

The resurrection as paradigm for power or for resistance?

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Abstract

One of the most important and influential New Testament scholars of our times, John Dominic Crossan, has done extensive work on the resurrection – not as mere confession, but as a declaration of autonomy in defiance of the Roman Empire. He also emphasises the fact that the presence and influence of the idea of “empire” is not something that was left behind with the end of the Roman Empire, for in the study of the Historical Jesus and his significance we also find that we are dealing with empire. Nowhere has this become more clear in the South African context than in the debate (battle?) between church and university. With Crossan as dialogue partner, this article aims to study the empirical function of claims about the resurrection within these South African debates and their various claims to power and influence (context).

A personal interlude¹

If there is one thing that I have learnt through my years of study, it is that one can never escape the confines of one’s mind and one’s history, especially when this particular history and context has been so formative. To deny this fact is to give up on the chance of real and possibly valuable research and growth. Therefore I begin this article with an attempt at honest contextualisation of the reason for my interest. I was brought up in the Dutch Reformed Church, and it was also through the Dutch Reformed Church that I completed my theological studies – immediately (and correctly) implying loyalty and a sense of “having a vocation”. But I was “lucky” enough to be studying theology at the University of Pretoria when the “Ferdie Mulder bomb” exploded in 2005; and I have been witness to the devastation, the

¹ As such, this article is in no way meant as a reflection of the current situation or position of any institution and/or person(s). It is merely a description of my own experience and the influence it has had on my life and thinking.

politics and the on-going battle ever since² – not only as a student and reader of news, but also as a “called” person with a vocation now qualified as a minister and trying to get into (and make a difference within) the Dutch Reformed Church. Ever since the bomb first exploded there has never really been a cessation to the conflict, the arguments and the politics; in fact, with the help of movements like the Evangelical Initiative,³ scholars such as Professor Adrio König, church members and Ferdie Mulder himself bringing out books like *Die Evangelie is op die spel*,⁴ *Die Trojaanse perd in die NG Kerk*⁵ and *Opgestaan*,⁶ to call the debate alive and well would be an

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- ² Stormfront, "NG Teoloë Frons oor Student se Aanval op Hul 'Opstandingsdwalings'" <http://www.stormfront.org/forum/t212468-14> (30 January 2011), n.p.; Frederik S Mulder, "The Resurrection of Jesus: Recent Major Figures in the Debate" (Pretoria: University of Pretoria, 2006); Die Burger, "NG Kerk Gons oor Opstanding" <http://152.111.1.87/argief/berigte/dieburger/2007/09/25/SK/13/forum25sept.html> (30 January 2011), n.p.; Bibleguidance, "The Afrikaner are a Cowardly People, says Theologian" <http://www.bibleguidance.co.za/Engarticles/Cowards.htm> (30 January 2011), n.p.; NG Kerk Nuus Argief, "Opstandingsdebat Slaan die Bal Mis," http://www.ngkerk.org.za/nuusargieflees.asp?nuus_id=32 (30 January 2011), n.p.; Adrio König, "Müller Moet Verduidelik oor Sy Opstanding-Boekie" <http://www.glodiebybel.co.za/geloofskwessies-m/60-ngk-opstanding-maagdelike-geboortens/175-2006-05-18-muller-moet-verduidelik-oor-sy-opstanding-boekie.html> (30 January 2011), n.p.; Kletskerk, "Effens Versigtige Versugtinge oor die Opstanding," <http://www.kletskerk.co.za/viewtopic.php?p=101800&sid=4cd39bb333d14199720377e85a65ffe6> (30 January 2011), n.p.; Pieter F Craffert "Die Stand van die Teologiese Debat in die Afrikaanse Wêreld" <http://www.nuwe-hervorming.org.za/wiki/stand-teologiese-debat-afrikaanse-w-reld> (30 January 2011), n.p.; Frederik S Mulder, "Die Ontkenning van Jesus se Liggaamlike Opstanding uit die Dood - 'n Teologiese Agtergrond" (Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Christian Higher Education, 25 August 2007); Riviersonderend, "Oor die Opstanding" <http://riviersonderend.net/2007/09/19/oor-die-opstanding> (30 January 2011), n.p.
- ³ On 26 and 27 July 2007 a group of Dutch Reformed members, ministers and theologians, led by theologians such as Prof Hoffie Hofmeyr, Prof Adrio König, Dr Johan van Schalkwyk and Dr Danie Malan, came together in Pretoria. This meeting led to the formation of the "Evangeliese Inisiatief in die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk" or the "Evangelical Initiative"; a movement aimed at confirming and protecting the classic mainstream theological traditions of the Dutch Reformed Church (Truth Exposed, "Evangeliese Inisiatief in NG Kerk" http://www.truthexposed.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=91&Itemid=37 (8 February 2011), n.p.)
- ⁴ Adrio König, *Die Evangelie is op die Spel: Vind Jou Weg deur die Huidige Geloofsdoolhof* (Wellington: Lux Verbi BM, 2009).
- ⁵ Glo die Bybel, "Nuwe Boek is Hier!" <http://www.glodiebybel.co.za/boeke-m/189-die-trojaanse-perd-in-die-ng-kerk.html> (30 January 2011), n.p.; Jaco Steyn, "Die Trojaanse Perd in die NG Kerk" <http://www.nuwe-hervorming.org.za/wiki/trojaanse-perd-ng-kerk> (30 January 2011), n.p.
- ⁶ Frederik S Mulder, *Opgestaan* (Cambridge: Opgestaan Publikasies, 2011); Glo die Bybel, "Opgestaan, deur Ferdie Mulder," <http://www.glodiebybel.co.za/index.php/boeke-dvds-ens-m/61-boeke-kat/352-opgestaan-ferdie-mulder.html> (13 September 2011), n.p.; Jean Oosthuizen, "Boek oor Opstanding Maak Opslae." *Kerkbode* 187/4 (2 September 2011): 3.

