Since 1977, Hansjürgen Verweyen, presently professor of fundamental theology at the University of Freiburg, has persistently promoted the thesis that the Easter faith (i.e., the conclusive and definitive judgement that the man Jesus transcends all human categories) was de jure adequately grounded during the earthly life of Jesus, inclusive of his dying — not first with the resurrection appearances.¹ He has described what he means by Easter faith in both Christological terms (“the definitive decision that Jesus transcends all human categories — however this may be formulated and as it was brought to expression most precisely by the (Chalcedonian) formula: ‘Jesus: true God and true man’”²) and soteriological terms (“the conviction that God in Jesus has overcome all human subjection to sin and death”³). In either case, Verweyen’s understanding of Easter faith includes belief in Jesus’ resurrection from the dead, though it is not limited to that.


In 1991 he reaffirmed that "to declare the self-manifestation of the Risen One essential for grounding faith in the 'once for all' character of the revelation of Jesus Christ" would contradict the testimony of the New Testament. "Already with the completion of the life of Jesus, his disciples had been given adequate evidence for faith in the life of God." He emphasizes that this affirmation is not negated by the conclusion of historical-critical research that the de facto origin of the Easter faith is to be traced back to special "happenings" (W. Marxsen) that took place after the death of Jesus. "Often anxiety or 'heaviness of heart' at first restrict the power of an encounter which is in itself powerful enough to overturn one's existence from its foundation." It can take days or even years for such an encounter to produce its effects in an experience which strikes like a lightning flash. In their encounter with Jesus, the disciples were engaged in a mortal struggle with anxiety concerning themselves which blinded their eyes for what "life of God" means. "The occurrence in which that anxiety was conquered by the evidence that Jesus 'through his dying conquered our death', is . . . to be understood as the breakthrough of that eschatological truth, which the disciples had experienced in the encounter with the 'earthly Jesus' and yet had not explicitly recognized." With Schillebeeckx, Verweyen suggests that this Easter happening can be understood as a "conversion experience." In the Easter experiences no supplementary information was added to what Jesus' life and dying had revealed. "In those occurrences rather, the power of this surrender itself gained the victory which, out of anxiety before the personal consequences, they at first had attempted to repress."4

In other words the question concerning when or how faith in Jesus' resurrection de facto came into existence, does not affect the de jure question concerning the objective foundation of Easter faith. This remains the earthly life of Jesus, inclusive of his dying.5 Encounters with the Risen Lord were not this "decisive ground" of Easter faith, but only the "triggering occasion, where an already previously grounded, but repressed,

knowledge finally broke through.” Verweyen is concerned with the central fundamental-theological question concerning what (for the disciples of Jesus and for us today) is the decisive ground for faith in Jesus as the definitive self-communication of God to humanity.  

In 1988, Verweyen summed up what is distinctive in his position in two points: (1) the in principle fundamental-theological critique of what he calls the “Easter-ditch” paradigm; (2) “The attempt to place this ‘ditch’ in question through a somewhat unconventional recourse to the New Testament sources.” Accordingly, Verweyen establishes his thesis on both systematic and biblical foundations.

I. THE FUNDAMENTAL-THEOLOGICAL CRITIQUE OF THE “EASTER-DITCH” PARADIGM

A. THE “DOGMA OF THE EASTER-DITCH” — A PARADIGM CHANGE

The critical investigation concerning the “historical Jesus” that blossomed in the 18th century under the influence of the Enlightenment and Deism, “the philosophy of religion of the Enlightenment” (Ernst Troeltsch), and which dominated discussion right up to the beginning of the 20th century, resulted in the Christological paradigm which Verweyen calls the “dogma of the Easter-ditch.” The historico-critical inquiry concerning the earthly Jesus terminated in the man Jesus of Nazareth “freed from all dogmatic additions and even from the kerygmatic transformation already effected in the New Testament traditions.” From this “historical Jesus” as critical history was able to reconstruct him, the “Christ of faith” was separated by a deep ditch traversable “only by a leap made possible by the Easter experience alone — inaccessible to the historian.”

8. Ibid. 67.
Verweyen points out that in the traditional pre-critical Christological understanding a clear continuity was maintained between the pre-Easter and post-Easter Son of God. The human traits of the earthly Jesus were overshadowed by the revelation of his divine power and the resurrection was perceived “as the triumphal continuation of the miracles with which the Son of God had powerfully legitimated himself already in his earthly life.”

The Christological understanding that grew out of the critical investigation concerning the historical Jesus constituted a paradigm change. The new element in the critical Christological paradigm was the affirmation of a deep epistemological chasm between Good Friday and Easter. While the “historical Jesus” would be available in principle to the adherents of all world views, what is specifically Christian “would consist essentially in the faith in the Lord as he has revealed at Easter.” Consequently, in the rational justification of what is proper to the Christian faith, the question concerning what “happened at Easter” assumes dominant importance vis-a-vis what is historically verifiable concerning the earthly Jesus.

Within this general paradigm of the “Easter-ditch,” however, Verweyen enumerates a variety of theological conceptions:

1) “According to Rudolf Bultmann, our historical knowledge about Jesus comes to an end with the naked fact of the cross.” Talk of Jesus’ resurrection, which has meaning only as mythological expression of the existential significance of the cross, becomes possible in the power of the Spirit alone, who founds kerygma and church. In Bultmann’s perspective “the question of the appearances of the risen Jesus is, viewed historically, hopeless, and, considered theologically, irrelevant.”

2) For Wolfhart Pannenberg, on the contrary, the historical verifiability of the Easter appearances possesses decisive significance. “According to Pannenberg, in the context of his [Jesus’]
orientation to the imminent unveiling of the truth of all history, Jesus raised a claim to authority which would have been left hanging completely in the air, if the Easter appearances had not actually followed.” The appearances of the risen Jesus reveal that in Jesus’ resurrection the apocalyptic expectation of the resurrection of the dead at the end of the age has been prophetically fulfilled in Jesus and that Jesus’ claim was valid. Pannenberg affirms that the Easter faith is justified in relation to historic-critical reason by the fact that the appearances of the risen Jesus to the disciples (as well as the empty tomb) can be established as historical fact, at least with high probability.  

3) Verweyen observes that recently the necessity of Easter appearances as the decisive ground for Christian faith has again been emphasized, although for the most part with a different accent than that of Pannenberg. “Now the central problem is no longer the apocalyptic orientation of the message and activity of Jesus to a legitimation which could first become manifest with the in-breaking of the end of history.” Theologians such as Hans Kessler and Lorenz Oberlinner argue that Jesus’ condemnation by the Sanhedrin, the highest court of the land and official interpreter of the Law and will of God, and his public execution by means of the shameful death of the cross, which in the Jewish context meant that he had died under the curse of God, were well qualified to raise the question, even in the minds of his closest disciples, whether in fact Jesus’ death was not a divine judgement on him. As the book of Deuteronomy declares, “God’s curse rests on him who hangs on a tree” (Dt 21:23b; cf. Gal 3:13). In order to eliminate the contradiction which Jesus’ death on the cross raised to Jesus’ publicly made claim to authority — the argument continues — God had to initiate a new act of revelation. “This occurred precisely in the Easter encounters of


the risen Jesus with his disciples.”

