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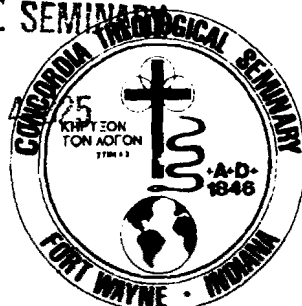
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Luther's Concept of the Resurrection in His Commentary on I Corinthians 15

David Scaer

In our time the resurrection of Jesus as historical fact has received a great deal of attention because of Rudolph Bultmann, who with his demythologizing denied it as historical fact but valued it because of its existential value for faith. This approach was not totally without value since it has forced tradition-minded Christians to reexamine the Biblical evidence to find support for what Luther sees as the linchpin of Christianity. Our intention is not to direct Luther's view to the contemporary problem, but to examine Luther within his own context. Luther's sermons on I Corinthians 15 delivered in 1533 will be studied. Here the general resurrection and Christ's resurrection are discussed as a unit.

I. Denial of Resurrection

We operate with a false view if we think that the denial of the resurrection is a contemporary problem. Bultmann's views are basically nothing new. In the last century David Friedrich Strauss startled the world by asserting that all miraculous events in the New Testament were fabricated by the writers. What is startling is Luther's claim that the Roman officials of his day did not really believe this article on the resurrection. Denial of the resurrection is motivated by the devil. Luther says, "For the devil surely presses us hard and assails us and also great men with the temptation to disbelieve this article or to doubt it. Pope, cardinals, and other great men, especially in Italy, are also fine, wise, intelligent, and learned people; yet if three could be found who believed this article, we should say that these were many."¹ Luther does not give us the details of this denial of the resurrection among Roman Church officials. Perhaps Luther sees the denial of the resurrection and of anything miraculous as a problem among church leaders in general without making a specific personal reference. The denial of the resurrection among the laity is virtually nothing in comparison with its denial among the clergy, who through their preaching can influence their congregations.² Christians should not, however, be too surprised by the denial of the resurrection. The Corinthian congregation denied it, though it had St. Paul as its pastor. The denial of the resurrection is akin to the denial of the sacramental efficacy of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Just as reason denies that

baptism washes away sins and that bread is Christ's body, so also it cannot believe that all men will be revived on the Last Day and that body and soul will be reunited.³

In some circles, including Lutheran ones in the 1950's, it has been fashionable and customary to deny the soul's survival after death. The soul is seen as a functional extension of the body. Luther's resurrection doctrine presupposes both a soul which survives and a body which decays. The body, united with the soul, is given a majesty which it has never previously known.⁴ Resurrection means reuniting body and soul in a union which we now experience.⁵ Reason is seen by Luther as the cause of denying the resurrection, because it operates only with what it can see:

To believe that [there is a resurrection] is surely not man's competence and power. For reason does no more than merely to observe the facts as they appear to the eye, namely, that the world has stood so long, that one crumbles to dust in the grave, from which no one has ever returned When reason approaches this article of faith and reflects on it, it is entirely at a loss.⁶

True to his graphic style, Luther points out how the bodily parts of the saints are scattered in several countries and how certain forms of dying make men's bodies turn quickly to dust and ashes so that no trace of them remains. The rebinding of these parts in the resurrection supersedes what reason can understand.

Luther here is not attempting to say that the resurrection doctrine is absurd in the sense that it is irrational. His diatribe against reason does not mean the suspension of the thought process. By "reason" he means induction from the collective human experience. This reason has experienced nothing more than the irreversible corruption of dead bodies, and this reason relies more on these experiences than God's Word. Luther's opposition to reason is not an invitation to surrender logic, as he himself sets up complex arguments in favor of the resurrection.

II. Proofs for the Resurrection

Luther's "proofs" of the resurrection are historical testimony to Christ's resurrection, the Scriptures, and the totality of Christian doctrine.

