

WHY WERE THE RESURRECTION STORIES  
READ AND BELIEVED?  
AND WHAT ARE WE MAKING OF THEM TODAY<sup>1</sup>?

And wherever they went  
they would find the sign of an immense Absence.  
And the heart would become troubled, without rest.  
(Rubem Alves)

This article aims to consider from a meta-critical point of view ancient and contemporary data about Jesus' resurrection. This epistemological choice does not represent an elegant way to avoid pronouncing myself about a complex question in Christian theology: the conclusion will present the theological understanding that I propose from this meta-critical analysis. But such a meta-critical analysis is required by a double diagnostic on the contemporary scholarly debate. On one hand, one can see the return of an explicit Christian apologetic discourse by certain scholars, for example by Andrew Tern Ern Loke. He describes the task of the apologist in his article on resurrection, as stated here:

the apologist can proceed to establish the credibility of certain evidentially significant details concerning the apostles' experiences as recorded in the New Testament, such as the touching of Jesus and seeing him eat fish as a group<sup>2</sup>.

On the other hand, one did not fully consider until now the historical, theological and institutional consequences of Gerd Lüdemann's radical interpellation, when he asserts for example:

disproving the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus ultimately annuls the Christian heritage as error<sup>3</sup>.

1. Thank you to Etienne Guilloud for revising the English of this article and for his stimulating observations. Thank you to my colleague in French Literature, Jérôme Meizoz, for the revitalizing discussion on the topic and his guidance to Annie Ernaux's writings.

2. See A. TER ERN LOKE, *The Resurrection of the Son of God: A Reduction of the Naturalistic Alternatives*, in *JTS* 60/2 (2009) 570-584, pp. 577-578.

3. See G. LÜDEMANN, *The Resurrection of Christ: A Historical Inquiry*, New York, Prometheus Book, 2004, pp. 7-8.

Indeed, in theological studies, scholars generally still consider that, if the infancy gospels can be viewed as legendary, it is not the case of the resurrection, as Henry Wansbrough asserts:

It can never be doubted that Christianity is a historical religion, founded on what actually happened—the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. If these did not happen, ‘then our faith is vain’ (1 Cor 15:17). In the case of the gospel infancy narratives, as in all accounts of the birth and infancy of men and women who have made an indelible mark on the world, exact historicity is not the main interest<sup>4</sup>.

In other words, few scholars really listen to Lüdemann’s interpellation and to the disinterest of a major part of the present Western culture in the idea of resurrection.

This double diagnostic urgently leads to situate the controversy about the resurrection in the perspective of a cultural history in Western Christianity, as the first point argues. Inscribed in this cultural history, the second point will try to understand why Jesus’ apparitions and empty tomb stories have had success in Hellenistic, Jewish and Greco-Roman cultures of the first centuries, to the point of becoming a *historia nuda et sacra*, according to the terms of Jerome<sup>5</sup>. The last part considers how we in Christian theology have to deal with stories that are becoming fiction in the eyes of the major part of the Western culture.

## I. TOWARDS A CULTURAL HISTORY ON RESURRECTION IN WESTERN CHRISTIANITY

### 1. *What It Is That Has Really Changed Since Strauss and Renan*

As Gerd Lüdemann himself notes, the perspective of the annulment of the Christian heritage “as error” was already present in the thinking of David Friedrich Strauss:

in *The Life of Jesus*, Strauss was already aware of the possibly ruinous effects of his work on Christian faith<sup>6</sup>.

4. H. WANSBROUGH, *The Infancy Stories of the Gospels since Raymond E. Brown*, in J. CORLEY (ed.), *New Perspectives on the Nativity*, London – New York, T& T Clark, 2009, 4-22, p. 5.

5. See Jerome, *Letter 53 and Letter 92.10*; for a commentary see C. CLIVAZ, *L’ange et la sueur de sang (Lc 22,43-44) ou comment on pourrait bien encore écrire l’histoire* (BiTS, 7), Leuven, Peeters, 2010, pp. 95-96.

6. LÜDEMANN, *The Resurrection of Christ* (n. 3), p. 191.

It is well known that Strauss was evicted from his position of Dogmatic and Church History professor at the University of Zürich, during the *Züriputsch* lead by the Zürcher government on the 6<sup>th</sup> of September 1839<sup>7</sup>. At first glance, one could think that nothing has changed today, if one refers to the decision of the highest German legal authority on the 28<sup>th</sup> of October 2008, confirmed on the 19<sup>th</sup> of February 2009: to approve the destitution of Gerd Lüdemann from his chair of New Testament at the University of Göttingen. This decision is based on the consideration that

the academic freedom of university teachers in theology is limited by the religious community's own judgement as well as by the ground covered by Art. 5 Abs. 3 GG of the Faculty's Regulation, that protects its identity as a theological faculty as well as its mission to accomplish the formation of theologians<sup>8</sup>.

But similar questions can be considered really differently in Europe today, depending on which countries. Even if we compare countries where the protestant Church is financed by the state – as it is the case in Germany and in the Canton de Vaud (French-speaking part of Switzerland) –, the political authorities can have different discourses.

Whereas the German federal authorities were confirming the autonomy of the religious domain and of the Göttingen Faculty of theology, the political authorities in the Canton de Vaud (CH) expressed the same year (in 2009) a different point of view about the relationship between the university, the state and the protestant Church:

The State Council considers of the utmost importance that formation in theology ... remains within the university. As the pastors are drawn to address a more and more diversified population – particularly on the religious level – it is fundamental that they receive a wide university formation as well as them being in tune with the actual culture and society. Nonetheless, the Faculty of Theology and Sciences of Religions is not a

7. See <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Z%C3%Bcriputsch>; last accessed on 03/12/11.

8. *Leitsätze zum Beschluss des Ersten Senats vom 28. Oktober 2008 – 1 BvR 462/06*, point 3: “Die Wissenschaftsfreiheit von Hochschullehrern der Theologie findet ihre Grenzen am Selbstbestimmungsrecht der Religionsgemeinschaft und an dem durch Art. 5 Abs. 3 GG geschützten Recht der Fakultät, ihre Identität als theologische Fakultät zu wahren und ihre Aufgaben in der Theologenausbildung zu erfüllen” ([http://www.bverfg.de/entscheidungen/rs20081028\\_1bvr046206.html](http://www.bverfg.de/entscheidungen/rs20081028_1bvr046206.html); last accessed on 03/12/11).

pastoral school and the Church ought not to interfere with the teachings that are given there<sup>9</sup>.

The scientific freedom is clearly expressed here: in Europe, the link between culture and Christianity can be considerably various, even between countries where Churches are financed by the state (it is notably not the case in France or Italy). Of course, these European examples are still very different from the situation on other continents, as the example of the translation of one of Glen Bowersock's books shows.