understatement.⁷ In the process and through the years many forms of media releases have been (self-) made, people's lives have been irreparably hurt and changed and many new facets of the church and its members have come to the fore.

And, as I stated before, my own life and career (vocation) has been changed; for when it becomes known that you were a student at the University of Pretoria's Faculty of Theology the person on the other end of the conversation (whether this be the local parish minister, a missionary from Uganda or any Tom, Dick and Harry that you meet on the street) immediately asserts their perceived right to submit you to a barrage of dogmatic questions probing your faith and loyalty, endlessly haranguing you about your experience of the "heretical" teaching in the faculty. And if you do not answer satisfactorily (in other words, negatively), you can know that your application/teaching/position is being reconsidered. But this article is not about feeding the scandal or being bitter – and I realise that this could very easily become that which I fight against – the vilification of "the other" (in this case the church) – in order to try and establish more of an equilibrium; – it is about trying to make sense of it all; because I am daily growing ever more aware of the importance of getting to know that which you fear/despise before really being able to pass judgement.

For the first few years of my studies I was one of those who very easily and passionately rejected "heretics" like John Dominic Crossan, without ever reading his work – well, you didn't want to contaminate yourself. But then I read the following statement: "It is not accidental ignorance

⁷ Jean Oosthuizen, "Opstandingsdebat Kry Nuwe Lewe." http://www.kletskerk.co.za/articles.php?article_id=94&page=archive (30 January 2011), n.p.; Kletskerk, "Toeskouers van die Opstanding," <http://www.kletskerk.co.za/viewtopic.php?f=5&t=8700> (30 January 2011), n.p.; Kletskerk, "Morele Dilemma," <http://www.kletskerk.co.za/viewtopic.php?f=1&t=11275> (30 January 2011), n.p.; Rudolph Meyer, "Oproep tot die Liefde," <http://www.wendag.com/forum/showthread.php/303-Oproep-tot-die-liefde> (30 January 2011), n.p.; Die Burger, "Krisis oor die Opstanding?" <http://stage.dieburger.com/Stories/Features/By/19.0.1562611312.aspx> (30 January 2011), n.p.; Julian Müller, "Jesus én Gesprek Staan Só Weer Op," <http://teo.co.za/artikel/articles/215/1/Jesus-en-gesprek-staan-so-weer-op/Bladsy1.html> (30 January 2011), n.p.; Izak JJ Spangenberg, "Debat oor Jesus se Opstanding," <http://www.nuwe-hervorming.org.za/?q=forum/debat-oor-jesus-se-opstanding> (30 January 2011), n.p.; Christo Landman, "Jesus het Opgestaan! Maar Hoe?" <http://praag.co.za/rubrieke-magazine-403/72-christo-landman/8126-jesus-het-opgestaan-maar-hoe.html> (30 January 2011), n.p.; Resurrection Hope, "First Ever World-Class Debate on the Resurrection in South Africa?" <http://resurrectionhope.blogspot.com/2010/05/first-ever-world-class-debate-on.html> (30 January 2011), n.p.; Antwoord, "Spangenberg vs. Craig: DIE GROOT DEBAT," <http://www.antwoord.org.za/spangenberg-vs-craig-die-groot-debat> (30 January 2011), n.p.; Kletskerk, "Jesus se Opstanding 'n 'Verdraaiing van die Bybel?'" <http://cayenne.websitewelcome.com/~kletsker/viewtopic.php?f=1&t=11084&sid=69c92f46d272004b39590aac3c4311ad> (30 January 2011), n.p.

but essential arrogance that dooms empires to the dustbin of time and the graveyard of history” (Crossan 2007:28). Because knowledge, any knowledge, is not dispassionate and objective, but is always working in the interest of a particular group – it is always a conjunction of power relations and information-seeking, for “it is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power”.⁸ So the continuing debate (through its many transformations and variations), together with more extensive reading recommended by caring mentors, has led me to questioning: What is the energy driving the debate? Is the debate really about the resurrection? This made me think. And it made me read. And it made me reconsider the words so easily flung around and the debate about the resurrection as a whole, also about the Dutch Reformed Church and the role of the all-important resurrection in that institution. This then is where my on-going journey has taken me thus far.