A. Historical Proofs

Receiving the least attention as proof of Christ's resurrection are the historical experiences of the apostles. In the current debate with the deniers of the resurrection, the defenders have chiefly focused their arguments on the reliability of the apostles as

historical witnesses. The argument from history hardly takes up a full paragraph in Luther's exposition of I Corinthians 15.⁷ Unlike current discussions there is no prolonged debate about the nature of history and historical reliability and whether or not the apostolic testimony, since it is allegedly biased, qualifies as history according to modern understanding. Luther's comparative lack of concern for a detailed historical argument is all the more astonishing since St. Paul's argument seems to be historical as he lists the witnesses to Christ's resurrection in an almost legal manner. Also noteworthy is Luther's lack of distinction between the appearances of Jesus to those who had been with him before the resurrection (e.g., Peter) and those who had not (e.g., Paul). Any serious debate on the historicity of the resurrection would also — at least it would seem to me — take into consideration the difference between the appearances of Christ during the forty-day period before the ascension and the subsequent Damascus Road appearance. Luther simply does not make the historical distinction here.

B. Scriptural Proof

It is not that Luther totally disregards the argument from history for Christ's resurrection, but he is interested in maintaining the centrality of the Scriptures as the ultimate available source of Christian truth. Even his discussion of the historical reliability of the witnesses of the resurrection is placed within the context of Scriptural prediction. Luther paraphrases Paul in this way, " 'All of these are, in addition to me, reliable witnesses of what we saw and experienced, carried out as foretold in Scripture.'"⁸ What impresses Luther is Paul's assertion that Christ "rose in accordance with the Scripture."⁹ The doctrine of the resurrection then gives Luther opportunity to extol Scripture for both its historical reliability and its efficacy. Luther is more interested in St. Paul's phrase that Christ rose in accord with the Scripture than he is in the apostle's careful listing of the historical witnesses. Luther's Scriptural obsession forces him to make quick work of the apostle's chief argument based on history so that he can concentrate on the Scriptures.

Luther interprets Paul's phrase "in accordance with the Scripture" as condemnatory evidence against those who find the Scripture a dead letter and who therefore assert that true power should be found outside of the Scripture in the Holy Spirit. Such an opinion comes directly from the devil. Luther does work with the distinction between the letter and the Spirit. The letter by itself is dead. This much Luther will grant his opponents. The letter,

however, which by itself is dead is the only vehicle through which the Spirit works. It is the deposit of all mysteries.¹⁰ Without the external word there is no working of the Spirit.

At first glance it might appear that Luther has surrendered too much to his opponents in speaking of the possibility of the Scripture's being a dead letter without the Spirit. The Reformer, however, can both condemn and praise (of course, from different perspectives) the use of the Word without the proper intention of those who are using it. Luther wants to avoid any magical use of the Word, as if the mere use of the Word places an obligation upon God to act in the situation where it is used. Even where the Word is used, God still has freedom in determining what its effect in each situation will be. The Word is always efficacious, but God will determine the effect. But God's freedom in his use of the Word to accomplish salvation does not mean that God can accomplish salvation in any way apart from the Word. Quite to the contrary, God's free choice in deciding to be efficacious in each situation is counterbalanced by His decision to act in no place other than in the Word. The Word is the only arena in which God accomplished salvation.

Since the Word provides the boundaries for God's saving activity in bringing men to belief, it must also be the only means of convincing men of the truthfulness of the resurrection of Jesus. Unless Luther's concept of the Word as God's only efficacious means is understood, his concentration on the Word as his chief "proof" for the resurrection seems somewhat unwarranted. Belief in the resurrection is subsumed under his theology of the Word. Here is how Luther presents the matter:

But here you notice how Paul adduces Scripture as his strongest proof, for there is no other enduring way of preserving our doctrine and our faith than the physical or written Word, poured into letters and preached orally by him or others; for here we find it stated clearly; "Scripture! Scripture!"¹¹