Written as *Fiction as History: From Nero to Julian* in 1994, this book demonstrates that the frontier between fiction and history becomes particularly weak during the Second Sophistic (see part II). Translated in French in 2007, with a preface by the historian Maurice Sartre, the book surprisingly became *Le mentir-vrai dans l'Antiquité: La littérature païenne et les évangiles / The True Lying in Antiquity: Pagan Literature and the Gospels*. Read thirteen years later in the French culture, this work was entitled as being focused on the Pagan literature – Christian gospels tension, whereas the English title was focused on a historical period, from Nero to Julian. Moreover, the French titles switched from the binomial fiction/history to the binomial truth/lying. This double transformation reflects in my opinion the recent cultural evolution in Europe in the perception of Christianity. Such an evolution is also present in the work of Gerd Lüdemann. Indeed, in 1994, he still wished “to encourage Christians to change their faith accordingly by basing it entirely on the historical Jesus”<sup>10</sup>. But he has been considering Christianity as a “worldwide historical hoax” since 2004<sup>11</sup>. Such an evolution is not only a personal one, but it also belongs to a general turn in the Western culture. One has to come back to Strauss and Ernest Renan to understand it.

9. *Réponse du Conseil d'État de Vaud au Grand Conseil à l'interpellation Jacques-André Haury sur l'avenir de la formation des pasteurs dans notre canton*, p. 4: “Le Conseil d'État estime de la plus haute importance que la formation en théologie ... demeure au sein de l'Université. Comme les pasteurs sont conduits à devoir s'adresser à une population de plus en plus diversifiée – en particulier au plan religieux – il est fondamental qu'ils soient au bénéfice d'une large formation universitaire et qu'ils soient en phase avec la culture et la société actuelles. Pour autant, la Faculté de théologie et de sciences des religions n'est pas une école pastorale et l'Église n'a pas à s'immiscer dans les enseignements qui y sont dispensés” ([www.vd.ch/fileadmin/user\\_upload/.../gc/.../09\\_INT\\_179\\_texte\\_CE.pdf](http://www.vd.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/.../gc/.../09_INT_179_texte_CE.pdf), last accessed on 03/12/11).

10. LÜDEMANN, *The Resurrection of Christ* (n. 3), p. 7.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 190.

To consider that the tomb of Jesus was not empty on Easter morning or that the disciples were victims of hallucinations when seeing him after his death are not new ideas. As Ernest Renan said in 1867 about the resurrection in his *Life of Jesus*:

The strong imagination of Mary Magdalen played an important part in this circumstance. Divine power of love! Sacred moments in which the passion of one possessed gave to the world a resuscitated God<sup>12</sup>!

For Renan, Jesus' miracles were not more authentic than Mahomet's miracles, but all the critics were done in the 19th century with the same ground conviction: the cultural superiority of Christianity. As Renan asserts at the first page of his *Life of Jesus*,

the great event of the History of the world is the revolution by which the noblest portions of humanity have passed from the ancient religions, comprised under the vague name of Paganism, to a religion founded on the Divine Unity, the Trinity, and the Incarnation of the Son of God. ... As soon as man became distinguished from the animal, he became religious. Especially in Africa, [the religious sentiment] became pure Fetichism<sup>13</sup>.

But such a conviction that Christianity is culturally superior has today drastically changed, as one can see in the contemporary examples mentioned above. In a European academic context, the days are bygone, where Henry Cadbury could justify the study of the New Testament as he did in 1927 because it obtains "a vast amount of attention of all kinds throughout Christendom"<sup>14</sup>. But such a notion of "Christendom" has today radically diminished in

12. E. RENAN, *The Life of Jesus*, Nabu Press, 2010, p. 338. In French: E. RENAN, *Vie de Jésus*, Paris, Michel Lévy, 1867, pp. 449-450: "La forte imagination de Marie de Magdala joua dans cette circonstance un rôle capital. Pourvoir de l'amour! moments sacrés où la passion d'une hallucinée donne au monde un Dieu ressuscité!"

13. RENAN, *The Life of Jesus* (n. 12), p. 51. In French: RENAN, *Vie de Jésus* (n. 12), pp. 1-2: "l'événement capital de l'histoire du monde est la révolution par laquelle les plus nobles portions de l'humanité ont passé, des anciennes religions, comprises sous le nom vague de paganisme, à une religion fondée sur l'unité divine, la trinité, l'incarnation du Fils de Dieu. ... L'homme, dès qu'il se distingua de l'animal fut religieux. ... [Des] pays, en Afrique surtout, ne dépassèrent point le fétichisme".

14. H.J. CADBURY, *The Making of Luke-Acts*, New York, McMillan, 1927, p. 1: "An attempt to bring fresh light on part of the New Testament requires no apology. Whatever else one may think of that volume, it is at least the most widely distributed of publications. Its circulation in our generation has already reached many million copies per annum. Month after month the New Testament in all its forms, with additions or subtractions, invariably heads all lists of best sellers, fiction or non-fiction. Doubtless it is not always read when received, nor heard when read, nor heeded when heard. It obtains, nevertheless, a vast amount of attention of all kinds throughout Christendom".

the Western culture. In more recent days, van Unnik could affirmed that the Gospel has to be studied because it speaks about the redemption of the mankind (1979)<sup>15</sup>. European non apologist scholars would not use such a justification today, because the general cultural framework in which they work has changed: European culture is not globally convinced of the superiority of Christianity anymore. This fact matters more than the individual opinions of scholars in relation to the way in which they write.

## 2. *Rethinking New Testament Research in This Present Western Cultural Framework*

This transformation of the appreciation of Christianity in Western culture is accompanied by the weakening of the frontier between fiction and reality, perceptible since the eighties, as Umberto Eco notably underlined, comparing this period with the Second Sophistic<sup>16</sup>. In such epistemological contexts, it appears more clearly that it is the community as it is defined by Charles S. Peirce that is in charge of defining the frontier between real and the unreal:

The very origin of the conception of reality shows that this conception essentially involves the notion of a COMMUNITY, without definite limits, and capable of an indefinite increase of knowledge. And so those two series of cognitions – the real and the unreal – consist of those which, at a time sufficiently future, the community will always continue to reaffirm; and of those which, under the same conditions, will ever after be denied<sup>17</sup>.

The topic of Jesus' resurrection in present research is a good example of this fact, if we consider for example the online and interactive (wiki) encyclopedia *4 Enoch*, focused on the Judaism of the Second Temple and the Christian origins.

15. W.C. VAN UNNIK, *Luke's Second Book and the Rules of Hellenistic Historiography*, in J. KREMER (ed.), *Les Actes des Apôtres: Traditions, rédaction, théologie* (BETL, 48), Leuven – Gembloux, Leuven University Press – Duculot, 1979, 37-60, p. 49.

16. See U. ECO, *Interpretation and History*, in S. COLLINI (ed.), *Interpretation and Overinterpretation: Umberto Eco with Richard Rorty, Jonathan Culler, Christine Brooke-Rose*, Cambridge – New York, Cambridge University Press, 1992, 23-44; and a comment in CLIVAZ, *L'ange et la sueur de sang* (n. 5), pp. 112-114.

17. N. HOUSER et al. (eds.), *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings*. Vol. 1, Bloomington, IN – Indianapolis, IN, Indiana University Press, 1992, p. 52.

This scholarly project, lead by Gabriele Bocaccini, Hanan Eshel and Loren T. Stuckenbruck<sup>18</sup>, has chosen to consider the entire existing literature on a topic published since the 16<sup>th</sup> century. This choice implies that a classification between fictional and non fictional literature be offered, which is done under a rubric named “Scholarship and Fiction (overview)”<sup>19</sup>. As an illustration of this repartition, I point to the movie *The Lost Tomb of Jesus* by Simcha Jacobovici (2007), wisely classified under “fiction”. It claims to demonstrate that

a Jerusalem tomb (the so-called Talpiot Tomb) contained the ossuaries of Jesus and his family, namely, ‘Jeshua bar Yehosef’ [Jesus son of Joseph], his wife ‘Mariamene’ [= Mary Magdalene], his son ‘Yehudah bar Yeshua’ [Judah son of Jesus], his mother ‘Maria’ [= Mary of Nazareth], his brother ‘Yose’, and a relative, ‘Matya’<sup>20</sup>.

