

Response to the Essay of A. Andrew Das

I thank the organizers of the Emmaus Conference for this invitation to respond to Dr. Andrew Das. His essay attests to his widely recognized academic accomplishments. This is not the first time I have addressed the topic of the resurrection in this kind of a setting. An assignment to the Bethany Reformation Lectures about thirty years ago first opened to me Luther's thought on the resurrection, prayer and *Anfechtungen*, a word defying exact translation, but one that resonates with Dr. Das's description of the Paul's self, ego or "I" that belongs to Christ but still is not fully released from sin. Lectures here two years ago on the gospel resurrection accounts serve now as a prelude to Dr. Das's lectures on how the resurrection was understood in the Book of Revelation, John 5 and especially Paul's epistles. Central to Paul's presentation of the resurrection was how it was understood and then misunderstood by Christians in the Greco-Roman world where people were obsessed with overcoming their passions. This dualism between human passions and ideal morality paralleled and provided a backdrop to a type of dualism in which Christians who had been resurrected into a new creation by baptism still struggled with sin and death. Lutherans preserves Paul's sense that a Christian cannot entirely escape the grip of sin. The Reformed, Arminians (Methodists) and Catholic theologies see things differently. A consciousness of the spiritual growth assures believers of their salvation. As a word of caution to Lutherans, Dr. Das notes that Christians do not have two personalities or centers of consciousness, one a saint and the other a sinner, a view falsely derived from Luther's oft quoted *simul iustus et peccator*. The true self is the believer who has been resurrected into a new life in Christ but at the same time is not completely rescued from sin and death. My task two years ago was considering what how each gospel and 1 Corinthians 15 handled the events "on the third day." Dr. Das task is showing how Paul dealt with how early Christians appropriated Christ's resurrection in their lives. My essay had to do with what happened, the historical aspect. His is what is happening, the existential, aspect, but these are not exclusive.

Between Jesus' resurrection (ca. 35-37 A.D.) and Paul's martyrdom (mid 60s), the church faced several problems surrounding the resurrection. Matthew addresses the first question about whether Jesus had been really raised from the dead or whether his disciples had stolen his body, as the Jews claimed (Mt 27:62-65). Another alternative was that the disciples had mistaken his body for a ghost (Lk 24:37). The Corinthians were inconsistent in accepting Jesus' resurrection but denying the general resurrection. As any pastor knows faith is never perfectly consistent with itself. Another problem for Paul, that Dr. Das addresses, is how Gentile Christians were coming to grips with the meaning of Jesus' resurrection in their lives. Paul's concept of resurrection had two foci. It was dependent on Jesus' resurrection and anticipated a general resurrection, but between these past and future resurrections, a resurrection from sin and death was already taking place by faith. This internal resurrection happening in faith and the bodily resurrection are parts of one reality with faith as the most important. While for the sake of clarity and convenience, we speak of two resurrections, one that happens now by faith and another that happens at the end time, they are aspects of one resurrection, two sides of one coin. Christians experience resurrection in baptism and its completion on the last day.

Paul's concept that death and resurrection is picked by Luther in his *Small Catechism* explanation of baptism that each day the Old Adam dies and a new man comes forth.¹ For Paul what had happened to Jesus by being put to death and being raised from the dead happens to believers metaphorically by having their sinful natures put to death and their being raised to a new life in Christ. What had happened at Golgatha and at the tomb happened in baptism for the Colossians and Ephesians, but this dying and rising in faith will be completed with a future

¹ Jonathan D. Trigg, *Baptism in the Theology of Martin Luther* (Boston and Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, Inc., 1994 , 2001) 92-99. Rather than seeing this as linear progress in which the Christian experiences substantive improvement, the death and resurrection that happens in baptism by faith every day but is not completed until the resurrection of the dead. Luther attaches this daily resurrection with his concept of vocation in that the Christian lives this new life in the work God has assigned him in life.

