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“What more can be said about the resurrection? Yet we must come to fresh appreciation of this central mystery for the sake of our Christian faith. What is Christ doing? What are we doing? Abbot Jeremy guides the reader, flashlight in hand, on a gentle walk through Scripture and Liturgy conjoined. First the transforming power of resurrection is shown in the biblical account of the Pasch. Then the Lord’s presence and power in the sacramental signs of the Paschal Triduum is shown. (Who could have guessed there was so much theology in the rubrics and texts and actions of these days?) This is liturgical exegesis at its best. Everyone should make a Lenten spiritual reading retreat by turning to this book during the last days of Lent and preparing themselves for the mystery of the Paschal vigil. Abbot Jeremy becomes theologian, poet, homilist, mystagogue, and spiritual father.”

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Professor, University of Notre Dame

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—Abbot Gregory J. Polan, OSB

Primate of the Benedictine Confederation, Sant’Anselmo, Rome

Awesome Glory

*Resurrection in Scripture,
Liturgy, and Theology*

Jeremy Driscoll, OSB



LITURGICAL PRESS
Collegeville, Minnesota

www.litpress.org

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1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Driscoll, Jeremy, 1951– author.

Title: Awesome glory : resurrection in scripture, liturgy, and theology / Jeremy Driscoll, O.S.B.

Description: Collegeville, Minnesota : Liturgical Press, 2019.

Identifiers: LCCN 2018034339 (print) | LCCN 2018044392 (ebook) | ISBN 9780814644270 (ebook) | ISBN 9780814644034 (pbk.)

Subjects: LCSH: Jesus Christ—Resurrection. | Catholic Church—Doctrines.

Classification: LCC BT482 (ebook) | LCC BT482 .D75 2019 (print) | DDC 232/.5—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2018034339>

*For the monks of Mount Angel Abbey
An effort by their Abbot,
wanting to strengthen their joy and their hope*

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Introduction

The most important event of human history, indeed, the most important event that has ever happened anywhere in the created universe, is the death of Jesus Christ on the cross and his being raised from the dead by the one whom he called God and Father. This event is the central proclamation of Christian faith. Everything that is Christian derives from this: a way of life, a way of prayer, a body of doctrine. If we Christians are to understand our faith and live it, we must continually deepen our grasp of what it means to say that the Jesus who was crucified has been raised up. An unimaginable new content has been introduced into our world by the resurrection of Jesus. Everything in the created order is changed by it. What was “natural” can now be played in a new key: a sweeter, stronger music that is nothing less than supernatural. The new key of resurrection takes up every melody of the old creation—from the joyous sounds of life’s greatest pleasures to the heartrending cries of suffering and death—and plays it in its supernatural tones. All that was passing and destined to be lost in the natural world is transformed into a song that will sound forever in the presence of God.

Easter is the annual celebration of this totally transformative event. By our very celebration of it—which in fact is extended over many days—we come under its force, we yield to its sway, we are inserted into the new life that will never end. Sunday Eucharist is the weekly celebration of this totally transformative event. Annually, in our celebration of Easter, we are renewed in our participation in the mystery of the Lord’s resurrection. Weekly, in our celebration of Sunday Eucharist, we are renewed in the same. Annually we prepare for Easter with forty days of Lent. We enter Easter day by means of the liturgies of the Paschal Triduum, but these launch us into the fifty days of Paschaltide, and all this culminates in the feast of Pentecost, an unimaginable outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the whole world.

The church lives her whole life in the world from the regular and continual nourishment she receives from her participation in these

events. The liturgies of the Paschal Triduum, of the whole paschal season, and of Pentecost, as well as all the subsequent Sundays of the year, are themselves *events*. They are strong, complex sets of rites. In all their moving and acting and speaking and singing and taking up of symbols of the strongest kind, these liturgies become *events* in the community that celebrates them. In fact, these liturgical *events* converge with the most important *event* that has ever happened: the death and resurrection of Jesus. By means of the liturgical events the community has communion in *the* event. We die with Christ and rise with him to new and everlasting life.