4) However, beginning with W. Marxsen in the year 1964, attempts were made to overcome what VerweyEN calls the “Easter-ditch paradigm” and to ground the Easter faith in the life of Jesus, not in occurrences after the crucifixion.

(a) R. Pesch I: Perhaps the best-known proposal is that of the German Catholic exegete, Rudolf Pesch. Pesch called into question the historical reliability of the New Testament references to the discovery of the empty tomb and to appearances of the risen Jesus. He proposed that the foundation of Christian faith in Jesus’ resurrection lay in the life and ministry of Jesus, not in occurrences after his death. During his lifetime Jesus understood himself as the final messenger of Yahweh, the bringer of the Rule of God, and the disciples came to believe in him as the Messiah, the eschatological-prophetic Anointed One (Mk 8:27-30). The death of Jesus was not for them a faith-destroying scandal. According to Jewish tradition, the violent fate of the prophets in Jerusalem was not itself the refutation of their authority and mission. Jesus himself foresaw his violent death, understood it as the necessary fate of a prophet and at the latest during the Last Supper articulated its salvific significance. Moreover, the disciples were able to draw upon contemporary conceptions of the martyrdom and resurrection of eschatological-prophetic figures like Enoch and Elijah to interpret the fate of Jesus and to accomplish the new decision to conversion and faith, demanded in face of the crucified Jesus. Accordingly, they were in a position

16. VerweyEN, “Die Sache,” 69; Gottes letztes Wort, 444. VerweyEN notes that this position has also been proposed by the Catholic Adult Catechism: “The resurrection of Jesus, understood as deed of God’s power, removed before all the otherwise invincible stumbling block for all Jews, that the one killed on the cross was supposed to be the promised Messiah, the Christ of God” (Katholischer Erwachsenen catechismus. Das Glaubensbekenntnis der Kirche, hrsg. v. der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz, Kevelaer, 1985, p. 208) (Gottes letztes Wort, 444-45).


to express the permanent personal salvific significance of the crucified Jesus by confessing and proclaiming: He is risen. With that confession, "they affirmed the legitimacy of his mission, his justified end-time authority 'as the unique and normative messenger of Yahweh' (K. Berger): not Enoch, not Elijah, also not Moses, not John the Baptist — but Jesus is 'more than a prophet': He is the Son of Man, Messiah, Kyrios and Son of God." Consequently, the fundamental-theological examination of the credibility of this affirmation should concentrate not on appearances of the risen Jesus, but on Jesus' public life and death, where it will discover the adequate historical foundation for Christian faith in the risen Lord.\(^{19}\)

Pesch later explained that his concern in this "proposal for discussion" was to show "that the 'ugly wide ditch', which since Lessing had become the problem of theology and in our century became known as the 'Easter-ditch' between the earthly Jesus and the proclaimed Christ, is a construct of the modern mind."\(^{20}\)

(b) R. Pesch II: In the decade which followed his first proposal concerning the origin of faith in Jesus' resurrection (1973), Pesch's reconstruction was subjected to critical evaluation,\(^{21}\) and he himself continued his research concerning the historical Jesus and the resurrection traditions.\(^{22}\) This period culminated in two

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20. Pesch, "Zur Entstehung" II, 84.


works in which his original thesis was substantially modified.\textsuperscript{23}

In correction of his previous position, Pesch now holds that the appearances of the risen Jesus are sufficiently assured as historical events by critical investigation.\textsuperscript{24} He also distinguishes (with reference to Verweyen) between the \textit{de jure} evidence of Jesus' resurrection present before Easter and the \textit{de facto} evidence after Easter, though he uses this distinction differently than Verweyen does. He maintains that because the New Testament witness places both the suffering of the Son of Man and the resurrection under the "it is necessary" ("\textit{dei}") of the divine will and in the mouth of Jesus as prophecy, the question concerning the origin of Easter faith must be posed in a twofold manner:

(1) as a question concerning the necessary presupposition of the \textit{de jure} evidence knowable for faith in the historical material (i.e., the promise of the resurrection) and (2) as a question concerning the necessary presupposition of the \textit{de facto} evidence disclosed for faith in the historical material. "Therefore the history of Jesus and his disciples is to be interrogated for the historical connection between promise and fulfillment, prophecy and verification of prophecy."\textsuperscript{25}

Pesch's new reconstruction stands in continuity with the old insofar as the pre-Easter Jesus again plays an important role. Now, however, Pesch affirms that the pre-Easter Jesus interpreted his mission in terms of the Son of Man expectation, not in terms of the eschatological prophet as previously proposed. In Mark 12:35-37 Jesus articulated his own messianic self-understanding in the horizon of the Son of Man Messianism: "the Son superior to the Son of David is the Son of Man, who occupies the place at the right hand of God." In Pesch's judgement, it is probable that faced with death, Jesus spoke of the handing


\textsuperscript{24} Pesch, "Zur Entstehung" II, 87.

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid. 86-87.
over of the Son of Man into the hands of men (Mk 9:31a) and in his trial before the Sanhedrin warned his judge that they would see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of God and coming with the clouds of heaven (Mk 14:62).²⁶

But above all, Pesch emphasizes Jesus’ saying concerning confession and denial of him, reconstructable from Luke 12:8f. and parallels, whose authenticity enjoys the widest consensus in the present-day community of biblical scholars and which originally read: “Amen, I say to you; everyone who confesses me before men, him the Son of man will confess before the angels of God. But whoever denies me before men, him will the Son of Man deny before the angels of God.” Pesch affirms that here Jesus bears witness to himself as the one with whom the Son of Man identifies himself, that figure to whom God has committed the final judgement who is portrayed at the right hand of God on the throne of his glory in highest possible immediacy to God. “Jesus, who in a situation of persecution in performative, not descriptive speech, invites to the confession of himself as Son of Man, gives at the same time a promise for the eventuality of his death: as the Son of Man, he ‘must’ rise from the dead.” For the believer who sees in Jesus the definitive envoy of God, the saying concerning the confession (or denial) of Jesus before men (12:8 f.: Q) implies the necessity of the resurrection-action of God. For “if God himself by his promise guarantees his eschatological envoy, the Messiah and Son of Man, since he has sent him as Saviour and Judge, then God’s fidelity ‘must’ also guarantee the fulfillment of the promise given with the sending of Jesus.”²⁷

But Pesch now concedes that the crucifixion of Jesus brought a crisis of faith for the disciples. It is true that by his claim and promise and in a special way by his interpretation of his approaching death at the Last Supper as representative atoning death, Jesus himself had given his disciples the de jure evidence of his resurrection. But Jesus had been crucified, “condemned to death in the name of the Law and the Roman emperor, of religion and politics.” By this, communication had been broken