The producers adopted an unfair attitude in the project's preparation, as François Bovon – interviewed in the film – explained later:

I have now seen the program and am not convinced of its main thesis. When I was questioned by Simcha Jacobovici and his team the questions were directed toward the Acts of Philip and the role of Mariamne in this text. I was not informed of the whole program and the orientation of the script<sup>21</sup>.

But even if *4 Enoch* classifies this film as fiction, the latter claims to offer a historical truth. It is probably the reason why Gabriele Bocaccini, who is the author of the article<sup>22</sup>, considers it as “arch-fi”, as a sub-genre. This abbreviation is not yet explained in

18. See [http://www.4enoch.org/wiki2/index.php?title=Main\\_Page](http://www.4enoch.org/wiki2/index.php?title=Main_Page); last accessed on 03/13/2011.

19. See [http://www.4enoch.org/wiki2/index.php?title=Scholarship\\_and\\_Fiction\\_%28overview%29](http://www.4enoch.org/wiki2/index.php?title=Scholarship_and_Fiction_%28overview%29); last accessed on 03/13/2011.

20. [http://www.4enoch.org/wiki2/index.php?title=The\\_Lost\\_Tomb\\_of\\_Jesus\\_%282007\\_Jacobovici%29,\\_arch-fi](http://www.4enoch.org/wiki2/index.php?title=The_Lost_Tomb_of_Jesus_%282007_Jacobovici%29,_arch-fi); last accessed on 03/13/2011.

21. F. BOVON, *The Tomb of Jesus*, in *SBL Forum*, n.p. [cited March 2007]. Online: <http://sbl-site.org/Article.aspx?ArticleID=656>; last accessed on 03/13/2011.

22. As *Wikipedia* does, *4 Enoch* offers the possibility to see who wrote something and when. About *The Lost Tomb of Jesus*, the entire article has been done recently by G. BOCCACCINI ([http://www.4enoch.org/wiki2/index.php?title=The\\_Lost\\_Tomb\\_of\\_Jesus\\_%282007\\_Jacobovici%29,\\_arch-fi\\_documentary&action=history](http://www.4enoch.org/wiki2/index.php?title=The_Lost_Tomb_of_Jesus_%282007_Jacobovici%29,_arch-fi_documentary&action=history); last accessed on 03/13/2011).

4 *Enoch* at the moment when I am writing this article<sup>23</sup>. If we consider, for example, that *The Unknown Life of Jesus Christ* by Notovitch<sup>24</sup> is also qualified as “arch-fi”, I understand this abbreviation to be meaning “archive-fiction”, something that claims to be a documentary, but is mainly considered as a fiction.

This concrete example of a repartition between scholarly production and fiction with “fictional archives” shows how the turn of the digital writing combines itself with the contemporary cultural sensibility to underline the porosity of the frontier between fiction and reality. It is within this context that one should produce a Western cultural history of the notion of resurrection. It would have to reveal all the institutional and political aspects that influences the perception of the topic, until the question of the academic jobs. It would also have to show why in Antiquity, the resurrection was able to pass from a status of a story coming from a marginal and small group to the status of *historia sacra et nuda*, in the Christian era. In my opinion, such a cultural history is eminently required today, because the research in New Testament is not lead in a context that presupposes the cultural superiority of Christianity any more.

But the double diagnostic that I have indicated in the introduction rather shows that New Testament research is not tempting to establish such a cultural history. On one hand, Andrew Tern Ern Loke illustrates the return of a Christian apologetic discourse in Western academic scholarship, as I underlined above. Moreover, in a quite fundamentalist way, Ter Ern Loke considers for example Luke 24,36-43 as a pure or direct report. Indeed, for him,

[Luke 24:36-43] demonstrating the improbability of the Intra-mental Hypothesis as an explanation of this particular post-mortem appearance<sup>25</sup>.

After three centuries of historical and literary criticism, all the knowledge of the humanities underlining the distance between an event and a story, as well as the philosophical phenomenology or psychology of the experience, seems to be forgotten here. The same oblivion is present in Jacke O’Connell’s article, *Jesus’ Res-*

23. A page is prepared for a definition, but does not yet offer it (see <http://www.4enoch.org/wiki2/index.php?title=Category:Arch-fi>; last accessed on 03/13/2011).

24. See A. NOTOVITH, *The Unknown Life of Jesus Christ*. Trans. F. MARION CRAWFORD, New York, McMillan, 1894.

25. TER ERN LOKE, *The Resurrection* (n. 2), p. 8.



*urrection and Collective Hallucinations* (2009)<sup>26</sup>: he tries to demonstrate that some marial apparitions attested at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are fictions, whereas gospel apparitions stories are not fictions, but “OEE, objective extraordinary event”<sup>27</sup>. It is really difficult to understand what could the meaning of “objective” be here, since this event is considered in this perspective out of any mediatisation that could give a point of view on the event. All the rich thinking about the figure of the witness in history, developed since the trauma of the Shoah, is here totally omitted<sup>28</sup>. It is rather frightening to assist to such a come back of apologist perspectives in research, based on a biblical literalism and an oblivion of historical and hermeneutical thinking on the story, the experience and the witness. It is surely not in that way that Christian theology will be able to remain in dialogue with the other Humanities in Western scholarship.

On the other hand, I am also not convinced that Gerd Lüdemann’s work will help to reformulate the historical research on the resurrection in early Christianity. With a certain panache, Lüdemann asserts to be a “historical or Enlightenment fundamentalist”<sup>29</sup>. But this assumed point of view leads him to a conservative exegetical approach, that cannot help to produce a Western cultural history of the resurrection. Indeed, he repeats the position of an Enlightenment exegesis based on a canonical assumption, by considering for example all the extra-canonical data as *de facto* later and useless. The appearance of Jesus to James is the most striking example in this sense. Lüdemann considers that Peter and Paul’s visions “played a decisive role in the rise and expansion of the faith of Jesus’ resurrection”<sup>30</sup>, whereas he disqualifies the appearance of Jesus to James. Yet, this one is mentioned in 1 Cor 5,7 and mentioned again in the *Gospel according to the Hebrews*, but Lüdemann remains convinced that James was not a disciple of Jesus during Jesus’ lifetime because of Mark 3,21<sup>31</sup>. It is here typically a “canonical” reading of the ancient Christian data,

26. See J. O’CONNELL, *Jesus’ Resurrection and Collective Hallucinations*, in *TynBul* 60/1 (2009) 69-105.

27. *Ibid.*, notably pp. 72.75.

28. See for example S. FELMAN – D. LAUB, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, New York – Londres, Routledge, 1992; F. HARTOG, *Le témoin et l’historien*, in *Gradhiva* 27 (2000) 1-15 (reprint in ID., *Évidence de l’histoire [Foliohistoire]*, Paris, Gallimard, 2007, 236-266); CLIVAZ, *L’ange et la sueur de sang* (n. 5), pp. 114-117.136-145.