To some Luther's approach in presenting the belief that Christ's resurrection is fact as a subcategory of his Word theology may at first glance appear somewhat naïve. We would be hard pressed to name a leading defender of the historicity of the resurrection who would use Luther's argument today. Conservative Christians, committed totally to Luther's view on the Scripture as the God-given and efficacious Word, have seen the value of the historical arguments for Christ's resurrection put forth by those whose views of Scriptural origin and authority may be charitably called

inadequate. Here we can mention the names of Stephen O'Neill, I. Howard Marshall, F.F. Bruce, and even Wolfgang Pannenberg, the father of the school of the theology of history. We even hazard the generalization that in recent times the greatest defense of the historicity of the resurrection has come more from Reformed than Lutheran sources. All this seems strange since Luther associates the denial of the resurrection with the denial of sacramental efficacy. Belief in the resurrection for Luther is tied to accepting the Scriptures in their totality rather than seeing it as a separate act in history capable of proof.

No one can say with any certainty what approach Luther would use were he confronting the historical denial of the resurrection today. He may have adopted an approach more saturated with concerns for historical argumentation. Luther faced a different situation. The secular and religious spheres of knowledge were not divided as they are today. Special categories for religious and secular knowledge were not developed. For him the secular denial of the resurrection was a masked religious question. The resurrection, as well as all doctrine, was being mocked by the high officials of the church. It was not a question debated by secular scholars, as all scholars and universities were Christian. The problem was not that some doctrines were being accepted and others not, but that all doctrines revealed in the Scriptures were ridiculed. The real problem was not that the church leaders had studied the historical arguments and become convinced that the resurrection did not happen, but that they held that nothing of an alleged supernatural origin contained in the Scripture was worthy of their intellectual attention. The scoffers were dressed as Christians. With the Reformed the matter was somewhat different, but the result was the same. They did not treat the Scripture as fable, but by asserting other channels of authoritative operation for the Spirit outside of the Scriptures they were, in effect, asserting that the Scriptural truth was inoperative and ineffectual. The contemporary method of demonstrating the resurrection as historical fact from the Scriptures understood not as divine word, but as historical documents, considered as having the same or more reliability than other human documents, probably would have been strange to Luther. It does not seem as if Luther would have handled the resurrection as a purely historical act outside and apart from God's total revelation through His prophets and apostles.

C. The Resurrection and the Totality of Christian Doctrine

Whether or not Luther would have handled the resurrection of Jesus as an isolated historical event apart from its place in the totality of Christian revelation is open for debate. Like contemporary defenders of the historicity of the resurrection, he does see Christ's resurrection as the doctrine basic for all other doctrines:

Paul stakes everything on the basic factor with which he began, namely, that Christ arose from the dead. This is the chief article of the Christian doctrine. No one who at all claims to be a Christian or a preacher of the Gospel may deny that.¹²

The term "chief article" is generally reserved for the doctrine of justification. Both resurrection and justification can lay claim to being the chief. Resurrection holds the honor so far as the truth content and value of Christianity is concerned; justification, so far as the personal appropriation and assurance of salvation is concerned. In Bultmann's theology this relationship is reversed, so that justification becomes the basis for the apprehension of Christian truth and resurrection becomes the personal, existential awareness of faith. Resurrection is understood as justification, and thus the two are confused.

At this point it would seem (at least, according to our reasoning) that Luther should attempt to establish some type of historical proof for the resurrection of Jesus. By laying down such proof the scaffolding of the Christian doctrine would be secured. As mentioned previously, while Luther does see the resurrection as historical, he does not use historical arguments on which to build the structure of the Christian religion.