With this book, I want to suggest that we are in need of a much clearer focus on the mystery of the Lord's resurrection as the principal content of the Christian message. I do not simply say something to the effect of, "We should sort of emphasize the resurrection a bit more." I want to come to a more foundational level of the question, one that explores the deep structure of the entire Christian message with its center in resurrection. Resurrection is the deep structure and message of each of the *four gospels*. It is the deep structure of the birth of the church as narrated in the *Acts of the Apostles*. All of *Paul's letters* are constructed and move within this same deep structure. "If Christ has not been raised, then empty is our preaching; empty, too, your faith." he exclaims in 1 Corinthians (15:14). Likewise, the *liturgy*, in all its constitutive parts, echoes the same deep structure represented in all these New Testament texts. To take for the moment just the example of the form of the eucharistic liturgy, we see resurrection as the deep structure of the entire *Lectionary*, just as it is the deep structure in the liturgy of the *Eucharist*, which celebrates the memorial of Jesus' entry into his death and glorification by means of his Last Supper.

The better we understand these interpenetrating deep structures, the more mindfully we can participate in them and celebrate them and, indeed, live our whole lives in the world from the new life they bequeath to us. *We* become witnesses to what God has done and is doing still. *We* become evidence in the world that the Jesus who was crucified has been raised up by God, and so all things are new.

A Story from the Synod on New Evangelization

The church held a synod on the new evangelization during three weeks of October 2012, scheduled to coincide with the fiftieth anni-

versary of the opening of Vatican Council II. This synod and many other things have set the whole Catholic community to thinking further about the new evangelization called for repeatedly by recent popes. It is worth observing that to evangelize well, we must be in renewed and ardent touch with what makes the Gospel compelling to ourselves. Evangelization is always an overflow of something else. Grasping at greater depth and with deeper wonder the absolute and total novelty of the divine deed that raised Jesus from the dead and gives us a share in his new life—this makes the Gospel compelling, and our sharing it with others should overflow from it.

One of the major focuses of the new evangelization is to bring alive again the vigor of the faith in the already baptized who may not be practicing any more or whose practice has grown lukewarm and mediocre. Once grasped and believed in, the actual content of what Christian faith proclaims is something absolutely stunning. I think one of the main tasks of the new evangelization for the whole church is a recovered sense of clarity about what the central core of the proclamation is. That may sound obvious, but I believe we are lacking this clarity in the general day to day of our life together in the church and in many of our pastoral undertakings. This is a theological question that needs to be treated competently and correctly, and it is also a question of the spirituality that would flow from this center correctly and be effectively identified by theology. This book is an attempt to do that.

I would like to share a story from the synod. In his intervention on the floor of the synod hall, addressing the entire assembly of bishops, Cardinal Telesphore Toppo from India told a story. It exactly caught my concerns. He told of a Hindu teenager who had been hanging around the Catholic priests for some time, in a school setting of some sort. I do not remember the details of the setting. But the boy was obviously a spiritual seeker, and he was often asking questions about Christian belief. At one point one of the priests gave the boy a copy of the gospels and told him to read them and then come back with questions and reactions. The boy came back more or less flabbergasted and accusing. He wanted to be sure he had got it right, and so he demanded clarification. "Jesus is risen from the dead?" he asked, "really risen from the dead?" "Yes," they calmly answered, not displeased at his excitement. "Why didn't you tell me!" he shouted at them, astonished that they would not have told him that straight out from the start.

I think this is a big lesson for us all as we consider the new evangelization, a big lesson for us all as we consider what it means to identify ourselves as believing Christians. Surely, that Jesus is risen from the dead is the central point. Everything else flows from that. Of course, there is much more than that to say and think about. But everything flows from resurrection of the crucified Jesus and leads back to that. Resurrection light defuses itself through everything that Christians believe and proclaim and know to say about Jesus.

Something Called “Ping”

I ask my reader’s indulgence to offer what perhaps may be considered a poetic interlude in this introduction. I want to express the importance of our pondering the resurrection in this book in a context that takes the whole cosmos into account. Cosmic consequences will not be my main focus in the book, but they are the ultimate context. This is an account of a dream I had that can perhaps evoke the point I want to make about the cosmic context of our thinking together about resurrection. I title my account “Ping.” This obscure title will, I hope, come clear with the reading.