²⁶. Ibid. 94.
²⁷. Ibid. 95-96.
off with his disciples, "whose community of faith he no longer immediately supported by his living presence." In these circumstances, "the open question whether the promise of his resurrection given with Jesus' mission and knowable in faith was actually fulfilled... had to be answered by the disciples." Confronted with the crucifixion, they were thrown into crisis of faith, into a situation of confession or denial. "If the disciples held fast to Jesus' claim, then the de jure evidence of his resurrection had been mediated to them by Jesus himself. The Son of Man, who according to God's will had to suffer and be killed had to rise after three days." But how were they to know that God had truly justified and raised the crucified Jesus, brought his universal salvific mission to its goal and enthroned him as Judge of all? "How did God make his judgement 'visible' to the disciples, who now in a new conversion to the One sent became the apostles of the Risen One?" Pesch replies that the historically verifiable answer is: "The de facto evidence of the resurrection was imparted to the apostles in their visions, in which they saw Jesus as the Son of Man exalted to the right hand of God." 28

In these visions, Jesus' promise of his resurrection contained in the Son of Man sayings, was revealed as fulfilled. "After Good Friday, the Easter appearances are, therefore, the historical locus, the necessary presupposition of the Easter faith in Jesus' resurrection, in which the crucified Messiah can be identified as the exalted Son of Man by virtue of his resurrection." 29

But Pesch emphasizes that though the historical presupposition is a necessary condition of faith, it is not a sufficient condition. "Sufficient condition of faith is the grace of faith, the interplay of grace and freedom in the community of faith." 30 In the case of the resurrection, the sufficient condition for the knowledge of God's action on Jesus" is the 'new creation' of the faith-community of the Exalted One, as the 'body of Christ' — the document of the successful redemption in and through

28. Ibid. 96-97. These appearances, "in which the Risen One was seen in his heavenly glory were exclusive experiences of vocation, perceptible only in faith" (ibid. 87).
29. Ibid. 96-97.
30. Ibid. 85.
Jesus Christ, which it guarantees by its testimony.”

Pesch speaks in similar terms in *Zwischen Karfreitag und Ostern* (1983). After Good Friday the disciples proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of Man, whose death possessed redemptive value and who God had raised to his right hand and appointed judge of all the world. *De jure* Jesus’ identity as Messiah and the meaning of his death were already available before Easter in Jesus’ self-presentation during his ministry and in his interpretation of his approaching death as salvific at the last supper. If this were not true, any subsequent bestowal of such identity and meaning would inevitably remain unauthorized and arbitrary. “That Jesus was raised did not confer meaning on his death after the fact; but the inherent meaning of his death, of which Jesus had already spoken at the Last Supper but which had remained closed to unbelief, was revealed through the Risen One to those who had newly come to faith.”

Accordingly, as the New Testament testifies, occurrences subsequent to the crucifixion were *de facto* necessary to ground the disciples’ preaching, not because of any inadequacy on the part of the historical Jesus, but due to the crisis of the disciples’ own faith when confronted with the crucifixion. “As long as Jesus was with them, He himself could support the faith of his disciples in his word and mission.” He himself was the “ground” of their faith. But his crucifixion made them dependent on “the proof of God’s fidelity to his Messiah, the revelation of the Crucified One as the Risen One.”

Pesch affirms that this revelation was given in the appearances of the Risen One. “With historical judgements of sufficient certitude, one can proceed from the fact that the appearances of the Risen One came to the disciples in ecstatic visions.” In these visions “in which they beheld the crucified Jesus as the Son of Man enthroned at the right hand of God, it became conclusively clear to them that Jesus was the Messiah, that his mission had universal-eschatological significance and was to continue through them.” The Easter appearances were, for the

31. Ibid. 97.
32. Pesch, *Zwischen Karfreitag und Ostern*, 74-75; cf. 8, 12, 67, 68.
33. Ibid. 70; cf. 67-68.
disciples, "evidence-experiences of the highest quality and certainty. The resurrection of Jesus was proven to them." By conceding that appearances of the risen Christ played the decisive role in the origin of Easter faith, "Pesch has joined a widespread consensus among contemporary exegetes and systematic theologians."  

Hansjürgen Verweyten regrets that R. Pesch has retreated from his earlier attempt to overcome the "Easter-ditch" and from his original concentration on the historical Jesus by the substantial modifications he has made to his first thesis concerning the origin of Easter faith. In contrast to Pesch, Verweyten has continued to clarify, define more exactly and develop more in detail, his own contribution toward the overcoming of the "Easter-ditch," which he has independently advocated since 1977.  

B. THE FUNDAMENTAL-THEOLOGICAL CORE QUESTION: THREE THeses

Since "in the question concerning the foundation of Easter faith, exegetical and systematic questions are closely interlaced with one another," in order to avoid confusion it is necessary "to delimit the central fundamental-theological problematic from those historico-critical questions of detail, which are not immediately connected with it."  

34. Ibid. 73, 61. In the on-going discussion of Pesch's current position, (1) his explanation of the content of these appearances (the Son of Man), (2) his interpretation of the de jure evidence for Jesus' resurrection ostensibly present in the message and ministry of Jesus, (3) his more precise understanding of the appearances (as conversion?), and (4) the true "necessity" of the appearances in light of the substantial continuity postulated between the historical Jesus and the Easter faith, have been critically questioned. Cf. H. Giessen, "Zu Entstehung und Inhalt des Osterglaubens," Theologie der Gegenwart 27 (1984) 41-46; Kessler, Sucht den Lebenden, 203-8; Oberlinner, "Zwischen Kreuz und Parusie," 89-90; G. O'Collins, Jesus Today: Christology in an Australian Context (New York: Paulist, 1986) 40-42.


37. Cf. footnote 1.

Verweyen identifies the core question of fundamental theology as the question concerning the meaning and foundation of Easter faith for us today. He concedes that New Testament exegesis may possibly reach unanimous agreement concerning the form in which Easter faith was originally expressed — for example in the sentence: "God raised Jesus from the dead" — and concerning the meaning of this sentence in the horizon of apocalyptic expectations. But that would not settle the question "whether we today are able to associate with the word 'resurrection' ideas which have something like a key function in the horizon of our own expectations of meaning or, if not, whether that category which mediated meaning in that time at least allows itself to be translated into key concepts of today's faith and hope." 39

The same is true in the case of the historical question concerning the facts which lay at the origin of the Easter faith. He concedes that despite the difficulty of defining more exactly the Easter happenings affirmed by the New Testament, an exegetical consensus may possibly be attained that the disciples of Jesus and finally Paul arrived at the Easter confession through encounters with the Risen Lord. But that does not settle the question "whether such phenomena were the decisive ground for the Easter faith and not merely the triggering occasion where an already previously adequately grounded knowledge finally broke through." Further, that exegetical consensus would not yet decide the question concerning "what is able to serve us today as the decisive ground for faith in Jesus as the definitive self-communication of God to men." 40

Verweyen emphasizes that under the presupposition of the paradigm of the "Easter-ditch," this core question of fundamental theology is a priori in danger of being displaced. He illustrates this and seeks to illuminate the untenability of the Easter-ditch paradigm by means of three theses. The first two concern the meaning of the Easter faith; the third concerns the question of its foundation; more exactly, of its coverage by historical facts. 41

39. Ibid. 446; "Die Sache," 66.
40. Ibid.
41. Verweyen, Gottes letztes Wort, 446; "Die Sache," 70.
1. THE "EASTER-DITCH" IN THE LIGHT OF THE CRITIQUE OF RELIGION

Verweyen’s first thesis is: “If the act of revelation decisive for faith in God’s definitive self-communication first occurred after the death of Jesus, the category of the ‘resurrection’ can no longer be made intelligible today as key concept for an ultimate expectation of meaning.”

