and the stripping of the altars in preparation for the sorrowful austerity of Good Friday. The former custom is the inspiration behind the term Maundy Thursday, “Maundy” coming from the *Mandatum novum* or “new commandment” that Christ gave his Apostles as he washed their feet: “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35). Our Lord’s gesture was clearly one of service, which is why Christian monarchs once washed the feet of the poorest of their subjects on Holy Thursday in a separate ceremony.⁷ But the foot-washing can also be seen as an analogical presentation of the Eucharist in John’s Gospel⁸ and as a purification of the ordained priesthood into which Christ had just initiated his Apostles, for the freshly-minted institution had been polluted moments earlier by Judas’ perfidy.⁹

The ceremonies of Holy Thursday in the Roman rite taught not only by addition but also by subtraction. Prior to the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), the Kiss of Peace was omitted during the Mass of the Last Supper, since the image of Judas’s despicable manner of identifying Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane was too vivid in the minds of the faithful to be imitated on this sacred night.¹⁰

TENEBRAE

Another form of traditional worship associated with Holy Thursday is Tenebrae, from the Latin word for “darkness.” Tenebrae is the Office of Matins and Lauds celebrated in the pre-dawn hours of Maundy Thursday or the night before,¹¹ but with one distinction. The service involves the use of a

“hearse,” a triangular candelabrum holding fifteen candles.¹² After the chanting of each psalm or canticle, a candle from the hearse is extinguished until the entire church is enveloped in almost total darkness. Only the topmost candle remains lit, which is then hidden by the side of the altar. Worshippers then make a banging noise, usually with their books on the pews, for several moments; after silence is restored, so too is the lit candle

Ever since the Church emerged from the catacombs and most likely even before that, Good Friday has been kept as a day of “bitterness” and fasting. Ironically, special foods also came to be associated with Good Friday.

to its place on the hearse. The extinction of the fourteen candles calls to mind the holy men mentioned in the Bible who, from the foundation of the world to the threshold of Christ’s ministry, were slain by their own brethren (see Matthew 23:35). Similarly, the hiding of the fifteenth candle signifies the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and his burial in the tomb; the banging noise commemorates the confusion

of nature when its Creator died (Matthew 27:51); and the restoration of the candle anticipates Christ’s glorious resurrection.

Tenebrae was popular in Catholic parishes before Pope Pius XII changed the rules governing Holy Week in 1955,¹³ and lately different versions of it have begun to reemerge in some Catholic parishes. Some Lutheran, Presbyterian, United Church of Christ, and Anglican and Episcopalian communities (especially the latter two) also celebrate a form of Tenebrae.

GOOD FRIDAY

Ever since the Church emerged from the catacombs and most likely even before that, Good Friday has been kept as a “day of lamentation and not festivity”¹⁴ and a day of “bitterness” and fasting.¹⁵ In the second century the faithful kept an intense forty-hour “Passion Fast” that began at the hour when Christ died on the cross and ended on the hour that he rose from the dead.¹⁶ Even after the forty-day Lenten fast became universal, believers would observe Good Friday with added rigor. In Ireland, Catholics would often keep a “Black Fast” in which nothing was consumed, except perhaps for a little water or plain tea, until sundown.

Ironically, special foods also came to be associated with Good Friday. The once-widespread custom in Catholic countries of marking every new loaf of bread with the sign of the cross took on a special meaning on Good Friday. In Austria, *Karfreitaglaib*, bread with a cross imprinted on it, was served on this day. And in England, hot cross buns, which first appeared

in 1361, would only be distributed on Good Friday. The hot cross bun was such a familiar feature of the English Lent that it continued after the Reformation as a seasonal food—and as an occasion for superstition. Hot cross buns were kept throughout the year for their curative properties; if someone “fell ill, a little of the bun was grated into water and given to the sick person to aid his recovery.”¹⁷ Some believed that eating them on Good Friday would protect their home from fire, while others wore them “as charms against disease, lightning, and shipwreck”!¹⁸

The centerpiece for most Christians on Good Friday is some form of worship. Historically, these services developed gradually. In the Latin West, Good Friday worship was the coalescence of three different practices: a Roman *synaxis*, a kind of prayer meeting with biblical readings; the adoration or veneration of the cross, borrowed from the ancient liturgy of Jerusalem; and the “Mass of the Presanctified,” in which Holy Communion (consecrated from a previous Mass) was distributed.¹⁹

Roman tradition also backhandedly led to the creation of Passion Music. In the traditional Roman rite, all four Gospel narratives of the Lord’s Passion are chanted during Holy Week: the Passion according to St. Matthew on Palm Sunday, the Passion according to St. Mark on the following Tuesday, the Passion according to St. Luke on Spy Wednesday, and the Passion according to St. John on Good Friday. The music for these Gospels is an outstanding example of the power and beauty of Gregorian chant; understandably, then, it left a deep impression on the Western imagination even after the Reformation in large part did away with the liturgical setting of Holy Week. Nature abhorring a vacuum, composers soon began writing Passion oratorios to replace the music of solemn liturgy, the most famous of which are Johann Sebastian Bach’s “Saint John Passion” and “Saint Matthew Passion” in the eighteenth century.²⁰

The Three Hours’ Devotion, or “Seven Last Words of Christ,” is another popular Good Friday service. Begun in 1732 by Father Alphonso Messia, S.J., in Lima, Peru, it quickly spread to all other countries in Central and South America and from there to Italy, England, and America, where both Catholics and Protestants embraced the devotion. The service, which alternates between homilies on the seven last statements of the crucified Christ and various hymns and prayers, has also inspired the composition of memorable music, including “The Seven Last Words of Christ” by Franz Joseph Haydn (1787), “Les Sept Paroles de Notre Seigneur Jesus-Christ sur la Croix” by Charles Gounod (1855), and “Les Sept Paroles du Christ” by Théodore Dubois (1867).

HOLY SATURDAY

“From evening until the cock-crowing, stay awake,” the fourth-century *Apostolic Constitutions* declares. “Assemble together in the church: watch and pray and entreat God. When you sit up all night, read the Law, the

Prophets, and the Psalms until the cock-crowing, and baptize your catechumens. Read the Gospel with fear and trembling, and speak to the people such things as tend to their salvation. And put an end to your sorrow."²¹

In the early church, the Easter Vigil service that began late Holy Saturday night and ended Easter Sunday morning was a remarkable experience. Thomas Finn writes that the North African liturgies of Lent and the Triduum

From the shenanigans of herring-hating boys of Poland to the writings of the greatest authors of the West, the Paschal Mystery of our redemption has been deeply felt through the ritual worship of the Church.

in St. Augustine's day were the "*spectacula christiana* — the new theatre, the new racetracks, and the new boxing ring. It is difficult to overestimate the impact of this long-extended ritual drama on convert and community alike."²² This was especially true for Holy Saturday, not only in North Africa but throughout Christendom. At the Basilica of St. John Lateran in Rome, the service would begin with

the blessing of the fire, the blessing of the Paschal candle, the proclamation of twelve Old Testament prophecies, and the blessing of the baptismal font (in a baptistery separate from the basilica). Stripped down, catechumens would descend into the font where they were baptized (women were anointed and baptized separately by a "deaconess," a non-ordained woman appointed for this purpose). Rising out of the font, they would be clothed in white robes, symbols of their new purity and having "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 13:14); they would then be confirmed or "chrismated" by the bishop. Next, the neophytes would enter the church carrying a lit candle as the congregation chanted the Litany of the Saints. As the dark church gradually filled with sparkling light, the Mass for Easter would begin.²³

Officially, the daylight hours of Holy Saturday would be spent in rest and prayer as the faithful kept spiritual vigil at the tomb of our Lord. One exception to this rule was the final interrogation of catechumens that took place in the afternoon. The bishop would question them one more time, exorcise them, touch their ears and nostrils in imitation of Mark 7:34 and John 9:1-3 and in order to symbolize their opening up to the graces and Word of God, and hear their pledge of conversion. The catechumens would face the West, point to the sunset, and renounce Satan and all his empty works before turning to the East and affirming their belief in Jesus Christ. Each recited the Creed memorized during Lent and was then dismissed to spend their last few hours before baptism in prayer.²⁴

Unofficially, there would be much activity the day before Easter as families prepared their homes and kitchens for an Octave of Paschal feasting (during Easter and the following week). The blessing of Easter foods by a priest, which in the Middle Ages often took place on Holy Saturday day, was a cherished custom in both the Latin West and Greek East, and it is still cherished by Eastern-rite Christians today. In Poland, boys would not only look forward to the new fare but say good riddance to the old. Taking a dead herring, which they had eaten in abundance during Lent, they would ritually execute it by hanging it from a tree and then bury it with glee in a mock funeral, all in celebration of their emancipation from the tiresome food.²⁵

CONCLUSION

Perhaps the most intriguing testimony to the power of the Triduum is its impact on the literary imagination. In the *Commedia* Dante famously begins his journey into Inferno on Holy Thursday and reaches Purgatorio on Easter Sunday morning. Before Dante's *Comedy* the Caedmonian *Exodus*²⁶ and the Anglo-Saxon poem *Beowulf* were both inspired by the Triduum: *Beowulf's* descent to the monsters' underwater lair, for instance, is deliberately evocative of Christ's harrowing of Hell, a scene that comes after a culminating series of Old Testament allusions recapitulating the Holy Saturday liturgy.²⁷ Even the various parts of St. Augustine's *Confessions* may be surmised in terms of the Triduum: the autobiography of his past in books 1-9 recounts his catechumenate and baptism on Holy Saturday, the autobiography of his present in book 10 hearkens to the Eucharist he received as a neophyte and his current vocation to the priesthood, and the commentary on the opening verses of Genesis in books 11-13 recalls his period of instruction during the Easter Octave as well as his duties as bishop to instruct the newborn "infants" in the Faith.²⁸ From the shenanigans of herring-hating boys to the writings of the greatest authors of the West, the Paschal Mystery of our redemption has been deeply felt through the ritual worship of the Church.

NOTES

1 Leo the Great, Sermon 47.1. All translations are mine.

2 Leo the Great, Sermon 50.3.

3 See William Harmless, S.J., *Augustine and the Catechumenate* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1995).

4 The original use of the word "quarantine" was Jesus' forty-day fast in the desert; it was applied to periods of penance before it was eventually applied to the temporary isolation of those with contagious diseases (see "Quarantine, n.," *Oxford English Dictionary*, second edition).

5 Francis X. Weiser, S.J., *Handbook of Christian Feasts and Customs* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1958), 193 and 173.

6 See Augustine, Epistle 54.7.9-10.

7 It was the custom in England, for instance, for the monarch to wash the feet of as many people as they themselves were years old and to give to each as many coins. After the Reformation, the foot-washing was eventually dropped and only the giving of coins was retained. Today, the coins used are specially-minted commemorative pieces called "Maundy money."

8 Rev. Msgr. Anthony A. La Femina, "The Footwashing—Jesus Christ Establishes the New Covenant before Calvary," *Adoremus* 12:1 (March 2006), www.adoremus.org/0306Footwashing.html (accessed November 18, 2013).

9 For the connection between priestly consecration and bodily washing, see Leviticus 8:6 and Exodus 30:17-21. For the interpretation of Christ's foot-washing as a moral purification and sanctification, see Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.22.

10 Michael P. Foley, "The Whence and Whither of the Kiss of Peace in the Roman Rite," *Antiphon: A Journal for Liturgical Renewal* 14:1 (2010), 45-94.

11 The Divine Office, or Liturgy of the Hours, consists of seven or eight designated times during the day in which the faithful chant or recite psalms, hymns, and spiritual canticles.

12 A hearse is a harrow, which is a spiked, rake-like tool used for tilling the ground. The candelabrum is so named because of its resemblance to the harrow, while the coffin bier and funeral vehicle take their names from the candelabrum, not the other way around.

13 See Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*, where a verse from *Tenebrae*, *Quomodo sedet sola civitas* / How lonely sits the city (*Lamentations* 1:1), is a motif.

14 *Apostolic Constitutions* 5.18.

15 St. Ambrose, Epistle 23.12.

16 Weiser, 201.

17 Katherine Burton and Helmut Ripperger, *Feast Day Cookbook* (Montreal, QC: Catholic Authors Press, 2005), 52.

18 Weiser, 206.

19 Dom Gaspar Lefebvre, O.S.B., *Saint Andrew Daily Missal* (Saint Paul, MN: E. M. Lohmann Co., 1953), 490.

20 Weiser, 91 and 203-204.

21 *Apostolic Constitutions* 5.19.

22 Thomas M. Finn, "It Happened One Saturday Night: Ritual and Conversion in Augustine's North Africa," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 58:4 (1990), 595.

23 Lefebvre, 519 ff., and 553.

24 The various exorcisms, interrogations, and rituals of the catechumenate during the Patristic era were preserved and compressed into a single rite of baptism kept by the Church of Rome and used for all baptismal candidates, infant and adult, until 1969.

25 Weiser, 208.

26 J. W. Bright, "The Relation of the Caedmonian *Exodus* to the Liturgy," *Modern Language Notes* 27:4 (April 1912), 97-103.

27 Allen Cabaniss, "Beowulf and the Liturgy," in Lewis E. Nicholson, ed., *An Anthology of Beowulf Criticism* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame Press, 1963), 223-232.

28 Angela Pearson, "The Unity of the *Confessions* and the Octave of the Infants," Baylor University, December 2005, unpublished; Michael P. Foley, "The Sacramental Topography of the *Confessions*," *Antiphon* 9:1 (Spring 2005), 30-65.



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“He Descended into Hell”

BY KEITH L. JOHNSON

In the Apostle’s Creed we affirm that Jesus Christ “descended into hell.” Exactly what and where is this hell to which he descended? Why did he have to go there? What did he do when he arrived in hell? And why are his descent and our confession of it central to our faith?

Whenever my church prints the Apostle’s Creed in the Sunday worship bulletin, one phrase has an asterisk attached to it: “he descended into hell*....” An explanation is provided at the bottom of the page: “hell refers to the realm of the dead rather than the place of punishment.” I have long found the presence of this asterisk and explanation disheartening. After all, if John Calvin is right that the Apostle’s Creed contains “a summary of our faith, full and complete in all details,” then doesn’t our need to *asterisk* the Creed signify that we do not truly understand what we believe?¹ Wouldn’t better catechesis be a more fitting solution? On my better days, however, I can hardly blame my church leaders for making the addition, because I know that they are simply trying to address a real point of confusion in my church and others like it. Many sincere Christians recite the Apostle’s Creed every week without knowing what it means to confess that Jesus Christ “descended into hell.” What *are* we affirming when we say this phrase? Exactly what and where is this hell to which Jesus descended? Why did Jesus have to go there? What did Jesus do when he arrived in hell? Whom did he meet? And why are his descent and our confession of it central to our faith?

CHRIST'S DESCENT IN SCRIPTURE

Scripture provides limited resources to directly address these questions. The passage most often cited in relation to Christ's descent is 1 Peter 3:18-22. In the midst of a summary of the saving effects of Christ's death and resurrection, Peter states that Christ "went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey" (vv. 19-20a). This

We have to think through Scripture to trace out what must be true about Christ's descent into hell in light of everything Scripture says about God, Christ, and salvation. As the Church has engaged in this task, three approaches have emerged.

statement seems vague on its own, but readers often have interpreted it in light of the subsequent claim that "the gospel was proclaimed even to the dead, so that, though they had been judged in the flesh as everyone is judged, they might live in the spirit as God does" (1 Peter 4:6). Read together, these verses are taken to mean that Christ proclaimed the gospel to the dead who existed in a distinct realm,

often identified with the Old Testament *Sheol* or Greek *Hades*. The timing of this proclamation is clarified by appeals to Romans 10:6-7 and Ephesians 4:8-10, both of which employ the motif of Christ's ascending and descending. These passages have been thought to imply that Christ descended into the "lower parts of the earth" to reside with "the dead" in the period between his crucifixion and resurrection. This idea is connected to Acts 2:27, which cites Psalm 16 to indicate that God would not abandon his people to Hades or let his "Holy One experience corruption." Viewed as a whole, these passages have led interpreters to posit the following scenario: in the time between his death and resurrection—the time identified with Holy Saturday, the day between Good Friday and Easter Sunday—Christ descended into the realm of the dead in order to preach the gospel to the dead who resided there.