“Ping.” During a restless night of sleep I had many mini-dreams, most of which, as usual, made no sense. However, there were two that did, one of them curious and interesting; the other, it would seem, a profound illumination. The curious dream was simply being presented with a title, a title which was like that of some symposium or project. It was

The Sun at Its Zenith Noon in Cosmos and Culture

There it stood in front of me. And I remember thinking, half asleep, half awake: not a bad phrase to come upon in a dream.

The second dream had to do with the cosmic context of the death of Christ, and although there were many nonsensical dreams between the symposium title and this, this dream seemed somehow to derive from the symposium title. Lurking in the back of the dream on the borders of my awareness was the line from the gospels as Jesus was dying: “It was now about noon and darkness came over the whole land” (Luke 23:44).

In this dream there was a vision of tiny planet Earth from far out in the cosmos, from the very edges of our solar system or perhaps beyond it. It was

one of the millions of things shining, but somehow I knew it was Earth, planet Earth. Then suddenly it shone with a new ping of light, not outshining any other but pinging with a new light, different from all the rest. I knew—intuition dream—that it was light from the moment of Christ's death, the moment in which the Lord of the Universe, God himself, had undergone that monstrous thing that had come to be on Earth, human death. And by God's having undergone it, it was also in that instant transformed. This was the ping of light. I saw that all the long history of the cosmos, its nearly fourteen billion years, was headed toward this Marvelous Exchange. Not only was this a universe that somehow knew we human beings were coming—we are not merely a monstrous accident of chance and evolution—it was a universe that knew God would make this Exchange, a universe that God made so that this could happen. Death stings and poisons that creature distinguished from all others by its awareness of coming death, but then God comes and makes this Exchange, standing himself in the place of death and so removing its sting. Intuition dream.

Then I awoke into my own little place on this planet floating in the cosmos. Earth, where God raised Jesus from the dead.

The Structure of the Book

There are many ways to think about the mystery of the resurrection. The testimony of *Scripture*, of course, is fundamental. But what the Scriptures recount has been thought about for millennia by believing Christians, and all sorts of *theology* has come about from that. The Scriptures come especially alive when they are proclaimed in the *liturgy*, but they also expand from being words proclaimed into becoming *sacramental events* that totally draw believers up into the mystery of resurrection. Scriptural words become sacraments, and Christians die and rise with Christ in baptism and live from his glorious risen life in the nourishment of the Eucharist. All this makes it possible and, indeed, imperative that *we live in a new way* in the world. The world is meant to be changed radically because of the way Christians live within it their participation in the resurrection. Each of these dimensions (italicized above) suggest both a method and a structure for the book.

Part 1 offers a summary of the proclamation of resurrection in theological terms. I do not begin straightaway with the scriptural witness that is so fundamental to our knowledge of resurrection. I presume my reader has a general knowledge of the basic lines of the

claim—namely, that after a brief but spellbinding ministry of preaching and healing, Jesus of Nazareth is misunderstood by the religious authorities of his day and, with the collusion with the Romans and these authorities, is crucified. Later, to the astonishment of those who had followed him and had, because of the crucifixion, thought themselves mistaken for having believed him to be the Messiah, Jesus appeared to chosen witnesses in a glorified state in which he indeed was seen to be Lord and Messiah. On the basis of this fundamental outline of the story, I want in part 1 to pull all the different scriptural ways of speaking about the extraordinary experiences of these chosen witnesses into a single synthetic vision that describes the Christian experience of the resurrection of the crucified Jesus.

