

The Resurrection of Jesus: The Foundation of Christian Faith

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Abstract

The resurrection of Jesus is the foundation of the Christian faith and doctrine. It is the cornerstone of the teaching of the Church since inception, and by reason of faith in the Risen Lord, Christians are called and strengthened to bear witness all over the world. This paper is an exposition of the doctrine of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. It argues that the Christian faith will make no sense if the “Lord is Risen” is not given a prior place. It also gives a significant cue to the fact that Christian theology does not merely affirm an eschatological bodily resurrection, but that a physical bodily resurrection is essential for a post-mortem eschatological existence, without which the Christian account of an afterlife is questionable, if not false, at best. Although, much of the structure of this paper is inspired by Joseph Ratzinger’s masterpiece, *Jesus of Nazareth*, the paper is not aimed at a mere intellectual or conceptual clarification, but hopes to engender and evoke genuine faith in the reader to proclaim that indeed, “the Lord is Risen.” Consequently, to undermine the resurrection of the Lord, one undermines the faith of the Church, and hence, its hope.

Keywords: Resurrection, Christian faith, Easter, Scripture.

1.0 Introduction

More often than not, the language of Christian prayer reflects two central themes of Christology. While one centres on the history shrouding the death of Jesus, and the other asserts his continuing presence to the believer. But the way these twin themes are articulated

is nowhere more apparent than in the theology of the Resurrection.¹ There, careful scrutiny is launched to underscore the significance of the Easter Faith, that “Jesus is Risen,” to the believer. As a matter of fact, the Easter proclamation that “Jesus is Risen,” should not merely be treated as one of those events in the life of Jesus, but must be incarnated in the life of the believer, such that, as Bultmann’s position clearly relates, to confess belief in the resurrection is essentially to realize that the cross has been taken into one’s life and has become a reality of faith. Bultmann says, “If the event of Easter Day is in any sense a historical event additional to the event of the cross, it is nothing else than the rise of faith in the risen Lord.”²

Furthermore, the increased attention to Christology during the past few years has resulted in greater diversity. Although the range of opinions among Catholic theologians is somewhat more restricted than it is among Protestants,³ Catholics, too, differ widely in their views on the subject.⁴ This paper takes its inspiration from the distinguished biblical exegete and theologian, Joseph Ratzinger’s (Pope Benedict XVI) seminal work, *Jesus of Nazareth*, on the theme: “Jesus’ Resurrection from the Dead” (Chapter 9), which stands for Christianity as the bulwark of faith (1 Cor. 15:12-14). However, this research is not done in isolation from the text above, but in the wake of the discourse by other leading contemporary theologians. It tries to clarify what the notion of resurrection means to Christians and how the resurrection of Jesus can be understood from two traditions that testify to the utter reality of the mystery of our faith, as well as the historical significance of this event in the contemporary world.

¹ David Fergusson, “Interpreting the Resurrection”, *Scotland Journal of Theology*, Vol. 38 (1985): 287.

² For a good exegesis of Bultmann’s position on the resurrection, see Schubert Ogden, *Christ Without Myth* (London: Collins, 1970), 83-88.

³ Joseph Smith, “Resurrection Faith Today,” *Theological Studies* 30 (1969): 393-419. Here, you can have access to studies of earlier literatures on the Resurrection message as far from yielding a uniform consensus.

⁴ John Galvin, “The Resurrection of Jesus in Contemporary Catholic Systematics,” *Heythrop Journal* 20 (1979): 123.

2.0 The Resurrection of Jesus Defined

Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians gives a perfect exordium with which to define or describe the Christian teaching on resurrection, when he writes that the doctrine of the resurrection from the dead is “a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1: 23-24). In another place, he remarks, “If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ” (1 Cor 15:14-15). The Christian faith stands or falls with the truth of the testimony that Christ is risen from the dead; it is its very foundation.⁵