Here is how Luther proves the resurrection of Christ within the totality of Christianity: (1) The resurrection is the one doctrine which is absolutely necessary for Christianity. (2) You are Christian or you want to be Christian. (3) Therefore, you must adhere to the doctrine of the resurrection. Let Luther speak for himself at this point:

And since every Christian must believe and confess that Christ has risen from the dead, it is easy to persuade him to accept the resurrection of the dead; or he must deny in a lump the Gospel and everything that is proclaimed of Christ and of God. For all of this is linked together like a chain, and if one article of faith stands, they all stand.¹³

As Luther himself will note, this argumentation for the resurrec-

tion of the dead is intended for Christians and not for unbelievers. Apart from a word of revelation accepted in faith, the resurrection is contrary to how reason interprets experience. Luther sees that the Christian has a vital stake in the benefits of Christianity; and any denial of Christian doctrine, especially the resurrection of the dead, can mean the end of Christianity. Luther argues from the conclusion to the premises of the argument. Thus, his point is not this: if you believe in the resurrection, you will believe in forgiveness. Rather, his argument is this: since you believe in forgiveness, why would you want to destroy it by not believing in the resurrection?

III. The General Resurrection

A. The Resurrection as Necessary for Christianity

Luther, putting himself in the shoes of a non-Christian, is quite critical of Paul's argument that Christ's resurrection is sufficient proof for the truthfulness of the doctrine of the general resurrection. It would have no validity in court. Luther calls this begging the question.¹⁴ The resurrection of the dead is not proven by asserting the resurrection of Christ. Even proving the resurrection of Christ as historical fact does not prove that anyone else will rise from the dead. Arguing from the particular to the universal is not valid, in Luther's opinion.¹⁵

What then is the value of Paul's argumentation on the resurrection? It is not intended for those who have not become acquainted with Christianity but for those who are Christian because they have accepted the apostolic message as it was delivered to them as true. If the resurrection is denied, the Word of which the resurrection message is a part must also be denied. The denial of the Word, in turn, means denying the truthfulness of the apostles and of God, whose authorization the apostle claims. Questioning God's veracity is, for Luther, questioning His existence.¹⁶ The proof for resurrection is an all-or-nothing argument. Christianity cannot be accepted in pieces. Belief in Christianity without the resurrection is impossible:

For whoever denies God and His Word, His Baptism and Gospel, will not find it hard to deny the resurrection of the dead as well. If you dare to say that God is not God and that the apostles and Christendom do not teach and believe correctly, it is easy for you — and nothing seems better — to knock the whole bottom out of the barrel and say that there is no resurrection, neither heaven nor hell, neither devil nor

death, no sin, etc. For what will you believe if you do not believe that God is something?¹⁷

B. The Resurrection, the Existence of God, and the Totality of Revelation

Thus, basic to Luther's argumentation for the resurrection is the existence of God Himself. In reverse it would appear in this way: The existence of God is true. This true God appoints men designated as apostles who proclaim the truthfulness of God's existence. They also proclaim the resurrection. Therefore, the resurrection is as true as God is.

Luther's argumentation for the resurrection seems inadequate on historical grounds to those who do not share what for him was assured *a priori* — that God exists. The current historical arguments, which have their origin in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, are presented with no *a priori* assumption, especially God's existence. God is not denied, but His existence plays no necessary part in the quest for the truth. The resurrection is proven as bare historical fact, from which some may go on to establish Christianity, including God's existence. However, the question must be asked whether the resurrection of Jesus as bare historical fact without prior belief in God establishes anything clear. Luther starts off with God and concludes with the resurrection. Pannenberg, on the other hand, starts off with history as a given, proceeds to the question of the resurrection as history, and concludes with the possibility of God's existence. The resurrection as bare historical fact without interpretation, as Pannenberg holds, is useless for religion and man's existence. It can create awe and wonder; but can it create much else? Luther's avoidance of the bare historical argument may, in the end, prove to be the best possible course of action.