When I say resurrection, this is, of course, intimately connected with the crucifixion of Jesus. But no one would be speaking about his crucifixion, much less his preaching and ministry, were it not that God had raised the one who had been crucified from the dead. This intimate connection between cross and resurrection is made clear in all the New Testament texts, however diverse from one another they may be. It is also an intimate connection made manifest in all the liturgies that the Christian community celebrates. The community's liturgical gatherings become the primary context for an encounter in the here and now with the crucified and glorious Lord Jesus. Such gatherings are the context that first created the New Testament texts and in which they are subsequently proclaimed. Such gatherings are also the context of the Lord's presence and power to save through sacramental signs. So part 1 finishes with a presentation of the birth of the liturgy as a constitutive part of the event of the Paschal Mystery itself. This sets us up and leads naturally into part 2.

Part 2 considers the witness to cross and resurrection in the liturgy of the church, not in general terms, but in a focused way on the very heart of the liturgical year—namely, the Paschal Triduum with its climax in the Paschal Vigil and the opening of this into the fifty days of Easter until Pentecost. There are separate chapters on Holy Thursday, Good Friday, the Paschal Vigil, Easter day and its Octave, Ascension, and, finally, Pentecost. These liturgies present us with abundant materials for exploring and deepening our understanding of resurrection. From these liturgies—from the Scriptures proclaimed in them and the rituals enacted—the church's rich theological understanding has developed. But not only that. These liturgies effectively

establish us in communion with the death and resurrection of Jesus in such a way that we can live in the world with the Spirit-filled energy that is given us by these. Reflecting on these liturgies will require of us what could be called a *liturgical exegesis*; that is, a discussion of passages of Scripture that takes account of their place in the liturgy, in relation to the other passages in that liturgy and in relation to the sacramental realities celebrated there.

I regret that I cannot do more than this in the present book, for there will be a great deal left untouched. The next move—another book?—in the logic of the method and structure I am using would be to examine, especially by means of the deeply theological letters of St. Paul, the consequences of resurrection for us and how we live. Paul's theology teaches us that the resurrection of Jesus is an event with universal consequences for the whole of humanity and the cosmos. It likewise has moral consequences that equip believers to live in a completely different way, not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. Resurrection creates a community of believers called in turn *church, temple of the Holy Spirit, Body of Christ*.

A note to the reader on how I will speak of the various liturgies. I imagine them beautifully celebrated according to the ideal that the liturgical books themselves set down. This way of speaking is an invitation not to get snagged for the moment on practical problems or unfortunate ways of celebrating that we may have encountered. To develop a theology based on the liturgical experience, the liturgical experience has to be imagined in its ideal form.

In any case, it is time now to dive in and do what we can. "Jesus is risen from the dead?" the little Hindu boy asked his Christian friends. "Why didn't you tell me?" Let us see if we can deepen our own understanding, hoping that no one will ever reproach us with such a question.

Part 1

A Summary of the Proclamation in Theological Terms



The event of Jesus' death and resurrection is the central proclamation of Christian faith. But this event, in fact, unfolds into infinite dimensions. By means of this event, God reveals who God is and what his plan and intentions are in having created the world. The theological tradition has developed an expression that enables us to say all at once: death, resurrection, ascension, sending of the Spirit, and establishing of the church. The expression *Paschal Mystery* means all of this at once, all of this as one single, huge deed of God posited in our world. It is important for us to understand the logic of this claim, that all these various events are essentially one huge event, something that can be named with a single expression. Jesus himself named it with a single expression, calling it "my hour" on a number of occasions, as reported in the Gospel of John (John 2:4; 5:25, 28; 7:30; 8:20; 12:13; 17:1), and the evangelist himself uses this same term for the multilayered reality (John 13:1). Jesus also refers to his cross, resurrection, and ascension by the single term of his being "lifted up" (John 3:14; 8:28; 12:34).

Understanding the logic of using single expressions—*Paschal Mystery, hour, being lifted up*—for these various events is the task of part 1. There are four little chapters here. First, the Paschal Mystery as a whole will be described, drawing into a unified vision, language from Scripture, theology, and liturgy. Second, we will look more closely at

the range of meanings in the word *pasch*, hoping thereby to heighten our sensibilities to the words *pasch* and *paschal* as these are used in Scripture, theology, and the liturgy. Third, we will reflect in theological terms on the nature of the crisis that the community of Jesus' disciples experienced at his death. Tightly joined to this, we will speak also in theological terms of how this crisis is unexpectedly overcome in the community's encounters with Jesus risen from the dead. In a fourth chapter, we see that the origins of the liturgies that we still celebrate today are rooted in the paschal event itself, that liturgy is an actual part or dimension of Jesus being raised from the dead.