What is expressed here is simply that the truth that Jesus Christ rose on the third day after his agony, crucifixion and death on the cross, in time, gives Christianity and all it stands to represent a new face, an appealing significance, and indeed, such that, as Ratzinger beautifully puts it, “only if Jesus is risen has anything really new occurred that changes the world and the situation of mankind. Then he becomes the criterion on which we can rely. For then God has truly revealed himself.” With the Resurrection, Jesus becomes the ultimate criterion, the crucial point of all measures. With it alone, the fullness of the figure of Jesus is manifestly complete. Karl Barth maintains that the Resurrection, distinct from the incarnation and crucifixion, is everywhere in the New Testament described as a sovereign act of God’s free grace.⁶ Given the centrality of this message, that “Jesus is Risen,” great efforts have been made over the centuries to spell out the presuppositions and implications, historical, metaphysical and theological, of this very event. In this paper, we join the queue of this gainful efforts, for we cannot be deceived into believing that the savour of the message has been completely exhausted.

⁵ Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week from the entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection* (San Francisco: Ignatian Press, 2011), 172.

⁶ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, Vol. IV, trans. G.W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T & T. Clark, 1957), 303.

In order that we might understand what actually happened, it is quite instructive to take a historical look into the Sacred Scripture. There, we are sure to find the Word (John 1:1-2) and Wisdom (1 Cor. 1:24) of the Father, revealed to us in the person of Jesus Christ; there, we hear from the witnesses who encountered the risen Lord himself (Acts 3:15). Although Hans Kung argues that the resurrection event cannot be described as a historical event in the strict sense:

For the raising of Jesus is not a miracle violating the laws of nature, verifiable within the present world, nor a supernatural intervention which can be located in space and time. There was nothing to photograph or to record. What can be historically verified are the death of Jesus and after this the Easter faith and the Easter message of the disciples. But neither the raising itself nor the person raised can be apprehended, by historical methods.⁷

Yet, one fact remains that a historical survey of the New Testament testimony leaves us with no doubt that what happened in the “Resurrection of the Son of Man” was utterly different, unimaginable and unprecedented. Hans Urs Von Balthasar calls it an event without analogy and an absolute unique state, such that anthropological considerations become of limited value in discussing its nature.⁸ Ratzinger captures it even aptly as “a life that opens up a new dimension of human existence.” Kung’s language expresses his sentiments as “a radical transformation into a wholly different state, into another, new, unparalleled, definitive, immortal life: *totaliter aliter*, utterly different.”⁹ Although, the Resurrection actually took place in the world, it has no antecedent cause, with no logical connection to the pragmatic context of human decisions.¹⁰ It is on this basis that we can understand the unique character of this New Testament testimony of the Easter faith.

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ cannot be understood merely in terms of a return to a normal human life in this world much like

⁷ Hans Kung, *On Being a Christian* (London: Collins, 1977), 349.

⁸ Hans Urs Von Balthasar, “Mysterium Paschale,” *Mysterium Salutis* 3/2 (Einsiedeln, 1969), 257-69, 308, 265.

⁹ Kung, *Being a Christian*, 350.

Lazarus and the others whom Jesus raised from the dead. For if in Jesus' Resurrection we were dealing simply with the miracle of a resuscitated corpse, it would ultimately be of no concern to us.¹¹ In fact, such miracle would only demonstrate, at best, that Jesus' Resurrection was equivalent to the raising of the son of the widow of Nain (Lk. 7:11-17), the daughter of Jairus (Mk. 5:22-24, 35-43), and Lazarus (Jn. 11:1-44). But that 'Jesus is risen' is drastically beyond a miracle, at least, is evident since the New Testament texts never suggest that the resurrection appearances "were in any way spectacular miracles which could have been watched with amazement by the general public."¹² "He has entered upon a different life, a new life – he has entered the vast breadth of God himself, and it is from there that he reveals himself to his followers."¹³ The disciples came to believe because the crucified Jesus manifested himself to them as Lord; "as they experienced after his death the living person himself."¹⁴

3.0 The Two Types of Resurrection Testimony

As highlighted above, the Scripture proves to be a powerful testimony to the Resurrection message and thus instructive. In the New Testament accounts, we find that there are two types of testimonies or traditions: "the Confessional Tradition" and "the Narrative Tradition."¹⁵ Below, we shall now consider each of these traditions.

3.1 The Confessional Tradition

The confession tradition reveals pertinent instances where the essentials of this mystery is crystallized in short phrases and anecdotes within which a genuine Christian identity is established.