Verweyen argues that every victory over death that is revealed not in this death itself, but only after such dying, comes too late. If the love of God which transforms all things is not revealed in the death of the Son of God on the cross, what would really be gained by a manifestation of divine power and glory tacked on, as it were, to the death of Jesus “from above”? Dostoyevski has Ivan Karamazov protest that in face of the torture of an innocent man, every subsequently effected harmony comes too late. A subsequent resurrection and enthronement of the crucified Jesus would not restrain an Ivan Karamazov from giving back his “ticket of entry into the eternal harmony. For this is bought too dearly with the tears of the innocent.”

Verweyen points out that Albert Camus, who has most emphatically taken up the indictment of Ivan, clearly addresses the fundamental Christological question posed by it in L’homme révolté: “Only the sacrifice of an innocent God could justify the long and universal torture of the innocent. Only the suffering of God and that the most oppressive, could alleviate the agony of man. If from heaven to earth everything without exception is delivered up to pain, then a strange happiness is possible.”

But, according to Camus, now that the divinity of Christ is denied and pain has again become the lot of man, not God, “the deceived Christ is only one more innocent man, whom the representatives of the God of Abraham have executed in public spectacle.”

Verweyen insists that an answer to Camus’ radical question concerning the dignity of man in face of the suffering of the

42. Ibid.
46. Ibid.
innocent is only possible if God himself has entered into and taken on this suffering; if in the extremity of Jesus’ self-surrender on the cross, the love and power and glory of God is already revealed to faith. “If the Easter experience of power and glory were something other than pure unfolding of that which the death of Jesus manifested right up to his final cry, then our knowledge of God would ultimately be composed” again of two very different conceptions of God; one completely new arising from the foolishness of the cross, and another, the old image of a powerfully enthroned ruler, familiar from the history of religion, arising “from a quite different experience of power, which stamps the self-revelation of God on the cross as a provisional one.” Verweyen emphasizes that the decisive question is: Was the greatest proof of the “Spirit and power” (G. E. Lessing) already visible in the cross of Jesus or only in the appearances of the Risen Christ? “Does that which the Christian ultimately knows about power and glory become visible in the accomplishment of that love itself which is stronger than death, or is there need, over and beyond that, for a subsequent demonstration that such death has ‘arrived in God’?”


*Critique of Thesis One*

The weakness of Verweyen’s first thesis lies in its dissociation of what must be viewed as a unity: the death and resurrection of Christ. The revelation of “the love of God which transforms all things” is communicated neither in the death of Christ alone nor in the resurrection (appearance) of Christ alone. And the revelation that God himself has entered into and taken on the suffering of all the innocent is not revealed in the death of Christ alone but only in the death of Christ as illuminated by the resurrection appearances. In the formulation of H. Kessler: “In the resurrection of the crucified . . . it is revealed that God exercises his power and Lordship over suffering and death not from somewhere outside (or “from above”) but while immersing himself in suffering” . . . “as the power of love who gives life
and serves life.” 48 God’s action often occurs “hidden under its opposite; centrally in the lowliness of the earthly and in the weakness of the Crucified Jesus.” But this first “becomes evident from the resurrection of the crucified.” 49 There is here no “subsequently effected harmony.” The Easter experience is the illumination of that which the death of Jesus effected. “Everything decisive occurred in the total, powerless surrender of Jesus.” 50 But this becomes historically tangible for us only in the resurrection. 51 And now every Christian, and potentially an Ivan Karamazov and an Albert Camus, can read the love of God which transforms all things (even the suffering of the innocent) in the death of the Son of God on the cross.

Consequently, H. Kessler has protested that his book does not contain “two different images of God” or “two different kinds of theology” as Verweyen claims. 52 For Kessler emphasized that in the resurrection of the Crucified, “the categories of power and lordship experience a radical revaluation and definitive new interpretation.” 53 The power of God and of the exalted Crucified One “is the power of self-emptying and surrendering love, which . . . apparently weak — withdraws itself, . . . in exterior weakness comes from below precisely as love” and “in the powerlessness of the being-there-for-others . . . [gains] power and space in the world.” 54

In 1991, Verweyen conceded that an amalgam of two images of God is naturally not present in the intention of theologians such as Kessler who holds that the experience of Jesus’ failure on the cross was conquerable only through a subsequent revelatory act of God. But he replies that the two statements seem to him to be incompatible from the fundamental-theological point of view: on the one hand, that God’s intention and action

49. Ibid. 295.
50. Ibid.
54. Ibid. 352.
“are most deeply hidden” in the extreme sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, but on the other hand, that in the resurrection of the Crucified One God reveals himself as the one “who is present in the midst of suffering and cross”. . . . [and] it “becomes manifest that God exercises his power and lordship over suffering and death, not from somewhere outside, but in as much as he immerses himself in suffering.”

Verweyen, however, owes to the reader an explanation of the reason why he finds the two statements incompatible. This is all the more needed because Kessler has clearly explained what he means by these statements. “My conception is unequivocal: in Jesus’ life, dying and death God is immanent and present (and this even as hypostatically united with him).” He refers to Paul’s statement that “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself” (2 Cor 5:19). Kessler explains that precisely this fact that “God was in Christ” had become extremely questionable through the death of Jesus on the cross (as failure and as divine curse). “That God is in the crucified Jesus was hidden under the downright gruesome opposite and invisible for all eyes in the humiliation and destruction of Jesus.” Kessler insists that it is the resurrection of Jesus which first makes manifest for those awakened to faith, that God proves his divinity precisely in the passion . . . of this man. Easter is “the revelation of that which already occurred in the life and dying of Jesus himself and the revelation of who Jesus himself is.”

Do Verweyen’s further arguments refute this position of

55. Verweyen, Gottes letztes Wort, 448, quoting Kessler, Sucht den Lebenden, 290, 308.
57. Kessler explains that what is meant is: as failure to all appearances, as divine curse for a determined Jewish view at that time. “The execution of Jesus meant the placing in question of his cause and person not only for certain people but in general (Book, 107 f.: ‘in principle’)” (“Irdischer Jesus,” 222, n. 15).
58. Kessler emphasizes that he resolutely maintains this against Verweyen who thinks that God’s victory becomes “manifest in the weakness of the self-emptying God itself.” He claims that by that, without thematizing it, Verweyen already presupposes the Easter faith; therefore, from that Easter faith already knows that he has to do with God, with the self-emptying God in the weakness of the cross. “Then, naturally, the victory of this God can be manifest also, in the weakness” (“Irdischer Jesus,” 222-23, n. 16).
59. Kessler, Sucht den Lebenden, 320.
60. Ibid. 318.
Kessler and provide the explanation Verweyten owes to his reader?