bodily death and resurrection. So overcome with the thought of what Christ's death resurrection meant in Christian life, Paul may have inadvertently led some to believe that they were already raised and seated at God's right hand with Christ (Col 2:12, 13). From God's perspective this has already happened, but from our perspective in time the resurrection will be completed in the future. Dr. Das points out that what Paul said in Colossians about being raised with Jesus had to be adjusted in Ephesians by his adding that Christians had been "created in Christ Jesus for good works" (Eph 2:10). By keeping good works on the agenda of believers, things they still had to do, Paul left no doubt that Christians were still on earth to do something. They were not in heaven. So by placing Colossians and Ephesians side by side, Dr. Das shows how Christians live within present and future realities at one time. They are now with Christ on at God's right hand in heaven, the permanent reality begun by faith, and yet they remain on earth to good works, the temporal reality taking place by faith. Even in Ephesians Paul does not push the heavenly element to the side to replace it with the earthly one, since the good works Christians do here have been prepared by God. The heavenly reality imposes itself into the earthly life in the good works God accomplishes in Christians (Eph 2:10). What happens in heaven is being played out in the lives of believers, a Platonic touch: earthly things are shadows of heavenly ones or heavenly things display themselves in earthly one. Less Platonic, the good works of Christians are extensions of the heavenly. "Heaven on earth", to borrow an over used cliché. Dr. Das puts it this way: "the great transition from to life has *already* taken place. Physical death is nothing more than a mere transition from the new life that already enjoy to [a] still more new life."

Dr. Das points out that for John the term resurrection, *anastasis*, is reserved for the general resurrection of the dead (Jn 5:29), but the fourth evangelist speaks of the life after death as a continuation of the believer's life now, a thought parallel but not identical to Paul's idea of a resurrection happening now but incomplete. John does not use death and resurrection terminology to describe the believers overcoming sin and faith, as Paul does. For John believers who have already died are actually alive and living believers never die (Jn 11:25). Since Jesus

has already removed the boundary between death and life, both the living and the dead from God's point of view are resurrected, something of which Martha is unaware in regard to her brother Lazarus (Jn 11:21). The substance of the resurrection for John is already present in Jesus who identifies himself as the resurrection and the life, but this does not preclude that he will have to die and await his own resurrection. Not only will Lazarus have to go through the dying experience all over again, as if dying once was not enough, he is now in danger of dying a violent death at the hands of Jesus' enemies (Jn 12:11). There is nothing to suggest that this happened, but it cannot be ruled out. Jesus does die a violent death and takes his life back. In one sense the future resurrection, when those in the tombs will hear the voice of the Son of Man (Jn 5:28-29), has begun with the resurrection of Lazarus.² Jesus dies and returns to life, not because like Lazarus and others, he has heard a word of God in the grave. but because of his own authority (Jn 10:18). He is himself the resurrection.

John and Paul use the resurrection motif differently. By recording the resurrection of Lazarus, John provides the evidence that resurrection is in progress. Paul sees the beginning of the resurrection taking place in lives of Christians who are dying to sin and rising to life. Jesus' raising of Lazarus (John) and his giving life to believers in baptism by faith (Paul) are both extensions of Christ's death and resurrection and a participation in the final resurrection. John and Paul develop the resurrection theme differently, but both apostles see what is now happening as events between Jesus' resurrection and the final one.

Oddly skepticism about whether Jesus really rose from the dead surfaces in the gospel accounts, but not in Paul's epistles, not even in 1 Corinthians where the general resurrection is denied but not that of Jesus. Paul's argues that general resurrection is a required outcome of Jesus' resurrection (1 Cor 15:12-22). The Corinthians are reminded about what they believe about Jesus' resurrection, but they are not instructed, as if they did not believe. Like the

² Andrew T. Lincoln, "The Lazarus Story: A Literary Perspective," *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, ed. Richard Bauckham and Carl Mosser (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 211-232, esp. 224

Colossians and Ephesians, the Corinthians did not deny Jesus' resurrection, but they had to come to terms with recognizing that the effect of the resurrection in their lives meant that they were dead to sin and so alive in Christ. They had even gone one step further and were with Christ God's right hand. Paul's letters to the Corinthians, Colossians and Ephesians are in agreement that Christ's death and resurrection is foundational some kind of change. For the Corinthians Jesus' resurrection the change has to with a general resurrection of the dead and for the Colossians and Ephesians it effects a resurrected life now. Dr. Das notes and then rejects the common scholarly view that for reasons of style Colossians and Ephesians were not written by Paul but by close disciples, may be even after his death. There are reasons for not accepting the majority opinion on this issue. Writers in the ancient classical world used amanuenses - as did Luther. Many writers and speakers are capable of several styles - so Luther also. It is unfortunate that suggestions persist that Paul did not write these letters and those known as the pastoral epistles. If we can extricate ourselves from the majority view, then we would be allowed to suggest that Paul wrote Colossians and Ephesians before he wrote 1 Corinthians. This allows a different argument to come into view. So try this one. Paul had so effectively described Christian life in terms of Jesus' death and resurrection in his preaching, as it was preserved in his letters to the Colossians and Ephesians, that some Christians in Corinth believed that the resurrection had already taken place. Hence some held there was no need for belief in a general resurrection, (2 Tm 2:18). So important for Paul was that the resurrection with its new creation was already taking place in believers, as Dr. Das points out, inadvertently he may have led some hearers to think that the perfections associated with the resurrection had already happened. A future resurrection of the body had gone into reverse gear from the last day into the present. It had been swallowed up or absorbed into the resurrection they were experiencing by faith. So the distinction between what would happen in the future and what they were experiencing by faith was lost. The Greek belief that the soul but not the body was made alive after death provided the fuel for the Corinthian denial of the resurrection of the dead. Paul's description of conversion or faith as a death and resurrection experience, a dying to and rising to