While with Luther there is the strong concern that denial of one Christian doctrine can have grave consequences for the rest of doctrine, there is the positive result of seeing revelation as totality. God's revelation of Himself as gracious necessarily implies a total revelation including resurrection. Therefore, Luther confidently holds that Adam was given a revelation of the resurrection in Genesis 3:15 in the promise that the woman's Seed would crush the serpent's head. God does not simply reveal that He exists, but He reveals Himself as one who accomplishes man's salvation in Christ and perfects this salvation in the general resurrection from the dead.¹⁸

Thus the real proofs for the resurrection are not historical facts

which are left to human interpretation, but rather the existence of God Himself:

Thus if you can believe that God is God, you must also not doubt that you will rise from the dead after this life; for if you were to stay underground, God would first have to become a liar and not be God. But if it is true that God cannot lie or deny or abandon His deity, this article, too, must become true. It is as certain before God as if the resurrection had already taken place, even though present appearances belie this, with men lying under the ground, stinking like a rotting carcass, and consumed by maggots and worms.¹⁹

Luther's argumentation for the resurrection moves from the question of God's existence to an accomplished certainty. While it might appear that he has taken "a leap of faith" for which there is no real evidence, his procedure is logical when it is realized that he has taken the argument for the resurrection from the nature of God. Since discussion of the resurrection is really an extension of discussion of God, it follows that the resurrection is no longer a future possibility but has already become an accomplished fact in the sight of God. Since the resurrection has been accomplished in the sight of God, the Christian's hope in the resurrection is not so much a hope of what God will do as it is confidence in what God already has accomplished. Faith in God and hope in the resurrection as future events are merged when the Christian by faith begins to share God's perspective. Since Luther sees the resurrection as a theological (in the narrow sense) issue, his minimal concern with historical questions is understandable. Luther's understanding of the resurrection as a theological issue does not, however, prevent him from seeing it as Christological.

IV. Resurrection, *Christus Victor*, and *Anfechtungen*

About a generation ago the English translation of Gustav Aulen's *Christus Victor* added a new — and to Lutherans, at first, frightening — dimension to the understanding of the atonement. Aulen attempted by reference to the early church fathers, the Scriptures, and especially Luther to champion a triumphal view of the atonement to the exclusion of satisfactional and moral views (i.e., that Christ paid a price for man's sin and that He left us an example). Confessionally-oriented Lutherans became so alarmed that they not only strongly emphasized the vicarious satisfaction as the central theme of the atonement but recognized it as virtually synonymous with it. Aulen's view was not new. He simply made an old view new for the twentieth century. His

exaggeration was clearly false. Regardless of his motives, he did call attention to a *Christus Victor* theme in Luther's theology. In Luther's theology *Anfechtungen*, resurrection, and the *Christus Victor* motif form an organic unit. Studying these topics together shows the unity of Luther's thought.

A. *Anfechtungen and Resurrection Belief*

Luther discusses *Anfechtungen* in connection with St. Paul's thought that Christians are the most pitiable of all men if, indeed, Christ has not been raised from the dead (I Corinthians 15:19). For it is on account of his belief that the Christian suffers at the hands of the world:

The world is so hostile to us; it begrudges us our very life on earth. Daily we must be prepared for the worst that the devil and the world can inflict on us. In the face of this, who would be stupid enough to be a Christian if there is nothing to a future life?²⁰

But Luther does not see the world's scorn and persecution as the chief affliction. These are called child's play.²¹ The real grief which the Christian endures for the sake of the bliss of the afterlife is internal *Anfechtungen*. Here the *Anfechtungen* are identified as the fear caused by God's wrath, eternal death, and becoming partners with Satan.