2. INCARNATION OR INSPIRATION OF THE ESCHATOLOGICAL WORD
OF GOD?

Verweyten’s second thesis is: “If the act of revelation decisive for faith in God’s definitive self-communication first occurred after the death of Jesus, the faith in the incarnation of the divine Word is undermined.” ⁶¹ For then what is most important in the definitive revelation of God in Christ “would not have occurred in the flesh of Jesus, i.e., in his earthly existence — the history of a man which stretches between conception and death — but only after the conclusion of this history, in the Spirit.” ⁶²

Verweyten points out that the considerations proposed in connection with the modern critique of religion are already suggested from the very center of the Christology of the early Church. In opposition to Gnosticism, which taught that the Christ did not possess a true body but only a sham-body, the early Church tenaciously defended the dogma of the incarnation: “God was able to reveal his entire nature ‘in the flesh’, i.e., in that powerless span of human life between conception and death, which the Christ had in common with all of us. And Verweyten warns that if today the decisive ground for faith in the finality of the self-communication of God in Jesus had to be sought in events after the death of Jesus, then the decisive act of revelation would again be shifted from the incarnation in the direction of inspiration. He contends that this statement holds true for all the above-mentioned proponents of the “Easter-ditch paradigm,” “whether one (with Bultmann) traces the Easter evidence to a pure act of the Spirit grounding the kerygma or (with Pannenber and Kessler) to the manifestation of a transfigured Spirit-body.” In effect, their position contradicts the content of Christian faith in Jesus as the definitive revealer of God.⁶³

⁶¹ Verweyten, Gottes letztes Wort, 448; “Die Sache,” 71.
Verweyen observes that this fundamental question was never thought through in the history of theology with the precision it deserves. And he suggests that this deficiency is connected with the specific nature of the Johannine presentation of Jesus. On the one hand, "according to the fourth evangelist the crucifixion is the hour of glorification and in this hour 'everything is accomplished'." On the other hand, despite the clear anti-docetism to which the fourth Gospel bears witness, "his Jesus walking in the flesh possesses features pointing in the direction of Docetism." And Verweyen observes that the central statement of Chalcedon that Jesus is of the "same nature with us" scarcely discloses itself immediately in the reading of Johannine text. "In such a horizon of presentation, the passage from the 'earthly Jesus' to the Christ manifesting himself in Easter glory is a fluid one." He concludes that the Christologically decisive question concerning the seriousness of the incarnation as God’s decisive act of revelation could for this reason be repressed again and again in a quasi-monophysitic manner in the history of theology. More exactly, until Chalcedon and beyond, incarnation was essentially reflected upon in an onto-theological manner — under the guiding question concerning the existence (Seinsbestand) of two natures in Jesus. In this situation, "the fundamental-theological question, in what act of history God had made himself definitively knowable to men remained unanswered in the background." 64

Critique of Thesis Two

The presupposition of Verweyen’s second thesis is that the doctrine of the incarnation refers simply to something which began with Jesus’ conception and terminated with his death; that it refers only to his "earthly existence — the history of man which stretches between conception and death." 65 He concludes that "the act of revelation decisive for faith in God’s definitive self-communication" must have occurred in the "flesh" of Jesus, "i.e., in that impotent span of human life between conception

and death which Christ has in common with us all." 66

But it is a mistake to separate the incarnation from the resurrection in this way. Nicholas Lash observes that the doctrine of the incarnation does not refer to something which occurred at Jesus' conception (or at his birth, or baptism, or death) or between his conception and death exclusively. That event, that fact, that state of affairs, to which we refer when we say, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us," was the event of Jesus from his conception and birth to his final risen state.

The Acts of the Apostles emphasizes the continuity between Jesus' earthly life and death and his resurrection. "Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested by God with deeds of power, wonders and signs ... this man ... you crucified and killed ... But ... this Jesus God raised up" (Acts 2:22-23, 32). "In the context of Christian belief, 'resurrection' is part of what 'incarnation' means." 67 Adapting Karl Barth's imagery, Lash affirms that the doctrine of the incarnation tells the story of Jesus as a tale of "the way of the Son of God into the far country" 68 and the doctrine of the resurrection tells the story of Jesus as a tale of "the homecoming of the Son of Man." 69 These two stories are "the two ways in which we truly narrate one single history, one single sequence of events, the history of Jesus." 70

That resurrection is part of what incarnation means is implied in what Karl Rahner affirms concerning "the absolute climax of revelation, when God's self-communication reaches its unsurpassable high point through the hypostatic union and in the incarnation of God in the created spiritual reality of Jesus." This climax of revelation occurs "in the incarnation of the Logos," where "what is expressed and communicated is God himself and ... the mode of expression [is] the human reality of Christ in his life and in his final state." 71

The risen Christ is the incarnate Logos in his final state. The resurrection appearances are the revelation of the incarnate

70. Lash, "Easter Meaning," 12.
Logos in his final state and definitively identify him. Consequently the thesis that the resurrection appearances as the culmination of God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ are decisive for Easter faith does not undermine faith in the incarnation of the divine Word.

It is true, as Verveyen points out, that in opposition to Gnosticism the early Church tenaciously maintained the dogma of the incarnation. It is true also that “in patristic writings the primary reference of revelation was always to Christ, especially under the influence of Mt 11:27” and that “Mt 11:27 was always linked to the thought of incarnation.” 72 But this does not mean that the early Church limited Christ’s revelation to “that powerless span of human life between conception and death which Christ had in common with all of us.” 73

Since they had to contend with the gnostic denial of the true “flesh” of Christ, the Church fathers underscored the significance of the incarnation for the revelation of God through the “flesh” of Jesus in whom the Father became visible. “The early Church’s dogmatics, which took shape in the conflict with the Gnostics, precisely out of an anti-Gnostic perspective was much more interested in the mystery of the incarnation than in the resurrection.” 74 R. Staats observes that the Easter event was not a proper theme of early Church dogmatics. Yet not seldom it formed an important argument in the Christological discussion, above all in support of the dogma of the incarnation. 75

Barnabas 5:6-7 is an example where the incarnation event embraced the resurrection: “The Lord had to appear in the flesh in order to destroy the power of death and to prove the resurrection of the dead.” 76 Here the implication is that the resurrection event pertains to revelation by revealing the resurrection of the dead.

73. Verveyen, Gottes letztes Wort, 448.
75. Ibid. 520.
76. Ibid. 518.
Irenaeus who so strongly emphasized that by the incarnation the Word became visible to the eyes of flesh, that the incarnate Son manifests the Father by the mere fact of his presence (A. H. 4, 6, 6) and that his passion and death on the cross condense in the highest possible degree of visibility God’s love for mankind (A. H. 4, 37, 7; cf. also 3, 12, 13; 3, 18, 4-5), also teaches that his resurrection shows forth the power of God, and that at the same time is the source, guarantee and exemplar of our future victory (A. H. 5, 7, 1-2). Here again it is implied that the resurrection is a revelatory event and belongs to the revelation of Jesus Christ.

The connection of incarnation and resurrection was also emphasized by John Chrysostom: In the life of the Church, Easter is “an enduring celebration of the universal mystery of incarnation.”

In these circumstances, it is not legitimate to appeal to the early Church in support of the restriction of the act in which God “made himself definitely knowable to men” to the flesh of Jesus, i.e., to “that powerless span of human life between conception and death which the Christ had in common with all of us.” The context in which the fathers linked revelation and incarnation did not possess this restricting implication.