¹⁰ Barth, *Church Dogmatic*, 300. For this reason, Barth frequently compares Jesus' resurrection to God's creation of the world. Barth sees in Jesus' resurrection an 'exact correspondence with what He did as Creator when He separated light from darkness and elected the creature to being (349).

¹¹ Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 173.

¹² Kung, *On Being a Christian*, 375.

¹³ Kung, *On Being a Christian*, 174.

¹⁴ Kung, *On Being a Christian*, 373.

¹⁵ Kung, *On Being a Christian*, 176.

With this Easter confession, Christians recognize one another. Ratzinger unveils that the context of these confessions evidently spread across the New Testament pages. When the two disciples in the Emmaus story returned to Jerusalem to meet with the eleven apostles, they were greeted with these words: “The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon” (cf. Lk. 24:34). In this narrative, we can identify a formula of confession in which the essential is proclaimed: the event and the witness who testifies to it.¹⁶

Again, in another passage, St. Paul writes: “If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom 10:9). Here, Ratzinger says we can point out two elements to the confession: first, “... that Jesus is Lord...” (that is, He is divine); and secondly, “... that God raised him from the dead...” (the fundamental historical event itself). The ultimate culmination of this confession has unflinching significance for Christians: “you will be saved” (v. 9). Accordingly, therefore, the confession of this truth is one that necessarily leads to the truth that is salvation of a new life in the Risen One.¹⁷

By far the most important of the Easter confessions is found in the fifteenth chapter of the first letter to the Corinthians where St. Paul makes strong the claim that the faith which he delivered to them is not of his own initiative, but a product of the common tradition of the Church from her beginnings, a transmitted deposit of faith:

That Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive ... Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me (1 Cor. 15:3-8).

The crux of this Pauline profession of faith is, “that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the

¹⁶ Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 177.

¹⁷ Cf. Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 177.

Scriptures...” (1 Cor. 15:4). However, going by the view of many biblical exegetes, and the testimony of the Gospel evangelists (Lk. 24:34; 24:36-49; Mk. 16:14; Jn. 20:19-20; 20: 26-31), one is poised to add the fifth verse: “and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve” (v. 5). Meanwhile, notice that there are other details that St. Paul adds to this confession testimony. While it is believed that the original confession ends with the fifth verse, the appearance to Cephas and the Twelve, the further addendum of having appeared to more than five hundred brethren, to James, and to all the apostles, and lastly to himself (Paul), is more or less controversial. Yet, we shall be content with the relieving remark of Walter Kasper that, “despite the irreconcilable discrepancies, however, all the traditions agree on one thing: Jesus appeared after his death to certain disciples.”¹⁸ In what follows, we shall thematically examine the confession tradition itself: “Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scripture.”

3.1.1 *Jesus’ Death*

Ratzinger notes that the fact of Christ’s death is predicated on two additional expressions: “for our sins” and “in accordance with the Scriptures.” It is crucial that the identification of the figure of Christ is inextricably tied to his death, or better still, to the paschal mystery. In that mystery, the fullness of revelation is evident and the fullness of God’s love and power is manifest. Christ’s death was an event that only demonstrates folly to the mind outside of faith, yet instructive and purposeful to the believer. For the Lord himself taught the disciples on the way to Emmaus that everything that happened to Him is in fulfilment of the Scriptures (Luke 24:13-35). In fact, Jesus made it clear by asking that “was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things, and so, enter his glory?” (Luke 24: 26). This means that with reference to Jesus’ death on the cross, there was no coincidence. It was not a product of happenstance. “It belongs in the context of God’s ongoing relationship with his people, from which it receives its inner logic and its meaning. It is

¹⁸ Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ* (London: Burns & Oates, 1976), 129.

an event in which the words of Scripture are fulfilled; it bears within itself Logos, or logic; it proceeds from the word and returns to the word; it surrounds the word and fulfills it.”¹⁹ And so, it is within the context of the *Logos*, the word of God, that one grasps the fundamental relationship between Christ’s death and us, God’s people; it is a dying “for our sins.” This forms the rationale and the warrant for death.