29. LÜDEMANN, *The Resurrection of Christ* (n. 3), p. 205.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

31. See *ibid.*, p. 82.

whereas extra-canonical attestations of James' leadership are numerous<sup>32</sup>; the fact that no canonical gospel narrates the appearance to James (1 Cor 5,7) indicates that the canonical gospels undermined the role of James.

In a similar way, Lüdemann always considers the Gnostic ideas as a later phenomenon. Reading the *Gospel According to Philip* (NHC, 2/3) 73,1-5, he wonders "why these Gnostics could refer to Paul"<sup>33</sup>, starting from the assumption that they were in frontal opposition. The Gnostic heritage of Paul is nonetheless largely attested and initiates in 1 Cor 2,6-16 itself. The involvement of Paul in the Gnostic terms and ideas of this passage remains debated. For Judith Kovacs, 1 Cor 2,6-16,

far from being merely a response, serious or ironic, to opponents, expresses Paul's own characteristic theology, his apocalyptic interpretation of the death of Christ<sup>34</sup>.

Whether one assumes or not a Pauline involvement in the ideas presented in 1 Cor 2,6-16, Heinz-Wolfgang Kuhn underlines that the terminology opposing πνευματικός with ψυχικός in religious writings is for the first time attested in 1 Cor 2,6-16: "the oldest literary record anywhere is 1 Corinthians"<sup>35</sup>. So if this passage is the first opportunity to use such a vocabulary, it means that what we consider as "Gnostic ideas" on death and resurrection were present from the very beginning of Christianity and remained present during all the writing of New Testament texts.

Finally, the canonical assumption of Lüdemann makes him consider that the stories of the women going to the empty tomb "cannot plausibly be termed historical", whereas "the historical kernel of Mk 16,1-8 is an appearance of the 'Risen One' to Peter

32. For the state of the recent research on the figure of James, see M. MYLLYKOSKI, *James the Just in History and Tradition: Perspectives of Past and Present Scholarship (Part I)* and *(Part II)*, in *Currents in Biblical Research* 5/1 (2006) 73-122 and 6/1 (2007) 11-98. And the reference study by J. PAINTER, *Just James: The Brother of Jesus in History and Tradition* (SPNT), Columbia, University of South Carolina Press, 2004.

33. LÜDEMANN, *The Resurrection of Christ* (n. 3), p. 179.

34. J. KOVACS, *The Archons, the Spirit and the Death of Christ: Do We Need the Hypothesis of Gnostic Opponents to Explain 1 Corinthians 2.6-16?*, in J. MARCUS – M.L. SOARDS (eds.), *Apocalyptic and the New Testament: Essays in Honor of J. Louis Martyn* (JSNT.SS, 24), Sheffield, JSOT Press, 1989, 217-236, p. 217.

35. H.-W. KUHN, *The Wisdom Passage in 1 Corinthians 2:6-16 between Qumran and Proto-Gnosticism*, in D.K. FALK – F. GARCÍA MARTÍNEZ – E.M. SCHULLER (eds.), *Sapiential, Liturgical and Poetical Texts from Qumran: Proceedings of the Third Meeting of the International Organization for Qumran Studies, Oslo 1998. Published in Memory of Maurice Baillet* (STDJ, 35), Leiden – Boston, Brill, 2000, 240-253, p. 245.

and the other disciples”<sup>36</sup>. But Mark 16,1-8 does not offer the story of an appearance of the ‘Risen One’ to Peter and the circle of the disciples! Moreover, the long ending of Mark evokes several other figures. The argumentation adopted here is particularly surprising:

By intimating that the women fail to relay the message of the resurrection, Mark implicitly identifies himself as the first to proclaim the story of the empty tomb<sup>37</sup>.

Lüdemann mixes up here a literary strategy – in order to put aside the testimony of the women – and an overemphasized auctorial role: an ancient author – “Mark” – would have been able to create such a tradition, reproducing the image of the modern and romantic author creating a literary work sitting at his desk. The multiplicity of the empty tomb stories, their variants and the always controversial place of the women in them (see Luke 24,11) attest of a tradition that cannot be limited to an individual author or even to the Markan community. The challenge is here again to keep in mind that the canonical gospels did not take in charge all the ancient Christian traditions. In summary, the way in which Gerd Lüdemann tries to put aside the traditions of the empty tomb remains a weakness of his approach. He demonstrates this fact himself in the appendix II of his 2004 book, where he evokes the stories of Aristean and Salmoxis told by Herodotus (*Histories* 4,14 and 4,94-95) and concludes:

To be sure, this analogy helps to elucidate something of why the justifications for the empty tomb of Jesus were so soon in forthcoming<sup>38</sup>.

Such literary comparisons should be developed in a Western cultural history on the resurrection, to understand the early success of the empty tomb pattern. In a paradoxical way, Lüdemann rejoins for example a conservative exegete such as N.T. Wright by saying that in the Greco-Roman culture, the resurrection was “something new”<sup>39</sup>. Whether it is to defend or to negate the resurrection stories, numerous researchers are always arguing about the originality of such stories. For my part, I do not see any historical

36. LÜDEMANN, *The Resurrection of Christ* (n. 3), p. 88.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 87.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 229.

39. N.T. WRIGHT, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, Minneapolis, MN, Fortress Press, 2003, p. 712; see LÜDEMANN, *The Resurrection of Christ* (n. 3), p. 63.

or theological reason to defend this alleged originality, and I propose to consider the question otherwise. At the time of Herodotus, the stories of Aristéas and Salmoxis did not encounter much success in the Greek culture, whereas it will be the case for the empty tomb stories – Christian or not – a few centuries later in a Hellenized culture. Can we gather some clues to understand this cultural shift? What can be deciphered from this emerging success at the beginning of our era, from the perspective of a cultural history?

## II. WHY WERE THE RESURRECTION STORIES BEEN READ AND BELIEVED?

### 1. *The Turning-Point of the Second Sophistic*

The evaluation of the anterior traditions to the Christian resurrection stories is evolving a lot. Regarding the Jewish traditions, scholars such as John Levenson, Emil Puech or Albert Hogeterp underline this evolution<sup>40</sup>. As Hogeterp summarizes,

the traditio-historical study of resurrection has sometimes laid one-sided stress on the development of a resurrection belief in apocalyptic, Daniel tradition or Pharisaic circles. In my view, the Qumran texts ... attest to a more pluriform spectrum of resurrections traditions, which also includes parabiblical and liturgical texts<sup>41</sup>.

As Puech underline,

clearly, the belief in postmortem vindication of the righteous did not arise in Israel from the experience of righteous suffering or martyrs, as has been so frequently asserted in scholarly accounts. Beliefs about survival beyond death or eschatological vindication may have infiltrated the Jewish Palestinian world after the exile, mainly from Persia, before any crisis of religious suffering among Jews, as the texts quoted above seem to indicate<sup>42</sup>.

40. See notably J.D. LEVENSON, *The Resurrection of the Dead and the Construction of Personal Identity in Ancient Israel*, in A. LEMAIRE (ed.), *Congress Volume Basel 2001* (VT.S, 92), Leiden – Boston, Brill, 2002, 305-322; E. PUECH, *Jesus and Resurrection Faith in Light of Jewish Texts*, in J.H. CHARLESWORTH (ed.), *Jesus and Archaeology*, Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 2006, 639-659; A.L.A. HOGETERP, *Belief in Resurrection and Its Religious Settings in Qumran and the New Testament*, in F. GARCÍA MARTÍNEZ (ed.), *Echoes from the Caves: Qumran and the New Testament* (STDJ, 85), Leiden – Boston, Brill, 2009, 299-320.