The insistence on the necessity of revelatory encounters with the risen Jesus after Good Friday for the adequate grounding of Easter faith neither contradicts the content of Christian faith in Jesus as the definitive revelation of God nor does it undermine faith in the incarnation of the divine Word. The definitive revelation of God which is the adequate basis of the origin of Easter faith was given neither in the life and death of Jesus alone nor in the resurrection appearances of Jesus alone but in the unity of both. “God has also revealed himself already in the earthly activity of Jesus; the resurrection of Jesus first gains its meaning from the earthly appearance of Jesus, but also immerses the latter in the full light of revelation.”

Kessler correctly explains that the pre-Easter (earthly and crucified) Jesus is for the Easter-faith, without doubt, necessary presupposition and basis but (especially because of his death) not adequate ground. "The life work of Jesus is, because of this, not less important. A resurrection of Jesus isolated from it can also not be the ultimate ground of faith. Rather, adequate ground of faith becomes the earthly and crucified Jesus as the one risen at Easter and newly present in the Spirit." 80 Kessler does not mean that the earthly life's work of Jesus and the primitive Easter experience added together form a "two fold source of the knowledge of faith." Rather, "as total process with continuity and discontinuity, [they] form a differentiated grounding context." 81 "Therefore, the whole Jesus Christ is the permanent constitutive ground of (Easter) faith." 82

Verwegen complained that the fundamental-theological question: in what act of history had God made himself definitively knowable to men, had received insufficient attention in present-day discussion. "On the one hand, the death of Jesus on the cross is understood as act of perfected revelation of God but on the other hand, the resurrection is understood as the highest sign of revelation." 83 As an example he quotes Heinrich Fries:

The death of Jesus on the cross is not the refutation of his mission and his claim, but its completion . . . A higher form and manner of revelation is not conceivable. Therefore it is unique and at the same time not surpassable . . . In the resurrection of Jesus from the dead God has legitimated and made credible the way of Jesus. It is therefore the sign and criterion absolutely, in which the deeds of Jesus converge and from which they receive their meaning and function. 84

But there is no contradiction or confusion here. God's definitive

82. Kessler, Sucht den Lebenden, 243.
83. Verwegen, Gottes letztes Wort, 449.
self-revelation occurred, not in one act of history, but in the one history of Jesus Christ from birth to resurrection appearances as a unity. Here cross and resurrection do not form "antitheses, not even two different foci, but . . . one and the same 'Mysterium paschale', . . . the death of . . . the Son of God, and therefore . . . the resurrection of the Crucified." But as Hans Urs von Balthasar points out, "The evangelists testify unanimously that the disciples first understood the meaning of the earlier life (and death) of Jesus, yes, of the entire Scripture from the Easter event."

3. TWO CLASSES OF RECIPIENTS OF REVELATION?

Verweyen's third thesis is: "If appearances of the Risen One after Good Friday form the decisive foundation for 'Easter faith', then the problem of 'disciples of first and second hand' raised by Lessing remains insoluble."

Verweyen explains that if originally Easter appearances functioned as the indispensable possibility of access to the "once-for-all" of Jesus, then this access would have been available to the disciples of first hand through their own perception. On the contrary, we disciples of second hand "would only have mere reports about that asserted foundational evidence, reports which — as everything historically documented — in the best circumstances lead only to probable certitude." Verweyen concludes that evidence with the character of mere probability cannot provide the basis of legitimation for an existential decision with unconditioned character.

However, the case would be different, claims Verweyen, if the

87. Ibid. 256.
adequate ground of the Easter faith was to be found not first in occurrences after Good Friday but already in the 'demise' of Jesus himself (as short formula for his entire "pro-existent" life). "Then to the foundational evidence of the disciples — which was given in the confrontation with this 'demise' — would correspond on our side, likewise, the experience of a demise: the confrontation with the testimony of those, who in their life and dying, make present the death-devouring death of Jesus." In this way, explains Verweyen, the qualitative difference between disciples of first and second hand disappears because the way into faith is equally broad for all. "All disciples of Jesus — placed before the critical case (das Ernstfall) — must decide whether their anxiety allows itself to be disarmed by such surrender of life or whether it needs additional signs."\(^{90}\)

Verweyen explains that this approach to the Easter evidence distinguishes itself from the 'contemporaneity' approach advocated by Kierkegaard and the kerygma theology by the fact that it truly implies a justification before historical reason. Here prospective believers are not simply placed before a paradox and challenged to the leap of faith. Verweyen contends that the mere appeal to the subjective or intersubjective experience of the Spirit for the founding of Easter faith is, in fact, equivalent to a positivism of faith. On the other hand, he considers the attempt to justify faith before critical reason by means of a historical investigation, which understands itself to be neutral and at best attains a probable certitude, to be a regress behind Kierkegaard and Lessing.\(^{91}\)

Verweyen points out that the approach he proposes basically takes up a familiar argument which runs through the whole history of Christian justification of faith: "In the readiness of the witnesses of Jesus to surrender their lives, the deprivation of death of its power by Jesus becomes transparent. This 'proof of power' is the most effective of all miracles."\(^{92}\) However, he

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92. Verweyen, *Gottes letztes Wort*, 451: "Cf. for instance, Origen, *Contra Celsum*, II, 56-57; but also Thomas Aquinas, *Contra Gentiles* 1, 6 in contrast with *Summa Theologica* I, q. 105, a. 8; III, q. 44, a. 2."
finds that in the tradition the question is not asked critically enough what is the decisive locus of divine self-manifestation, which here and now comes to expression in the life-surrender of the witnesses. "Do supernatural deeds of power effected by Jesus, the changes in the heavens at his death, the appearances of the Risen One, represent this decisive locus — miraculous occurrences about which one can properly only report because they pertain to theoretical-observing reason, — or is it simply the 'flesh' of Jesus, i.e., the history of freedom of the earthly Jesus up to and including his death glorifying God, which permanently proves itself as depriving death of its power — and which must be attested, because only perceptible to moral-practical reason?"  

Critique of Thesis Three

Verweyen's third thesis, may simply be denied. If appearances of the risen Jesus after Good Friday form the decisive foundation for Easter faith, the problem of disciples of first and second hand raised by Lessing does not remain insoluble.

Hans Kessler, in agreement with most Catholic theologians, concedes that evidence of Easter faith for us today cannot be grounded alone on the past extraordinary experience of the first disciples which are no longer accessible to us and not repeatable for us. "In this sense the Easter appearances can not in fact be the permanent and adequate objective ground (Sach-grund) of the (Easter) faith." He maintains that the Easter appearances (in their close linkage with the pre-Easter data of the life of Jesus, etc.) were, at the time, the unique historical origin and original basis of knowledge of the Easter faith. "But they are in no way the unconditional foundation of the Easter faith, neither in the sense of the permanent (not even of the initial, original) objective basis, nor in the sense of the later, permanent (but, to be sure, of the original) basis of knowledge."  

A distinction must be made between the unique historical origin of the Easter faith in the Easter experiences and the

94. Kessler, Sucht den Lebenden, 238.
unconditioned ground of the Easter faith witnessing to itself historically-concretely in this historical origin. This unconditioned ground which gives faith its absolute certitude is the revealing triune God, “the God definitively united with the crucified and exalted Jesus in the Spirit . . . or the risen Jesus definitively united with God in the Spirit (the Christus praesens)” revealing himself. For Easter faith is founded on the event of divine revelation itself in which God communicates himself.