Therefore, here we can safely state that Jesus’ death was not occasioned or presumed by men; it was entirely a divine plan out of the humility of God.²⁰ By far, “it is not the inevitable consequence of a false hubris, but the fulfillment of a love in which God himself comes down to us, so as to draw us back up to himself.”²¹ It is the mystery of Jesus’ death that opens the way to the Resurrection message.

3.1.2 The Question of the Empty Tomb

Quite recently, some contemporary Catholic theologians have more profoundly explored and illuminatingly articulated in their works thoughts around the gospel stories on the empty tomb and of the appearance of Christ to his disciples. As for the empty tomb narrative, it appears in the Resurrection accounts of the four gospels, with the Markan version considerably held to be prior to others (Mark 16:1-8).²²

From the foregoing, it is settled that Jesus participated in the human destiny of death, so that we can say that he had a complete

¹⁹ Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 180.

²⁰ Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 180.

²¹ Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 180.

²² The Catechism theologians share this opinion of the Markan priority among the four gospels we have. Again, they hold that the eight verses Markan empty tomb narrative constitute “the oldest account of Easter in the gospels.” For more reading on this, see Fergus Ker, *The Empty Tomb Story*, 455. Also see Feiner and Vischer, *The Common Catechism* (London: Search Press, 1975). For a systematic presentation of Christian beliefs from the perspective of the Catechism theologians. On Markan priority, see John S. Kloppenborg, *Q, the Earliest Gospel: An Introduction to the Original Stories and Sayings of Jesus*. (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 5-12.

human voyage of crib to grave, from the joys of birth to the seemingly hopeless end in the tomb. Now, if the Resurrection message was true (which we suppose is the case), is it possible that he remained in the tomb? Would not the tomb have been empty after he had risen? Several debates have in theology have been centred on this issue over time. Most commentators come to the conclusion that an empty tomb would not be enough to prove the Resurrection, albeit John's account makes it clear that Mary Magdalene found it empty and assumed that someone must have taken Jesus' body away (Jn. 20:11-15), so that the fate of the corpse is of no consequence.

On the contrary, then, one is perplexed how the Easter faith is compatible with the body remaining in the tomb afterward. This creates a vague scenario for Christians. But Kung argues, on the flip side that the Resurrection of Christ could still be bodily, even if the tomb were not empty. He says "the empty tomb is not a condition, but at best an illustration, of the Easter event. It is not an article of faith; it is neither the ground nor the object of the Easter faith."²³ Ratzinger, given these fronts, concluded that since "Thomas Söding, Ulrich Wilckens, and others rightly point out that in Jerusalem at the time, the proclamation of the Resurrection would have been completely impossible if anyone had been able to point to a body lying in the tomb," it would be safe to argue "that the empty tomb as such, while it cannot prove the Resurrection, is nevertheless a necessary condition for Resurrection faith, which was specifically concerned with the body and, consequently, with the whole of the person."²⁴

But ultimately, a decomposition of the body would mean that he never conquered death. For this reason, Ratzinger argues that "resurrection essentially implies that Jesus' body was not subject to corruption. In this sense, the empty tomb is a strongly scriptural element of the Resurrection proclamation."²⁵ Thus, theological

²³ Kung, *On Being a Christian*, 366. He employs both scriptural and metaphysical argument to clear this point.

²⁴ Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 181.

²⁵ Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 183.

speculations arguing that Jesus' decomposition and Resurrection could be mutually compatible belong to modern thinking and stand in clear contradiction of the biblical vision. This opens us into the realm of the Catechism theologians who approach the matter from another perspective. Their perspective leans toward treating the verses of the empty tomb account as a setting of the Church's already established Easter faith in the context of an angelic message.

Consequently, the central theme of these verses stress more on the origin of the easter faith in divine revelation than with the historical fact of the tomb being empty. Kasper, one of the Catechism theologians writes: "The clear intention of the passage is to use the messenger angel as a means of giving the women – and through them the reader – the news of the raising of the crucified Jesus of Nazareth, and to present it as 'divine news', and not a human invention."²⁶ In this way, what the angel says is far more important than what the women find. In other words, "Mark's empty tomb story is a dramatic presentation of the Easter message with all the stress on what God has done rather on what the women found."²⁷ However, this does not take away the tradition that the tomb was empty, at least "on the whole it seems probable."²⁸