a new life, led some in Corinth and perhaps elsewhere that the general resurrection had already taken place or was no longer necessary. Lost was the distinction between a future resurrection and what was experienced by faith.³

As mentioned above, Paul's handling of Jesus' resurrection in Colossians and Ephesians differs from that of Matthew, Luke and John. It's a matter of the existential versus the historical. All four evangelists' gospels agree that the women in discovering an empty tomb encounter one or two supernatural figures, but from this point on each evangelist goes his own way in describing what happened "on the third day." While Matthew, Luke and John report appearances of the resurrected Jesus first to the women and then to the disciples, Mark does not. Matthew, Luke and John also preserve the words of the resurrected Jesus, Mark does not.⁴ Each of these accounts retains a note of initial skepticism to what women say about their experiences at the tomb, a theme perpetuated in Mark's longer ending (16:9-20). Mark goes beyond this. The women are not only skeptical about what they encounter at the tomb, but they are downright terrified (Mk 16:9). In attributing Colossians and Ephesians to Paul, Dr. Das has swum upstream against the majority scholarly opinion. This gives us license to put aside or at least challenge Markan priority, the hypothesis treated by scholars as incontestable dogma, that Mark was the first gospel and then used by Luke and then Matthew in the 80s, though much later dates

³ This is also noted by Louis C. Brighton, *Revelation*. Concordia Commentary (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999, 564.

⁴ In Matthew Jesus' words to the women and the eleven disciples are monologues. There is no give and take conversation as in Luke or John. John records one discourse with Mary Magdalene and three with the disciples, two in Jerusalem and one in Galilee. Luke places Jesus in Jerusalem with the disciples on Easter night and Jesus actually converses with them, but oddly Jesus' first and longest discourse is with two men on the way to Emmaus where Jesus reveals who he really is in the first post-resurrection celebration of the Eucharist. On the face of it, this is an offense against protocol, since Cleopas and the anonymous traveler were not part of the twelve but probably belonged to the seventy. They were the second stringers, the bench warmers. (As a side note, in titling this gathering the Emmaus Conference, its organizers may have caught Luke's idea that discussion of the resurrection would not be the sole possession of the apostles, but a topic calling for the engagement of Christians in all generations.)

have been given.⁵ Two reasons stand out for placing Mark first: its overall brevity compared to Matthew and Luke and lack of an appearance of the resurrected Jesus in the authentic ending (Mk 16:1-8). The argument from brevity is specious, since in cases where the three synoptic gospels agree Mark is often longer. Formerly it was thought that when Mark was written, Jesus' resurrection did not involve the raising of an actual body. At heart of this kind thinking is an evolutionary view of Christianity that it developed from the allegedly simple teachings of Jesus into the doctrinally complexity of the Pauline epistles, a principle underlying the attribution of Colossians, Ephesians, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus not to Paul but to others. Assuming that Mark was written no earlier than 65 A.D.,⁶ its author surely would have known of Jesus' resurrection from Paul's and Peter's preaching and letters, other oral traditions, some of which was included in the gospels or, heaven forbid, from the gospels Matthew and Luke.⁷ Since Jesus' resurrection was the all important event undergirding the importance and uniqueness of the earliest Christianity, as it certainly was for Paul, Mark made a deliberate decision to omit a resurrection appearance of Jesus. Like the other evangelists Mark knew of the empty tomb and so to bring this gospel up to speed the evangelist himself or someone well meaning soul(s) knowing that an honest to goodness gospel had to include an appearance of the resurrected Jesus,

⁵ See for example Bart D. Ehrman, *A Brief Introduction to the New Testament* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 52. This matter is not all that settled, since dates from 40 A.D. to after 100 A.D. are given. W.D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*. The International Critical Commentary, (3 vols; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988-1997), 1:127-128. Davies and Allison favor 100 A.D. or later.