Perhaps it is debatable whether Paul was referring to Luther's idea of *Anfechtungen* or simply to external miseries as the reason why Christians should be pitied if there is, indeed, no resurrection from the dead. However, it is clear that Luther understands his *Anfechtungen* as the price which he must pay to be a Christian and to believe in the resurrection and to share its benefits. The *Anfechtungen* suffered by Luther in connection with his belief in the resurrection relate to the thought that believers have the certainty of the future life and the resurrection, while unbelievers await judgment and eternal fire.²² The Christian struggles because in his *Anfechtungen* he places himself with unbelievers and experiences God's wrath:

[The Christian] must always worry that he has angered God and merited hell, although he may be pious and well practiced in faith. For such thoughts will not cease; rather, they are felt more and more and always become stronger than good thoughts.²³

The heathen, in contrast, goes to his death as if he were an animal, with no thoughts of judgment and wrath.²⁴

B. Anfechtungen as the Common Experience of Believers

Luther has a place for a discussion on the *Anfechtungen* in connection with the resurrection because the *Anfechtungen* were part of Christ's suffering and were the necessary prelude to His own resurrection. As Christ's resurrection released Him from His *Anfechtungen*, so Christians will be released from their *Anfechtungen* through the appropriation of Christ's atonement, and the Christian's sufferings in his *Anfechtungen* are of the same type, "anguish and the fear of hell." Since the *Anfechtungen* were experienced by Christ, they become proofs to the Christian that he really belongs to Christ. Let Luther speak for himself here:

However, you must fend this [*Anfechtung*] off and cling with a firm faith to the fact that your Christ has risen from the dead. He, too, suffered such anguish and fear of hell [i.e., the type suffered by Christians now], but through His resurrection He has overcome all. Therefore, even though I am a sinner and deserving of death and hell, this shall nonetheless be my consolation and my victory that my Lord Jesus lives and has risen so that He, in the end, might rescue me from sin, death, and hell.²⁵

Luther calls these *Anfechtungen* "a reliable sign" to the believer of his Christianity.²⁶

While there is no suggestion in Luther's thought that the *Anfechtungen* of the Christian have any contributory value in the atonement, it does become clear that the Christian knows in a personal and direct way, not merely in an intellectual way, the sufferings endured by Christ in His atonement. The sufferings of Christ and Christians may differ in their intensity but not qualitatively. While justification is attributed to the Christian in a forensic sense, Christ's sufferings are shared personally by the Christians because Christ and the Christians are organically one. Since the Christian is part of the spiritual body of Christ, he *must* suffer not only *like*, but more importantly *with* Christ. In the experience of the *Anfechtungen*, the Christian is unified with Christ. Just as the Christian has no real freedom to avoid suffering, since he is one with Christ, so Satan is also without freedom in bringing this internal affliction into the Christian life. Luther says, "For all of this misery and grief arise because of Christ. It is due to the fact that the devil is hostile to Him and to His Word and to His rule, to Baptism, and to all of Christendom."²⁷

At this point Luther is ready to make the connection of the

Anfechtungen and the resurrection with the *Christus Victor* theme. The *Christus Victor* theme concentrates on Christ's saving work as a struggle with Satan. The struggle is brought to a satisfactory conclusion for Christ through His own resurrection. The Christian finds himself in two places, both within the struggle itself and within the victory provided in Christ's resurrection. Because of the double dimension, the Christian suffers even a further conflict. Within the struggles of the *Anfechtungen*, not only does salvation seem uncertain, but hell, association with Satan, and eternal damnation appear as the overarching realities; however, in Christ who has already risen from the dead, the Christian also knows personally through faith victory over the *Anfechtungen*. Since he is incorporated in Christ, he in God's view has already risen from the dead with Christ. With God the victory of the resurrection is already a certainty. As Christ is the cause of the Christian's suffering, He is also the cause of his release from suffering through glorification by resurrection. The resurrection is not a mere possibility but a reality for the Christian in his *Anfechtungen*, since Christ Himself was already relieved of His *Anfechtungen* in His resurrection.