For the first disciples this revelation event was the encounter with the risen Jesus in the resurrection appearances. Here the objective, “unconditioned ground of Easter faith (the triune God) witnessed to himself in the historical origin of the Easter faith (the ‘appearances’ of the one raised by God) completely and definitively for the first time; but he witnessed to himself here not once-for-all without analogy.”

For the subsequent disciples (the disciples “of second hand”) this (dependent) revelation event is the encounter with the risen Jesus present through the Spirit in the Church. Here the objective unconditioned ground of Easter faith (the triune God) witnesses to himself in the apostolic Easter testimony, in the other signs of his presence in the Church and in the act of faith which he creates and which responds to him.

Kessler protests that the difference between first Easter experience and later conversion and faith-experience, between original witnesses and later disciples “of second hand” (Soren Kierkegaard) should be neither minimized nor exaggerated. “The Easter experience of the first witnesses is unique and incommensurable, first because they had known the earthly Jesus and therefore could identify him as the Risen One and secondly, because their Easter experience represents the exceptional and historically unique breakthrough experience of the beginning, which can not be repeated in this way later.”

95. Ibid. 245.
97. Kessler, Sucht den Lebenden, 238.
Kessler points out that in general it can be shown that the beginning (especially of the qualitatively new) is not simply the first moment of a sequence of further comparable moments, but — as the measure which itself cannot be overtaken — contains all that follows in itself and makes it possible. “All later (Easter) faith of the Church is fundamentally referred to the testimony of the original apostolic bearers and witnesses of the revelation (to the apostolic foundation) and is conditioned and meditated through its tradition. But the beginning (the original Easter experience), on the contrary, is not mediated through such tradition.”

99

We later disciples of second hand, however, are not left orphans, obliged to believe blindly on the authority of others. If we are asked to make the apostolic witness our own, it is because we are able to have our own experience of the revelatory action of the risen Christ, analogous to that of the first witnesses. “For the later disciples of second hand, there is . . . a (though mediated) immediacy of personal encounter with the risen Lord, and a corresponding existential knowledge of the risen Lord, so that their faith of authority and its certitude is not a merely derived certitude, but one grounded in their existential experience.” This is the answer to be found in New Testament appearance narratives, such as the Emmaus narrative (Lk 24:13-35), which respond to the question how those who were not original witnesses of the “appearances” could come to faith in the Risen One under the influence of the already existing community. At the eucharistic meal in the breaking of the bread, “their eyes were opened and they knew him” (Lk 24:31) in the full biblical sense of existential knowing in love and trust. At the eucharistic meal also, the place of the reading and interpretation of Scripture (Lk 24:26, 45 f.), with hearts burning within them, they also first fully comprehended the Scriptures (Lk 24:32).

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In the living community as the Body of Christ, the disciples of second hand made their own existential experience of the living presence of the risen Jesus in his Spirit, an experience

dissimilar yet analogous to that of the original disciples. This is the "proof of the Spirit and of power" which Lessing correctly perceived was alone adequate for the certain knowledge of the resurrection but which he mistakenly thought "has now entirely lapsed" and is no longer present today. 101 We later disciples of second hand "are not simply and absolutely outside of the experience of the apostolic witnesses." 102 Kessler explains that we later ones can assent to the original apostolic witness concerning the resurrection of Jesus (and concerning an original experience of the Risen One) "from our own experience of the living presence and efficacy of the risen Lord and in fact from our own (and not only derived) right and ground." 103 This dependent revelatory encounter with the risen Christ present through his Spirit in the Church is what produces the absolute certitude of faith which justifies the unconditioned commitment of the believer. This event of revelation and of self-communication of God is attained and affirmed as ground of faith in the act of free reception and personal acknowledgement, i.e., in the act of faith itself. This divine self-communication provides the eyes to perceive the summons of the revealing God and the capacity to freely respond in faith. This means that "the assent of faith, in which the revelation is accepted in freedom and affirmed with certitude, is essentially a work of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 2:10-16)." 104

Does this leave faith open to the objection of subjectivism and reduce it to a blind or arbitrary decision of the believing subject? Does it result in a "hidden fideism" which appeals to the action of the Holy Spirit and the interior light of grace to fill the gap left by a deficient knowledge of credibility based on human reason that can only attain probability? 105

On the contrary, Christian faith is based upon objective evidence ascertainable with certitude by human reason. Christian revelation is accompanied by a constellation of signs of cred-

103. Kessler, Sucht den Lebenden, 262.
104. Kunz, "Glaubwürdigkeitserkenntnis," 442.
105. Verweyen, Gottes letztes Wort, 186-87.
ibility, footprints of God in the sands of history, which testify to revelation's divine origin and render it objectively credible. Human reason is at work discerning the signs "not only in the approach to faith but in the very act of conversion and, indeed, in all mental activity of the believer."  

In the sublimity and coherence of the Christian message and its correspondence to human needs and aspirations, in the religious testimony of the New Testament concerning the person, mission, message, service, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the definitive revelation of God, in the witness of the saints as symbols of the new life communicated by the risen Christ, in the experience of the living presence and action of the risen Lord in the community of believers as confirmation of the Easter testimony, in these signs and many others (which include that proposed by Verweyen: "the testimony of those, who in their life and dying, make present the death-devouring death of Jesus"), reason discerns the force of the multiple convergent clues and integrates countless particulars, many of which are known only in a tacit, subsidiary or even subliminal way, into a unified whole unambiguously pointing to the truth of Christian revelation.

Here it is helpful to recall John Henry Newman's distinction between formal and informal (including "spontaneous") inference. "Formal inference operates by a set of carefully articulated rules; informal inference by a kind of spontaneous or natural logic better adapted to many of the real situations of life, in which the evidences are too complex to be methodically analyzed."  

In the real situation of his search for the Truth, the religious inquirer's discernment of the signs of revelation takes place by means of an informal type of inference from the data of experience, interpreted with the help of antecedent presuppositions and expectations aroused through the supernatural workings of grace.

In the case of the signs of revelation, we are dealing with patterns of intelligibility which point to a divinely given meaning. "There is no way of strictly proving that the meaning is really

there. Either one recognizes it or one does not. As we contemplate the scene (the data of experience) there seem to be moments when the pieces fall into a pattern.” 108 We discern the divinely given meaning. Newman attributes such a discovery to a faculty he calls the illative sense, a spontaneous power of inference, not dependent on formal rules. “It is a personal power to discern and assess the force of multiple convergent signs that could not be turned into logical premisses.” 109 It is the perfection in man of the power of judgement.