Clearly, that the emptiness of the tomb as a historical fact is not the point of the story of the women's visit to the tomb, and that it is thus not to be taken primarily as a historical record, is shown as plausible. But for Ratzinger, Peter's Pentecost sermon strikes him as important, where Peter quotes Psalm 16:8-10 as follows: "... my flesh will dwell in hope. For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, nor let your Holy One see corruption. You have made known to me the ways of life" (Acts 2:26-28). Although Peter grants that the psalm was originally prayed by David, he nevertheless, held that Jesus is revealed here as the true David, precisely because in him this promise is fulfilled: "You will not let your Holy One see corruption."²⁹ Consequently, if St. Paul stated that Jesus rose according to the

²⁶ Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 170.

²⁷ Kerr, *The Empty Tomb Story*, 456.

²⁸ Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 171.

²⁹ Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 182.

Scriptures, then surely Psalm 16 must have been seen as key scriptural evidence for the early Church. Here, they found a clear statement that Christ, the definitive David, will not see corruption – that he must truly have risen.³⁰

3.1.3 The Witnesses

From “He appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve...” St. Paul enumerates a number of witnesses to the truth of gospel to which he is proclaiming, that “he rose from the dead.” By far, the names that St. Paul lists can be said to have some theological weight; they reveal the foundation of the Church’s faith.³¹ Because Peter had a unique and particular mission, first at Caesarea Philippi, and then at the Last Supper (Luke 22:32), and since the Christian faith stands or falls to the truth of testimony to the Risen Christ, Peter’s special witnessing would play a vital role vis-à-vis the faith of the whole Church (John 21:15-17). So, the Resurrection account flows naturally into ecclesiology.³² Clearly thus, it would be strikingly appropriate that Jesus appeared first to him, before appearing to the Twelve, that he may strengthen his brethren (Luke 22:32).

3.2 The Narrative Tradition

Now, we move on to the narrative tradition. Whereas the confessional tradition authoritatively articulates the shared faith of Christianity in fixed formulae and insists on their binding character, down to the letter, for the whole believing community, the narrative accounts of the Resurrection appearances reflect different consideration.³³ They may not be taken as binding in every detail, but are clearly regarded as valid testimony, giving content and shape to the faith. Ratzinger points the major difference between the two traditions: “The narrative tradition tells of encounters with the risen Lord and the words spoken by him on those occasions; the confessional tradition merely establishes the key facts that serve to

³⁰ Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 182-83.

³¹ Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 185.

³² Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 185.

³³ Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 185.

confirm the faith: this is another way of describing the essential difference between the two types of tradition.”³⁴ Again, in the confessional tradition only men are named as witnesses, whereas in the narrative tradition women play a key role, indeed they take precedence over the men.³⁵ The reason for this is not far from obvious: the fact that in the Jewish tradition only men could be admitted as witnesses in court – the testimony of women was considered unreliable.³⁶

The narrative tradition are the various anecdotes that tend to explain what it was that happened geographically in Jerusalem and Galilee, the appearance stories of the Risen Jesus that the Christian confess, as enshrined in the gospels. The narrative tradition proclaims the experiences of the witnesses and the words spoken by the Risen Lord at such encounter. That narrative that captures the ‘Easter Faith.’ However, since it is a mystery between Jesus and the Father, a phenomenon totally outside human experience, it defies description for us. Barth explains it as “to raise the dead, to give life to the dead, is like the creative summoning into being of non-being, a matter wholly and exclusively for God alone, quite outside the sphere of any possible co-operating factors.”³⁷

³⁴ Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 186-87.

³⁵ Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 187.

³⁶ Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 187. Here, one can deduce Ratzinger’s thought on the on-going campaign on rights for women in the Church, especially as concern Sacred Orders. For him, though the Church’s juridical structure follows the foundation on Peter and the Eleven, nevertheless, the quotidian life of the Church belong to the women who are constantly opening the door to the Lord and accompanying him to the Cross, and so it is they who come to experience the Risen One. (p.187). Thus, women should feel content that the whole breadth of the Resurrection experience is entrusted to them.

³⁷ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 301. These are some of the reasons why Kung thinks that the Resurrection cannot be, strictly speaking, an historical event. Hans Kung says, “For the raising of Jesus is not a miracle violating the laws of nature, verifiable within the present world, nor a supernatural intervention which can be located in space and time... neither the raising itself nor the person raised can be apprehended, by historical methods.” See Hans Kung, *On Being a Christian*, 349.