Just as Luther can describe Christ's atoning suffering and the Christian's personal suffering by virtually the same language, so the same picturesque language used by Luther in putting forth the *Christus Victor* concept is used in describing the Christian's personal victory through resurrection. Luther is not content merely to say with St. Paul that Christ died and rose; he paints a magnificently gory picture borrowing language of the ancient church:

But [Christ] came forth alive from the grave in which He lay and destroyed and consumed both devil and death, who had devoured Him. He tore the devil's belly and hell's jaws asunder and ascended into heaven, where He is now seated in eternal life and glory.²⁸

It is obvious that Luther here is using the ancient church's description of Christ's death according to the hook-and-worm image. The hook is the divine nature and the worm the human nature. Satan, like a fish, devours both and is destroyed. Luther exhausts the imagery by referring to Satan's torn belly and ruptured jaw, a picture appreciated by any fisherman.

What is noteworthy is Luther's projection of the *Christus Victor* imagery into the Christian's personal victory in the *Anfechtungen*. (It might be called the "stomach imagery.") In the face of the *Anfechtungen* Christians can definitely and tri-

umphantly say to Satan,

Therefore devour us if you can, or hurl us into the jaws of death, you will soon see and feel what you have done. We, in turn, will create such a great disturbance in your belly and make such an egress through your ribs that you will wish you had rather devoured a tower, yes, an entire forest.²⁹

C. *The Relationship of Christ's and the Christian's Resurrection*

Luther's connection between the *Christus Victor* concept and the Christian's personal triumph over Satan comes in his discussion of Christ's being the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep (I Corinthians 15:20). Thus Christ's resurrection is not an isolated event occurring only to one person in history, but a cosmic event:

And what is more than that, calling Christ "the Firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep," Paul wishes to signify that the resurrection is to be viewed and understood as having already begun in Christ, indeed, as being more than half finished . . .³⁰

Luther takes total advantage of Paul's imagery of the church as Christ's body. Where the Head has gone, the body must also follow. Now since the Head is seated at God's right hand and has conquered death and the devil and whatever else causes the *Anfechtungen*, the Christian no longer has any need to be concerned. It seems that the combined imagery of "Head" and "Firstfruits" suggests to Luther a birth in which the child's head comes out before the body: "As in the birth of man and of all animals, the head naturally appears first, and after this is born, the whole body naturally follows."³¹ Suddenly from this perspective all that terrified the Christian previously, the *Anfechtungen*, is now viewed as positive benefit.

D. *Adam-Christ Imagery and Resurrection*

Christ's resurrection has the same efficacy for the resurrection of all men as Adam's sin had for the death of all men.³² Luther injects the thought that the general resurrection will involve the judgment of unbelievers, who will have little reason to rejoice in it.³³ Luther does, however, point out that Paul does not handle this matter but refers only to the resurrection of Christians. Luther has taken this concept over from John's Gospel, which speaks of one resurrection to life and another to damnation. The Christian's victory through resurrection finds its certainty in at least two points in Luther's theology: (1) the unity of the Christian with Christ, who has risen from the dead already, and (2) Christ's

place as the head of all Christians in the same sense that Adam was the head of humanity in bringing sin and death to it.

E. The Resurrection and the Current Anfechtungen

Eschatology is for Luther not something that will happen only in the future, but something already in the process of happening. Faith in the resurrection is not directed to something that God will do in the future but rather to what God is already in the process of doing now. In Christ the resurrection has already begun. This point does not change the fact that today the Christian experiences death and all the other factors that contribute to the horror of his personal *Anfechtungen*. He does not now experience personally the reality of his own resurrection. Luther sees the resurrection of Christ as being effective in the Christian's perspective of life and death now. Special significance is seen in the Pauline language in which Christ is described as raised from the *dead* and the "Firstfruits" of those who have fallen *asleep*. In the first instance the lifeless condition is called *death* and in the second *sleep*. Christ's submitting Himself to what otherwise would have been an eternal death (i.e., a death for which there is no solution) has changed that death into a temporary sleep for Christians:

And so Christians who lie in the ground are no longer dead, but sleepers, people who will surely rise again. For when we say that people are asleep, we refer to those who are lying down but will wake up and rise again, not those who are lying down bereft of all hope of rising again. Of the latter we do not say that they are asleep but that they are inanimate corpses. Therefore by that very word "asleep" Scriptures indicate the future resurrection.³⁴

The resurrection is past, present, and future depending on the perspective from which the words are spoken. Christians view their death as sleeping — they *will* be raised up; hence it is future. They also know of Christ's resurrection as an accomplished fact and already are sharing in His benefits; hence it is past. Since Christ's resurrection is an event of corporate significance, God has already initiated a present activity the processes which will culminate in the final resurrection.

The resurrection of Christians means that the Lord who proved by His resurrection that He was indeed the *Christus Victor* becomes totally operative in the lives of His Christians. This fact means that the *Anfechtungen* can be totally conquered. The *Anfechtungen* can be seen for what they are, temporal and not

eternal realities. The *Anfechtungen* are not God's final Word. Death, wrath, and hell were all real, but not in the sense that they would last forever for Christians. Satan preaches these as eternal realities of God and terrifies all Christians. Christ's resurrection has shown that Satan was still deceiving us all and that the eternal reality for all Christians is life with Christ. By resurrection Christ has shown us that the *Anfechtungen* were only God's masks, behind each of which stood a loving Father drawing us closer to Himself. In conclusion, let the Reformer speak with his own eloquent words:

Behold, thus we must view our treasure and turn away from temporal reality which lies before our eyes and senses. We must not let death and other misfortune, distress, and misery terrify us so. Nor must we regard what the world has and can do, but balance this against what we are and have in Christ. For our confidence is built entirely on the fact that He has arisen and that we have life with Him already and are no longer in the power of death. Therefore let the world be mad and foolish, boasting of and relying on its money and goods; and let the devil rage with his poisonous darts in our conscience; and let him afflict us with all sorts of trouble — against all of this our own defiant boast shall be that Christ is our Firstfruits, that He has initiated the resurrection, that He has burst through the devil's kingdom, through hell and death, that He no longer dies or sleeps but rules and reigns up above eternally, in order to rescue us, too, from this prison and death In the face of this, why should we let the devil terrify us and make us so despondent, even though he comes face to face with us and reaches out to us, as though he would rob us of everything; even though he kills wife and child, torments our heart with all sorts of misery and sorrow and in the end also destroys the body, assuming that he has thereby taken everything away?³⁵

FOOTNOTES

1. Martin Luther, *Commentary on I Corinthians 15*, tr. Martin H. Bertram, in *Luther's Works*, 28 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1973), p. 61.
2. *LW* 28, p. 62.
3. *LW* 28, pp. 69-70.
4. *LW* 28, p. 121.
5. *LW* 28, p. 69.
6. *LW* 28, pp. 69-70.
7. *LW* 28, p. 70.

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8. *LW* 25, p. 76.
 9. *Ibid.*
 10. *LW* 28, p. 77.
 11. *Ibid.*
 12. *LW* 28, p. 94.
 13. *Ibid.*
 14. *Ibid.*
 15. *LW* 28, p. 95.
 16. *LW* 28, pp. 95-96.
 17. *LW* 28, p. 96.
 18. *LW* 28, pp. 97-98.
 19. *LW* 28, p. 98.
 20. *LW* 28, p. 103.
 21. *Ibid.*
 22. *Ibid.*
 23. *LW* 28, p. 104.
 24. *Ibid.*
 25. *LW* 28, p. 105.
 26. *Ibid.*
 27. *LW* 28, p. 106.
 28. *LW* 28, p. 108.
 29. *Ibid.*
 30. *LW* 28, p. 110.
 31. *Ibid.*
 32. *LW* 28, pp. 113-115.
 33. *LW* 28, p. 114.
 34. *LW* 28, pp. 109-110.
 35. *LW* 28, p. 111.