Constructing context

As has been shown, in the South African context (especially but not exclusively), the scandal and debate surrounding the resurrection has been in focus and on the cards since 2005, and it shows no signs of letting up any time soon. But what can we make of it all? Ostensibly the debate has always been a debate about the resurrection of Jesus and about whether the literal and physical aspect thereof is still confessed as it was/is in the three accepted Dutch Reformed Church confessionals. Now, though it is not easy to demarcate the two positions/spaces of the debate – they do not really have separate histories and separate interests, creating the strong possibility for overlap – for the sake of clarity and to be able to make some point (and sense) I will define the two spaces as that of the *Confessional Jesus* versus the *Historical Jesus*.

Introducing each corner

The space of the Confessional Jesus existed long before the space of the Historical Jesus, and part of its power and claims to power stem exactly from that long tradition. The mechanisms used for its production of knowledge are made up of creeds, confessions, dogmas, doctrinal battles, personal experiences and opinions but especially from institutional interests. It would not be far from the truth to see the church as the institutional space for the production of knowledge concerning the Confessional Jesus. As space for the production of knowledge, it centres around that which it considers its canon

⁸ Michel Foucault, "Prison Talk," in *Power/Knowledge* (ed Colin Gordon; London: Vintage Books, 1980), 52.

(here referring not only to the Bible itself but also to the creeds and policies), and it has created its own mechanisms for the maintenance of this canon (e.g. sermons, Bible study groups, syllabuses of what it regards as “truth” at seminaries), with several surveillance practices (e.g. disciplinary hearings/“kerk-like tug”, hearings before undergraduate students commence with seminary studies, and again after studies and before entering the church; specific roles also ensure that the correct version of truth concerning the Confessional Jesus is produced, such as by the minister her/himself, the elders exercising a watchdog function, and then also especially the “experts” who are accommodated at the various seminaries of each particular denomination) to keep that canon intact. It has also devised mechanisms by means of which it excludes what it regards as threats to its version of produced truth. The debate was therefore seemingly a disclosure of heresy, brought up in an effort to protect the education of the church’s leaders of tomorrow and to safeguard the church.

Historical Jesus research is the product of nineteenth-century knowledge production. It was also at this time that the Humanities in their diversity originated, a diversity mostly driven by one objective – to enquire into “man” as the universal, primary originator of meaning (and here “man” is deliberately put into quotation marks, since the enquiries were heavily engendered, extremely elitist and obviously Western-oriented). Interesting to note here is that it was also during this period that Darwin’s theory of evolution emerged, searching for a plausible and workable theory on the origins of “man”. So it stands to reason that the categories provided and formed by this underlying desire to locate “man” as the primary originator of meaning would also be used in Historical Jesus research. It is at this time that Historical Criticism emerged as the methodology sanitising the production of knowledge from theological influences and from the monolithic, hegemonic imperialism of Theology⁹ and providing categories that functioned in non-theological disciplinary spheres, thereby adding intellectual status and respectability to the enquiries of scholars within the field of Biblical Studies.¹⁰ Prompted by Historical critics, Historical Jesus enquiries emerged during this same period, with Historical Criticism starting its move into a position of dominance within mainline Biblical Studies (which it has held for at least the last century). Historical criticism includes well-known methods such as source criticism, form criticism, grammatical studies and archaeology, and attempts to combine them in ways that will produce solid and agreed-on interpretations of the Biblical text (whether these be the author’s intention, the understanding of the original audiences, or reference to actual historical

⁹ Albert Schweitzer, *The quest of the historical Jesus: a critical study of its progress from Reimarus to Wrede* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1964), 2.

¹⁰ Johannes N. Vorster, “Rhetorically Reflecting on ‘Jesus’ Research,” *Theologia Viatorum* 32/2 (2008), 12.

events).¹¹ “Authorial intention” functioned as the target of enquiry of Historical Criticism, thereby giving to the writings of the New Testament the status of sources provided with access to their authors’ minds within their diverse communal settings. Now, Historical Jesus enquiry has since then wandered on routes far beyond the methodologies initially deployed; so what we have today in terms of Historical Jesus research cannot be equated with its beginnings. But it can still be said that the space from which knowledge concerning the Historical Jesus has been produced is still a space within the confines of Christian discourse; for, although it wants to distance itself from the space occupied by the Confessional Jesus, it still operates within the same discursive space, being, in its functioning, subservient to the grand project of constructing “man” as the primary originator of meaning, thereby providing a myth that is acceptable and accessible for modern consumption. Within the circle of New Testament scholars working on this project, the theological enterprise has been made a taboo; it is not regarded as a legitimate process of knowledge production. To exclude theological elements as well as confessed personal experiences as grounds of knowledge, Historical Jesus research functions within the sphere of the disciplinary. It has established its own field even within the realm of New Testament Studies, and it features in several programmes of Biblical Studies as a self-sustaining field of knowledge. It has established its own maintenance mechanisms in creating space for Historical Jesus research in syllabuses, in the construction of structures within the fellowship grouping “SBL”, and even in the initiating of a journal concerned only with Historical Jesus matters. Experts on this side also contribute to the maintenance of this space and implement surveillance techniques – in this case formal examinations, peer reviewing and the evaluation of journal articles, but also public statements (e.g. responses to newspaper articles and participation in public debates concerning Jesus), all to ensure that a particular version of truth concerning Jesus is brought to (and kept in) the foreground.