41. HOGETERP, *Belief in Resurrection* (n. 40), p. 319.

42. PUECH, *Jesus and Resurrection Faith* (n. 40), p. 644.

A similar evolution in the perception of Greco-Roman and Egyptian sources is happening. In 1993, Adela Yarbro Collins claimed that

the narrative pattern according to which Jesus died, was buried, and then translated to heaven was a culturally defined way for an author living in the first century to narrate the resurrection of Jesus<sup>43</sup>.

Dag Oistein Endsjo developed this analysis by underlining that the philosophical language used in Acts 17,32 was not representative of all the available cultural representations at the 1<sup>st</sup> century. He is surprised to see that,

for some reason, most scholars ignore these many mythical and historical examples of people who were resurrected from the dead and made physically immortal<sup>44</sup>,

in the Greco-Roman culture. I share this surprise, but it is also important to underline, as I did in I.2, that Herodotus' stories on Aristeas and Salmoxis did not meet as much success as the later empty tomb and afterlife stories in Hellenistic culture. To understand this fact, it is important to consider the very important cultural changes happening in Hellenistic culture during the Second Sophistic, from "Nero to Julian", according to Bowersock's title evoked above. During this time, as the American historian notes, the frontier between fiction and reality is weaker. It is not a new topic in Antiquity, but at the imperial period, since Nero,

it acquired a special urgency because apparent fictions about both past and present were proliferating at a rate that the classical world had scarcely seen before<sup>45</sup>.

It is in such a cultural atmosphere that Antonius Diogenes adapts the "resurrection" story of Salmoxis, known only by Herodotus until that time; Lucian of Samosates will later use this re-

43. A. YARBRO COLLINS, *The Empty Tomb in the Gospel According to Mark*, in E. STUMP – T.P. FLINT (eds.), *Hermes and Athena: Biblical Exegesis and Philosophical Theology*, Notre Dame, IN, University Press, 107-140.151-155, p. 130. This sentence is quoted by D.Ø. ENDSJØ, *Immortal Bodies, before Christ: Bodily Continuity in Ancient Greece and 1 Corinthians*, in *JSNT* 30/4 (2008) 417-436, p. 431.

44. ENDSJØ, *Immortal Bodies* (n. 43), p. 425.

45. G.W. BOWERSOCK, *Fiction as History: Nero to Julian*, Berkeley, CA – Los Angeles, CA – London, 1994, p. 2.

writing to compose his *Verae Historiae*<sup>46</sup>. Consequently, concludes Bowersock,

our review of the literature amply demonstrates, that the theme of bodily resurrection was all too familiar to pagan readers and even audiences in the theater. For a sage like Apollonius or for a hero like Protesilaus, a resurrection of this kind could be presented in total seriousness and enjoyed, if not necessarily believed. The fiction has its own truth, which carried conviction within its context<sup>47</sup>.

He then compares Mark 16,1-8 to the story *Chaereas and Callirhoe* by Chariton, where one finds the patterns of the empty tomb and the apparent death<sup>48</sup>. As I have developed elsewhere, it is quite a sterile enterprise to establish the anteriority of Chariton over the Christian empty tomb stories, or the contrary<sup>49</sup>. It is probably more realistic to underline a common cultural atmosphere to such stories, shared by the rhetorical training of the writers. This common cultural training can sometimes be verified, as I did for a common literary topic used in Luke 24,41 and in *Callirhoe* 3,3,2-3, the “contrast of the emotions”, mixing up joy, astonishment and unbelief<sup>50</sup>. Empty tomb stories, dead people coming back to life and resurrection stories belong to the atmosphere of the Second Sophistic, in Jewish, Christian and Pagan stories.

One can join to Bowersock’s analysis this following one by Umberto Eco. According to the great Italian philosopher, such an epistemological turning-point is provoked during the Second Sophistic by a geo-political factor, the *pax romana*. As he says,

the second century is a period of political order and peace, and all the peoples of the empire are apparently united by a common language and culture<sup>51</sup>.

This atmosphere encourages the blurring of the frontier between fiction and reality, like

46. See *ibid.*, pp. 100-101.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 118.

48. See CHARITON, *Chaereas and Callirhoe* 3.3.1-2; BOWERSOCK, *Fiction as History* (n. 45), pp. 115-120.

49. See CLIVAZ, *L’ange et la sueur de sang* (n. 5), pp. 102-104.

50. See C. CLIVAZ, “*Incroissants de joie*” (*Lc 24,41*): *Point de vue, Histoire et Poétique*, in *Regards croisés sur la Bible: Études sur le point de vue. Actes du III<sup>e</sup> colloque international du Réseau de recherche en narrativité biblique, Paris 8-10 juin 2006* (LD, hors série), Paris, Cerf, 2007, 184-195.

51. ECO, *Interpretation and History* (n. 16), p. 29.

in the myth of Hermes; ... the god knows no spatial limits and may, in different shapes, be in different places at the same time. Hermes is triumphant in the second century after Christ<sup>52</sup>.

This analysis can still be supported by the insightful reflexion by Laurence Welborn, who proposes a socio-political analysis of the success of the pattern of the cross at the beginning of the Common Era in popular literature and culture:

the omnipresence of the cross in popular literature portraying the lives of slaves stands in striking contrast to the social constraint upon discourse about the cross in the literature of the elite<sup>53</sup>.

The popular culture expresses with the motif of the cross its resistance to the political oppression of the elitist and imperial culture, argues Welborn, underlining the example of *Chereas and Callirhoe*: the story “gives a grim depiction of the crucifixion of sixteen slaves who were working on a chain gang in Caria”<sup>54</sup>.

But if Welborn is right in enlightening the emergence of the crucifixion – and of the resurrection – patterns in such literature, one nonetheless has to ask whether it is really such a “popular literature”. Against the patriarchal clichés that have led to classify this story as a “novel”<sup>55</sup>, Chariton’s readers should have not been exclusively “romantic readers” or “popular readers”. According to Brigitte Egger,

‘popular’ and ‘academic’ readers were more or less the same people: the literate upper and middle classes of the Greek-speaking eastern Roman Empire<sup>56</sup>.

Such a large success is attested by the jealous remark of Philostrates in his 66th *Letter to Flavius*. He addresses himself to Chariton:

52. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

53. L.L. WELBORN, “Extraction from the Mortal Site”: Badiou on the Resurrection in Paul, in *NTS* 55/3 (2009) 295-314, p. 307.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 307.

55. B. EGGER, *Looking at Chariton’s Callirhoe*, in J.R. MORGAN – R. STONEMAN (eds.), *Greek Fiction: The Greek Novel in Context*, Londres – New York, Routledge, 1994, 31-48, p. 32: “the assumption of a female audience resulted from the gendering of what was considered culturally non-authentic as feminine, reinforced by the modern association of women with romantic fiction”.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

You fancy that Greece is going on to remember your work when you are dead: but what is likely to be the posthumous fate of men who were nobodies even while they were alive<sup>57</sup>?