3.2.1 *The Appearances of Jesus in the Gospels*

Further, it goes without saying that the appearance narratives we read in the Gospels are manifestly different. While the narratives tell of the physical dimension of the Risen One, such as walking alongside the Emmaus disciples; the invitation of Thomas to touch his scars, and more importantly, having to eat a piece of fish³⁸ (Luke 24:42-43), yet, they do not diminish the utter mysterious novelty that accompanied his new existence. One striking fact to this is that it took the disciples quite some time to recognize him at first: “Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus” (Jn. 21:4). Not until that disciple whom Jesus loved would say to Peter, ‘It is the Lord!’ (21:7); it was a deep inward recognition.

In fact, one marked significance of the Risen Jesus was that though he appeared in full physicality, he was nonetheless bound by no physical laws of time and space, he had no immediate recognizability (Luke 24:31,36; John 19:20), he lives anew in fellowship with God, permanently beyond the reach of death. In this remarkable dialectic of identity and otherness, of real physicality and freedom from the constraints of the body, we see the special mysterious nature of the risen Lord’s new existence.³⁹ Ratzinger, examining some earlier theophanies of the Old Testament – God’s appearance to Abraham at the Oak of Mamre (Gen 18:1-33); Joshua and a man with a drawn sword (Josh. 5:13-15); the story of the angel of the Lord appearing in human form (Judges 5:11:24) – concludes that though these theophanies may be admittedly analogous, the theophany of the risen Christ is radically novel; it reveals him as truly man and truly God, not coming from the realm of the dead, but from the realm of pure life, he comes as the one who is truly alive, who is himself the source of life. Luke notes that

³⁸ Although some biblical exegetes accuse Luke of an exaggeration here in his apologetic zeal, so that he contradicts his own narrative by drawing Jesus back to the very empirical physicality that he had transcended by virtue of the Resurrection.

³⁹ Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 189.

he is not a ghost or a spirit to be feared for he ate before their eyes (Luke 24:41-43), and he has “flesh and bones” (Luke 24:36-43).

It was instructive for Ratzinger that he considered the three passages where Jesus is presented with eating a meal. With this, he finds out that Jesus establishes a new ‘table fellowship’ through which he incorporates his disciples into a share of his new real life. The immediate passage that comes to mind is the Emmaus story where Jesus sat down to table with the disciples, taking the bread, giving thanks and praise, breaking the bread and giving it to the two of them. At this point, something happened: “they recognized him and he vanished out of their sight” (Luke 24:31). Again, in John 21:1-14, Jesus, though not recognized by the disciples, standing on the sea shore invites them saying: “Come and have breakfast.” And now “they knew” that it was Jesus” (v. 12). In the Acts of the Apostles, Luke gives us three elements that characterized the time Jesus spent with his disciples generally: “For forty days he had continued to appear to them and tell them about the kingdom of God. When he had been at table with them, he had told them not to leave Jerusalem” (1:3-4). Thus, He appeared to them, he spoke to them, he sat at table with them. In other words, appearing, speaking, and sharing meals. These three self-manifestations of the risen Lord belong together; they were his ways of proving that he was alive.

Ratzinger gives a special emphasis on the third element going by the word Luke used to describe it: *synalizômenos*. Literally, it means “eating salt with them.”⁴⁰ Here, we can draw an implication in that salt is regarded as a guarantee of durability. It is a remedy against putrefaction, against the corruption that pertains to the nature of death. To eat is always to hold death at bay; it is a way of preserving life.⁴¹ We can also see an inner association of this new table fellowship with the Last Supper where Jesus established a New Covenant: he gives himself to his followers as food and thus makes them sharers in his life, in life itself.⁴² So, Luke’s event of the appearances of Jesus and in those three elements that characterize

⁴⁰ Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 192.

⁴¹ Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 192.