The toil and trouble

What we have seen thus far is that an abundant (and lucrative) local (and international) cottage industry has emerged in the past few years in response to the apparent attacks on the Christian faith by perceived enemies (mentioned above). But there is a problem with this industry – both corners in (sides of) the debate often misrepresent the texts, their authors, and the scholars who study them, precisely because they are concerned about the impact “the other side” might have on their readers/followers. And so they

¹¹ George Aichele, Peter Miscall & Richard Walsh, "An Elephant in the Room: Historical-Critical and Postmodern Interpretations of the Bible," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128/2 (2009), 384.

seek to reinforce their position by denigrating and ridiculing the other corner (their enemies), with their chief strategy being to refute by exposure (with little or no argumentation) the views being presented by the opposition in such a disparaging way that detailed argument is unnecessary. On both sides the opposition's research and views are juxtaposed with the "truth" of their own research and views. Another common strategy is to disparage their opponents for disagreeing among themselves while placing those opponents in a chain of known "heretics". Also, the leaders of the various groups are demonised, revealing a tendency to place emphasis on the most repugnant aspects (real or imagined) of their beliefs and practices.

In this fight, the Confessional Jesus space is motivated by a fear that orthodox Christians will be led astray by the ideas presented by the Historical Jesus space, and their works are aimed at those curious about the literature and/or those concerned about others who are curious about the literature. In either case, their research and publications mainly appeal to those within a rather closed community of believers who, ultimately, are unlikely to leave the group over the claims of "radical"/"liberal" scholarship. Interesting to note – especially for the purposes of this article – is that the Confessional Jesus space/group and the Historical Jesus space/group seem never to really interact with one another. The Confessional Jesus group reads and seeks to refute the Historical Jesus group's work, but otherwise have little substantial knowledge of the literature and ignore scholarship that does not support their interpretation of the evidence. Likewise, the Historical Jesus group targeted by the Confessional Jesus group seems completely oblivious to the attacks and also appeals only to scholarship that is congenial to its approach to the material. So the Confessional Jesus group makes no effort to understand or sympathise with the Historical Jesus group and their supporters. In other words, no side in this debate is seeking merely to advance neutral scholarly concerns – it seems, rather, that both groups simply want their respective "heresies" to disappear; they only make scholarly arguments in defence of what they believe to be true. What we have, then, is two sets of scholars who believe their scholarship is true, or at least more rationally compelling. With this attitude, it is very hard to have an open discussion/dialogue in which one group can learn from another.

This situation is brought about and maintained by the phenomenon that, when we analyse events in the past, we tend to try to attribute simple, clear causes for those events.¹² But this attribution of cause-and-effect (in such a simplistic manner) may mask the fact that there were myriad contingent contributory factors which led to the past playing out as it did. Thus, although focusing on simple cause-and-effect relations certainly makes thinking and writing about the past that much easier, it inhibits the analysis of

¹² Sara Mills, *Michel Foucault* (London: Routledge, 2003), 51.

any/all power relations. And so, perhaps, we do not have to be doomed to repeat the errors of the past; for there is no really compelling reason for either the Confessional Jesus group or the Historical Jesus group not to pay closer attention to each other's works and their implications. In fact, it would be wise of them to consider the responses of their critics and to consult a broader range of scholarship in their assessments and in other aspects of their scholarship. Such openness might even lead them to reconsidering their "beliefs" that the opposing side's views are all late, derivative, and ultimately deserving of censure. So every instance of the production of knowledge, every instance where someone seems to be speaking on behalf of someone else – no matter how good their intentions may be – needs to be interrogated. For "history should not be used to make ourselves comfortable, but rather to disturb the taken-for-granted" (Kendall & Wickham 1994:4). If the two groups were able to set aside their guiding assumptions, they might find they have more to discuss than they expect. And then, perhaps, there is something that scholars on both sides of the debate can learn – not only about themselves, but also about those whom they attack. Even more, they could find new meaning for themselves in the work of "the other". So, rather than characterising the present as an inevitable outcome of events in the past we must see the present as one possible outcome of those events, and to analyse the present then "does not consist of a simple characterisation of what we are but instead – by following lines of fragility in the present – in managing to grasp why and how that-which-is might no longer be that-which-is" (Foucault 1988b:36).