Consequently, what we call today an ancient “popular culture” – narrating crucifixion, after-death and resurrection stories – illustrates a larger cultural phenomenon in the Second Sophistic period than a literature limited to a unique political or entertainment perspective. It is rather a literature that attests of a cultural evolution influencing an entire society, that is interested in hybrid and syncretic perspectives, as the Egyptian context shows.

## 2. *The Egyptian Illustration*

The influence of the Egyptian context in New Testament texts is largely underestimated. But almost all the early manuscripts of the New Testament come from Egypt; they present texts read, understood, rewritten in Egypt between the second and the fifth century. They are deeply coined by the Egyptian Christianity, by the early Christianity in Egypt. Concerning the resurrection, this influence is notably perceptible in the textual variants of Luke 24, and the question of the Western Non-Interpolations (WNI). The WNI – belonging to the Alexandrian tradition and present in P<sup>75</sup> – are particularly numerous in Luke 24,3.6.12.36.40.51<sup>58</sup>.52. If Bart Ehrman proposed to understand the WNI as anti-docetic reactions<sup>59</sup>, Michael Wade Martin demonstrated that these modifications were prior to the copy of P<sup>75</sup> and revealed rather an anti-separationist tendency<sup>60</sup>. Both authors agree that the WNI en-

57. Quoted by G.P. GOOLD (ed.), *Chariton: Callirhoe* (Loeb), Cambridge – Londres, Harvard University Press, 1995, p. 3.

58. As I have demonstrated elsewhere, I do not count Luke 24,51b in the WNI (see C. CLIVAZ, *Luke, Acts and the Ancient Readership: The Cultures of Author, Scribes and Readers in New Testament Exegesis*, in A. GREGORY – K.C. ROWE [eds.], *Rethinking the Unity and Reception of Luke and Acts* [Religious Studies], Columbia, SC, University of South Carolina Press, 2010, 153-171, pp. 161-165).

59. See B.D. EHRMAN, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament*, New York – Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1993, pp. 187-194.

60. See M.W. MARTIN, *Defending the “Western Non-Interpolations”: The Case for an Anti-Separationist Tendenz in the Longer Alexandrian Readings*, in *JBL* 124/2 (2005) 269-294, p. 286. For a definition of the separationism see EHRMAN, *The Orthodox Corruption* (n. 59), p. 14: “Other Christians agreed with the adoptionists that Jesus was a full flesh and blood human and that something significant had happened to him at his baptism. For them, however, it was not that he was adopted to be God’s Son; instead, at his baptism Jesus seemed to be indwelt by God. ... This is a Christology that I will label separationist, because it posits a division between the man Jesus and the divine Christ. As we will see, it is a view that was prevalent among second-century Gnostics”.



lighten the bodily existence of Jesus *after* the resurrection. It is so judicious to consider the cultural Egyptian context on resurrection and afterlife at the second century to understand the pre-history of P<sup>75</sup>, that matters so much to establish the text of Luke 24.

At the beginning of our era, the Egyptian culture knows of different voices evoking resurrection or bodily afterlives. On the Jewish side, the *Testament of Job*, that researchers consider as having been composed in Egypt at the first century C.E.<sup>61</sup>, evokes the resurrection (TestJob 4,9). The most ancient papyrus we have with *Chereas and Callirhoe* comes from Egypt (2<sup>nd</sup> century)<sup>62</sup>: Greek stories about crucifixion and empty tombs were therefore circulating there at that time. About the Egyptian culture itself, one can still read authors estimating that there is no consonance between Osiris' "resurrection" and the Christian resurrection, as Dieter Zeller does:

Von einer leiblichen Neuschöpfung ist nicht die Rede. Der ägyptische Totenglaube und der christliche Auferstehungsglaube sind durch Welten getrennt<sup>63</sup>.

But such a clear opinion cannot be maintained if one observes the diversity of the Egyptian funerary practices, as Mark Smith demonstrates in *Traversing Eternity: Texts for the Afterlife from Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt* (2009)<sup>64</sup>. That book offers a range of Egyptian texts used next to or in the place of the *Book of the Dead*, before and after the beginning of our era. Smith reminds us that the mummification always underlined the importance of the survival of the dead as physical or bodily entities, up to the point that one had to regularly bring them food and drinks<sup>65</sup>. Smith does not hesitate to speak about "Osiris' resurrection"<sup>66</sup>. A text as ancient as 305 B.C.E.<sup>67</sup> attests of the fact that Osiris is supposed to

61. See R.P. SPITTLER, *Testament of Job*, in J. CHARLESWORTH, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*. Vol. 1, Londres, Darton, Longman & Todd, 1983, 829-868, pp. 830.833. These datation and Egyptian origin have been confirmed by W.C. GRUEN III, *Seeking a Context for the Testament of Job*, in *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 18/3 (2009) 163-179.

62. See n. 57.

63. D. ZELLER, *Religionsgeschichtliche Erwägungen zur Auferstehung*, in *ZNT* 19 (2007) 15-23, p. 15.

64. See M. SMITH, *Traversing Eternity: Texts for the Afterlife from Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009.

65. See *ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

66. See *ibid.*, pp. 1.50.

67. See *ibid.*, p. 97.

“raise” during the ritual of the afterlife, as well as the priest who imitates him<sup>68</sup>.

However, the most striking Egyptian feature about the afterlife at the first century C.E. is the emergence of the Fayum painted portraits on the mummies. The most ancient of these portraits are dated during the reign of Tiberus (14-37 C.E.)<sup>69</sup>. If these portraits have been available since 1880, research did not really consider them in the historical enquiry until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, because of the separation of the disciplines in the Humanities (philology, papyrology, history, history of arts, aso). As Euphrosyne Dioxadis explains, these portraits have begun to replace the traditional funerary Egyptian masks at the first century “for unknown reasons”<sup>70</sup>. But they attest of the emergence, at the first century C.E., of a strong desire to keep the dead present in the families, with their bodily appearance. Petrie observed in 1911 that several mummies were kept inside the houses<sup>71</sup>, a phenomenon also attested by Diodorus of Sicilia<sup>72</sup>. The tradition to have mummies has existed until the emergence of Islam: Athanasius and Saint Antonius deplore that some Christians are making mummies with their dead<sup>73</sup>. As AnneMarie Luijendijk demonstrated, Christians continued to live as the other people in Egypt did, and could neither be recognized by their name, nor by their use of “God” at the singular, a rather common practice at that time in Egypt<sup>74</sup>. Art history underlines that the technique of the Fayum portraits has been reemployed in the first Christian icons<sup>75</sup>: art introduces continuity where polemic texts accentuate discontinuity.

To valorize the cultural heritage transmitted by the paintings of the Fayum portraits and the Christian icons, one has to keep in

68. See *ibid.*, pp. 108.116.118.119.

69. See E. DIOXADIS, *Portraits du Fayoum: Visages de l'Égypte ancienne*. Trad. D. COLLINS, Paris, Gallimard, 1995, p. 40.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

71. See W.M.F. PETRIE, *Roman Portraits and Memphis (IV)* (Publications of the Egyptian Research Account, 20), London, School of Archaeology in Egypt, 1911, pp. 2-3; quoted by DIOXADIS, *Portraits du Fayoum* (n. 69), pp. 44-45.

72. See DIODORUS OF SICILIA, *Hist. Bib.* 1.93.1, 91.6-7, 92.6; quoted by DIOXADIS, *Portraits du Fayoum* (n. 69), p. 44.