This statement marks the limits of what Scripture might be said to explicitly support when it comes to Christ's descent into hell, and my church's explanation of its asterisk stands in line with this content. The problem, however, is that if we are going to say this much about Christ's descent, then we also must be willing to say a lot more. Doctrines can never just be affirmed; they also have to be put to work. And just as it would do little good to say that God is a Trinity without being able to explain *how* the Father, Son, and Spirit are one God, it does little good to say that Christ descended to the dead without being able to explain why he did so and what this descent actually means for our life of faith. This sort of explanation

requires theological reasoning that goes beyond the letter of Scripture into the realm of faithful speculation. We have to think *through* Scripture by following its trajectory to trace out what must be true about Christ's descent into hell in light of everything else Scripture says about God, Christ, and salvation. As the Church has engaged in this task over the centuries, three primary approaches to the descent have emerged.

CHRIST THE TRIUMPHANT KING

The first approach is the traditional position: Christ descended into hell as a triumphant king to proclaim his victory over sin, death, and the devil to the saints who had died before him. The descent takes place as a glorious display of Christ's power and his status as the one who now holds "the keys of Death and of Hades" (Revelation 1:18). As Irenaeus puts it in the second century, "the Lord descended into the regions beneath the earth to preach his advent and to proclaim remission of sins for all who believe in him."² This act fulfills Christ's earlier promise that "the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live" (John 5:25). It also stands in line with God's prior work in salvation history. Christ does not offer salvation to *all* the dead, as if God's covenant had been revised and now everyone had a second chance at salvation. Rather, Christ proclaims salvation only to the *righteous* dead, including figures like David, Samuel, the prophets, and John the Baptist.³ This means that Christ's descent vindicates rather than revises God's promises, and it takes place as the first movement of his Easter triumph.

The key for assessing this approach is to consider what it implies about the nature of Christ's saving work. Specifically, if Christ enters hell as the triumphant king, then Christ's death on the cross must have been sufficient to free humans from the power of sin and death. For most the church fathers, this indicated that the physicality of Christ's death was the very point of his saving work. Christ came to save human beings, and humans are not merely souls but *embodied* souls. The salvation of an embodied soul must be a physical salvation. For them, this meant that Christ saved us on the cross not primarily by fulfilling the standards of divine justice or accepting the fullness of God's wrath. Rather, he saved us by embracing the physical death that comes as a consequence of our sin (Genesis 2:17). This embrace of death was the entire point of the incarnation: Christ took a physical body upon himself precisely so that he could die in it *as God*. As a result, death's power "fully expended" on him, leading to the "dissolution of death" and the resurrection of the faithful.⁴ This is what Paul is talking about when he says, "Death has been swallowed up in victory" (1 Corinthians 15:54). As the eternal Son of God, Jesus Christ defeated death by dying a human death on the cross, and everything that happens after the cross – including his descent and his resurrection from the dead – works out the implications of this victory for our salvation.

CHRIST THE CRUCIFIED SERVANT

The second approach is held by John Calvin (1509-1564) and much of the Reformed tradition after him, including Karl Barth (1886-1968). Calvin affirms that Jesus Christ “descended into hell,” but he rejects the claim that Christ literally descended to the realm of the dead to preach to the saints. Such an idea, he says, “is nothing but a story” containing “childish” elements with no basis in the biblical narrative.⁵ In reality, Christ could not have descended into hell to proclaim salvation to the righteous dead because there are no righteous dead: “all, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin, as it is written, ‘There is no one who is righteous, not even one’...for ‘no human being will be justified in his sight’ by deeds prescribed by the law” (Romans 3:9-10, 20). This means, Calvin says, that Peter’s claim that Christ “made a proclamation to the spirits in prison” (1 Peter 3:19) should not be interpreted literally. Rather, it is meant to indicate that the power of Christ’s death “penetrated even to the dead” so as to highlight their already determined destiny: the faithful knew that “the grace which they had only tasted in hope was then manifested to the world,” and the wicked “realized more clearly that they were excluded from all salvation.”⁶

Our confession of Christ’s descent gives us similar clarity, Calvin thinks, because it helps us grasp the true nature of his suffering. While he agrees that Christ’s death on the cross was sufficient for salvation, he insists that this suffering must have been *spiritual* as well as physical because God’s judgment against sin included spiritual as well as physical consequences. “If Christ had died only a bodily death,” Calvin says, “it would have been ineffectual. No – it was expedient at the same time for him to undergo the severity of God’s vengeance, to appease his wrath and satisfy his just judgment.”⁷ Here we see the influence of Calvin’s doctrine of the atonement upon his interpretation of the descent. If the consequences of the Fall include God’s wrath against sin, then this wrath must be satisfied in order for salvation to take place. And if the cross is sufficient for salvation, then the cross must have been the place where this wrath was satisfied. For Calvin, the confession that Christ “descended into hell” points us to this very fact, because it helps us recognize the true nature of Christ’s suffering. In addition to his physical suffering, Christ endured an “invisible and incomprehensible judgment” and paid “a greater and more excellent price in suffering in his soul the terrible moments of a condemned and forsaken man.”⁸ The implication is this: when Christ takes the full weight of sin upon himself, he is taking the penalty of God’s wrath against sin as well. This means, as Barth puts it later, that Christ experienced the horrors of hell on the cross: “We must not deny that Jesus gave Himself up to the depths of hell not only with many others but on their behalf, in their place, in the place of all who believe in Him.”⁹ Christ’s descent still marks his victory over sin and its consequences, but the nature of this victory is seen differently: instead of taking place as a triumph *over* death, Christ’s

victory takes place *in and through* his death. The descent thus signifies the moment on the cross when Christ willingly bears the full burden of human sin and its consequences.

CHRIST THE GODFORSAKEN

The third approach, associated most prominently with Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988), combines elements from each of the previous two views. With the tradition, Balthasar affirms that Christ literally descended into hell in the period between his death and resurrection. Yet, with Calvin and Barth, he holds that the descent indicates the depth of Christ's suffering rather than his triumph. Balthasar's approach is governed by his commitment to the Patristic principle that "only what has been endured by Christ is healed and saved."¹⁰ He takes this principle to mean that Christ must suffer the full consequences of sin and death in order to overcome them, which means that he must endure a spiritual death as well as his physical one. He moves beyond Calvin and Barth on this point, however, by affirming that this suffering happens in hell rather than strictly on the cross. As he sees it, to say that Jesus Christ "descended into hell" is to confess that Christ descended to the place of punishment in order to experience the Godlessness of hell on our behalf. "And so it is really God," Balthasar says, "who assumes what is radically contrary to the divine, what is eternally reprobated by God, in the form of the supreme obedience of the Son towards the Father."¹¹ Christ's suffering in hell marks his second death, one that extends the suffering of the cross into a new dimension. The difference between the first and second death is located in Christ's posture toward it. On the cross, Christ actively embraces the burden of human sin and God's wrath against it; in hell, Christ passively exists in solidarity with the dead by accepting the absolute rejection of God.

Although often criticized on this point, Balthasar himself does not think that his approach means that Christ's death on the cross was inadequate or incomplete, as if an additional saving work had to be done in order to secure humanity's salvation.¹² Rather, he sees Christ's suffering in hell as the necessary continuation and perfection of the suffering that began on the cross. "His being with the dead," he says, "is an existence at the utmost pitch of obedience."¹³ The perfection of Christ's obedience includes the display of Christ's lifeless body. This is what Balthasar thinks Peter's statement about Christ preaching to the spirits in prison indicates. It does not occur as the active proclamation of a triumphant king, but rather, it takes the form of a visible, embodied word as the eternal Son, united to a condemned human corpse, that assumes the fullness of God's curse on our behalf.¹⁴ This visible proclamation marks the point at which the *Sheol* of the Old Testament – the shadowy realm of the dead – becomes the hell of the New Testament. "Hell is a *product* of the Redemption," Balthasar argues, "a product which henceforth must be 'contemplated' in its own 'for itself' by the Redeemer, so as to become, in

its state of sheer reprobation that which exists ‘for him’: that over which, in his Resurrection, he receives the power and the keys.”¹⁵ In other words, Balthasar believes that Christ has power over death and hell precisely because he suffered the fullness of death and hell, but then prevailed over them. As a result, hell is determined and defined by Christ himself, because the possibility of hell becomes a reality through his work.

What if we explained the descent differently? Instead of importing the events of Sunday into Saturday, or Saturday into Friday, or extending Friday into Saturday, what if we interpreted Christ’s descent primarily in light of the living Jesus Christ himself?

**CHRIST THE
LIVING LORD**

How are we to sort through these three approaches to Christ’s descent? One place to start is with their distinct accounts of the consequence of sin and Christ’s actions to overcome it. Those who hold to the traditional approach see sin primarily in terms of the death that results from it, and they believe the cross is sufficient to save us because death’s

power is exhausted on Christ. As a result, they import Christ’s Easter triumph into Holy Saturday and view the descent as the first movement of Christ’s victorious reign. Those who follow Calvin’s approach see sin primarily in terms of God’s wrath against it, and they hold that the cross is sufficient to save us because it is where Christ’s bears this wrath. Accordingly, they import the events of Holy Saturday into Good Friday and view the cross through the lens of the descent. Balthasar sees sin in terms of both death and wrath, and he thinks we are freed from them because Christ suffered both on the cross *and* in hell. He thus extends Good Friday into Holy Saturday, joining them together as two stages of suffering necessary for the sake of our redemption.

The clear differences among these three approaches mask a common similarity: they each interpret Christ’s descent through the lens of another event. The traditional view sees the descent in light of the resurrection; Calvin interprets it as a gloss on the crucifixion itself; and Balthasar sees it as the extension and perfection of the crucifixion.

But what if we explained the descent differently? Specifically, instead of importing the events of Sunday into Saturday, or Saturday into Friday, or extending Friday into Saturday, what if we interpreted the meaning of Christ’s descent primarily in light of the *living* Jesus Christ himself? The Apostle’s Creed, after all, is a confession of faith, and the primary object of our faith is the God who has come to us in Jesus Christ. He is not in hell but

lives and reigns here and now through his Holy Spirit. And one of the ways he does so is through *us*: "it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). When we confess that Christ "descended into hell," we are not merely making a claim about an event that happened in the past; we are making a claim about the One who lives in and through us in the present. To make this confession is to say that the Christ who dwells in us is the *same* Christ who did not regard the borders of death and hell as barriers blocking him from saving us.

This insight adds a distinct dimension to Christ's statement that the "gates of Hades shall not prevail" against his Church (Matthew 16:18). In one sense, he means that the Church has nothing to fear from any external enemy, even death and hell. As Paul puts it, "Who will separate us from the love of Christ?" (Romans 8:35). Yet might Christ not also mean that death and hell pose no barrier for the Church? That is, because Christ crossed the borders of death, are we not free to do so as well? Doesn't Christ's saving work allow us to follow him wherever he may lead, even if doing so means "becoming like him in his death" (Philippians 3:10)? Is not the Church able to go to any place in this world and face any horror because we know that Christ has been to the "darkest valley" and faced our enemies before us (Psalm 23:4-5)?

Perhaps these ideas can direct us to the work that the confession of Christ's descent actually does for the Church. Our limited information leaves us speculating about what it truly means to say that Christ "descended into hell." For everything that we cannot know about the descent, however, we can say this much with confidence: to confess these creedal words is to declare that we can face outward into the world, toward the sometimes brutal and terrifying edges of human life, without fear. To say this phrase is to declare that we the Church – the people who exist in and with Christ – are free to cross any border, confront any evil, and take upon ourselves any suffering as we seek to obey the commission Christ gave us. We can do so with full confidence that Christ himself, "the pioneer and perfecter of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2), has gone before us into the depths and goes with us still.

Where can I go from your spirit?

Or where can I flee from your presence?

If I ascend to heaven, you are there;

if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.

Psalm 139:7-8

In short, to say these words is to declare that we are *free* – free to love our enemies, to face sin in its stark reality, and to embrace the world without fear of the cost.

NOTES

1 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.16.8. All translations by Ford Lewis Battles, edited by John T. McNeill, in *Library of Christian Classics*, volume 20 (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1960).

2 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 4.27.2, translated by James R. Payton Jr., in *Irenaeus on the Christian Faith: A Condensation of AGAINST HERESIES* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 125.

3 For this point, see Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, 4.11. Aquinas later explained that Jesus did not descend to the hell of the damned because he does not have fellowship with darkness (2 Corinthians 6:14). See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, Q. 52, A. 2.

4 On this point, see the remarks by Athanasius in *On the Incarnation*, §§ 8, 10, translated by John Behr, *Popular Patristics Series* (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2011), 57 and 60.

5 Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.16.9.

6 *Ibid.*

7 Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 2.16.10.

8 *Ibid.*

9 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics II/2* (Edinburgh, UK: T&T Clark, 1957), 496.

10 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III: The Dramatis Personae: Persons in Christ*, translated by Graham Harrison (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1978), 238-239.

11 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale: The Mystery of Easter*, translated by Aidan Nichols, O.P. (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1990), 51-52.

12 For example, see Alyssa Lyra Pitstick, *Light in Darkness: Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Catholic Doctrine of Christ's Descent into Hell* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007), 206.

13 Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 174.

14 *Ibid.*, 150-151.

15 *Ibid.*, 174; emphasis in the original.



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Raised to Walk in Newness of Life

BY ROBERT B. KRUSCHWITZ

Christ's resurrection guides us into "newness of life," which is life here and now, but with a new, eschatological dimension. We examine everything we feel, think, and do from a new perspective that takes our present bodies, our resurrectional bodies, and Christ's body (which is the Church) ever more seriously.

My dad asked quietly, "Are you ready?" It was the signal for me to draw a deep breath and pinch my nostrils shut with my right hand. Then he intoned "Buried with him by baptism into death" as he lowered me back and under the water's surface where I could not breathe. "Raised to walk in newness of life" he announced in a louder voice as he pulled me, gasping for air, back out. Because being baptized as a believer into the body of Christ is the most publicly vulnerable thing I have ever done (and, I suspect, that anyone could ever do), I remember it well fifty years later.

The baptismal formula my father used, drawing from Romans 6:3-4, portends that discipleship involves participating ever more fully in Christ's death and resurrection. In this article I will explore how Christ's bodily resurrection gives distinctive shape to the Christian moral life—which is to say, how believers ought to feel, think, and act in regard to one another, other created things, and God.

There is much mystery in that baptismal formula. The first part—being buried with Christ—entails that believers have "died to sin" (Romans 6:2). When they allow the "old self [to be] crucified" with Christ in baptism, the

Apostle Paul explains, they no longer welcome sinful “passions” or willingly yield themselves to be “instruments of wickedness” (6:6, 12-13). Of course believers keep messing up their lives through culpable ignorance, weakness, and inattention – we see this in our own experience as well as in the deplorably messy lives of the baptized Christians Paul was addressing – but, nevertheless, they have turned an important corner. Since believers are no longer “enslaved” partners with those distorted desires and sinful habits, they now can actively resist them; they have been “freed” to “present [themselves] to God as those who have been brought from death to life” (6:7 and 13b).¹ This new orientation toward their sinfulness is not their own accomplishment, but something so amazing that it reveals “the glory of the Father” in the same way Christ’s resurrection does (6:4). And that is why the baptismal formula goes on to proclaim, with Paul, that believers have been raised “so that [they] *might* walk in newness of life” (6:4).

This line of causation that runs from the event of Christ’s bodily resurrection to the divinely empowered life of his disciples is sometimes called “the spiritual resurrection of believers.”² Paul describes it as “the power of [Christ’s] resurrection” which enables him to “press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly [or, literally: upward] call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:10, 14). The central idea is that resurrectional power does not merely give believers a jump start for discipleship by freeing them from sin and making it possible for them to resist their distorted practices and desires, it also enables and guides their growth into Christlike virtues throughout their lives. The power of Christ’s resurrection not only breaks their entrenchment in a rebellious way of life, it also instructs them in a Christlike way of living.