Engaging Foucault

Understanding discourse

Discourse is one of the most frequently used terms in Foucault's work and, at the same time, one of the most contradictory.¹³ Foucault himself defines it in a number of different ways throughout his works – in one of these, discourse is described as referring to "the general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualisable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements" (Foucault 1972:80). This definition implies that "discourse" can be used to refer to all utterances and statements which have been made and which have meaning and some effect, utterances that form groupings, as well as for the unwritten rules and structures that produce particular utterances and statements. He has also described discourse as a "regulated set of statements which combine with others in predictable ways ... regulated by a set of rules which lead to the

¹³ Mills, *Michel Foucault*, 53.

distribution and circulation of certain utterances and statements” (Foucault 1981:56). The result is that some statements are circulated widely, while others have restricted circulation – here the Bible itself, and statements about the Bible, can be given as an example of a discourse kept in circulation and given structural “support” within our society (in contrast to other religious texts which are not given such a wide circulation or the same type of support). This helps us to understand that discourse is not simply a set of statements which have some coherence, but is a phenomenon that exists because of a need to keep a complex set of practices in circulation while at the same time attempting to fence it/them off from other statements and keeping those statements out of circulation. So discourse does not simply translate reality into language: it should be seen as a system that structures the way in which we perceive reality – “we must conceive of discourse as a violence which we do to things, or in any case as a practice which we impose on them; and it is in this practice that the events of discourse find the principle of their regularity” (Foucault 1981:67). For we can only think about and experience material objects and the world as a whole through discourse and the structures it imposes on our thinking – in the process of thinking about the world, we categorise and interpret experiences and events according to the structures available to us; and, in the process of interpreting, we lend these structures a solidity and a normality which is often difficult to question. Thus objects exist and events occur in the “real world”, but we apprehend and interpret those events within discursive structures, without necessarily being aware of the way that discourse structures our understanding (Laclau & Mouffe 1985:108).

So discursive practices are “characterised by a delimitation of a field of objects, the definition of a legitimate perspective for the agent of knowledge and the fixing of norms for the elaboration of concepts and theories” (Foucault 1977:199) – this means that, in our deciding to say something, we must as speakers focus on a particular subject, we must simultaneously make a claim to authority for ourselves in being able to speak about this subject, and in the process we must also add to and refine ways of thinking about the subject. What interests Foucault¹⁴ in his analysis of discourse is the way that it is regulated, for “in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, and to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality” (Foucault 1981:52). The implication is that discourse is not about a unified body of ideas, but about a set of conflicting discursive frameworks and pressures which operate across a social body and which interact with each

¹⁴ Michel Foucault, “The Order of Discourse,” in *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader* (ed. Robert JC Young; London: Routledge, 1981), 51-52.

other, in this way conditioning how and what people think, know and write. It is thus about the way that we know what we know; where the information comes from; how it is produced and under what circumstances; whose interests it might serve; how it is possible to think differently – all in order to be able to trace the way that information that we accept as “true” is kept in that privileged position; thus enabling us to look at the past without adopting a position of superiority (Mills 2003:66).

Discourse and/as power

The description of how discourse functions can, seemingly, fit in very nicely with the way power is often conceptualised – the capacity of powerful agents to exercise their will over powerless people. In this view power becomes almost like a possession held onto by those in power, with the powerless unable to wrest it from them. But Foucault¹⁵ feels that power should be seen as a verb rather than a noun – power thus *does* something rather than *being* something to hold onto; and it “must be analysed as something which circulates, or as something which only functions in the form of a chain ... power is employed and exercised through a netlike organisation ... individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application” (Foucault 1980:98). In fact, it might even be argued that the very choice of the object of analysis already suggests a particular position in relation to which side in a conflict one is supporting. In this way, power struggles are now characterised as being “local”/“immediate”¹⁶ struggles, since they are instances in which people are criticising the immediate conditions of their lives and the way that certain people/groups/institutions are acting on their lives; with the main objective of these struggles being “to attack not so much such-and-such an institution of power, or group, or elite, or class, but rather a technique, a form of power” (Foucault 1983:212). And so power becomes a system of relations spread throughout society rather than simply a set of relations between those in power and the powerless. This also makes it clear that individuals should not be seen simply as the recipients of power, but rather as the “place” where power is enacted and the place where it is resisted, which implies that power is something that needs to be continuously *performed* rather than being *achieved*. Thus all relations between people (whether it be between parents and children, lovers, employers and employees) are power relations¹⁷ – in each interaction power is negotiated and one’s position in a hierarchy is

¹⁵ Michel Foucault, “Two Lectures,” in *Power/Knowledge* (ed. Colin Gordon; London: Vintage Books, 1980), 78–108.

¹⁶ Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (written by Hubert L Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow), Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 212.

¹⁷ Mills, *Michel Foucault*, 49.

established (however flexible, changing and ill-defined that hierarchy may be).

A reality that can be (and is) seen all over the world (and beautifully in the debate under discussion) is that where there is power, there is resistance. This reality is productive in that it allows us to consider the relationship between those in struggles over power as not simply reducible to an oppressor-victim relationship – for where there is no resistance, there is no power; so, in order for there to be a relation where power is exercised, there has to be someone who resists. Learning from Foucault's model of power means understanding that perhaps we should not see the way that power operates as simply about the oppression of individuals; but that we should rather recognise the frequency and function of resistance to oppression. This has the implication that, in analysis, it is necessary to look at the way in which organisations/institutions operate and the way that they are constrained by the demands and resistance of individuals within the organisation (as well as individuals and groups outside it). His focus is thus on the way that power relations permeate all relations in society – enabling an account of the mundane ways in which power is enacted and contested – in this way allowing for an analysis focused on individuals as active subjects rather than as passive dupes. Throughout his career, Foucault¹⁸ focused on the analysis of the effects of various institutions on groups of people, and the role that those people play in affirming or resisting those effects. Central to this concern is his analysis of power,¹⁹ and then not as something which a group of people or an institution possess and which is focused only on oppression and restriction; for even at their most constraining, oppressive measures are in fact productive, giving rise to new forms of behaviour (rather than simply closing down or censoring certain forms of behaviour).