Chapter 1

The Paschal Mystery Described

In the several years of ministry before his passion and death, Jesus of Nazareth gathered a group of disciples around himself and moved with them through Galilee announcing that the kingdom of God is at hand. People were spellbound by his teaching. He worked wonderful signs of healing. And when his closest disciples began to believe him to be the Messiah promised by God who would restore the kingdom to Israel, he taught them that the Messiah had to go up to Jerusalem, suffer greatly from the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, then be killed and on the third day be raised up. This mysterious teaching was not understood at the time, but Jesus continued to repeat it to his disciples. As his ministry advanced, Jesus revealed himself to be totally caught up and marked by this strange messianic vision. He set his face to go up to Jerusalem. And we would not be wrong to consider his ministry of teaching and healing to be a slow and determined procession to Jerusalem, where he was ready to undergo what awaited him.

At every stage of his ministry Jesus showed himself to be totally shaped by his confident surrender to the One whose coming kingdom he announced, the kingdom of his God and Father. His disciples found him absorbed in prayer through the long hours of the night or in the early hours of the morning. One of the most precious gifts he gave them was teaching them how to pray as he did, by addressing God with the close and affectionate title of *Abba*, Father. Jesus spoke constantly of his Father, and he revealed who God is by speaking in marvelous parables of the Father's love. On the occasions when he spoke of the signs of healing that he worked, he explained that he did them because he had been sent from his Father, that he and

the Father were one, that he did only what he saw the Father doing (John 5:16-47).

Jesus' constant surrender to his Father, which characterized his entire life, culminated in his death on the cross, when he entrusted himself entirely into the hands of the One who alone could save him. The gospels give us glimpses of how profound was the agony of Jesus in the last hours of his life, to the point even of sweating drops of blood. But he kept on praying and called God "Abba" and said, "Abba, Father . . . not what I will but what you will" (Mark 14:36). And even if in the course of the long, drawn-out hours of his dying, he was heard to pray "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt 27:46), his very last words were "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46) and "It is finished" (John 19:30). Praying thus, he uttered a loud cry and passed over his spirit. Jesus' whole life was a procession toward that loud cry, where with his body even more than his voice, he thrust his whole being toward the One whose coming reign he announced, toward the One who alone could save him.

Jesus' cry was answered by the Father. When Jesus surrendered himself completely to God in death, then God the Father surrendered himself completely to his Son, filling him with divine life, raising him up from the dead, making him the first human being born again from the dead and thus making him the pioneer of our salvation. Jesus' whole life, culminating in his death, was an invocation of God with the name "Father." God answers this invocation with an invocation of his own. "Beloved Son!" he says to Jesus. And the uttering of this name raises him up. This exchange of names is the highpoint of all the deeds of God in the created universe. This exchange *is* the death of Jesus and his resurrection, his death conceived as his crying out the name "Father" with his entire being, his resurrection conceived as the Father's crying out "Beloved Son" with his entire being (see Acts 13:33).

This exchange of names has occurred from all eternity. It is what God *is*. But what is new here—utterly unforeseen, completely undreamed of—is that this exchange of names should take place now, at a particular place and time in the created universe, indeed that it should take place from within the realm of death, that realm set up by rebellious creation which had ruptured the relationship with God, the exchange of names that God wished to share between himself

and human beings. If the exchange of divine names can occur even within the realm of death, this means that the power of that realm is undone. Its continued power—that we all must undergo death—is henceforth only apparent, for what happened at Jesus' death cannot pass away. From within the space of death Jesus said "Father," and into that realm the Father pronounced the name "Beloved Son." All of us who must enter that realm can now do so crying out the name "Father" in confident surrender, and we can expect to hear ourselves addressed there by a name which raises us up: "Beloved!" But I am perhaps getting ahead of myself. I am talking already about our share in the Paschal Mystery. We have not yet finished watching that immense event unfold. Let us turn back to it, knowing that we can come in due time to a careful meditation of all the ways we share in it.