However, we have no right to assume that this discernment and integration is made by the light of reason alone. Avery Dulles contends that it is far more probable that reason, whenever it seriously engages itself with religious questions, is motivated by a God-given attraction to the salvation which is God’s gift to us in Jesus Christ. “That motivation affects the way in which questions are posed and in which evidence is assessed.” Grace arouses restlessness of heart and dissatisfaction with one’s present condition; it stimulates preconceptual anticipations and inarticulate longings; it incites a “passionate search” and “reaching out in darkness toward the ‘unknown God’.” 110

For the miracle of the integration of the countless, tacitly known particulars into a unified whole which terminates in the judgement of credibility, these inclinations and inarticulate longings of the religious inquirer are of the utmost importance. They are the effects of God’s grace calling to communion with himself. They propel the person affected on a passionate search for the suspected but still hidden goal, the “unknown God,” waiting to be found. Keeping his attention focused in the direction indicated by his inarticulate spiritual longings, the religious inquirer “dwells on the images and symbols proposed by various ideologies and religions” and by Christianity in particular, “assessing their power to satisfy the heuristic tension of the spirit.” He will experience that some of them “ring a bell,” i.e., strikingly


110. Ibid. 263.
correspond to his inarticulate anticipations. Michael Polanyi explains that "the gradient of deepening coherence tells us where to start, and which way to turn, and eventually brings us to the point where we may stop and claim a discovery." When the longed for answer arrives, "it manifests itself as something which had been at hand all the time, waiting only to be found. And thus the convert can exclaim in the language of St. Augustine, 'Late it was that I loved you, beauty so ancient and so new, late have I loved you'."

One of the signs, mentioned previously as attesting the credibility of the revelation in Christ, is the religious testimony of the New Testament concerning the resurrection of Jesus. In Apologetics and the Biblical Christ, Avery Dulles has shown how this sign can be justified before historical reason. Based on philosophers like Gabriel Marcel and historians like Henri Marrou, he makes use of a historical method which proceeds in a more existential and less positivistic manner than that of the historicocritical school of von Ranke and Bernheim, Langlois and Seignobos. He does not argue from Scripture as an objective-historical source, but analyzes the New Testament as a testimony to the faith of the primitive Church to show "concurrently the credibility of the essential facts and of their Christian interpretation." He contends that such a procedure is more convincing for the sincere religious inquirer, actively seeking communion with God, than the uncovering of naked objective-historical facts by means of scientific-historical techniques according to the postulates of the historicocritical school.

In a first step Dulles shows that in the eyes of the sincere religious inquirer the resurrection possesses a certain *prima facie* plausibility antecedent to any critique of the historical testimonies. Viewed in the total framework of the biblical story, the message of Christ's resurrection will not strike the religious inquirer as a merely bizarre interruption of the order of the

114. Ibid. 45.
universe. It fits harmoniously into the pattern of God’s action on behalf of his chosen ones, whom he redeems from suffering and crowns with glory. “The total glorification of Christ, body and soul together, provides a fitting culmination to the religious history of ancient Israel.” Further, in the context of Pentecost, it forms “the foundation-stone of a new world-wide economy.” By pouring forth his Spirit, “the risen Christ inaugurates the final age of history” and sets in motion the transformation of all things into the new creation of God. “The resurrection, then, appears as the central event by which God offers hope of redemption from all the ravages of sin . . . God becomes in Christ the author and finisher of salvation.”

When viewed in the perspective of salvation history, the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth is “a supremely meaningful event. It exhibits the loving kindness of the God of Israel. Since it is revelatory and salvific, it may be judged fitting and possible.”

In the light of this religious meaning, the religious inquirer will ask, “Why after all, should God not do an utterly singular thing here at this unique juncture of history, when the Old Israel reaches its religious consummation and the new Israel is coming to birth?” What God certainly would not do for Queen Elizabeth or Pontius Pilate or Barabbas, might he not do for the prophetic, religious teacher who claimed to be the eschatological mediator of salvation and agent of the Kingdom of God?

In a second step Dulles contends that this reasonable anticipation of the truth of the resurrection solidifies into genuine credibility when we study the qualities of the apostolic testimony. He explains that the concrete logic by which the religious inquirer arrives at the judgement of credibility can be outlined in terms of various indices or criteria of genuine revelation, which are magnificently verified in the New Testament testimony of the primitive Church.

1) Unanimity. This testimony reflects the unanimous faith of

115. Ibid. 56-57.
116. Ibid. 57.
118. Dulles, Apologetics and the Biblical Christ, 58, 37.
the infant Church. This may be illustrated by Paul’s sweeping affirmation referring to the traditional kerygma in 1 Cor 15:3-5: “Whether, then, it was I or they [the other apostles], so we proclaim and so you have come to believe” (1 Cor 15:11).

2) Certitude. They testify with the strongest conviction to Jesus as living and therefore risen from the dead. The resurrection faith is never expressed in the language of doubt but is proclaimed as something manifested to them with blinding clarity.119

3) Complete Novelty. This absolute firmness of the Easter witness is all the more impressive because the idea of the final resurrection of one person alone was utterly novel. “The event is one, which, from all we can gather, contradicted the previous expectations of the apostles and their contemporaries. An isolated individual resurrection before the final consummation of the universe was something that would never have entered their minds.”120

4) Transformation of the Witnesses. Finally the apostles were completely transformed by their experience of the risen Christ. The revelatory encounter radically changed the lives of the witnesses and made them new men. “It made them slaves of the Gospel, urgently compelling them to preach the glad tidings with power to the whole world.” Saul, the zealous persecutor, was transformed into the indefatigable missionary to the gentiles; Peter, the faithless failure, was transformed into the official witness. In both cases, their unshakable conviction led them eventually to a martyr’s death. “The Jews protested that this doctrine was blasphemy; the Greeks that it was folly. But neither threats nor ridicule could reduce the apostles to silence.” This surprising transformation of the disciples raises the question concerning the source of their firm conviction and the persuasive power of their testimony. “One explanation is that given by the apostles themselves,” namely, that in his appearances Jesus himself revealed to them his resurrection and communicated to them their mission to proclaim the good news. “This explanation, if

we accept it, fully accounts for the faith and proclamation of the primitive Church. Every other hypothesis labors under serious difficulties.” 121

A. Dulles concludes that to experience the convincing power of the ancient testimonies to the resurrection, we should take our stand on the ground indicated by the nature of the New Testament itself. As confessional documents and religious testimonies, the New Testament writings are addressed to believers or sincere inquirers. Men and women “earnestly seeking communion with God can find in the Bible a solid warrant for belief. The religious meaning of the event itself, together with the extraordinary qualities of the apostolic proclamation, make it fully credible that Jesus did manifest to his chosen friends his new and glorious existence.” 122

Contrary to Verweyen’s third thesis, the problem of disciples of first and second hand raised by Lessing does not remain insoluble, if appearances of the risen Jesus after Good Friday form the decisive foundation for Easter faith. Both disciples of first and second hand have the “proof of the Spirit and of the power” through personal encounter with the risen Lord, though in ways that are not identical but analogous. Further, this conclusion that the certitude of faith of later disciples is essentially the result of revelatory encounter with the risen Christ present in the Church through his Spirit, does not result in a “hidden fideism.” On the basis of the signs which testify to revelation’s divine origin, believers and religious inquirers can discern with certitude that the Christian message, including the witness to the resurrection, is credible and that the decision of faith is reasonable.

121. Dulles, Apologetics and the Biblical Christ, 58.
122. Ibid. 59.

(Part II, an exposition and critique of the biblical foundation of Verweyen’s position, will appear in the next issue.)