¹⁸ E.g. Michel Foucault, *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988); Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (written by Hubert L Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow; Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1983) 208-226; Michel Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress," in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (written by Hubert L Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow; Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 229-252; Michel Foucault, "The Order of Discourse," 48-79; Michel Foucault, "Prison Talk," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977* (ed. Colin Gordon; London: Vintage Books, 1980), 37-54; Michel Foucault, "Two Lectures," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977* (ed. Colin Gordon; London: Vintage Books, 1980), 78-108; Michel Foucault, "History of Systems of Thought," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault* (ed. Donald F Bouchard; Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 199-204; and Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1972).

¹⁹ Mills, *Michel Foucault*, 33, 36.

Debate = growth?

With this (at least for me) new understanding of the way that discourse functions, as well as the fact that power and its playing out is not only negative but necessary, I have realised that there is more to be said and done with the debate surrounding Jesus. The two sides of the debate and their different viewpoints have been explained and compared endlessly, but to what end? What does this endless repetition of the same old thing mean? For discourse is ultimately about the creation of meaning, of a space from which to operate and live. Do we really want to spend our precious time, attention, finances, energies, emotions and publication space on the simple repetition of entrenched opinions?

I, for one, wanted to step outside the trenches. I wanted to try and really engage with someone who has always been known to me only as “the enemy/devil” in order to see if (and what) new understanding could be established. Could “the enemy” actually contribute new meaning, a new and more responsible way of talking about traditional (confessional) space? In searching for clarity and answers I found a surprising ally – John Dominic Crossan.²⁰ In his thinking about the resurrection and the role it played/plays I

²⁰ Though I am aware of the multi-level and on-going debate with John Dominic Crossan – cf. Robert L Webb and Robert J Miller, *Jesus as Peasant Sage: Engaging the Work of John Dominic Crossan* (London: T & T Clark, 2011); Robert B Stewart, ed, *The Resurrection of Jesus: John Dominic Crossan and NT Wright in Dialogue* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006); Donald L Denton, *Historiography and Hermeneutics in Jesus Studies: An Examination of the Work of John Dominic Crossan and Ben F Meyer* (London: T & T Clark, 2004), 1–79; Shawn Kelley, “The Ideology of Parables: Funk, Crossan, and the Myth of Origins,” in *Racializing Jesus: Race, Ideology, and the Formation of Modern Biblical Scholarship* (ed Shawn Kelley; London: Routledge, 2002), 190–206; Tania Oldenhege, “John Dominic Crossan and the Literary Turn in Biblical Studies,” in *Parables for Our Time: Rereading New Testament Scholarship after the Holocaust* (written by Tania Oldenhege; New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), 73–84; Raymond Martin, “Two Liberals: Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza and JD. Crossan,” in *The Elusive Messiah: A Philosophical Overview of the Quest for the Historical Jesus* (written by Raymond Martin; Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999), 71–97; Dale C Allison, “Method of John Dominic Crossan,” in *Jesus of Nazareth: Millenarian Prophet* (ed. Dale C Allison; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998), 10–32; Mark A Powell, “John Dominic Crossan,” in *Jesus as a Figure in History: How Modern Historians View the Man from Galilee* (written by Mark A Powell; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 83–100; Paul Copan, *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up: A Debate Between William Lane Craig and John Dominic Crossan* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998); Sean Freyne, “Galilean Questions to Crossan’s Mediterranean Jesus,” in *Whose Historical Jesus?* (ed William E Arnal and Michel R Desjardins; Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University, 1997), 63–91; Stephen T Davis, Daniel Kendall and Gerald O’Collins, (eds.), *The Resurrection: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Resurrection of Jesus* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 249–286; Ben Witherington, *What Have They Done with Jesus? Beyond Strange Theories and Bad History: Why We Can Trust the Bible* (San Francisco, CA: Harper One, 2006), 58–92; and Jeffrey D Carlson and Robert A Ludwig, *Jesus and Faith: A Conversation on the Work of John Dominic Crossan* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994) – and though this article falls

found new direction, and new questions which we need to ask of the ongoing debate. Are hate and love, polemics and apologetics, the inevitable alternatives for the resurrection debate and all Historical Jesus research; and, if so, does not each option prejudice the evidence in equal but opposite directions (Crossan 1998:23)? Jesus was received by both belief and disbelief, both acceptance and indifference, both worship and crucifixion. Is it not possible to bracket either response today and reconstruct what it would have been like to bracket it two thousand years ago (Crossan 1998:23)? What did he say and do that elicited such divergent responses? And what (if anything) can an examination of these questions mean to us?