In this article I will briefly explore three ways that this resurrectional power gives a distinctive shape to the Christian moral life: it calls believers to take their present bodies seriously, to take their resurrectional bodies seriously, and to take Christ’s body (which is the Church) seriously. Why do I focus on these themes? I think it is no accident that God’s power to enliven believers spiritually is ‘channeled’ to them (so to speak) through the *bodily* resurrection of Jesus. Indeed, Christ’s resurrection sets the pattern for discipleship; and, therefore, the act of believer’s baptism, because it is a dramatic sign of our participating in Christ’s resurrection, becomes an augury of the entire Christian moral life.³ That is what I want to explore.

It will be clear in what follows that it is Christ’s *resurrection* – not his resuscitation, revivification, or reanimation – that informs the Christian moral life in distinctive ways. God did not bring Jesus back to (more of the same) life, as when Elijah revived the Zarephath widow’s son (1 Kings 17:17-24) or Jesus resuscitated his friend Lazarus (John 11); rather, God raised Jesus to new life of an eschatological order, to life that reflects God’s ultimate purpose for creation. Furthermore, it is important that it is *Christ’s* resurrection. By this I mean that the resurrection event is not self-interpreting,

but gets its layers of meaning from the fact that it is Israel's Messiah, or Christ, whom God raises to new life. For that reason we can discern how resurrectional power shapes the moral life only when we interpret the resurrection within the narrative of God's work through the people of Israel and the Church.

TAKING PRESENT BODIES SERIOUSLY

It is interesting that one of the briefest and, therefore, possibly earliest of the Christian baptismal confessions says only this:

I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
and in his only begotten Son
our Lord Jesus Christ,
and in the Holy Spirit,
and in the resurrection of the flesh,
and in the holy catholic church.⁴

After professing the Trinitarian God, the catechumen proclaims belief "in the resurrection of *the flesh*." This is not a proclamation of Christ's resurrection, though surely that historical event would be in the catechumen's mind and be believed. Rather it is a claim that rising from the dead—both Christ's resurrection which has occurred already and the believer's own resurrection which is promised for the eschatological future—is not to existence as

a disembodied soul, but to life with a body. This clear affirmation of the importance of the human body in the economy of God's redemptive plan is common in early Christian baptismal formulas, worship liturgies, and theological writings.

Kevin Madigan and Jon Levinson describe the political implications that early Christians and rabbinical Jews drew from their belief in the resurrection of

the flesh. Precisely because it meant that the human body "would be a locus of redemption," they could believe "the redeemed life began in the here and now, with the life of discipleship (Christians) or the life of Torah (Jews), and would come to its spiritual fulfillment with the general resurrection and the eternal life that resurrection would inaugurate."⁵ On a practical level this meant that some believers were drawn more closely

Christ's resurrection sets the pattern for discipleship; and, therefore, the act of believer's baptism, because it is a dramatic sign of our participating in Christ's resurrection, becomes an augury of the entire Christian moral life.

together into communities to care for one another's physical needs. Amazingly, the early Christians in Jerusalem were willing to share their possessions (even if only for a short time) so that "there was not a needy person among them" (Acts 4:34). Luke explains that this miraculous spirit of fellow feeling unfolded during a time when "with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all" (Acts 4:33). Furthermore, whenever wayward religious structures, cultural practices, or political regimes threatened God's intentions for embodied life together "in the here and now," the people of God had reason to stand up to those "principalities and powers" and to be fearless of death at their hands. We can glimpse this political dynamic in the running controversy over resurrection between the Pharisees (who were the forebears of rabbinical Judaism and were politically closest to the early Jesus movement) and the Sadducees (Acts 23:6-8 and 24:20-21; cf. Acts 4:1-3 and Matthew 22:23-33//Mark 12:18-27//Luke 20:27-40). Belief in the resurrection of the flesh "was embraced and expounded by the Pharisees, a popular-level pressure-group insisting on law-based reforms" in the society, N. T. Wright explains, but it "was rejected by the Sadducees, the Jerusalem based aristocracy" who had much to gain by truckling to the Roman authorities.⁶

So, here is the first way that resurrectional power gives distinctive shape to the Christian moral life: it calls believers to treat their own and other human bodies with the great respect and care they deserve as a prime locus of God's redemptive work. For many disciples this takes the form of providing urgent or long-term care directly to particular human bodies in need – for instance, to those who are unborn, very young, disabled, sick, or dying. But it also involves their working to correct the broken social systems that endanger many human bodies – such as material poverty, unjust and unhealthy food production, disordered constructions of sexuality, or predatory warfare. Not all of their work will be corrective or defensive, as those examples might suggest; some disciples will employ the creative arts, literature, teaching, or counseling to encourage a rightly ordered appreciation of the human body. These are just a few ways that believers honor and care for present human bodies. They realize that precisely because the resurrection of the flesh is (in N. T. Wright's words) "about the Creator God reclaiming, judging, and renewing the created world," their "working for God's kingdom in the present is... 'not in vain' (1 Corinthians 15:58)."⁷

TAKING RESURRECTIONAL BODIES SERIOUSLY

When early Christians professed belief "in the resurrection of the flesh," they were not thinking that their rotting, dismembered corpses would simply be revived, but hoped that in some mysterious way those physical bodies would be involved in God's raising to life their resurrectional bodies. Where did they get this notion?

The Gospels report Jesus saying very little about the general resurrection or about resurrectional bodies, but what he says is intriguing. During the final week of his life some Sadducees approached him with a trick question: if a certain woman has been married in sequence to seven brothers in this life (according to the laws of levirate marriage in Deuteronomy 25:5 ff.), which one will be her husband “in the resurrection” (Matthew 22:23-33// Mark 12:18-27// Luke 20:27-40)? Jesus answers that resurrected human beings “neither marry nor are given in marriage” because they are “like angels.” We do not know much about angelic life, and probably there is not much that Jesus could tell us about it that we would understand. Nevertheless, his cryptic comment suggests that while the woman and the brothers would be in the same place and recognize one another (i.e., “in the resurrection”), their needs, desires, and (therefore) caring relationships would be different. This is consistent with Paul’s teaching that while resurrectional bodies will be continuous in some way with present bodies, they will be quite dissimilar from present bodies in their needs, desires, and powers – something like mature plants that have far outgrown their origin as seeds (1 Corinthians 15:37-38). Resurrectional bodies will be “heavenly,” “spiritual,” “imperishable,” and filled with appropriate “glory” and “power” (15:40-44), as God wants them to be.⁸ These teachings by Jesus and Paul fit well with the descriptions of Jesus’ resurrected body. It was dissimilar to his earthly body in having unusual powers (like appearing and disappearing very suddenly in the entombment garden, a locked room, or the open countryside) and not being immediately recognized by his closest disciples. Nevertheless, Jesus could easily reveal his identity to them through the stigmata and some characteristic bodily gestures – like blessing and serving their dinner bread (Luke 24:30), calling them by name (John 20:16), and graciously supplying their needs (John 21:6-7) – by which he had expressed his love for them over the years.

Resurrectional power gives distinctive shape to the Christian moral life: it calls believers to treat their own and other human bodies with the great respect and care they deserve as primary locus of God’s redemptive work.

A new perspective on the human body emerges from these scriptural teachings and stories. On the one hand, how believers treat present human bodies – how they honor and care for them, and develop in them habits of love – becomes even more important because one day their resurrectional bodies will be informed in appearance, habits, and loving gestures by the embodied lives that they are living now. On the other hand, preserving their present bodies at great cost

becomes much less important because believers are promised resurrectional bodies that will be wonderfully different—more glorified and powerful, and totally incorruptible. This is why Jesus can say rather bluntly to some disciples who are shying from the “wolves” who twist political and social systems to persecute them: “Do not fear those who can kill the [present human] body but cannot kill the soul” (Matthew 10:28; cf. Luke 12:4).

So, here is a second way that resurrectional power gives distinctive shape to the Christian moral life: it calls believers to take their resurrectional bodies seriously, which permits them to revalue their present bodies from a fresh, eschatological perspective. Within the larger story of God’s redemptive purposes, believers can see their present embodied lives as wonderful gifts from God which they, in turn, can donate to one another and back to God. Indeed, the primary value of their present bodies is to be “seeds” that become formed in the ways of receiving and giving love in this life, so that they may serve as embryonic platforms for more glorious forms of love and intimacy with God and one another “in the resurrection.” When they look at their present bodies from this perspective, modern-day disciples will be empowered to resist the ways that culture sexualizes young bodies, denigrates aging ones, siphons off medical resources to preserve advantaged persons’ lives with extreme measures, and so on. And in those places where “wolves” of social and political persecution still roam, disciples will be empowered to courageous acts of service to others and even to martyrdom. As believers embrace this eschatological perspective, they do not value their present bodies less than they should, but value them rightly because they have taken their resurrectional bodies seriously.

TAKING CHRIST’S BODY SERIOUSLY

The final statement of the brief baptismal confession cited above is belief “in the holy catholic church,” which is the unity of Christian believers across all times and places. I do not know why the early catechizers coupled that doctrine with a belief in the resurrection of the flesh, but the close pairing of them is certainly consonant with the Apostle Paul’s view on the matter. For instance, when he instructs the Roman disciples who have been raised from the waters of baptism to “consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God *in Christ Jesus*” (Romans 6:11), he is using a phrase—“in Christ Jesus”—that is his favorite designation for believers’ membership together in the Church. He calls the Corinthian disciples “the church (*ekklesia*) of God in Corinth...who have been sanctified *in Christ Jesus*, called to be saints” (1 Corinthians 1:2); and he instructs them that since they have been “called *in the Lord*” (7:22),⁹ they are now “*the body of Christ* and individually members of it” (12:27).¹⁰ Paul is certainly not applauding the believers in Rome and Corinth for constructing warm and supportive communities; indeed, in his correspondence to them he harps on the fractured nature of their lives together. Rather, with these designations—“sanctified in Christ Jesus,”

“called in the Lord,” and being in “the body of Christ” – Paul is reminding these believers of their true identity and urging them to live into it. Luke Timothy Johnson explains, “It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that Paul’s understanding of the church involves a deep and mystical identity between the community and the risen Jesus mediated by the Holy Spirit.”¹¹ In other words, the believers’ identity in Christ is not their own choice or accomplishment, but an effect of the power of Christ’s resurrection through their incorporation by baptism into Christ’s body, the Church.

Here, then, is a third way that resurrectional power gives distinctive shape to the Christian moral life: it calls believers to take seriously their identity and growth as members in Christ’s body. They must no longer regard their other identities of family heritage, nationality, race, and gender (cf. Galatians 3:28, Colossians 3:11) – and we might add to the Pauline list such things as wealth, social status, and political affiliations – as establishing the ultimate norms for their behavior, but they should examine all of these with a wary eye. Furthermore, through “the holy catholic church” Christ is resurrectionally present to believers as he instructs and corrects them, and his Spirit empowers them to walk in newness of life. Or, as Frederick Dale Bruner puts it, “Jesus has everything the Father has to give, and he gives us this everything in the unlikely place called baptism in the church.”¹²

This should not lead believers to withdraw from the world – that is, to learn only from other church members or to serve the world only through church institutions – because God’s Spirit can work in their lives through channels other than the Church. However, the Church remains the fundamental locus of their moral lives in the following ways: only through its worship and practices can believers learn to inhabit their true identities, and only in concert with other members can they form the specific

As members in Christ’s body, believers must no longer regard their other identities of family heritage, nationality, race, gender, wealth, social status, and political affiliations as establishing ultimate norms for their behavior, but should examine these with a wary eye.

commitments and habits that enable them to discern and embrace the work of God in the world. As believers embrace this ecclesial perspective, they do not value their other identities and morally formative relationships less than they should, but value them rightly because they have taken the body of Christ seriously.

CONCLUSION

The results of our exploration into how Christ's bodily resurrection gives distinctive shape to the Christian moral life—that is, how it informs believers' feelings, thoughts, and actions toward one another, other created things, and God—can be summarized in the familiar formula of believer's baptism, "raised to walk in newness of life."

First, through the power of Christ's resurrection believers have already been "raised" after their death to sin. They have received a new identity in Christ, which means, in part, that they no longer 'identify' with their sinful habits and desires, but are empowered to grow in Christlike virtues.

Second, the power of Christ's resurrection guides believers into "newness of life," which is life here and now, but with a new, eschatological dimension. This involves scrutinizing everything they feel, think, and do from a new perspective that takes their present bodies, their resurrectional bodies, and Christ's body (which is the Church) ever more seriously.

NOTES

1 In another context Paul says the baptized "have died" and "have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed [themselves] with the new self" (Colossians 3:3, 9). They have been "raised with Christ" (3:1). Nevertheless, he urges believers to "put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry)" (3:5). We see the same pattern: the orientation of the old self is destroyed in the waters of baptism, but the new self struggles to resist the flotsam of bad habits, stratagems, and desires left behind.

2 Richard N. Longenecker, "Resurrection," in Joel B. Green, *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 677-680, here citing 679. Longenecker cites Romans 6:4-17 and Colossians 2:12 as descriptions of the present spiritual resurrection of believers. Two other types of resurrection statements in the New Testament look backward to the bodily nature of Christ's resurrection (e.g., Romans 6:9) or forward to physical resurrection of believers from death to new life (e.g., 1 Corinthians 15:52).

3 For more on believer's baptism as a sign of Christ's death and resurrection, and, therefore, as an augury of the entire Christian life, see Eric Howell, "How the Tomb Becomes a Womb," *Death, Christian Reflection: A Series in Faith and Ethics*, 48 (Waco, TX: The Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University, 2013), 11-18.

4 Quoted in D. H. Williams, *Tradition, Scripture, and Interpretation: A Sourcebook of the Ancient Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 81. While admitting "the exact date of the confession is unknown," Williams believes "its simplicity suggests sometime in the second century."

5 Kevin J. Madigan and Jon D. Levenson, *Resurrection: The Power of God for Christians and Jews* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2008), 236-237.

6 N. T. Wright, "Resurrection of the Dead," in Kevin J. VanHoozer, et al., eds., *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 676-678, here citing 677.

7 *Ibid.*, 678.

8 When we read these teachings by Jesus and Paul in their contexts, it is clear why each one chooses to emphasize some important *discontinuities* between resurrectional bodies and earthly bodies. Jesus is correcting the Sadducees' mistaken assumption about marriage relations following the general resurrection, and Paul is assuring the Corinthian believers that through the resurrection they will be preserved by God from every ruler,

authority, and power in the universe—and especially from death (1 Corinthians 15:24-28). But we should not lose sight of the fact that Jesus and Paul assume believers will enjoy resurrectional *bodies*, rather than the sort of ethereal figments that populate some popular movies and novels. Perhaps Paul calls these resurrectional bodies “spiritual” because (at least) they will be fully attuned to God’s life-giving Spirit and “heavenly” because (at least) they will fully share in the life of God.

9 Cf. Galatians 5:10, where Paul refers to the community of baptized believers as “you in the Lord.” One modern translation, the Good News Bible, puts it this way: “Our life in union with the Lord makes me confident....”

10 Cf. Romans 12:5, Colossians 3:15, and Ephesians 4:12, et al.

11 Luke Timothy Johnson, “Paul’s Ecclesiology,” in James D. G. Dunn, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to St. Paul* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 199-211, here citing 207.

12 Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Christbook: A Historical/Theological Commentary on Matthew 1-12* (Dallas, TX: Word, 1987), 94, quoted in Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells, “The Gift of the Church and the Gift God Gives It,” *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, Ltd., 2004), 13-27, here citing 15.



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The resurrection itself appears nowhere in the Gospels, but Piero della Francesca creatively portrays the event as a timeless truth, condensed to its essentials.

The Power of the Resurrection

BY HEIDI J. HORNICK

The commanding figure of the Risen Christ is one of the most enduring images of Christian victory in Western art.¹ Piero della Francesca's fresco heightens the drama of the subject by juxtaposing Christ's perfectly proportioned body, which stands triumphantly emerging from the tomb (presented here as a classical sarcophagus) in the center of the composition, with the four guards slumped at his feet in the foreground. On the left side of Christ the trees in the background are stark and dead, awaiting rebirth, while those on the right are flourishing, symbolizing the rebirth of humanity.

The composition of the painting demonstrates why Piero is considered a master of perspective—it is balanced and symmetrical, framed by Corinthian columns on a classical portico (which were trimmed when the fresco was moved to its current location). Piero chose a viewpoint corresponding to the viewer's position and depicted the architectural frame at a sharp angle from below.² While working in Florence during the 1430s, Piero was sure to have encountered the perspectival studies of the artists Masaccio (1401-1428) and Brunelleschi (1377-1446) as well as the writings of Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472), but he also wrote his own books on theory and perspective, emphasizing geometry, volume, space, and form.