73. See ATHANASIUS, *Sancti Antonii Vitae*, PG 26.969.1 and 26.972.10, quoted by DIOXADIS, *Portraits du Fayoum* (n. 69), p. 46. On Christian mummies, see also J. WILPERT, *Le nimbe carré: À propos d'une momie peinte du musée égyptien au Vatican*, in *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire* 26 (1906) 3-13; J. DORESSE, *Des hiéroglyphes à la Croix: Ce que le passé pharaonique a légué au christianisme*, Istanbul, Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut in het Nabije Oosten, 1960, pp. 24-25.

74. See A.M. LUIJENDIJK, *Greetings in the Lord: Early Christians and the Oxyrhynchus Papyri* (HTS, 60), Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2008, pp. 26-54.

75. See DIOXADIS, *Portraits du Fayoum* (n. 69), pp. 90-92.

mind that the culture in Antiquity was transmitted as much – if not more? – by visual and oral technologies than by texts. *Literacies* must be considered as a plural concept for Antiquity, as William Johnson and Holt Parker proposed it<sup>76</sup>. As we know thanks to P.Oxy. VI 896, some painters were illiterate, such as Artemidoros. But does it make sense to use our modern judgement of “illiteracy” to qualify the author of such images? In the Greco-Roman Egypt, the cultural practices clearly also implied orality and visual arts<sup>77</sup>. Such considerations lead one to read *Chereas and Callirhoe* and contemplate the Fayum portraits together, as well as with the diverse Egyptian funerary rituals. With regard to such various literacies, one cannot doubt anymore: the Hellenistic Egyptian culture was largely ready to welcome Christian stories on an empty tomb and a resurrection. There is no absolute reason for considering that a rupture is necessary to evaluate the transition between two cultural models, as the example of Nonnus of Panopolis underlines.

David Hernández de la Fuente has explained with a new light the articulation of both texts of this last epic poet at the 5<sup>th</sup> century C.E., converted to Christianity: the *Dionysiaca* and the *Paraphrasis of the Gospel according to John*<sup>78</sup>. Usually, one explains the transition between the two works by the “conversion” of Nonnos. But de la Fuente notes cleverly that the *Dionysiaca* offers Christian features, in the same way as the *Paraphrasis* shows Pagan features<sup>79</sup>. The same expressions are used to narrate the resurrection of Lazarus and of a local Lydian hero, Tylos<sup>80</sup>, or to describe Jesus and Dionysios<sup>81</sup>. As De la Fuente concludes from his inquiry:

in our view, it seems no longer necessary to discuss if this poet wrote the *Dionysiaca* as a Christian or as a pagan, or which poem he wrote at first.

76. See W.A. JOHNSON – H.N. PARKER (eds.), *Ancient Literacies: The Culture of Reading in Greece and Rome*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2009.

77. For a synthetic point of view, see C. CLIVAZ, *Literacy, Greco-Roman Egypt*, in R. BAGNALL (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Ancient History Online*, forthcoming.

78. See D. HERNÁNDEZ DE LA FUENTE, *Nonnus' Paraphrase of the Gospel of St. John: "Pagan Models and Christian Literature"*, in J.-P. MONFERRER-SALA (ed.), *Eastern Crossroads: Essays on Medieval Christian Legacy* (GECS), Piscataway, Gorgias Press, 2007, 169-189.

79. See *ibid.*, pp. 174-175.

80. See NONNUS, *Dionysiaca* 25.541-552 and *Paraphrasis* 11.1-185; quoted by HERNÁNDEZ DE LA FUENTE, *Nonnus' Paraphrase* (n. 78), p. 177.

81. See *ibid.*, p. 178: “The poet does not intend any confrontation between Dionysos and Christ, for he does not Christianize Dionysos neither ‘dionysizes’ Christ: they seem rather equivalent in the strange syncretism of this poet from Late Antiquity”.

We believe that both works were written almost simultaneously along many years of a common literary project<sup>82</sup>.

He therefore proposes to understand that these two works have been written in parallel, not on the basis of the substitution of cultural models, but on their encounter and, in a certain part, on their dialogue<sup>83</sup>. Such a perspective would be useful to keep in mind for the writing of a cultural Western history of the resurrection. I hope that parts I and II offer some clues to inspire researchers to undertake such a quest.

### III. AND WHAT ARE WE MAKING OF THESE STORIES TODAY? A THEOLOGICAL CONCLUSION

Gerd Lüdemann is right in asking “who decides at what point of historical study a ‘theological explanation’ ought to begin?”<sup>84</sup>. This question has until now been considered as implicitly belonging to the task of the biblical theologian, who does history and theology. As we have seen in part I, the institutional and cultural status of the theologians is not so obvious today and can really differ depending on the different Western countries. Consequently, I consider that a biblical scholar now has to explicitly assume when she/he passes from the historical enquiry to the theological analysis. It is a necessary clarification, in order to allow the diverse academic readerships to identify what kind of discourse is told, and for which purpose. So in this third part, I assume to present a theological reappraisal written to “whom it may concern”<sup>85</sup>, either to researchers interested in documenting themselves about what contemporary Christian theologians think, or to theologians interested in developing their reflexion on the resurrection today, in another way than an apologetic approach (see part I). Indeed, after the so long and problematic history of the Christian cultural and political hegemony in Western world, one

82. *Ibid.*

83. See *ibid.*

84. LÜDEMANN, *The Resurrection of Christ* (n. 3), p. 201.

85. For a similar explicit theological reflexion, but on the *sola scriptura*, see C. CLIVAZ, *The New Testament at the Time of the Egyptian Papyri: Reflections Based on P<sup>12</sup>, P<sup>75</sup> and P<sup>126</sup> (P. Amh. 3b, P. Bod. XIV-XV and PSI 1497)*, in C. CLIVAZ – J. ZUMSTEIN (ed.), in collaboration with J. READ-HEIMERDINGER and J. PAIK, *Reading New Testament Papyri in Context / Lire les papyrus du Nouveau Testament dans leur contexte: Actes du colloque des 22-24 octobre 2009 à l’université de Lausanne* (BETL, 242), Leuven, Peeters, 2011, 15-55, pp. 52-55.

could only wish that those who claim to be “Christians” stop claiming that they have the unique valuable religious conception. Humility is required from the Christian theologians today, considering the facility with which Christianity has passed from the side of the persecuted to the side of the persecutors. Such humility is particularly underlined in a cultural historical perspective: it enlightens indeed more the continuity than the discontinuity between diverse cultural features.

For itself, the Christian theology needs a constructive and not a defensive discourse. First, let’s recognize the facts. The proclamation of the resurrection depends on some Jewish people, at the first century C.E.: a certain Mary of Magdala, considered as a hysteric woman from Celsus to Renan<sup>86</sup>; some other women, originally not believed by the male apostles; some disciples, notably with James, brother of the Lord, and Paul. It does not sound “serious” in regard to the present academic standards; all the elements of the resurrection stories could lead to consider that such apparitions could have simply been hallucinations, in a cultural milieu where the visions were frequent in popular and historical stories. Are the present Christians ready to rely on such fragmentary testimonies? Or are they still dreaming of a *deus ex machina* ready to impose his/her presence to the world? Are the Christians ready to accept that “their stories” have been heard and received by people tinged with a Hellenistic syncretism and worried about not losing their loved ones after death? There is maybe nothing more special that a deep anthropological aspiration at the heart of the belief in the resurrection. But this may precisely be the reason for which it could convey some trueness.