Jesus's resurrection contextualised

It is commonly accepted that the visions the disciples had of Jesus's resurrection are the reason for Christianity's birth, growth, spread and triumph across the Roman Empire. But at this junction Crossan (1999:6) asks two questions: (1) Is that the way his first followers understood such visions and apparitions? And (2) Is that the way first-century people argued the significance of such visions or apparitions? In asking these questions, Crossan (1999:6) is not attempting to transform the discussion into one about delusions, hallucinations or losing touch with reality. Neither is the discussion pushed in the direction of tricks and lies or losing touch with honesty. It is a question of focus – should our focus be on the *words* of Jesus or on the *life* of Jesus? Is it remembering (or even repeating) his words, or imitating and replicating his life (Crossan 1998:409)?

In an attempt at answering this focus dilemma, Crossan (1998:415) prefers the use of the terminology "Life tradition" and "Death tradition": with the former phrase presuming that Jesus's sayings were a question not of memory but of imitation and of lives to be lived; the latter presuming that Jesus's death was always dyadic or dialectic between persecution *and* vindication, execution *and* resurrection (Crossan 1998:415). By passion *and* resurrection Crossan (1998:479) means to always include accusation *and* justification, danger *and* deliverance, persecution *and* vindication, defeat *and* triumph. The story was always about an innocent one vindicated by God (Crossan 1998:479).

under the same rubric, the article engages Crossan and his work on another level, that of intent, context and function. The rest of this article will thus be a dialogue with Crossan, and with Crossan only. Not because I think that he has all the answers, or because I think his work can be accepted without critique; but because this paper attempts to study the meaning that dialogue could have for both sides, and in this dialogue Crossan specifically has been chosen as dialogue partner.

For the Historical Jesus, the Kingdom of God is *already* here. For the Pauline tradition, the general resurrection is *already* begun. For the Synoptic Gospels, the Son of Man is *already* present. For John's Gospel, the Logos of God is *already* incarnate (Crossan 2007:188).

Jesus and Paul announced that the Kingdom of God was *already* present and challenged believers to accept it, to enter into it and to live it as fully as they themselves were doing. God's kingdom, in other words, was already freely available here below upon the earth for anyone with the faith and courage to embody it – conditional upon their becoming “participants” with God so that, together, “if we will but do it, we will bring about a new day of justice and brotherhood and peace” (Crossan 2007:230).

Instead of speaking about the words of Jesus, Crossan (1998:411) wants to speak of the radical life of Jesus; and instead of the death of Jesus, the imperial crucifixion of Jesus. Only then, by focusing on both Jesus's imitated lifestyle and in his resurrected deathstyle, does the Jewish God of justice and righteousness stand radically against injustice and exploitation (Crossan 1998:411). For those who proclaimed Jesus's resurrections were *proclaiming that the general bodily resurrection had already begun with Jesus's bodily resurrection* (Crossan 2007:187). That meant that Jesus's resurrection was not just an individual privilege but a communal process for past, present and future (with Jesus's resurrection as the heart of that process). In light of the above, the present was believed to be simply an in-between period in which Christian believers were called to a resurrected life with, in and through the resurrected Jesus – the challenge for Christian believers then being to live lives of bodily resurrection in this in-between period (Crossan 2007:187).

There is, ever and always, only one Jesus (Crossan 1998:xxi) – the Historical Jesus *as* risen Jesus. And the birth of Christianity is the interaction between the Historical Jesus and his first companions, and the continuation of that relationship despite his execution (Crossan 1998:xxi). History and faith are always a dialectic for incarnational Christianity; and its insistence on the resurrection of Jesus's flesh is its insistence on the permanence of Jesus's history (Crossan 1999:47). That was precisely the point – where, they asked, do *you* find the divine especially, particularly or even uniquely present? Where do *you* find your God?

The meaning of the resurrection

There is, then, only one Jesus – the *Word* became *flesh*, that is to say, the divine meaning of life was incarnated in a certain human way of living (Crossan 1999:46). That one Jesus may be experienced as risen Jesus through

divergent modes – through justice and peace, prayer and liturgy, meditation and mysticism – but it must always be *that* Jesus and no other; there is, in other words, ever and always only one Jesus (Crossan 1998:39).

Does the risen Jesus still carry the wounds of the crucifixion? Those wounds are the marks of history; so, to understand them, you would have to know about his death – but to understand that death you would have to know about his life (Crossan 2000:34). And, though each of the canonical gospels goes back to the Historical Jesus of the late 20s in his Jewish homeland, every gospel has that Jesus speak directly to its own immediate situation and communities; which implies a constant dialectic between then-and-now and then-as-now, that is, of the Historical Jesus then as the risen Jesus now (Crossan 2000:33). So it is not as simple as the Historical Jesus then and the risen Jesus now, but rather it is a matter of the two as one within a contemporary faith (Crossan 2000:34).