Piero painted *The Resurrection of Christ* fresco during the middle of the fifteenth century for the Sala dei Conservatori (official chambers of government) in his hometown of Borgo San Sepolcro. As the art historian Marilyn Lavin has noted, Christ's placement in the commune's council hall "both protects the judge and purifies the judged."³ This civic symbolism combined with the city's namesake, the Holy Sepulcher, further enhances the power of this image.⁴

NOTES

1 Frank Dabell and J.V. Field, "Piero della Francesca," Grove Art Online, Oxford Art Online (Oxford University Press), www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T067465 (accessed December 12, 2013).

2 Fred S. Kleiner, *Gardner's Art through the Ages* (Boston, MA: Wadsworth, 2014), 466.

3 Marilyn Aronberg Lavin, *Piero della Francesca* (London, UK: Phaidon, 2002), 244.

4 The town takes its name from the presence of two relics of the Holy Sepulcher carried by two pilgrims in the ninth century.

Due to copyright restrictions, this image is only available in the print version of *Christian Reflection*.

Eugène Burnand portrays John and Peter's dawning hopes and deep concerns through his realistic depiction their anxious race to Christ's tomb.

Anticipation

BY HEIDI J. HORNICK

After Mary Magdalene ran to tell Peter and “the disciple whom Jesus loved” that the stone had been removed from the entrance to Jesus’ grave on Easter morning, the two men raced back to the garden tomb to see for themselves. The other disciple (traditionally understood to be the Apostle John) outran Peter and looked into the sepulcher first (John 20:1-5). This ‘race to the tomb’ does not indicate competition, Raymond Brown notes, because “throughout the Gospel, Peter and the Beloved Disciple are portrayed as friends and not as rivals.”¹ Rather, their running expresses the disciples’ concern upon hearing Mary Magdalene’s report.²

There is a traditional depiction of this event in the fifteenth-century *Codex de Predis*. As is characteristic of Renaissance compositions, the figures in *Following the News of Mary Magdalene of the Resurrection of Jesus, Simon Peter and John Come Running to the Tomb* (1476) are represented in solid or local colors; their bodies are proportional and movement across the foreground is conveyed through their body positions. In keeping with both literary and visual traditions, John is shown in the lead and he appears young and clean-shaven. Notice that his facial features indicate anticipation with directed gaze and open lips; his hands are open and his arms are moving forward. Peter, bearded and grey, seems more complacent and calm with both feet firmly on the path. An indication of movement can be found in his gold mantle extending behind him and his arms moving out in front of his body. Despite the late date of this image, the halos are painted flat against the sides of the apostles’ heads. One-point linear perspective had been codified four decades earlier in 1435 by Leon Battista Alberti and was certainly known by the illustrator of this codex. The three empty crosses on Golgotha and the pink Jerusalem cityscape are visible in the background against the blue sky.

The *Codex de Predis*, a manuscript book of the New Testament which is signed and dated April 6, 1476, was illuminated by the Milanese artist Cristoforo de Predis (c. 1440-1486).³ This artist’s oeuvre remains debated amongst scholars. In the earliest archival documentation of his life, which occurs in a notarial act of September 1467 concerning the division of his paternal inheritance, he is described as “mutus” (mute). The artist worked for the Duke of Milan, Galeazzo Maria Sforza, the Borromeo family, and the Bishop of Piacenza, Fabrizio Marliani.⁴ This miniature was most likely patronized by a noble family in Milan. Cristoforo was influenced by the retardaire miniature style of France and Flanders, which may explain the lack of perspective for the halos discussed above.

The Swiss painter Eugène Burnand (1850-1921) offers a modern interpretation of the same event in *Saints Peter and John Running to Christ’s Tomb on the Morning*

Due to copyright restrictions, this image is only available in the print version of *Christian Reflection*.

Cristoforo de Predis (c. 1440-1486), FOLLOWING THE NEWS OF MARY MAGDALENE OF THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS, SIMON PETER AND JOHN COME RUNNING TO THE TOMB, illustration from the Codex de Predis (1476). Royal Library, Turin, Italy. Photo: Album / Art Resource, NY. Used by permission.

of the Resurrection (1898). The disciples are seen running through a Swiss-inspired landscape on a cold morning. John's facial expression and body language indicate worry as he wrings his hands. Peter's eyes show fear and anxiety.

Burnard was intrigued by the newest publishing techniques especially as they applied to photography. As a Realist, he challenged the avant-garde painters of the time known as the Impressionists. Like them, however, he was inspired by nature in his homeland. He studied in Geneva at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts with Barthélemy Menn before he went to Paris and joined Jean-Léon Gérôme's studio in 1872. He decided to stay in residence in Paris after a trip to Rome in 1876-1877. Along with the young French artists of the time, Burnand was exposed to discussions about the aesthetic aspects of positivism and the tradition of recording modern rural and urban life under the rubric of naturalism.⁵

Soon the artist created his signature style of landscape painting that is seen here. His ability to convey the rural beauty of Switzerland was rewarded with several works being included in the Paris Salon. He was awarded a medal in the Paris Salon of 1882, a gold medal in the Exposition Universelle of 1889 in Paris, and another in 1900.⁶

Burnand was influenced by the realism and sociological concerns found in the paintings of Jean-Francois Millet (1814-1875) and Gustave Courbet (1819-1877). After learning the technique of engraving from Paul Girardet (1821-1893), Burnand produced numerous illustrations for newspapers such as *L'Illustration* and *Tour du monde*. Not only did these works in the graphic arts allow Burnand to earn a living, they earned him quite a reputation. Because he could work quickly and accurately, he was often hired to illustrate popular working people: collectors of coal, sowers in the fields, and penitent woodsmen praying at a roadside cross.⁷

An interesting mixture of realism and religious symbolism are woven through this composition. For instance, the biblical figures of John and Peter are depicted as rugged "working types." They are running away from the three crosses on the lower right of the composition and towards the light of the dawn. The liturgical colors of both Easter and Lent (purple, gold, and white), found on the horizon and through the sky, are reflected by John's robe. As the art historian Gabriel Weisberg explains, "The artist's ability to capture the light and atmosphere of Switzerland showed how Burnand's vision of the [realist] landscape was integrated with progressive developments while also suggesting that the landscape itself could contain religious symbolism."⁸

Beginning in the 1860s, the writings of the French historian and philosopher Ernest Renan (1823-1892) had highlighted the importance of Christ's humanity.⁹ Burnand, as a naturalist, was also determined to show in his religious compositions only what could be tangibly understood. Weisberg writes, "Such paintings as *Les Disciples* (1898), in focusing on two figures in the foreground plane, reveals religion through the recording of human conduct and passion. There is little that is supernatural in this or in his other works." Documentary photographs of the artist's models reveal how he painted in his studio to achieve the realist effects seen here.

NOTES

1 Raymond Brown, *The Gospel according to John XIII-XXI*, Anchor Bible 29A (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), II, 1006.

2 *Ibid.*, 1007.

3 R. Passoni, *Il Codice Varia 124 della Biblioteca Reale di Torino e Cristoforo De Predis*, in *Il Codice Varia 124 della Biblioteca Reale di Torino, miniato da Cristoforo De Predis* (Milano, 1476), edited by A. Vitale-Brovarone (Turin, Italy: 1987), 85-113.

4 Enrica Banti, "Predis, de," *Grove Art Online, Oxford Art Online* (Oxford University Press), www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T069308pg1 (accessed December 12, 2013).

5 Gabriel Weisberg, "Review of Philippe Kaenel, *Eugène Burnand (1850-1921), peintre naturaliste* (Exhibition catalogue, Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts, Lausanne and Editions 5 Continents, Milan, March 12-May 23, 2004), in *Nineteenth Century Art Worldwide*, www.19thc-artworldwide.org/index.php/autumn04/290-eugene-burnand-18501921-peintre-naturaliste-by-philippe-kaenel (accessed December 17, 2013).

6 A. Daguerre de Hureaux, "Burnand, Eugène," *Grove Art Online, Oxford Art Online* (Oxford U.P.), www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T012567 (accessed December 12, 2013).

7 Weisberg, *ibid.*

8 *Ibid.*

9 *Ibid.*

❖ Other Voices ❖

There is no form of early Christianity known to us—though there are some that have been invented by ingenious scholars—that does not affirm at its heart that after Jesus’ shameful death God raised him to life again. Already by the time of Paul, our earliest written witness, the resurrection of Jesus is woven into the very structure of Christian life and thought, informing (among other things) baptism, justification, ethics and the future hope both for humans and for the cosmos.

N . T . W R I G H T , *The Challenge of Easter (2009)*

I have no wit, no words, no tears;
 My heart within me like a stone
 Is numbed too much for hopes or fears.
 Look right, look left, I dwell alone;
 I lift mine eyes, but dimmed with grief
 No everlasting hills I see;
 My life is in the falling leaf:
 O Jesus, quicken me.

My life is like a faded leaf,
 My harvest dwindled to a husk:
 Truly my life is void and brief
 And tedious in the barren dusk;
 My life is like a frozen thing,
 No bud nor greenness can I see:
 Yet rise it shall—the sap of spring;
 O Jesus, rise in me.

My life is like a broken bowl,
 A broken bowl that cannot hold
 One drop of water for my soul
 Or cordial in the searching cold;
 Cast in the fire the perishing thing;
 Melt and remold it, ‘til it be
 A royal cup for Him, my King:
 O Jesus, drink of me.

C H R I S T I N A R O S S E T T I , “A Better Resurrection,” *Goblin Market and Other Poems (1865)*

Surely Christian ethics should ask different questions: Who are we as baptized persons who profess faith in the resurrection? Who or what does the risen Christ want us to become?

GERALD O'COLLINS, S.J., *Believing in the Resurrection* (2012)

Resurrection changes everything. Everything. The reality of Easter—Christ risen, death defeated, sins forgiven, evil overcome, no consequences—is so incredible, in the original sense of the word, that it's beyond believable.

This is why I need more than just Easter Day. If Easter were only a single day, I would never have time to let its incredible reality settle over me, settle into me. I would trudge through my life with a disconnect between what I say I believe about resurrection and how I live (or fail to live) my life in light of it. Thanks be to God, our forebears in faith had people like me in mind when they decided that we simply cannot celebrate Easter in a single day, or even a single week. No, they decided, we need 50 days, seven Sundays, to even begin to plumb the depths of this event. They knew that the riches of this most important event in all of history cannot be exhausted in a single day.

KIMBERLEE CONWAY IRETON, "The Red Balloon," *A Deeper Church blog* (2013)

I regard it as absurd and unjustifiable that we should spend forty days keeping Lent, pondering what it means, preaching about self-denial, being at least a little gloomy, and then bringing it all to a peak with Holy Week, which in turn climaxes in Maundy Thursday and Good Friday...and then, after a rather odd Holy Saturday, we have *a single day* of celebration.

... Is it any wonder people find it hard to believe in the resurrection of Jesus if we don't throw our hats in the air? Is it any wonder we find it hard to *live* the resurrection if we don't do it exuberantly in our liturgies? Is it any wonder the world doesn't take much notice if Easter is celebrated as simply the one-day happy ending tacked on to forty days of fasting and gloom? It's long overdue that we took a hard look at how we keep Easter in church, at home, in our personal lives, right through the system. And if it means rethinking some cherished habits, well, maybe it's time to wake up.

N. T. WRIGHT, *Surprised by Hope* (2008)

Before Jesus entered into his passion, "when he knew that he had come from God and was returning to God, he took a towel, and began to wash his disciples' feet" (John 13:5). The Word became flesh so as to wash my tired feet. He touches me precisely where I touch the soul, where earth connects with my body that reaches out to heaven. He kneels and takes my feet in his hands and washes them. Then he looks up at me and, as his eyes and mine meet, he says, "Do you understand what I have done to you? If I, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you must wash your brothers' and sisters' feet" (John 13:13-14).

As I walk the long, painful journey toward the cross, I must pause on the way to wash my neighbors' feet. As I kneel before my brothers and sisters, wash their feet, and look into their eyes, I discover that it is because of my brothers and sisters who walk with me that I can make the journey at all.

HENRI NOUWEN, *Walk with Jesus (1990)*

Good Friday is not just one day of the year. It is a day relived in every day of the world, and of our lives in the world. In the Christian view of things, all reality turns around the "paschal mystery" of the death and resurrection of Christ. As Passover marks the liberation from bondage in Egypt, so the paschal mystery marks humanity's passage from death to life. Good Friday cannot be confined to Holy Week. It is not simply the dismal but necessary prelude to the joy of Easter, although I'm afraid many Christians think of it that way. Every day of the year is a good day to think more deeply about Good Friday, for Good Friday is the drama of the love by which our every day is sustained.

RICHARD JOHN NEUHAUS, *Death on a Friday Afternoon: Meditations on the Last Words of Jesus from the Cross (2001)*

Lord, who createdst man in wealth and store,
Though foolishly he lost the same,
Decaying more and more,
Till he became
Most poore:
With thee
O let me rise
As larks, harmoniously,
And sing this day thy victories:
Then shall the fall further the flight in me.

My tender age in sorrow did beginne:
And still with sicknesses and shame
Thou didst so punish sinne,
That I became
Most thinne.
With thee
Let me combine
And feel this day thy victorie:
For, if I imp my wing on thine,
Affliction shall advance the flight in me.

GEORGE HERBERT, *"Easter-Wings" (1633)*

The First Day of Creation

DAVID W. MUSIC

The first day of creation
God said, "Let there be light!"
and by this proclamation
the darkness put to flight.
The morning stars together
in melody gave voice
to sing of their Creator
and in God's name rejoice.

The day of resurrection
God once again turned night
to joyful adoration
and anthems of delight;
for Christ from death ascended,
the stone was rolled away;
the reign of death was ended
on that first Easter day.

In glad anticipation
of Easter's dawning bright
we wait night's transformation
to resurrection light.
Rejoice in celebration,
your voices all as one,
to sing the new creation
in Christ, God's risen Son.

The First Day of Creation

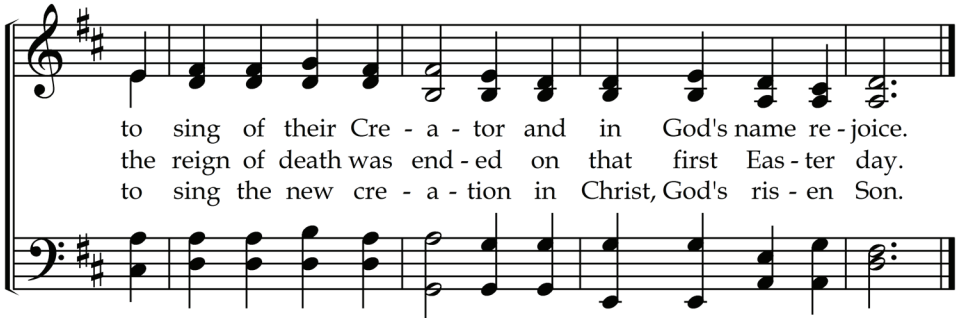
DAVID W. MUSIC

SAMUEL S. WESLEY (1864)

1. The first day of cre - a - tion God said, "Let there be light!"
 2. The day of res - ur - rec - tion God once a - gain turned night
 3. In glad an - ti - ci - pa - tion of Eas - ter's dawn - ing bright

and by this pro - cla - ma - tion the dark - ness put to flight.
 to joy - ful ad - o - ra - tion and an - thems of de - light;
 we wait night's trans - for - ma - tion to res - ur - rec - tion light.

The morn - ing stars to - geth - er in mel - o - dy gave voice
 for Christ from death as - cend - ed, the stone was rolled a - way;
 Re - joice in cel - e - bra - tion, your voic - es all as one,



The image shows a musical score for a hymn. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff on top and a bass clef staff on the bottom. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 7/6. The melody is written in the treble staff, and the bass line is in the bass staff. The lyrics are written below the treble staff. The music ends with a double bar line and repeat dots.

to sing of their Cre - a - tor and in God's name re - joice.
the reign of death was end - ed on that first Eas - ter day.
to sing the new cre - a - tion in Christ, God's ris - en Son.