Trueness. When Ulrich Luz reproaches to Gerd Lüdemann to make the “equation ‘historical = real’”<sup>87</sup>, Lüdemann is right answering him that history cannot cut off all links with reality<sup>88</sup>. But in this duality, one still needs the notion of “trueness”, that is sometimes based on history and reality, but sometimes goes beyond them and can also be based on fiction, poetics or even madness. One sometime needs mad people who tell the trueness, beyond history and reality. But we also always need a strong anchorage in history and reality, because madness can easily lead to

86. See ORIGEN, *Contra Celsus* 2.59; RENAN, *The Life of Jesus* (n. 12), p. 338 (quoted in Part I.1).

87. Quoted by LÜDEMANN, *The Resurrection of Christ* (n. 3), p. 17.

88. See *ibid.*

hauntedness or collective hallucination. Indeed, as Paul Ricœur claimed,

hauntedness is to collective memory what hallucination is to private memory, a pathological modality of the incrustation of the past at the heart of the present, which acts as a counterweight to the innocent habit-memory, which also inhabits the present, but in order to ‘act it’ as Bergson says, not to haunt it or torment it<sup>89</sup>.

Christianity stands today precisely at this crossroad: it has to decide if the resurrection belongs to its collective hallucination – something that would “haunt” it –, or if the resurrection nevertheless tells something true. Beyond history and reality, at the margins of fiction, poetics and madness.

The recent book of the French writer Annie Ernaux – *L’autre fille* (2011)<sup>90</sup> – illustrates this kind of recurrent hauntedness of the resurrection in Western culture. *L’autre fille* is a letter addressed to Ernaux’s sister, Ginette, who died two years before Annie’s own birth. In this work, the resurrection fascinates, repels, hides itself between brackets, and even stands at the roots of the writing motivation:

[Est-ce que je t’écis pour te ressusciter et te tuer à nouveau?];  
[N’est-ce pas une forme de résurrection de toi qui soit pure de tout lien de corps et de sang que je cherche au travers de cette lettre?]<sup>91</sup>.

[Am I writing to you in order to resurrect you and kill you again?];  
[Isn’t it a sort of resurrection of you pure of any body and blood ties that I’m seeking through this letter?].

As Ernaux illustrates by asking to herself if she is looking for a pure “sort of resurrection” in her writing, resurrection does not convey any aseptized or clean representation of the afterlife. It continues to speak about blood, body, and scars: Jesus shows his scars after death (John 20,25-27). Resurrection’s trueness is to affirm the importance of the body as the unique and specific place where the life is lived. Everything that happens to us affects us through and with the body. Our body is this inescapable place to which we belong, for the better, for the worst. Sometimes for the better, often for the worst, until death. But, as far as I can guess,

89. P. RICŒUR, *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Trans. K. BLAMEY – D. PELLAUER, Chicago – London, 2004, p. 54.

90. A. ERNAUX, *L’autre fille* (Les affranchis), Lormai, Nil, 2011.

91. *Ibid.*, pp. 24.50.

this importance of the body is maybe being culturally revised now in Western culture. How and why?

About the how, I will refer here to a surprising and masterful article by François Bovon, that recently enlightened the importance of the “soul” against “today’s obsession with the body in a framework of life limited by death as the final perspective”<sup>92</sup>. His purpose is not so much to have a discourse on the “soul” itself, as it was an independent entity. As Bovon says,

what really mattered for the Christians of that time is not a definition of the soul or a philosophical distinction of the parts of the self but the hope of an afterlife and a relationship of hope and love with the deity<sup>93</sup>.

So for Bovon, the important point is

the Christian hope for afterlife for the self as opposed to today’s obsession with the body<sup>94</sup>.

He concludes that the first Christians

claimed a holistic view of the person, with ethical embodiment now and the risen person tomorrow, and suggested the preservation of the person (between the two) through the existence of the soul and the care and memory of their God<sup>95</sup>.

It is clear that such an article represents a shift in the present Christian theological discourse that has tried during the last decades to valorize the body<sup>96</sup>, notably under the influence of Merleau-Ponty<sup>97</sup>.

In my own opinion, such a shift could probably be accentuated in the following years in the Christian theological discourse, because of the arrival of the digital era, in Western and non Western cultures<sup>98</sup>. Indeed, the digital culture drastically influences our perception of the body. As Marie-Laure Ryan writes,

92. F. BOVON, *The Soul’s Comeback: Immortality and Resurrection in Early Christianity*, in *HTR* 103/4 (2010) 387-406, p. 398.

93. *Ibid.*, p. 395.

94. *Ibid.*, p. 398.

95. *Ibid.*, p. 406.

96. See for example R. ALVES, *I Believe in the Resurrection of the Body*, Eugene, Wipf and Stuck, 2003 (first publication Augsburg Press, 1986).

97. See BOVON, *The Soul’s Comeback* (n. 92), p. 404.

98. See for the first mention of this new era: C. Clivaz, “Je laisse de côté la question de savoir si l’historiographie relève ou non de cette intelligence narrative” (*Ricœur 1992*): Ricœur, *White et le retour de la question du réel*, in *A Contrario* 14 (2010) 10-26, p. 24.

cyberculture and postmodern theory have popularized the view that we own not simply a physical body, given to us, mortal, subject to irreversible changes, limited in its abilities, and anchored in ‘real reality’, but also numerous virtual bodies, or body images, which either clothe, expand, interpret, hide, or replace the physical body, and which we constantly create, project, animate, and present to others<sup>99</sup>.

With consideration to this cultural framework, I guess – following here a cultural historical approach – that Bovon’s quest for other points of view on the afterlife than the bodily resurrection at the end of the times, could reflect something of this aspiration to different modes of “out-of-body lives”, or of “afterlives”. If it is correct, we have here a very interesting example of the kind of services that Christian theology can offer in a digital culture. By looking into the huge reserve of early Christian wisdom, Bovon allows one to grasp some elements to reaffirm the inalienability of the self, in the afterlife but also already now. It becomes today particularly urgent to reaffirm this inalienability, because the digital culture could lead one to get only fragmentary selves – selves fragmented in several virtual places, between Facebook, institutional websites, e-mails, numerous pdf documents, aso. In a digital culture, the physical body does not seem to be sufficient to guarantee the self against its fragmentation any more. Early Christian wisdom reminds the existence of the self in the “care and memory of God”<sup>100</sup>. With the help of the communion of the saints, let Christians believe in the resurrection of the body-self in the care and memory of God. Let them not turn the Scripture into an aseptitized writing transmitting a sort of resurrection “pure of any body and blood ties”<sup>101</sup>.

Claire CLIVAZ

University of Lausanne  
 Institut romand des sciences bibliques  
 Quartier UNIL-Dorigny  
 Bâtiment Anthropole  
 1015 Lausanne  
 Suisse

99. M.-L. RYAN, *Narrative as Virtual Reality: Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media*, Baltimore, MD – London, John Hopkins University Press, 2001, p. 306.

100. BOVON, *The Soul’s Comeback* (n. 92), p. 406.

101. ERNAUX, *L’autre fille* (n. 90), p. 50.