Raising Jesus from the dead was but the beginning of the Father's answer to his Son's surrender into his hands. The Father glorified his Son totally and absolutely. The risen Son ascended into heaven in his glorified body, drawing the whole universe toward him in this luminous ascent, for he is connaturally joined in his body to the whole created realm. The ascended Son was seated in glory at the Father's right hand. To say something like this—seated at God's right hand—is language and an image with which we grope for some way to say that Jesus is placed totally where God is, that he completely shares all that is of God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible. But if in his glorification Jesus is seated now at the Father's right hand, we can never forget or stop being amazed that the one who is seated there is the one who was crucified. Ascended into heaven and glorified forever at his Father's right hand, Jesus gives unceasing thanks and praise for his having been raised up, for his own glorification. His crucified and now glorified body retains the wounds of his crucifixion. Those wounds are continually set before the Father's eyes. They continue to plead on our behalf. His wounds call upon the Father to send forth on the rest of humanity the Spirit that raised him from the dead.

The Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead—this is another way, another angle from which to view the jewel of the Paschal Mystery. The Father filled with his *Breath (the Spirit)* the corpse of his Son. The risen Lord breathed on his disciples and said to them, "Receive the holy Spirit" (John 20:22)! The Spirit given to Jesus at his resurrection immediately flowed through him to those who believed in him. The

gift of the Father, then, was enormous. Not only was his glorified Son in their midst, but the Spirit immediately flowed out through him. Yet there seem to be stages, as it were, of the revelation of this infinite gift. For forty days the disciples' attention was focused on encounters with the risen Jesus, meeting him in that same body in which he was crucified, "eating and drinking with him after he rose from the dead" (see Acts 10:41). But after forty days Jesus was taken from their sight as he ascended into heaven, after telling his disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the gift of the Holy Spirit that he had promised.

On Pentecost, suddenly the Holy Spirit came down with force on the gathered disciples. What in fact is happening here, what this reveals, is that the Father's act of raising Jesus in the Spirit is inseparably one with his act of transmitting the Spirit through Jesus to all who believe in him. This outpouring of the Spirit from the Father through the body of the ascended Lord Jesus is nothing less than the birth of the church, that is, the birth of a community of disciples who are filled in their mortal bodies with the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead. This Spirit renders these disciples capable of understanding all that God has done in raising Jesus from the dead. The Spirit makes them witnesses and forceful preachers whose announcement of the deed of God becomes the very occasion of the hearers encountering the risen Lord whom the disciples announce. So, just as the Father's raising of the Son is inseparably one with his sending of the Spirit, the sending of the Spirit is inseparably one with the birth of the church. All this, from the death of Jesus to the birth of the church, *is* the Paschal Mystery. It is his hour. It is his being lifted up, when he draws all things to himself. It is an hour which does not pass away. Each of the Paschal Mystery's dimensions is inseparably one with the other.

It is striking how, in order to speak of all the dimensions of the death and resurrection of Jesus, we have had to speak of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and also of the church. The death and resurrection of Jesus *is* the revelation of the Holy Trinity, which includes our communion in trinitarian life. And although it would take us too far afield to enter at length into a discussion of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, it is important for us to realize that the doctrine has its roots here. In other words, the doctrine of the Trinity is not some arbitrarily complex and too subtle a set of ideas about God. It is rather how the community that encounters God through the resurrection of Jesus

learns to speak of all that God is—knowledge of God inconceivable without all that is revealed in the Paschal Mystery.

We have just mentioned how the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost created a body of disciples capable of understanding what God had done in raising Jesus from the dead. They were not only granted a new level of understanding, but they also became fearless in witnessing to it. The Acts of the Apostles leaves us the precious record of many of the sermons of the Spirit-filled witnesses. Again and again, we hear variations on one basic, core announcement that constitutes the central content of their message. In one way or another they announce, “This Jesus who was crucified, God has raised him up, and we are his witnesses.”