⁴² Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 192.

his company with the disciples shows that “the Lord is drawing the disciples into a new covenant-fellowship with him and with the living God; he is giving them a share in real life, making them truly alive and salting their lives through participation in his Passion, in the purifying power of his suffering.”⁴³

4.0 The Nature of Jesus’ Resurrection and Its Historical Significance

The Resurrection message of Jesus is, by far, what gives content to Christian preaching and teaching as well as its faith: “If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is void of content and your faith is empty too” (I Cor. 15:14). And so, what is the true nature of Christ’s Resurrection? Some theologians such as Karl Rahner interpret the resurrection as in fundamental continuity with the life and death of Jesus. In a theology that echoes John’s gospel, Rahner views the death and resurrection of Jesus as two aspects of a single event in which Jesus hands over his life’s history of freedom to God and God accepts and seals forever the totality of that offering of love.⁴⁴

Liberation theologians, like Elizabeth Johnson, Edward Schillebeeckx, John Sobrino have a different position.⁴⁵ For them, the resurrection can only be understood from the point of view of the cross, for the resurrected one is one and the same who was crucified; though Ratzinger stresses that the resurrection event can no longer be described in same terms as the crucifixion of death of Jesus, because it has attained a radical ontological leap that elevates it beyond history.⁴⁶ However, for the liberation theologians, the death of Jesus of Nazareth was clearly an execution by the complicity of both political and religious leaders of his tradition because of the lifestyle Christ had adopted, lived and taught, as well as the fidelity to his preaching mission; but, in all these, God remained silent. For

⁴³ Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 193.

⁴⁴ Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith* (New York: Seabury, 1978) 266.

⁴⁵ Mary Catherine Hilkert, “Preachers of Grace: Witnesses to the Resurrection,” *Worship* 77, no. 4 (July, 2003): 294.

⁴⁶ Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 195.

that reason, the liberation theologians underline the scandal of the cross.⁴⁷ In the final analysis, the point is that the resurrection confirms definitively: death and evil do not have final victory; the power of God does.

Nonetheless, it is important to make it clear that “what Christians celebrate is not the cross, nor the sufferings of Jesus, but the power of a love that is faithful even unto death. The triumph of the cross is the triumph of God’s mercy bursting the bonds of sin and death – the triumph of resurrection.”⁴⁸ The point here is simply that in and through Jesus’ love and fidelity God has taken on the evil and suffering of this world and broken their hold once and for all with the stronger power of love, so that placing the resurrection in the context of the life, ministry, and death of Jesus, the social and political significance of that love is highlighted concretely.⁴⁹

Ratzinger’s thought is not far from this as well. For him, it is not enough to take the Resurrection as some deceased individual coming back to life. Rather, it is an “ontological leap,” opening up a dimension that affects us all, creating for all of us a new space of life, a new space of being in union with God.⁵⁰ The Resurrection has its origin within history and up to a certain point still belongs there: it points beyond history but has left a footprint within history. Therefore, it can be attested by witnesses as an event of an entirely new kind, but not the same kind of historical event as the birth or crucifixion of Jesus.⁵¹

5.0 Conclusion

It has been an interesting discourse to engage here on the resurrection of Jesus from the perspective of Joseph Ratzinger (the Late Pope Benedict XVI). The paper began by clarifying the notion of the resurrection, thereby presenting what it means. Then, it considered the two testimonial traditions that the resurrection message presents

⁴⁷ Hilbert, “Preachers of Grace,” 295.

⁴⁸ Hilbert, “Preachers of Grace,” 295.

⁴⁹ Hilbert, “Preachers of Grace,” 296.

⁵⁰ Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 194.

⁵¹ Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 195.

to us from the Scripture: The Confessional Tradition, and the Narrative Tradition. Only after that did it look at the historical significance of the nature of the Easter faith, both for our contemporary world and generations to come.

As a matter of fact, the claim that God raised Jesus from the dead has implications not only for how we interpret the life, ministry, and death of Jesus, but for our understanding of who God is and how God acts as well. The Christian hope remains that God can and will bring life out of death, that like Jesus, not only human persons, but all of creation will be taken into God and transformed. But is that hope credible in a postmodern scientific and suffering world, some have continued to ask? In moments of doubt, Ratzinger gives us a cue to help us recover our faith: "If we attend to the witnesses with listening hearts and open ourselves to the signs by which the Lord again and again authenticates both them and himself, then we know that he is truly risen. He is alive."⁵²

⁵² Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 196.