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Baylor University, Waco, TX

Tune: AURELIA
7.6.7.6.D

Worship Service

BY DAVID W. MUSIC

CELEBRATING THE LIGHT AN EASTER SUNRISE SERVICE

Instrumental Prelude

*Welcome and Instructions for the Service*¹

*Opening Sentence: Psalm 30:4-5 (ESV)*²

Sing praises to the LORD, O you his saints,
and give thanks to his holy name.

For his anger is but for a moment,
and his favor is for a lifetime.

Weeping may tarry for the night,
but joy comes with the morning.

Hymn of Response

“When Morning Gilds the Skies” (stanzas 1, 2, and 4)

When morning gilds the skies,
my heart awaking cries,
may Jesus Christ be praised!
Alike at work and prayer,
to Jesus I repair;
may Jesus Christ be praised!

The night becomes as day,
when from the heart we say,
may Jesus Christ be praised!
The powers of darkness fear,
when this sweet song they hear,
may Jesus Christ be praised!

In heaven's eternal bliss
 the loveliest strain is this,
 may Jesus Christ be praised!
 Let earth, and sea, and sky
 from depth to height reply,
 may Jesus Christ be praised!

German (c. 1800); translated by Edward Caswall (1858), alt.
Tune: LAUDES DOMINI

Prayer

THE FIRST DAY

Light is an amazing phenomenon. By it we see the wonders of nature, illuminate our homes, measure the distance to far stars and galaxies, and gain warmth and heat. In anticipation of the light of dawn on this Easter Sunday, we reflect upon the origin of this marvelous creation that made possible the first day.

Old Testament Reading: Genesis 1:1-5 (ESV)

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

Responsive or Antiphonal Reading: Psalm 148

Praise the Lord!

Praise the Lord from the heavens;
 praise him in the heights!

**Praise him, all his angels;
 praise him, all his hosts!**

Praise him, sun and moon,
 praise him, all you shining stars!

**Praise him, you highest heavens,
 and you waters above the heavens!**

Let them praise the name of the Lord!

For he commanded and they were created.

**And he established them forever and ever;
 he gave a decree, and it shall not pass away.**

Praise the Lord from the earth,
 you great sea creatures and all deeps,
 fire and hail, snow and mist,
 stormy wind fulfilling his word!

**Mountains and all hills,
fruit trees and all cedars!**
**Beasts and all livestock,
creeping things and flying birds!**
Kings of the earth and all peoples,
princes and all rulers of the earth!
Young men and maidens together,
old men and children!
**Let them praise the name of the Lord,
for his name alone is exalted;
his majesty is above earth and heaven.**
He has raised up a horn for his people,
praise for all his saints,
for the people of Israel who are near to him.
Praise the Lord!

Commentary

The first of all visible beings that God created was light; not that by it he himself might see to work (for the darkness and light are both alike to him), but that by it we might see his works and his glory in them, and might work our works while it is day. The works of Satan and his servants are works of darkness; but he that does truth and does good, comes to the light, and covets it, that his deeds may be made manifest.

Light is the great beauty and blessing of the universe. Like the first-born, it does, of all visible beings, most resemble its great Parent in purity and power, brightness and beneficence; it is of great affinity with a spirit, and is next to it; though by it we see other things, and are sure that it is, yet we know not its nature.... By the sight of it, let us be led to and assisted in the believing contemplation of him who is light, infinite and eternal light, and the Father of lights, and who dwells in inaccessible light.

In the new creation, the first thing wrought in the soul is light: the blessed Spirit captivates the will and affections by enlightening the understanding; in this way it comes into the heart by the door, like the good shepherd to whom the sheep belong, while sin and Satan, like thieves and robbers, climb up some other way. Those who, by sin, were darkness, by grace become light in the world.

The light was made by the word of God's power. He said, "Let there be light"; he willed and appointed it, and immediately there was light—such a copy as exactly answered the original idea in the Eternal Mind. O the power of the word of God! He spoke, and it was done, done really, effectually, and for perpetuity, not in show only, and to serve a present turn, for he commanded, and it stood fast: with him it was *dictum, factum*—a word, and a world.

The light that God willed, when it was produced, he approved of: God saw the light that it was good. It was exactly as he designed it, and it was fit

to answer the end for which he designed it. It was useful and profitable; the world, which now is a palace, would have been a dungeon without it. It was amiable and pleasant. Truly the light is sweet; it rejoices the heart.

...What God commands, he will approve and graciously accept; he will be well pleased with the work of his own hands. That is good indeed which is good in the sight of God, for he sees not as we see. If the light is good, how good is he that is the fountain of light, from whom we receive it, and to whom we owe all praise for it and all the services we do by it!

God divided the light from the darkness, so put them asunder as that they could never be joined together, or reconciled; for what fellowship has light with darkness? And yet he divided time between them, the day for light and the night for darkness, in a constant and regular succession to each other. Though the darkness was now scattered by the light, it was not condemned to a perpetual banishment, but takes its turn with the light, and has its place, because it has its use; for, as the light of the morning befriends the business of the day, so the shadows of the evening befriend the repose of the night, and draw the curtains about us, that we may sleep the better. God has thus divided time between light and darkness, because he would daily remind us that this is a world of mixtures and changes. In heaven there is perfect and perpetual light, and no darkness at all; in hell, there is utter darkness, and no gleam of light. In that world between these two there is a great gulf fixed; but, in this world, they are counterchanged, and we pass daily from one to another, that we may learn to expect such vicissitudes in the providence of God, peace and trouble, joy and sorrow, and may set the one over-against the other, accommodating ourselves to both as we do to the light and darkness, bidding both welcome, and making the best of both.

God divided them from each other by distinguishing names: he called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." He gave them names, as the Lord of both; for the day is his, the night also is his. He is the Lord of time, and will be so, till day and night shall come to an end, and the stream of time be swallowed up in the ocean of eternity. Let us acknowledge God in the constant succession of day and night....

This was the first day's work, and a good day's work it was. The evening and the morning were the first day. The darkness of the evening was before the light of the morning, that it might serve for a foil to it, to set it off, and make it shine the brighter. This was not only the first day of the world, but the first day of the week. I observe (to the honor of that day) that the new world also began on the first day of the week, in the resurrection of Christ, as the light of the world, early in the morning. In him the day-spring from on high has visited the world; and happy are we, forever happy, if that day-star should arise in our hearts.

Matthew Henry (1662-1714)³

Hymn of Response

“We Sing the Mighty Power of God” (stanza 1)

We sing the mighty power of God
that made the mountains rise,
that spread the flowing seas abroad
and built the lofty skies.

We sing the wisdom that ordained
the sun to rule the day;
the moon shines full at his command,
and all the stars obey.

Isaac Watts (1715), alt.

Suggested Tunes: ELLACOMBE or FOREST GREEN

THE EIGHTH DAY

The early Christians often called Sunday “the eighth day” because it marked a new act of creation—the provision of salvation for humanity through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Just as God rested from his labors on Saturday, the last day of the original creation week, so Jesus rested in the tomb on Saturday, the last day of the original Holy Week. But the next day literally made “all the difference in the world,” as God raised Jesus and began a new creation.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 28:1-9

Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you.” So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. And behold, Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him.

Commentary

Let those who are devout and love God rejoice in this beautiful, radiant Feast.
Let those who are grateful servants be glad and enter into the joy of the Lord.

Let those who have fasted now receive their wages.
Those who have labored since the first hour
 may now accept their just reward.
Those who arrived at the third hour
 may join in the festival with thankfulness.
Those who came at the sixth hour should not doubt,
 for they too shall lose nothing.
Those who tarried until the ninth hour should not hesitate,
 but should come also.
And those who did not arrive until the eleventh hour
 should not fear because of their delay.
For God is merciful and welcomes those who came last,
 as well as those who came first.
The Lord provides rest to those who come at the eleventh hour
 even as he does to those who labored from the first hour.
The Lord gives favor to one person as well as to another.
 He accepts their work and rewards their faith.
 He recognizes what they have done and why they have done it.

Let us all come into the joy of the Lord!
The first and the last receive the same reward;
 You who are rich and you who are poor, be glad together!
 Industrious and lazy, rejoice in this day!
 You who have fasted and you who have not,
Be glad on this day, for the Lord's table is full of good things!
Come! Partake of the fatted calf at this royal feast!
 Do not go away hungry!
 Come! Drink the cup of faith!
 Enjoy all the bounty of the Lord!

No one should be ashamed because they are poor,
 for the eternal kingdom has been brought to light.
No one should grieve because they have sinned repeatedly,
 because pardon has risen from the tomb.
Do not fear death; the Savior's death has brought freedom.
 He endured death and thus destroyed it.
He descended into Hell and destroyed it.
 Even as Hell tasted his flesh he threw it into chaos.
All this was foretold by Isaiah, who said,
 "Hell below is moved to meet you at your coming." [Isaiah 14:9]
Hell was in chaos because it was annihilated.
 It was in chaos because it was cheated.
 It was in chaos because it was done away with.
 It was in chaos because it was defeated.
 It was in chaos because it was led away captive.

Hell swallowed humanity and discovered divinity.

It swallowed earth and experienced heaven.

It swallowed the visible

and was defeated by the invisible.

O death, where is your sting?

O grave, where is your victory?

Christ is risen, and death is destroyed!

Christ is risen, and the powers of Satan are defeated!

Christ is risen, and the angels celebrate!

Christ is risen, and life has been set free!

Christ is risen, and the grave has given up the dead,

for Christ, in his resurrection,

has become the first-fruits of those that sleep.

To him be the glory and the power throughout all eternity. Amen.

*John Chrysostom (c. 347-407)*⁴

Hymn of Response

"We Welcome Glad Easter"

We welcome glad Easter when Jesus arose
and won a great victory over his foes.

*Then raise your glad voices, all Christians, and sing,
bring glad Easter praises to Jesus, your King.*

We tell how the women came early that day
and there at the tomb found the stone rolled away.

Refrain

We sing of the angel who said: "Do not fear!
Your Savior is risen and he is not here."

Refrain

We think of the promise which Jesus did give:
"That he who believes in me also shall live!"

Refrain

Anonymous

Tune: ST. DENIO

THE ETERNAL DAY

For early Christians, the eighth day also was symbolic of the new creation, the infinity that will begin when Jesus returns in glory and those who believe will enter everlasting life. The order that began on that first day with the creation of light will be swept away and we will be with the Lord forever and ever, world without end.

New Testament Reading: Revelation 21:1-5a, 22-26

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new."

And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day – and there will be no night there. They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Commentary

It is the purpose and intention of the Lord Jesus to make this world entirely new. You recollect how it was made at first – pure and perfect. It sang with its sister-spheres the song of joy and reverence. It was a fair world, full of everything that was lovely, beautiful, happy, holy. And if we might be permitted to dream for a moment of what it would have been if it had continued as God created it, one might fancy what a blessed world it would be at this moment. Had it possessed a teeming population like its present one, and if, one by one, those godly ones had been caught away, like Elijah, without knowing death, to be succeeded by pious descendants – oh! what a blessed world it would have been! A world where every person would have been a priest, and every house a temple, and every garment a vestment, and every meal a sacrifice, and every place holiness to the Lord, for the tabernacle of God would have been among them, and God himself would have dwelt among them! What songs would have hailed the rising of the sun – the birds of paradise caroling on every hill and in every dale their Maker's praise! What songs would have ushered in the stillness of the night! Ay, and angels, hovering over this fair world, would oft have heard the strain of joy breaking the silence of midnight, as glad and pure hearts beheld the eyes of the Creator beaming down upon them from the stars that stud the vault of heaven.

But there came a serpent, and his craft spoiled it all. He whispered into the ears of a mother Eve; she fell, and we fell with her, and what a world

this now is! If people walk about in it with their eyes open, they will see it to be a horrible sphere. I do not mean that its rivers, its lakes, its valleys, its mountains are repulsive. Nay, it is a world fit for angels, naturally; but it is a horrible world morally. ...

But Jesus Christ, who knew that we should never make this world much better though we do what we would with it, designed from the very first to make a new world of it. Truly, truly, this seems to me to be a glorious purpose. To make a world is something wonderful, but to make a world new is something more wonderful still.

When God spoke and said, "Let there be light," it was a fiat that showed him to be divine. Yet there was nothing then to resist his will; he had no opponent; he could build as he pleased, and there was none to pluck down. But when Jesus Christ comes to make a new world, there is everything opposed to him. When he says, "Let there be light," darkness says, "There shall not be light." When he says, "Let there be order," chaos says, "Nay, I will maintain confusion." When he says, "Let there be holiness, let there be love, let there be truth," the principalities and powers of evil withstand him, and say, "There shall not be holiness, there shall be sin; there shall not be love, there shall be hate; there shall not be truth, there shall be error; there shall not be the worship of God, there shall be the worship of sticks and stones; people shall bow down before idols which their own hands have made."

And yet, for all that, Jesus Christ, coming in the form of a man, revealing himself as the Son of God, determines to make all things new; and be assured, brothers and sisters, he will do it. Even though he pleases to take his time, and to use humble instrumentalities to effect his purposes, yet do it he will. The day shall come when this world shall be as fair as it was at the primeval Sabbath; when there shall be a new heaven and a new earth, wherein shall dwell righteousness. The ancient prophecy shall be fulfilled to the letter. God shall dwell among humanity, peace shall be domiciled on earth, and glory shall be ascribed to God in the highest. This great work of Christ, this grand design of making this old world into a new one, shall be carried into effect.

*Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1892)*⁵

Hymn of Response

"The First Day of Creation"

The first day of creation
God said, "Let there be light!"
and by this proclamation
the darkness put to flight.
The morning stars together
in melody gave voice
to sing of their Creator
and in God's name rejoice.

The day of resurrection
God once again turned night
to joyful adoration
and anthems of delight;
for Christ from death ascended,
the stone was rolled away;
the reign of death was ended
on that first Easter day.

In glad anticipation
of Easter's dawning bright
we wait night's transformation
to resurrection light.
Rejoice in celebration,
your voices all as one,
to sing the new creation
in Christ, God's risen Son.

David W. Music (2013)

Tune: AURELIA (pp. 53-55 of this volume)

Benediction

THE DISMISSAL

Closing Sentence: Romans 13:12 (ESV)⁶

The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.

NOTES

1 Give these first three instructions to the congregants. (1) Explain that each scripture passage will be followed by a portion of a commentary or sermon by a historic figure. (2) Explain how the psalm will be read (responsively/antiphonally) and how the sung response (if used) will work. (3) Practice any congregational songs that might be unfamiliar.

The following notes are for worship leaders as they prepare the service. This order is designed as an Easter sunrise service, with an emphasis on the light of morning at creation, the Lord's resurrection, and the *parousia*. Because a regular Easter Sunday worship service will take place later in the morning, such items as an offering, a sermon, and standard Easter hymns are not included. Of course, these items may be added to or substituted for other elements of the service in order to adapt it for a regular Easter Sunday service or an Easter vigil.

Apart from the opening and closing sections, the service is divided into three principal parts: "The First Day" (creation), "The Eighth Day" (Christ's resurrection) and "The Eternal Day" (unending life with God). Each section contains an opening comment, a scripture passage, a commentary on the passage from a historic Christian figure, and a congregational song; the first section also includes a psalm reading. At least three different persons should be employed for the various readings; use both men and women, and perhaps multi-age readers as well. The longer commentaries may be broken

up among the different readers. The readers should be given their assignments well in advance, should practice them, and should receive coaching in reading them effectively from appropriate persons before the day of the service. If a sermon is included it should come after the singing of “The First Day of Creation” and should serve to summarize the three “days.”

Determine how the psalm will be read, whether responsively (one person reading the plain type and the group responding with the bold print) or antiphonally (one group reading the plain print and another group responding with the bold print). If antiphonal reading is used, the congregants may be divided by right and left sides, by front and back of the worship space, by men and women, or by choir and congregation.

If the service is held out of doors where a piano is not available, most of the congregational hymns may be sung a cappella or accompanied by a guitar or other transportable instruments.

2 Scripture quotations marked (ESV) are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), Copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. All rights reserved.

3 This passage is adapted from the notes on Genesis 1:3-5 in *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, available online at www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/matthew-henry-complete/genesis/1.html (accessed December 4, 2013).