The good news

The canonical gospels are exactly what they openly and honestly claim they are (Crossan 1998:21): they are not history, though they contain history; they are not biography, though they contain biography; they are gospel, they are good news – *good* indicating that the news is from somebody's point of view, *news* indicating that a regular update is involved (Crossan 1998:21). Taken together it indicates that Jesus is constantly being actualised for new times and places, situations and problems, authors and communities. It is *primarily this dialectical process that made the canonical gospels normative* (Crossan 2000:34) – the gospels always created an interaction of Historical Jesus and risen Jesus, and that interaction must be repeated again and again throughout Christian history: but always *for* faith, *to* faith and *from* faith (Crossan 1998:21). With those canonical gospels as inaugural models and primordial examples, each Christian generation must write its gospel anew – first reconstructing its Historical Jesus with fullest integrity, and then saying and living what that reconstruction means for present life in this world (Crossan 1999:47). The *Logos*, the Word, means God's inaugural vision for the world at the dawn of creation. It is not as if God came up with a new idea or a new programme at the time of Christ – it should rather be seen to be as if the mighty stream of divine non-violent radicality had been pushing steadily against the logjam of civilisation's violent normality until it finally broke through (Crossan 2007:188).

Resurrecting justice

So it is about an image of the decline and fall of empire, a symbol of what has happened to every empire that has ever existed: eventually the wheels

come off the trolley and the trolley comes off the tracks (Crossan 2007:239): an allegory of imperial destiny with the wheels as violence, the trolley as empire, and the tracks as civilisation. Deep below the surface of history is a giant tectonic plate that some have called Macroparasitism, others Kleptocracy or the Trap; but Crossan (2007:240) calls it Civilisation itself – the normality or even the cutting edge of human civilisation in all its imperial inevitability has as its chant: “First victory, then peace” (Crossan 2007:240). On one side another plate grinds relentlessly against that great central one – some call it Idealism, others Eschatology or Apocalypse; Crossan (2007:240) calls it Post-civilisation, and its chant is: “First justice, then peace”. On the other side of Civilisation’s great central plate a third one also grinds relentlessly against it – some call it Nihilism, others Totalitarianism or Terrorism; Crossan (2007:240) calls it Anti-civilisation, and its chant is: “First death, then peace”.

There is both good news and bad – the bad news is that our problem is as deep as human civilisation itself; the good news, as seen from Jesus and Paul, is that the violent normality of human civilisation is not the inevitable destiny of human nature (Crossan 2007:241). In the challenge of Christian faith we are called to cooperate in establishing the Kingdom of God in a transformed earth – to imagine it, to create it and to enjoy it on a transfigured earth (Crossan 2007:242). The Second Coming of Christ is what will happen when we Christians finally accept that the First Coming was the Only Coming and start to cooperate with its divine presence (Crossan 2007:231). For, if enough people lived as he did, lived in non-violent protest against systemic evil and the normalities of this world’s discrimination, exploitation and oppression, the result would be a new world we could hardly imagine (Crossan 1998:279).

Last (first) thoughts

Wryly strange that “the enemy”, a “heretic”, can be so much closer to Jesus’s own vision of the Kingdom of God and the meaning of his resurrection. For it has been six years and counting that we as the Dutch Reformed Church have attacked, accused, defended and tried to bolster the resurrection; yet, to what end? We passionately claim that we are protecting the gospel, the Kingdom of God, yes, even Jesus himself; and then we use the resurrection as a tool for sniffing out those that don’t belong, for building walls and for keeping out those that don’t agree word-for-word with us. We have become another empire, with the resurrection simply our main offensive in the protection of this empire. Think about it – we are constantly arguing, pointing fingers, defending and vilifying; shouting at the top of our lungs about the importance of the resurrection; but what difference is this all-important resurrection

making in the way we function as an organisation or live our lives as individuals?

For Jesus the Kingdom of God was always about living a life in which the marginalised and the victimised felt welcomed and included, about bringing/defending justice into a world where injustice and violence reigned. What are we living to the people around us? What are we doing to change and stop the injustices taking place around us daily? What are we doing, as individuals and as organisation, to embody the resurrection of Jesus daily? Or are we so busy defending the letter of the faith that we are forgetting to live the faith Jesus embodied? When looking at “the facts” – at what has been said and been written and been done in the last couple of years – I fear the answer is yes. For where are the headlines in which the church cries out against the injustice of poverty? Where are the articles reporting on the church’s efforts to relieve the needs of the marginalised and the forgotten? Where are the news stories describing the church’s involvement in the country, their living of the resurrection life?

To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognise it “the way it really was”. It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger. Historical materialism wishes to retain that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to people singled out by history at a moment of danger. The danger affects both the content of the tradition and its receivers. The same threat hangs over both: of becoming a tool of the ruling classes. In every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it. The Messiah comes not only as the redeemer; he comes as the subduer of Antichrist (Benjamin 2009 [1939]:6).

This brings us back to empire: an empire is a phenomenon where the status quo is defended; where picket lines and borders are all-important; where people are divided into “in” and “out” and where everything possible is done to prevent change – for change could spell the end for an empire. The sorry reality is that the resurrection, for all our valiant efforts at protecting it, has become that picket line. It has become the border, the wall we build between ourselves and others. It has become the weapon we use to control and to manage our empire. Have we lost our connection to the resurrection life that Jesus invited us into? Has life now become stale dogma? And, at the risk of sounding corny, now knowing all that we do about Jesus and his agenda, one question remains: What would Jesus do? Not what we have been doing for the last six years.

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