⁶ Mark Allen Powell, *Introducing the New Testament; a Historical, Literary and Theological Survey* (Grand Rapids, MI: Backer Academic, 2009), 128. Scholars date Mark between 65 and 73 A.D.

⁷ Skewering interpretations of the gospels and the Pauline epistles is the scholarly insistence that Luke and Matthew, in this order, are the last gospels, and both used Mark and the hypothetical Q document. As Chesterton remarked "a fallacy does not become less of a fallacy merely because it has become fashion." Ignoring the order of the gospels in pursuit of developing a New Testament theology is plain ordinary agnosticism.

added 16:9-20. Regardless of who is responsible for the longer ending, the first edition of Mark excluded any appearance of the resurrected Jesus and may be the key to understanding the role of the resurrection before 70 A.D..

We cannot know for certain why an appearance of Jesus was excluded, but a plausible reason for can be found in the context of the anticipated or recent martyrdoms of Mark's two mentors, Peter and Paul. Their prominence as the two great apostles of the church did not exempt them from death (1 Pe 1:14, 15; 2 Tm 4:6). Matthew and Luke describe Jesus' resurrection in virtually apocalyptic terms (Mt 28:3; Lk 24:5). Mark does not. His conclusion reflects the somber reality of a church losing Peter, its last living link to Jesus, and Paul, the theologian par excellence. Paul's prior enthusiasm for the resurrection that had begun to happen by faith in the lives of Christian did not translate into unbridled resurrection faith optimism as he awaits martyrdom (2 Tm 4:6). He looks forward to the crown of righteousness to be given him on the last day (2 Tm 4:8), but this does not prevent him from having negative thoughts about those who deserted him (2 Tm 4:10). At the end of his life, he returns to the early days of his ministry in seeing his life and the world in terms of crucifixion (Gal 6:14). As death approaches, he knows that he sees himself as a sacrifice, a reality that parallels Christ's life that before going into glory, he had to die. In placing Christ's death and resurrection side by side, our creeds incorporate what Jesus and the early church had said (Mt 16:21; 1 Cor 15:3-4). What the Scriptures and the creeds said about the dying and rising of Jesus takes affect in the internal dying and rising in Christ that take place in face: however, on this side of grave the dying and not the rising gets the lion's share. Post-Easter doldrums rather than Easter exhilaration defines the life of the church and the ministries of her pastors. Jesus' resurrection has taken hold of our lives, but plagued by sicknesses as a series of mini-deaths, we cannot fully escape death. We need few reminders that in the tandem between death and resurrection, death proves stronger but rather than defeat, death is the Christian's victory (1 Cor 15:54-57).

Dr. Das has taken us through the labyrinth of Paul's thought on the resurrection and so the thought strikes me that Peter may have been right in saying Paul had written things that the

uninitiated had twisted to their own destruction (2 Pet 3:15-16). Paul's placing conversion as the first and most important element of the resurrection had the unanticipated result in leading some to believe that the resurrection had already happened. It is a real sense it had, but the resurrection that had taken place within believers was an anticipatory down payment of something more. Dead bodies would actually be brought back to life. This is what Paul believed. Others took Paul to say that they were immune to sin. No language is immune to misunderstandings and deliberate falsification. Metaphors are more susceptible. They take on legs. What is signified is fused and confused with the signification. . . Gnosticism with its promise of its mystical life was emerging at that time in the ancient world. In Colossae a syncretistic Christian form Gnosticism was forged by combining Paul's preaching on the resurrected life with Jewish and pagan beliefs, as Dr. Das pointed out. Believers mixed beliefs about spirits and demons into their Christian beliefs.

I would like to switch gears and respond to Dr. Das's first essay, "The Problem of 'Our First Resurrection.'" He rightly distances himself from a not uncommon view among Lutherans, e.g. Siegbert Becker and Louis Brighton, that the first resurrection in Revelation 20:5 refers metaphorically to conversion and the second one in v. 6 to a real resurrection.⁸ Problematic in these interpretations is the lack of consistency in what is meant by resurrection, a problem that arose with Paul speaking of faith as a resurrection. In interpreting Revelation 20:6 Evangelicals are right in taking both references to the resurrection as real resurrections, but they get off the track in looking (and in some cases working) for a political kingdom of believers reigning on earth for a thousand years before the final judgment. Without prejudice Dr. Das references the increasingly popular and literarily prolific Anglican Bishop N. T. "Tom" Wright that the first and second resurrections are both real resurrections with the first being a resurrection of the martyrs, a view supported by early post-apostolic writings. There is little doubt that the second resurrection is a bodily one. It is the first resurrection requiring expansion.