4 This passage is adapted from John Chrysostom's Easter Sermon, available online at en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paschal_Homily (accessed December 4, 2013).

5 This passage is adapted from Charles Haddon Spurgeon, “A New Creation,” Sermon 3467, based on Revelation 21:5, available online at www.spurgeon.org/sermons/3467.htm (accessed December 4, 2013).

6 An option for the dismissal is for the choir to sing Felix Mendelssohn's “The Night is Departing” from his *Lobegesang [Hymn of Praise]*, No. 7, which is based on Romans 13:12. There are several editions of this work; a free downloadable score is available at www.free-scores.com/download-sheet-music.php?pdf=7491 (accessed December 4, 2013). If desired, the piece can conclude at measure 66 (the entire work is 215 measures long).



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On Beyond Easter

B Y M I L T O N B R A S H E R - C U N N I N G H A M

The power of Christ's resurrection is realized most, not in our building of monuments or institutions, but in the breaking of the bread, the quotidian collecting of those whom we love around a table that nourishes us all, and praying God would give us new eyes to see those who belong alongside us.

The morning my father died, I drove to the nursing home where he was in hospice care soon after sunrise, trying to make sense of what had happened. When we left the building after we had said goodbye, all we knew to do was go eat together. Grief does strange things to the mind, not the least of which is to make random connections. For me, that goes from an egg hunt in the graveyard, to a hospice bed, to a children's book, and then a couple of lines from an old sermon I heard a long time ago. Bear with me.

When we lived in New England, my wife Ginger pastored North Community Church in Marshfield, Massachusetts, which originally broke off from the First Church of Plymouth — as in “The First Church.” That's right: Pilgrims and all. It was a white clapboard building with big clear windows, very few decorations except for the driftwood cross that hung at the front of the sanctuary, and a tall steeple, in keeping with good Puritan tradition. Next to it was a cemetery whose tombstones bore the names of folks who lived and died before the Revolutionary War and on down.

One of my favorite traditions at our church was the Easter Egg Hunt, which followed our Easter Sunday worship service. The young people came early to hide the eggs and then the little ones came bursting out of the sanctuary after the benediction to find the eggs — among the tombstones. Since we were just south of Boston, some of those early Easters meant they

found the eggs lying in the snow as well. The whole scene was a marvelous picture of the resurrection: the children running and laughing among the silent granite slates, some with names we remembered and some long forgotten. It was not uncommon to find one of the little gatherers perched on a gravestone stuffing her face with as much candy as possible before one of her parents caught on.

The juxtaposition of cold stones and vibrant children reminds me that the transition from Good Friday to Resurrection Morning is not 'either/or' but 'both/and'. We proclaim the resurrection in the middle of the cemetery that is our grief-colored existence, losing loved ones even as we welcome new people into our hearts. We are the walking wounded, the disconsolate, as the old hymn calls us, the ones who need to be reminded there is a love that will not let us go. For those who have had loved ones die, Easter is less certain, even as it is more necessary. "He is not here" carries both a tone of palpable absence and enduring hope.



My dad died last summer. He was almost eighty-five, so I suppose I should have seen it coming, but it was still a surprise. One day he was there, and then he was not. Now there is a stone in a cemetery that carries his name, just as I do. This Easter, I think about resurrection differently because my father is not alive. His grave is filled. He is not here and I do know where they put him. My wife's father died a little over two years ago. In the days that followed both deaths, we said more than once that we needed to get in touch with our friends whose parents died before ours and simply say, "I'm sorry. I thought I was being helpful but I had no idea how this feels."

In the days between my dad's death and his funeral, we told stories. One of my favorites came when I asked my mother why there were three or four bags of little white donuts in the pantry. "Oh," she said, "we got up every morning at seven and I fixed coffee and we had a couple of donuts and talked about what we wanted for breakfast." The story made my heart smile, because my father was one who was already thinking about the next meal any time he sat down to eat. Every gathering over food was an opportunity to dream about what was to come.

One of the Dr. Seuss books I remember best from my childhood because of how much my father loved it was called *On Beyond Zebra*. The story centers around one boy telling his younger friend how much more he could imagine if he refused to be confined by the prescribed alphabet: there were words and worlds to discover if one kept going "on beyond zebra." Dad read it as a metaphor of faith. He was on to something.

"In the places I go there are things that I see
That I *never* could spell if I stopped with the Z.

I'm telling you this 'cause you're one of my friends.
My alphabet starts where *your* alphabet ends!"†



I do not often remember sermons. I remember snippets, but rarely the whole arc. Some of those snippets have hung with me for years in a deeply meaningful way. A couple of decades ago, the senior pastor at our church in Winchester, Massachusetts, used the opening sentence of Mark's gospel as his text: "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."

"This sentence," he said, "is not as much an introduction to the book as it is a title. The story of Jesus' life is the beginning of the gospel; it continues with us." Easter proves his point. Jesus' resurrection is not the culmination of the story, but the beginning.

The way the Gospel writers offer us the chance to see on beyond Easter, and the way they tell the story, Jesus started by doing something after the resurrection he had not done before: he cooked. He endured the cross and the grave, came back from the dead, and made breakfast (John 21). The meal is no small matter. Jesus had made three or four other appearances to those whom he loved. He spoke with Mary in the grave yard (John 20:11-18), walked with two disciples along the Emmaus road (Luke 24:13-35), and showed up twice in the room where everyone was gathered (John 20:19-29).

Each time, including our fishing story, they did not recognize him at first.

Things were not as they had been before his death. He was alive, yes, but they were not hanging out or taking trips together. He was not with them all the time. And Easter had not erased the grief. They were all indelibly marked by his crucifixion and all that had happened around it. Judas was dead. They were confused, at best. When Peter

said, "I'm going fishing," he was grasping for some sense of normalcy: I'll go do what I know how to do. The ritual of daily work—the stuff in their bones—offered a way to try and make some sense of all that was swirling around them. They fished all night, casting their nets into the dark waters.

Who knows why they did not catch anything. Maybe they should not have been out there at night. Maybe they were just going through the

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motions and were not doing it well. Maybe the fish were asleep. The futility of their enterprise is excruciating. They were out in the middle of the night slinging nets into the darkness, as though that will somehow make things better, just as they had tried hiding in the room together and who knows what else. Nothing worked. Things were not as they had been and they could not be fixed. It was never going to be like that again. There was *before*; this was *after*. They did not yet have the rituals of the Church to comfort them. There were no chapels to go to, no Communion to share. They only knew of their last supper with him and that things had not been right since. They had run out of letters in their alphabet of hope. So they went fishing.

Then they heard a voice call out from the shore, asking if they had caught anything. When they reported their failure, he told them to cast the net on the other side of their little boat. They had nothing to lose, so they followed the instructions that came out of the fading darkness and the breaking dawn and came up with a net so full as to almost capsize their vessel. Peter said, "It's the Lord." No one, it seems, had recognized who was calling out to them until that moment. He dropped his net and put on his tunic and swam to shore, where he found Jesus cooking fish on the beach over an open fire.

Mark noted that Peter had been fishing naked; now he was stripped bare by Jesus' questions: "Simon, do you love me?" "Simon, do you love me?" "Simon, do you love me?"

Maybe it did matter that the last time a charcoal fire showed up in the story, Peter was in the courtyard denying that he had anything to do with Jesus; or, perhaps, he had been around one of those fires at every meal since. Maybe it did matter that Jesus served bread and fish, much like the lunch the little boy had offered when they ended up feeding over five thousand people and had baskets and baskets of leftovers; or, perhaps, they ate fish at most every meal. Maybe it mattered that they caught one hundred and fifty three fish; or, perhaps, they just caught as many as the net would hold. Maybe it mattered that Jesus asked Peter if he loved him three times – as many times has Peter had betrayed him; or, perhaps, it mattered, mostly, that Jesus made breakfast and fed his friend who had disowned him, offering him the grace to know his betrayal was not the last word. There was something on beyond the courtyard, the cross, and the cemetery, even on beyond the fretful and fruitless night they had just lived through.



The Gospel writers offer us two incredibly important meals that happen within a week of each other. One we mark regularly; the other gets less notice. The Last Supper became the Lord's Supper and has become for many Christians both primary meal and metaphor. It is the one thing that happens across denominational and cultural divides. We have come to the Table in

an unbroken line since that night when Jesus first broke the bread and poured the wine and said, "As often as you do this, remember me."

"Remember." In this case let us hear the word not as the opposite of forget, but as the opposite of dismember: we come to the table to put ourselves back together in Jesus' name. We re-member the Body of Christ as we share the bread and wine, which is an ongoing and difficult task. As the story unfolded that last night when Jesus and the disciples gathered together in the upper room, they fell apart almost before supper was over. Judas went to tell the authorities how to find Jesus; Peter ended up in the courtyard, doing his best to follow Jesus, but then denied even knowing who Jesus was; the others scattered, leaving the women standing with him at the end. For all the parables and promises, the future looked bleak. The disciples were overcome with grief and shock. They were alone and unsure, wondering, perhaps, if they had spent their lives on the wrong person.

In much the same way I did not understand grief until my father died, I am not sure we can truly feel the weight of that week between the last supper and that last breakfast. Our Lenten observances take us through solemn services and vigils from Thursday night to Saturday, but we have already hired the trumpeters for Sunday morning and have the eggs dyed and decorated. We are not grieving, we are observing and waiting. We know what's coming. They did not. Even after they knew the tomb was empty, they were sitting in the dark, alone and afraid with no idea what to do next. Jesus was not anywhere to be found. He spoke to Mary in the graveyard and made a couple of visits to the upper room, but things were not like they had been. And then Jesus met them on the beach, asking them to remember once more. In both meals, Jesus is the host: he served the Supper and he cooked the breakfast. He was the one creating the space, setting the table, feeding his friends, offering what they needed most. If Communion remembers his death – "we proclaim his death until he comes" – then might the breakfast on the beach proclaim his resurrection? And, if so, what does it proclaim?

A glance through a few commentaries on John's telling of that meal on the beach, and it is apparent we are digging for meaning in most every detail: from the Greek verbs Jesus used for love, to the last time there was a charcoal fire, to the number of fish they caught. We have had a couple of millennia to parse most every turn of phrase. If we get too close to the painting, however, we may miss the big picture and see only brush strokes. With all the days together, it seems safe to say they ate together as much as they did anything else. Some of the meals made the Gospels, but most were just daily bread: the sharing of sustenance as they went about their lives and work.

In the specific person of Jesus, God says, "Me, too" in a way that had not been said before. The stories in the Gospels are full of specifics: Jesus making particular movements, though not spectacular ones, to offer

compassion and healing. He stopped when the woman with the hemorrhage touched his coat. He asked Zacchaeus if he could come over to the house. He wrote in the sand to take the attention off the adulterous woman for at least a moment. He offered Peter breakfast.



The first building blocks of our faith were around tables, over meals—and all the messing meaning that implies. We are called to feed one another, to heal one another, to come together right now over food. By the time we see the beginnings of the Church in Acts, sharing food and eating together has become central to their identity and practice.

Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Acts 2:46-47

Our faith calls us to go on beyond Communion, on beyond the cross, on beyond the empty tomb, to meet each other for breakfast, lunch, and dinner to re-member to keep looking for new words and worlds to describe the indefatigable love of God that breathed us into being, holds us as we walk through these days, and welcomes us when we move beyond this life. We are called to come to the same table. We take our turn as we feed one another, and as we feed the world. The early church gathered for their love feasts, sharing food from house to house, as Acts points out. Whatever they had to do, they knew they had to eat, and so they fed one another. “As often as you do this” might mean more than simply observing the Lord’s Supper. What if Jesus had in mind that we would re-member every time we broke bread or sat down at the table together? What if Jesus was calling us to widen our sense of every table to include those who harvested the crops and raised the animals, and to make sure they are paid fairly and treated justly?

Here is the story of the Easter breakfast: Jesus was back at work, remembering those whom he loved, feeding them, forgiving them, and calling them to go and do likewise. Paul admonished the Corinthians to come to the Lord’s Table clear in heart and mind. If there were things that needed to be set right, set them right before supper. What if all our meals were markers—altars of forgiveness and belonging? We don’t do well to digest all that we carry around. Come to the table. Lay down your burdens. Offer forgiveness. Ask for it, too. And bring anyone else you can find. Christ is risen!—pass the potatoes.

The power of Christ’s resurrection is realized most, not in our building of monuments or institutions, not in our grand schemes and fantastic

programming, but in the breaking of the bread, the quotidian collecting of those whom we love around a table that nourishes us all, and praying God would give us new eyes to see those who belong alongside us. How do we expand the Communion table to include every table? How do we make sure everyone has a table and food to put on it? How does every meal become part of the story of our redemption, our sustenance? How do we hear the call to feed the sheep?

If Communion is the meal that galvanizes us, then perhaps the breakfast on the beach is the meal that reminds us who we are and who we are called to be, and reminds us Easter is the beginning of the Gospel, not the final chapter. Go out into the highways and byways of life, to the bars and the beaches, go out on beyond Easter and compel them to come to breakfast. “Feed my sheep” – even Jesus used the meal as a metaphor: you know what it feels like to completely screw up; you know what it feels like to feel hungry for hope; you know what it feels like to be fed by grace, to be loved back into being. Now go do that for someone else. Get cooking.

NOTE

† Dr. Seuss, “On Beyond Zebra!” (New York: Random House, 1955), 5.



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The “Real Presence” in Footwashing

BY BILL J. LEONARD

I have never participated in a footwashing service that did not transcend the moment. Somehow I always forget how overpowering an event it can be. The sheer vulnerability of it carries participants beyond its anticipated logistical awkwardness to a palpable expression of servanthood.

In a wonderful documentary on the Old Regular Baptists of Appalachia entitled *In the Good Old Fashioned Way*, a female member of the Little Dove Baptist Church declares: “I wouldn’t take the bread and the wine if I didn’t wash feet.” The film then moves to a Communion and footwashing service, women on one side of the church, men on the other. Members “gird themselves” with a towel, kneel and participate in what they often call the “third sacrament,” as the preacher chants, “Oh, them feetwashing Baptists; we’ll be here till the Lord comes again.”[†] The practice characterizes numerous Baptist traditions.

I have never participated in a footwashing service that did not transcend the moment. Somehow I always forget how overpowering an event it can be. The sheer vulnerability of it carries participants beyond its anticipated logistical awkwardness to a palpable expression of servanthood.

My first footwashing experience began as an experiment. I began teaching at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (SBTS) in Louisville, Kentucky in the fall of 1976, and was required to teach the two-semester church history course required of every Master of Divinity student. Because most students were Baptists, a substantial part of the second semester course focused on Baptist history. As we approached the Lenten season, it dawned on me that neither I nor most of my students had ever participated in a footwashing. So on Maundy Thursday, 1976, I convened the first ever footwashing on the

SBTS campus. Everyone was asked to bring a towel and I scrounged up some Tupperware basins. We read the John 13 passage in which Jesus washes his disciples' feet and declares: "I give you a new commandment (*mandatus novum*), that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another" (13:34). Noting that the Holy Week designation of *Maundy* Thursday came from that Latin phrase, we sang and prayed together, and washed feet. To everyone's surprise the service got beyond us; it took us into spiritual territory that few of us had occupied before. And suddenly SBTS had a new tradition. From 1976 to 1991 (my last Lent at SBTS), I helped with the annual Maundy Thursday footwashing. (I think my colleague Dr. Molly Marshall kept it going a few years longer, and I have often wondered what might have happened in the Southern Baptist Convention if "moderates" and "conservatives" had washed each other's feet in the 1980s and 90s.)

In the spring of 1980, I joined my church history colleague Dr. Timothy George in reorganizing the service and adding Holy Communion, a rather scandalous practice in those days since many Southern Baptist seminaries eschewed on-campus Communion, insisting that it was to be administered only as a "local church ordinance." Timothy George and I have been friends for forty years. Our views sometimes (but not always) occupy diverse ends of the theological spectrum, yet we have washed each other's feet literally and figuratively for a long, long time, a gift for which I am forever grateful. When the Maundy Thursday footwashing/Communion services were an annual tradition at the seminary, several hundred students, faculty, and staff members participated in the occasion, with music guided and gifted by folksinger Darrell Adams and his lyrical guitar. The memories of those moments remain deep and clear.

