

## RESPONSE TO PROFESSOR PETER—II

1 Pet 3:15, to which Professor Peter alludes in his interesting contribution, admonishes the Christian reader: "Always be prepared to make a defense (*apologian*) to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you." Fully in accord with this text is the Roman Catholic position that there exist "motives of credibility" for the Christian faith. Paul himself makes use of such a motive when he points out to the Corinthians that most of the five hundred witnesses of the risen Lord are still alive (1 Cor 15:6) and thus can be consulted. The resurrection of Jesus has a special place in Christian apologetics because it provides, as Moltmann says, a glimpse of the future and final meaning of life.

The question is: in *what sort* of relationship does God's future, as revealed in the resurrection of Jesus, stand to our present? *what sort* of "motive of credibility" is provided by the apostolic witness that Jesus has been raised from the dead? Professor Peter believes that St. Thomas deserves a hearing in this matter, since "he saw the not-yet in terms of its beginning in the here-and-now." Hence he can remedy the irrationality of Moltmann's position, which "has considerably diminished any grounds *in the present* (emphasis mine) for making statements about God and providence."

The trouble is that the Thomistic texts cited have *nothing to do* with the resurrection of Jesus. Professor Peter's affirmation that "The Lord's future gifts are already anticipated in history, helping give a meaning to history" may be true as a general proposition, but when applied to the resurrection it is highly misleading. Difficulties arise on two counts: (1) The relationship of the risen Lord to this present age is a strictly dialectical one, so that our share in the power of the resurrection can in no way be explained by metaphysical analogy. (Contrast: "Participation and analogy go hand in hand in this case.") (2) The grounds for the credibility of the resurrection faith are *not* to be found in the present (here Moltmann is entirely right), because the apostolic witness to the resurrection shares in the "once and for all" character of the Christ-event itself.

1) The kingdom of God, which is the object of Christian hope, though proclaimed by Jesus, was not established through the acceptance of his preaching. On the contrary, it was, in God's providence, precisely through the rejection of Jesus' "good news" and through his violent death that the kingdom was to come. Even after his resurrection Jesus still remains "the Crucified One" (Mk 16:6). The crucifixion was not a passing episode on his way towards heavenly glory. Consequently, God's future, as revealed in the risen Lord, stands in radical discontinuity with "the present evil age" (Gal 1:4). The resurrection is present in this world only under the paradoxical sign of the cross.

Paul's longing to know Christ "and the power of his resurrection" (Phil 3:10) is not fulfilled by any sort of metaphysical analogy. The fact that God has paradoxically chosen to grant us *life* through Jesus' *death* has as its consequence that the Christian rite of initiation is a mystical incorporation into the *death* of Christ (Rom 6:3). To be sure, the author of Colossians writes: "You were buried with Christ in baptism, *in which you were also raised with him*" (2:12). However, this is not Paul's own way of speaking. For him the Christian's share in Christ's resurrection is reserved for the end-time: "For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we *shall* (note the future tense) be united with him in a resurrection like his" (Rom 6:5).

This rejection of any direct participation in Christ's resurrection here and now seems to have been polemically motivated. The Corinthian Christians who denied the resurrection of the dead (1 Cor 15:12) did not do so because they *denied* the resurrection of Jesus, but rather because they *interpreted* his resurrection in an exclusively *presentist* fashion. Because *Jesus* had already been raised, they seem to have believed that there was nothing more to hope for, that *their* resurrection too had already taken place (cf. 2 Tim 2:18). Apparently, they interpreted their experience of charismatic phenomena as a sharing in the resurrection of Jesus, who, after having been raised to God's right hand, sent forth the Spirit upon the community.

Paul, on the contrary, insists on the eschatological difference. Christ in his resurrection is but "the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor 15:20). (Contrast: "That anticipation of future realities takes place in the present not by way of a promisory note but by way of a real participation in the here-and-now.") God's future does indeed

“have an impact now that is real” but this impact—the forgiveness of sins—can only be grasped by faith.

The apostle Paul is wholly future-oriented, as he presses on “towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Jesus Christ” (Phil 3:14), but *in the present* he bears on his body the marks of Christ (Gal 6:17). The relationship between present and future is not that of metaphysical analogy but that between cross and crown: “For this slight momentary affliction *is preparing* for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, because we look *not to the things that are seen* [contrast: ‘God’s future kingdom is already partly visible’] but to the things that are unseen” (2 Cor 4:17-18). Luther’s distinction between the *theologia crucis* and the *theologia gloriae* seems not to have lost its cautionary importance for Roman Catholic theology.

2) The familiar tendency of our day to try to ground religious faith and hope in present experience runs into difficulty in the matter of the resurrection. The Corinthian Christians may have related their mystical delights to the resurrection of Jesus, but Paul certainly does not do so. The “motive of credibility” for Christ’s resurrection which he presents lies in the past, in the apostolic witness (1 Cor 15:5ff.). Furthermore, even if understood of the past, Professor Peter’s statement that “The Lord’s future gifts are already anticipated in history” is misleading, when applied to the resurrection. It raises the old question: *in what sense* can the resurrection, or, more properly, the post-resurrection appearances, be said to have been “an historical event”? To this the only answer that can be given is: “historical” in an exceptional and unique sense. For although the *witnesses* were in history, *what they witnessed* most emphatically was not. Even for them the risen Lord cannot be said to have become part of their present experience. They witnessed the glory of God’s kingdom which *for Jesus* had become present through the power of the resurrection but which *for his earthly followers* remained and remains the object of future hope.

This is what makes the resurrection appearances absolutely unique: they were the manifestation in (past) history of that which is not yet, the Eschaton. They cannot be repeated, any more than the resurrection of Jesus itself can be repeated. Our resurrection faith is ineluctably dependent on the faith of the original witnesses. We are not even in the

position of the Corinthian Christians, who could at least consult these witnesses. We must accept their witness as part, indeed, as the fundamental part, of the Church's tradition. The teaching of the New Testament seems to corroborate neither Bultmann nor Carl Peter in the view that "Always in the present lies the meaning of history."

The value of Professor Peter's paper consists for me in the sharp distinction which emerges, *despite* the author's best efforts to demonstrate "fruitful cooperation between faith and reason," between the biblical and the metaphysical understanding of the future, the distinction which Moltmann sums up neatly in the two phrases "*Deus adventurus*" and "God as *finis ultimus*." A study of the present may indeed be the basis for speculation about the future. Men have always sought to uncover "the laws of history" in the hope of predicting its outcome. In similar fashion St. Thomas sought to establish, by an analysis of the dynamism of the human mind, that the beatific vision alone could be a totally satisfying end for man. But the analysis of the present never brings us, and, by its nature *cannot* bring us beyond mere conjecture concerning the future. "No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor has the heart of man conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Cor 2:9). Reflection on the present cannot tell us with the certitude that faith requires just what God's future will be, nor can it assure us that this future has already begun in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. For this we need the manifestation of "the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Cor 4:6).

To have said this does not put us in the Averroist camp, nor does it constitute a denial of the unity of the intellect. For in confessing the resurrection of Christ as the proleptic realization of God's future, Christian faith is exercising its function not of "seeking understanding" but of "proclaiming the mighty works of God" (Acts 2:11).

SCHUYLER BROWN, S.J.  
*General Theological Seminary*  
*New York City*