⁸ Brighton, *Revelation*, 564-565.

I will begin with something less positive. On Christmas 1949 Pius XII issued the infallible dogma that Mary was assumed into heaven. Her being taken bodily into heaven presupposes that she never died or she was resurrected, a possible view in the Eastern church who make her death is a favorite objects of its icons. Revelation 12 with the woman and the child fleeing from the dragon is widely taken a metaphor for the church, Jesus and Satan, but commentators note the word ‘woman’ is used for Mary and so here she represents the church.⁹ Church tradition is not united on her fate or the interpretation of Revelation 12 and matters are not settle by pontifical decree. What is intended in the Book of Revelation cannot be resolved here, but the thought of resurrections that having already taken place is not strange to the Scriptures. If there is not one first resurrection, there are at least a series of them. Enoch walked with God and he was not (Gen 5:24). Without dying Elijah was taken by fiery chariot into heaven (2 Ki 2:11). The appearance of Moses with Jesus at the transfiguration indicates that after God had buried him (Deut 34:6), his body was resurrected. This is supported by the report that the archangel Michael wrestled with Satan for his body (Jude 1:6) and Luke’s account that Moses and Elijah appeared in glory (9:31), οἱ ὀφθέντες ἐν δόξῃ, terms implying resurrection. Another issue is the identity of the Elijah who also appears with Jesus at the transfiguration. In response to the disciples’ question when Elijah will come, Jesus responds that he has come and men did to him whatever they wanted. Jesus was not speaking of the Old Testament Elijah but the New Testament one, John the Baptist. This might suggest that the Elijah who appeared with Jesus and Moses was really John the Baptist (Mt 17:10-13.) John is surpassed in greatness only by Jesus, who is meek and lowly and so fittingly calls himself as the least in the kingdom of the heavens. Thus John’s appearance at the transfiguration might signal that “our first resurrection” has already taken place or better is taking place.

Perhaps the idea of “our first resurrection” can be expanded to include the resurrection of the saints following the death of Jesus (Mt 27:50-53). This “first resurrection” is appropriately

⁹ Brighton, *Revelation*, 325-341.

accompanied within the apocalyptic events of the final judgment: the earth quakes, rocks split and the temple curtain is ripped from top to bottom. This stuff from sleeping saints rise emerging from tombs to enter the holy city, belongs in the Book of Revelation, but it does not. Here in Matthew the holy city is not the earthly but the heavenly Jerusalem (Rev 21:10). Matthew is not an apocalyptic writing on the par with Revelation, but it preserves the apocalyptic preaching of both John the Baptist and Jesus: the ax is laid to the root of the tree for burning (Mt 3:10), a theme picked in Jesus' parables about burning weeds and fish (Mt 13:40, 41, 49,50). Jesus speaks of his death in apocalyptic terms of the sun and moon not giving forth their light and stars falling from heaven (Mt 24:29), predictions that are carried over into the description of the death of Jesus itself (Mt 27:45). Matthew also speaks of the resurrection in apocalyptic terms.¹⁰ Scholars have argued that Jesus was an apocalyptic prophet and so it is not unlikely that his disciples describe what he did in apocalyptic terms.¹¹ (Comp. Acts 2:17-20.) Although the majority scholarly view places the composition of Matthew between 85 and 100 A.D., or even later because of Matthew's advanced trinitarian theology (Mt 11:27; 28:19), its apocalyptic language suggests a date as early as 40 A.D. Dr. Das has rightly argued that both the first and second resurrections in Revelation 20 are real resurrections and Wright proposes that the first resurrection is that of the martyrs. The first resurrection following the death of Jesus in Matthew might meet the necessary criteria for what the Revelation calls the first resurrection. Dr. Das has opened for us a wider perspective on how the New Testament writers saw the resurrection functioning in Christian lives and for this he has earned our gratitude.

¹⁰ Mt 28:2-4. "And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone, and sat upon it. His appearance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men."

¹¹ In 1906 Albert Schweizer popularized this view among scholars. This has been advanced by others, especially more recently by Bart D. Ehrman in *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet for the New Millennium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), esp. 125-162.