I have also washed feet in Appalachia, a most appropriate place for such an observance. For almost a decade I was privileged to teach in the summer program of the Appalachian Ministries Educational Resource Center (AMERC), held on the campus of Berea College in Berea, Kentucky. Founded by Presbyterian minister, Mary Lee Daugherty, AMERC is a consortium of theological schools that in the 1980s and 90s brought students for a month-long experience of study on the Berea College campus and internships in churches and small farms throughout the region. Because the students came from a variety of denominations—Catholic, Mainline Protestant, and Evangelical—Daugherty knew that Holy Communion could be problematic; so, she utilized footwashing as a concluding ritual to the summer experience.

Once again, the powerful services transcended the specific moment. I shall never forget the night in the Danforth Chapel at Berea College when we washed feet with a group of men and women that included a Byzantine Franciscan in his rough brown robe, assorted ordained Protestant women, and a serpent-handling preacher whose revival service we had attended the

night before. The preacher, Arnold Saylor, washed the feet of his young son and then gently kissed them. When it was over I do not think there was a dry eye in the chapel. Reverends Daugherty and Saylor have “gone on to glory” now, as they both would have said, and I doubt if any of us who washed feet in the Danforth Chapel that night will ever forget that moment, till we “go on to glory” too. Walking back to the dorm that night Brother Saylor told me: “You know, Brother, in our services the men and women do not wash each other’s feet unless they are married. Some of our wives don’t believe in cutting their hair, so it is very long. Sometimes they wash their husband’s feet and dry them with their hair, like that woman did for Jesus.” “Brother Saylor,” I responded, “that sounds a little sexy to me.” He just laughed.

Perhaps Brother Saylor was on to something. If at Christ’s table we repeat his words, “this is my body given for you,” in footwashing we declare to one another: “these are our bodies,” broken, bruised, and vulnerable. So if footwashing is not a sacrament, perhaps it is at least sacramental, an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual confession of common humanity and uncommon grace. Perhaps it represents the “real presence” of persons who belong to the body of Christ and thus to each other, a *mandatus novum* to love each other in Jesus’ name: flesh and Spirit, towel and basin, the water and the Word.

NOTE

† *In the Good Old Fashioned Way*, directed by Herb E. Smith (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop, 1973)



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Between Easter Eggs and the Empty Tomb

BY MARK MCGCLINTOCK

The best outcome of crafting Easter worship with children in mind is that everyone in the congregation may hear the Easter story in a new way. For adults steeped in church tradition, the opportunity to regain a childlike wonder at the miraculous life, death, and new life of Jesus is good news indeed.

If you ask children in the United States which holiday is their favorite, the top answer (by a landslide) will be Christmas. It will likely be followed by Halloween, with Valentine's Day and Easter vying for third place. A 2011 Harris poll indicates that adults favor the holidays in a similar order (with the addition of Thanksgiving sliding into second).¹

The secular trappings and sweet treats that adorn these celebrations allure people of all ages, even those who practice little religious allegiance. Bunnies and chicks are cute and cuddly, unlike a crucifix or an empty tomb, and candy-filled eggs provide an immediate gratification that the promise of a future resurrection lacks. Amidst the glitter and gluttony of the holiday marketplace, how do we communicate to children the sacred nature and narrative of Easter in a meaningful way?

IMAGINE THAT!

Christianity has incorporated elements of the prevailing cultures throughout its history. For instance, early celebrants of Christmas and Easter adopted popular traditions, including evergreen trees and decorated eggs, from pagan festivals that predate Jesus' birth but coincide with the two Christian holidays. German Lutheran immigrants in the late nineteenth century brought to America the myth of the *Osterhase*, a hare (that venerable

harbinger of fertility) that brings colored eggs on Easter Sunday for well-behaved children. Over the years these imported symbols of the seasons have made their way into Sunday school, children's sermons, and church decorations.

Before we set out on an icon-bashing spree, let us agree that it is not our job to purge our congregants' homes of bunny baskets any more than to strip away Santa Claus, the tooth fairy, or unicorns. The Puritans and Quakers tried to do so by omitting the celebration of Easter altogether, preferring to emphasize the atoning death of Jesus or the equal sanctity of every day of the year. Myth is not the enemy of truth, however. Young children build their understanding of the world through a blend of personal experience and fantasy. Imagination, Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, is the precursor of reason. I would add that imagination is the precursor of faith. James Fowler calls it the stage of "Intuitive-Projective faith."² Children who can envisage a friendly though unseen bunny who shares joy through gifts can begin to contemplate a divinity whose nature is love and who delights in sharing.

THAT WASCALLY WABBIT

Fun and fancy are well and good (they help awaken children to the excitement of the Easter season), but leave the baskets at home. The Church should avoid mixing magical creatures with the message we proclaim as reality. Why? Preschoolers naturally weave together different narrative strands, and on the ride home from church may explain to a bemused parent, "Jesus died in a hole in the hill, and every year the Easter bunny comes out of the hole with eggs for everyone." In the postmodern age that sees all truth as relative, it is important that children be able to distinguish between the biblical and the secular.

Resist the temptation to add to the confusion by introducing a live rabbit at church—or worse, a person in an Easter bunny costume, which will surely distract (and may frighten) little ones from the Bible story. Children need to hear the gospel clearly and distinctly as the central theme of our faith that defines our identity and our values.

WHICH CAME FIRST—THE CROSS OR THE EGG?

Eggs are a still more ubiquitous image of the holiday. If your congregation's Holy Week traditions include an egg hunt, plan for a location other than the church property and, ideally, not on Sunday. Gimmicks for incorporating eggs into children's sermons and Sunday school lessons abound on the Internet, but the relevance of eggs to the resurrection account requires a level of symbolic thinking that young children have not yet developed.

Preteens may connect the emergence of a bird from a hatched egg with Jesus' departure from the tomb. Unlike fledglings and chicks, which are part of the natural order, Jesus' resurrection transcends nature and transforms the status quo. Early Christians grasped the topsy-turvy irony

of the event, that Jesus overcame not only death but the entrenched systems of injustice that condemned him.³ Elementary school children, for whom fairness is a priority, will resonate with the victory of justice. Be sure that an object lesson with eggs does not overshadow the transformative power of the Bible story.

THE CHILDREN'S HERO

Instead of symbols and substitute objects, let the story speak for itself, both in the telling and the modeling. Children learn through experience and example. Jesus is their hero, and the people at church who demonstrate Jesus' character and deeds make their hero real and approachable. When children hear that Jesus, who loves and heals "the vulnerable and afflicted children," is mistreated by bullies, they identify with him for being "vulnerable to the ruling powers, threatened with death, and reliant upon God."⁴ When children receive forgiveness from adults at church, they understand the importance of Jesus' forgiveness from the cross. And when Jesus rises in spite of abuse, they rejoice that good has triumphed over evil.

DYING TO SIN

Of course, resurrection presupposes death—a topic few adults enjoy contemplating, much less explaining to children. Rather than avoid the subject, church leaders should interpret Jesus' death in ways that are relevant. Children understand primarily what they physically sense and emotionally feel. For those youngsters who have had a family member or friend die, death means a broken relationship with someone they love. Even infants grieve when someone to whom they are attached goes away. Children will intuitively grasp the disciples' sadness when Jesus died and their joy when he surprised them by returning.

Take care in describing the reasons for Jesus' death. Sin is an abstract term, and

as soon as we try to give concrete examples, we run the risk of making the concept too small. Sin is more than stealing, lying, and killing. Sin is, in part, thinking that what I want is more important than what God or anyone else wants. Young children can comprehend that some people did not like what Jesus taught; they did not want Jesus to change things, and so they put him on a cross to die.

Instead of symbols and substitute objects, let the Easter story speak for itself. Children learn through experience and example. Jesus is their hero, and the people at church who demonstrate his character make their hero real and approachable.

Avoid the grisly details. One of my worst experiences in ministry was hearing an evangelist describe to a sanctuary full of families the trial and crucifixion in ways that made Mel Gibson's *Passion of the Christ* seem tame. To make matters worse, he insisted that everyone in the room was responsible for the execution because of our sin. Terror and guilt may produce a desired behavior (or inhibit an undesirable one), but they seldom inspire the change of heart or the lifelong commitment Jesus calls his followers to make. Scary manipulation can subvert children's belief in the loving nature of God and actually lead to protective, secretive, self-absorbed behaviors—quite the opposite of what Jesus teaches.

AHA'S AND ALLELUIAS

Children need to know about Jesus' death in order for Easter Sunday's celebration to make sense. His resurrection was a surprise! No one expected the man buried in a tomb to become alive again. Children enjoy the thrill of making new discoveries, and there are many to be made on the holiday. The change in paraments and clerical vestments, the use of bells or special musical instruments, and the larger crowd in the worship service—all of these experiences are still a novelty for young children. Tap into their excitement by teaching them about the amazement of the people who met Jesus when he had risen. The disciples were themselves like astonished children for whom everything is new—a new way to know that God loves us, a new message to share, and a new job (to tell everyone the good news of God's love).

Plan Easter worship that engages children in the celebration. If you have refrained from using "Alleluia" during Lent, urge the children to sing and shout the word in song and litany. Give each child a bell to ring whenever an "Alleluia" is proclaimed. Have children help decorate a cross with flowers from congregants' gardens. The aroma, the visual splendor, and the feel of the soft petals will enrich the jubilation of the day. For churches that follow the Revised Common Lectionary, Carolyn C. Brown's *Sharing the Easter Faith with Children* provides a treasure trove of ideas for interpreting the readings, hymns, and other elements of liturgical worship in child-friendly ways.⁵

In sum, here are some guidelines to keep in mind as you share the Easter story with children: avoid mixing secular traditions with the sacred space of worship and Bible study; focus on the biblical narrative; engage children's senses; pay attention to the feelings in the story—fear, surprise, sadness, and especially joy; and include children in your worship rituals and plan a few surprises.

The best outcome of crafting Easter worship with children in mind is that everyone in the congregation may hear the Easter story in a new way. For adults steeped in church tradition, the opportunity to regain a childlike wonder at the miraculous life, death, and new life of Jesus is good news indeed.

NOTES

1 Samantha Braverman, Sr., "Happy Holidays! Christmas Is Americans' Favorite Holiday," *The Harris Poll #107* (October 12, 2011), www.harrisinteractive.com/NewsRoom/HarrisPolls/tabid/447/ctl/ReadCustom%20Default/mid/1508/ArticleId/878/Default.aspx (accessed September 27, 2013).

2 James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (New York: HarperCollins, 1981), 133-134.

3 Marcus J. Borg and John Dominic Crossan, *The Last Week: What the Gospels Really Teach About Jesus's Final Days in Jerusalem* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), 161-162.

4 Sharon Betsworth, "The Child and Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew," *Journal of Childhood and Religion*, 1:4 (Sopher Press, June 2010), 11-12. Available online at www.childhoodandreligion.com (accessed November 25, 2013).

5 Carolyn C. Brown, *Sharing the Easter Faith with Children: Helping Children Observe Lent and Celebrate Easter* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006). Brown has also written *Forbid Them Not: Involving Children in Sunday Worship* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1992-1994), a three-volume guide for leaders of churches that follow the Revised Common Lectionary. Her helpful blog is at worshipingwithchildren.blogspot.com.



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Christ's Last Words from the Cross

BY ARTHUR BOERS

Though the Seven Words practice constructs a coherent plot that none of the Gospel writers intended, it has proven rich for Christians these last centuries. The Seven Last Words of Christ, like the Lord's Prayer, ably condense and collapse into one set of short passages the essentials of our faith.

As a pastor I have had a number of experiences with people who were dying and with those close to them. In this richly rewarding work a significant challenge was to help people think through their last words to each other. Where possible, I encouraged folks to part on a note of blessing. Final messages count—quite a lot.

The Gospel writers were aware of this when they each gave their own versions of Jesus speaking from the cross. Gradually, these various accounts were drawn into “seven last words” devotionals. (Biblically, seven is often a holy number: days in a week, seven-day festivals and weddings, golden lampstands in Revelation, petitions in the Lord's Prayer.) The gathered Seven Last Words approach was first developed by a Jesuit Priest in seventeenth century Peru but eventually was embraced by nineteenth century British Protestants and has since become a mainstay of Good Friday services. This theme continues to inspire many choral works, following the earlier famous ones by Franz Joseph Haydn, Charles Gounod, César Frank, and Théodore Dubois.

In some ways, constructing a coherent plot that none of the Gospel writers intended was an artificial move; it resembles the bringing together of nativity stories that sometimes puts the shepherds and the Magi in the

same place at the same time. (In such harmonization genres we might include the observance of the Stations of the Cross.) Nevertheless this Seven Words practice has proven rich for Christians these last centuries. Proof of its on-going fruitfulness includes the rich array of books that continue to be published using the motif.

While the five volumes reviewed here come from a number of theological perspectives (Methodist, Roman Catholic, Anabaptist/Anglican), there are striking similarities and overlaps among them. All clearly indicate that these final words are vitally important and all agree on the order of their pronunciations: "Father, forgive them"; "Today you will be with me in Paradise"; "Woman, here is your son..."; "My God, my God..."; "I thirst"; "It is finished"; and "Into your hands...."

More than that, most show that a comprehensive summary of Christian faith can be derived from and based on these seven short sayings. We encounter not only predictable Good Friday themes of forgiveness, reconciliation, redemption, and atonement but also theologies of incarnation, mission, and hospitality. Several books draw explicit Trinitarian implications from the accounts, showing how the events of that day exhibit the close collaboration of Father, Son, and Spirit. The Seven Last Words of Christ, like the Lord's Prayer, ably condense into one set of short passages the essentials of our faith.



The most unusual, but least satisfying, volume is *Echoes from Calvary: Meditations on Franz Joseph Haydn's THE SEVEN LAST WORDS OF CHRIST* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005, 244 pp., \$26.95). The editor, Richard Young, is a violist in the Vermeer String Quartet, which has often performed Joseph Haydn's *The Seven Last Words of Christ*, inviting articulate preachers (from the famous to the not-so-famous) to reflect for up to two minutes each on Christ's final words in between the various musical movements. One can imagine that this creative project drew many intrigued listeners to performances. The book includes reflections from such noteworthies as Martin Marty, Raymond Brown, Jean Bethke Elshtain, and Peter Gomes, as well as homily excerpts from works of Martin Luther King and Billy Graham. The volume is accompanied by two compact discs—one with samples of the meditations and another with musical excerpts of Haydn's haunting piece. I found the CDs uneven and incomplete.

The book has several strengths. There is an impressive theological range, with entries from conservative evangelicals to mainline liberals, as well as theological mavericks; a rabbi and a Mormon even offer reflections. There are contributions by Latino and African American voices. A number of the short pieces reflect on contemporary social justice issues. Young notes that the meditations fall into three categories: the "intellectually (theologically)

stimulating,” the “spiritually uplifting and prayerful,” and “those that have contemporary relevance and challenge our modern-day values” (p. 22).

Part of the problem is the two-minute limit to the pieces. While the reason for such a guideline is understandable, the result is that many orations have almost a clichéd feel; there is only time to repeat well-worn ideas. And the other problematic aspect is that since there are so many different orators, there is never a sense of a narrative arc, of the contributions building on one another. The reader is left with an unsatisfying episodic impression.



I have long been a fan of William Willimon and thus was thrilled to explore his take on Jesus’ final words in *Thank God It’s Friday: Encountering the Seven Last Words from the Cross* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006, 104 pp., \$15.00).

This book is full of critiques of American culture and American versions of Christianity. Early on, Willimon asserts that the U.S. is “one of the most violent cultures ever” (p. x). He has tough analyses about over-reaction to September 11 and, more than once, he specifically criticizes George W. Bush. Then he goes on to disparage various sacred cows, including the promotion of “family values” (a refrain for Hauerwas too), the celebration of “happy church,” and the transformation of Christian worship into consumerism. He dislikes Mel Gibson’s take on the Passion. Willimon dismisses the scholar who considers the crucifixion divine “child abuse” as an “alleged theologian.” All of this is fitting for him because he believes Christian faith to be deeply countercultural, even and especially in a country that so often professes to be Christian. Willimon wants us to have a sense of the shocking disruption that the words of Jesus bring into the lives of his hearers.

As usual, Willimon weaves together trenchant theological reflections with his experiences as a bishop, a pastor, an academic dean, and a reflective Christian in American society. While many of his stories certainly pack a punch—Willimon is known for witty anecdotes—some left me perplexed. I did not get the relevance of some of the stories and occasionally felt as if he was just trying to get a laugh. The latter factor contributed to an occasional feeling of flippancy, a feeling only heightened by the book’s title.

Willimon is engaging and always worth reading, but this volume is not his strongest work, nor is it the best selection reviewed here.



With Stanley Hauerwas’s *Cross-Shattered Christ: Meditations on the Seven Last Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004, 108 pp., \$15.00) we move into substantial theological reflection on the Last Words. To be sure there

was theological exploration in the previous volumes, but Hauerwas raises such considerations to whole new levels. This is all the more noteworthy as the book grew out of his Good Friday homilies at a church, rather than graduate-level lectures.

The remarkable and evocative title comes from a poem by John F. Deane, a contemporary Irish writer. The meditations are evocatively amplified by wood block line drawings by Rick Beerhorst, in themselves easily worth the price of the book. In some ways this is an unfamiliar Hauerwas. We do not find here his usual biting humor and prophetic polemics. Rather, he writes with deep reverence and tries to overcome the sentimentality that we too often encounter on Good Friday.

Hauerwas strives to keep the focus off of us and on the work of the Triune God. He criticizes atonement theories that make it “really very simple: Jesus had to die because we needed and need to be forgiven.” The problem is that “such a focus shifts attention from Jesus to us” (p. 27). Good Friday observances then can become a form of narcissism.

This book captures an essential aspect of Good Friday: the otherness of God as revealed in that perplexing, mysterious event. Hauerwas wrestles with uncertainty in the best tradition of Biblical lament. This is a book worth reading and re-reading, at least once every year. It, along with the next two reviewed, is among my favorites.



Peter Storey, a former Methodist bishop in South Africa and currently a professor emeritus of Christian ministry at Duke Divinity School, also has written a small but brilliant book on the Seven Words. His reflections in *Listening to Golgotha: Jesus' Words from the Cross* (Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 2004, 93 pp., \$12.00) – the book is so short that it could be considered a pamphlet –

are derived from his preaching at the Duke University Chapel. The volume is movingly illustrated with charcoal illustrations by Jan L. Richardson.

Much of what Storey writes is informed by almost forty years of ministry during the South African apartheid era. (As bishop, his responsibility included Soweto.)

Hauerwas keeps the focus on the work of the Triune God. He criticizes atonement theories that make it “really very simple: Jesus had to die because we needed and need to be forgiven,” because this “shifts attention from Jesus to us.” Good Friday observances then become a form of narcissism.

Across South Africa's cruel political landscape of that period, Holy Week was always a strengthening time for the hurting victims of apartheid. The poor and oppressed and the people of faith trying to offer resistance seemed to know instinctively that in that pain-drenched narrative, their own struggles would be embraced and given meaning by the sorrow of God. (p. 10)

Storey gives a particularly insightful reading of Good Friday as having numerous social justice implications. Both his words and experiences easily make this book the most prophetic of all those considered here.

Storey writes with a clarity that communicates dense theological ideas in concepts that we can readily comprehend.

When we allow Calvary's forgiving stream to permeate all the way to the primal places of our failure, it heals us.... It makes the difference in otherwise defeated lives. Ordinary people touched by the power of the Cross can become extraordinary in their capacity to love and forgive. (pp. 19-20)

This is a short book. But its spare style speaks volumes.



Richard John Neuhaus's *Death on a Friday Afternoon: Meditations on the Last Words of Jesus from the Cross* (New York: Basic Books, 2000, 272 pp., \$15.95) is not only the longest in this collection, it is by far the most substantial. If I only had time to read one book on the Seven Words, this is the one that I would choose. Neuhaus was the author of many books and founder of *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life*. He was originally a Lutheran pastor, but then converted to Catholicism and became a priest.

This book is in a league all its own – the most comprehensive I know of on the Seven Last Words. Like several others considered here, this one grew from preaching the three-hour Good Friday service for a congregation. They must have been long sermons.

Neuhaus does the best and most thorough job of summarizing Christian faith through the Seven Words. He is particularly adept at explaining Roman Catholic theology. There are discourses here on the paschal mystery, veneration of the cross, and "offering it up" devotional practices. His chapter on Mary – in connection with the words of Jesus to his mother – is so brilliant that I shall consult it whenever need clarification on how Catholics understand her role. But there is plenty of other theological substance as well, with reflections on sacrifice, theodicy, forgiveness, redemption, dereliction, faith, and atonement. His chapter on "I thirst" is a comprehensive exploration of the meaning and motivation of mission.

Neuhaus writes with a magisterial, occasionally almost pompous, style that will not appeal to all readers. As you engage him, you know that here is

a man who has absorbed great swathes of theological history and integrated them with extensive knowledge of art, literature, politics, and history. Even if you do not agree with all his conclusions, you will learn a lot.

For me the most astonishing chapter had to do with the penitent thief. Neuhaus sees this as a way of entering questions of salvation, judgment, and hell. Just to be sure that we do not mistake any of his convictions for sentimental namby-pambyism, he quotes H. Richard Niebuhr's complaint of those who believe that "A God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross." Nonetheless, Neuhaus himself advocates a near universalism. He contends with conviction that not only does God desire that all will be saved, it is possible that finally this will be the case.

More than any of the other authors considered here, Neuhaus carefully and probingly explores the rich implications of the Seven Last Words. The statements at the end of the life of Jesus still have the promise to lead us to eternal life today.



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Charting the Christian Hope

BY CAMERON JORGENSEN

The authors of three recent books reviewed here agree that if Christians (and Jews) lose their understanding of the resurrection, then they will lose the central conviction that gives shape to the hope they proclaim, and they will lose sight of the God in whom they have trusted.

A few years ago I attended a lecture by the New Testament scholar N. T. Wright on the resurrection of Christ. Wright contended that the contemporary Church had veered way off course, preferring spiritualized concepts of the afterlife to the emphatic materiality of both the Easter event and the Christian hope. With our imaginations shaped more by Plato than by Jesus, we pine for the release of our souls from the prison-house of our bodies, a point he illustrated by quoting an American folk-hymn: “when I die, hallelujah, by and by, I’ll fly away!” I winced. Wright’s critique did not miss the mark.

There are plenty of saintly men and women waiting to “fly away” to heaven, escaping the limits of a physical body through their personal death or a collective “rapture,” without realizing how significantly this picture departs from both the Christian scriptures and the ancient confessions of faith. This is precisely what worries Wright, and he is not alone in his concern.

The three books reviewed here, one of which grew out of the lectures just mentioned, address the resurrection using the tools of biblical studies, history, and theology. The common thread that unites them is the authors’ shared belief that if Christians (and Jews) lose their understanding of the resurrection, then they lose the central conviction that gives shape to the hope they proclaim, and they lose sight of the God in whom they have trusted.



In *Resurrection: The Power of God for Christians and Jews* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008, 304 pp., \$24.00), Kevin J. Madigan and Jon D. Levenson make the case that while modern spiritual sensibilities have led both Christians and Jews to conceive of the afterlife in wholly ethereal terms, the radical claim of both traditions is that at the end of history the dead will be raised in bodily form.

Levenson, a professor of Jewish Studies at Harvard University, is the highly regarded author of an earlier and more technical study, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel: The Ultimate Victory of the God of Life* (2006). The co-authored project builds on the foundation of that study, expanding its scope by way of a partnership with Madigan, a Church historian at Harvard University's Divinity School, to include the origins of Christian understandings of resurrection.

Rather than working chronologically forward from the earliest glimmers of resurrection hope in Jewish thought, Madigan begins with familiar territory for Christians: Jesus and Paul. He reminds us that, "we need to relate the Christian sources affirming resurrection specifically to the context of late Second Temple Judaism," because it is only when we hear the message of Jesus in historical context that we can appreciate its richness and complexity (p. 4). He contends that Jesus' message was consistent with the "restoration eschatology" of his day and that Jesus was, essentially, an apocalyptic prophet announcing that God's work to combat evil and to restore scattered Israel was finally at hand. Similarly, Paul—the faithful Pharisee who became the Apostle to the Gentiles—is best understood against his own theological backdrop. Because resurrection was the quintessential doctrine of the Pharisees, it is no surprise that a pharisaic rabbi like Paul would proclaim resurrection, or that he would make it the centerpiece of his theology. The distinctly Christian shape of his account, however, is that "the God of Israel had acted to redeem his people in Christ's death and resurrection. That act had triggered the dawning of the new age. All of God's people would soon be redeemed, nature recreated, and God's faithful rescued from death" (p. 27).

With the context for Christian claims in place, Levenson proceeds to describe how, despite a paucity of explicit claims about the afterlife in the Hebrew scriptures, pharisaic convictions regarding the resurrection developed. He begins by delving into the murky conceptions of Sheol, the amorphous realm of the dead, resisting the temptation to speculate where the text is silent. He urges the reader to "respect the uninterest, viewing it as characteristic of the nature of Israelite religion as it is reflected in the Hebrew Bible...[for] the focus of that *book* is not on the world of the dead but that of the living" (p. 66). Using similar care, the authors explore other themes that are pregnant with meaning for Jewish eschatology: the close

identification between heaven and the Temple, the counteraction of death through the continuation of a family line, and the powerful narratives of divine intervention in matters of childlessness, slavery, famine, and death. These themes lay the foundation for the hope in God's power to overturn human mortality, a conviction that only becomes fully articulated in the second century B.C. All of this demonstrates an important conclusion: "When the belief in resurrection finally makes an unambiguous appearance in Judaism, it is thus both innovation and a restatement of a tension that has pervaded the religion of Israel from the beginning—the tension between the Lord's promise of life, on the one hand, and the reality of death, on the other" (p. 200). Indeed, life has the last word.

In the final few chapters of the book, Levenson and Madigan turn their attention to the contemporary importance of belief in resurrection. They lament the modernizing and Gnosticizing tendencies that have jettisoned the resurrection and they suggest ways that Christians and Jews, despite persistent differences, may see the resurrection as part of their shared confession about God.

I found it difficult to appreciate some aspects of Madigan's account of Christian convictions, primarily because some critical perspectives were uncritically embraced. For example, Madigan offers a creative back-story for the Gospel of John's portrayal of "Doubting Thomas," asserting that early Christians were divided about the resurrection. He says, "whatever the historical truth of this story, John put it in his gospel in order to affirm belief in the bodily resurrection of Jesus," and to combat "the 'Thomas Community,' that produced, among other things, the Gospel of Thomas" (p. 221). Although Madigan admits, "we know little about this community," he continues this line of speculation, saying, "John uses Thomas in order to speak to this community and to persuade them to surrender their doubts. One of his cleverest moves was to put the proclamation of belief in the physical resurrection on the lips of Thomas, the very apostle around whom the opposed...community was formed" (p. 222). These are far reaching claims concerning John's motives and his interaction with a community about which we know so little!

Despite this reservation, I think Madigan and Levinson do inestimable good in this book by clarifying the central convictions of the two sibling traditions of Christianity and rabbinic Judaism.



Among the thinkers who have called for a renewal of Christian understandings about resurrection and the afterlife, no one has captured the imagination of both academics and church-goers as successfully as N. T. Wright, formerly the Anglican Bishop of Durham, England, and currently a research professor of New Testament and Early Christianity at St. Andrew's

University in Scotland. This coming together of popular and scholarly sensibilities is evident in *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008, 352 pp., \$24.99). On the one hand it is a well-researched work of biblical theology, advocating for a particular understanding of the afterlife (and its implication for our daily lives) by way of careful scholarship; on the other hand, it is a feisty engagement with popular misconceptions and current events with the page-turning flavor of a best-selling work of non-fiction.

The argument of *Surprised by Hope* unfolds in three parts. The first, "Setting the Stage," covers the same biblical background as Levenson and Madigan, but pays greater attention to modern examples of eschatological confusion—particularly the way that the language of "Heaven" has often supplanted the concrete language of resurrection. Beyond reviewing biblical sources and critiquing contemporary misunderstandings, Wright goes one step further to anticipate the sorts of philosophical and historical questions that arise when one makes a strong claim for the resurrection in an age of skepticism. In this way he plays the role of apologist in addition to that of the scholar.

After establishing the biblical and historical claim that Christ is risen, Wright evaluates a wide range of Christian conceptions of the future in part two, "God's Future Plan." Briefly, here is the heart of Wright's eschatology. In keeping with 1 Corinthians 15, he asserts the centrality of the resurrection of Christ as the firstfruits of God's intended resurrection of all humanity. Furthermore, according to Romans 8, the scope of the resurrection includes the entire cosmos, enabling the wedding of heaven and earth. Wright, therefore, rejects spiritual or otherworldly conceptions of heaven; rather, he envisions eternity as the unfolding work of the kingdom of God: "the redeemed people of God in the new world will be the agents of his love going out in new ways, to accomplish new creative tasks, to celebrate and extend the glory of his love" (p. 105).

While modern spiritual sensibilities have led both Christians and Jews to conceive of the afterlife in wholly ethereal terms, the radical claim of both traditions is that at the end of history the dead will be raised in bodily form.

In the final part of the book Wright takes up the theme "Hope in Practice: Resurrection and the Mission of the Church." He makes concrete suggestions for how the Church today, as the body of Christ, can begin to live into the new order of reality ushered in at Easter. These practical concerns are essential precisely because resurrection was "an event within

our own world, [so] its implications and effects are to be felt within our own world, here and now" (p. 191). The resurrection guarantees that there is enduring significance to human activity in the world; works of justice, beauty, and evangelism become essential signs of God's kingdom. Specifically, Wright recommends that believers refocus the proclamation of the Church on the triumph of life over death; spend at least as much energy and attention in the practice of Easter as in the practice of Lent; consider the importance of sacred spaces for connecting people to the transcendent; reclaim a sense of time, the value of tradition, and the hallowing of a day of worship; and rally around the Lord's table and receive nourishment from the Eucharist. These practices are ways that we can joyfully participate in the already unfolding transformation of God's beloved creation.



Matthew Levering's *Jesus and the Demise of Death: Resurrection, Afterlife, and the Fate of the Christian* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012, 240 pp., \$29.95) makes a significant contribution to recent literature about the shape of the Christian hope. Levering, a professor of theology at Mundelein Seminary of the University of Saint Mary of the Lake, is a prolific writer who excels at contextualizing ancient and medieval theologians in order to address modern questions. In this work he commends recent efforts to recover the centrality of the resurrection, yet he believes that some recent proposals, especially Wright's, err by overemphasizing materiality as it is presently experienced.

Unfolding in two parts that examine "The Passage of Jesus Christ" and "The Passage of Christ's People," Levering covers the now familiar ground of the connection between the work of Christ and the future hope of Christians, but from a Catholic perspective. This book provides more than ecumenical balance, however. Arguably, Levering's most helpful contribution is his critique of a key assumption made by Wright, Madigan, and Levenson: namely, that most talk of "heaven" is indicative of disembodied Platonism, rejecting the scandalous bodily nature of the resurrection. He suggests that this goes a bit too far.

Levering agrees with the view of Joseph Ratzinger, later Pope (emeritus) Benedict XVI, that "biblical faith, in the Hellenistic period, encountered the best of Greek thought at a deep level, resulting in mutual enrichment" (p. 9). This conviction results in a more charitable reading of ancient and medieval theologians and it problematizes some of Wright's bolder claims. Following Aquinas, Levering emphasizes that the power of the resurrection will transform the cosmos in such profound ways that one cannot presume continuity between our lives now and our activities in the eschatological future. In contrast, Wright's "insistence on 'new creative tasks' threatens to bog us down in endless work" in his effort to avoid a

picture of the new creation that seems boring (p. 110). Levering helpfully warns that in our efforts to assert the materiality of the resurrection, we must not domesticate eternity.



Bodies renewed and transformed by the power of Jesus' resurrection—this is the news the Church has claimed as its gospel. The Christian hope is not that someday believers will “fly away.” Therefore, we do not expect, with Hamlet, that one day we will “have shuffled off this mortal coil” in a final escape from materiality. Rather, as these books remind us, the structure of the Church's hope is firmly fixed on the promise of the risen Lord who comforts his people by saying, “See, I am making all things new” (Revelation 21:5).



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