

Resurrection and I

Dan Fefferman, April 16 2017

Today being Easter, I've chosen the theme of the Resurrection. To begin, here's a story about one person's spiritual resurrection:

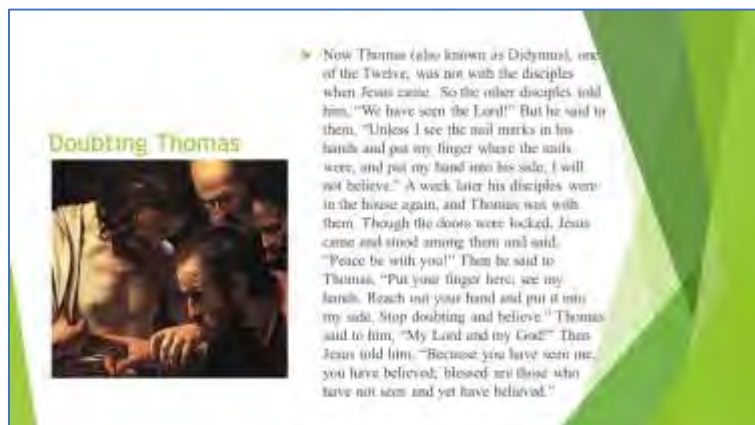
Once there was a boy whose family didn't believe in God. The boy himself wanted to believe, but he was loyal to his parents. So at the age of five, the little philosopher told God, "God, right now I can't believe in you because I have to obey my parents. But maybe, when I become a man,



then I'll believe in you. And sure enough, when he was about 18, he started to believe. On his 19th birthday he said to God, "God, now I believe in you. But now I want to know what it means to be a man of God. I want to know what it means to be your son.

That day he went on a long walk through the hills of Marin Forest in the San Francisco Bay area and ended up at the beach, exhausted. As he lay on the beach he felt as if Jesus entered his body spiritually and he began to feel as if he himself was on the cross, pouring out his life's blood for mankind. That began an intense spiritual quest for the young man. That was nearly 60 years ago, and the quest is still continuing.

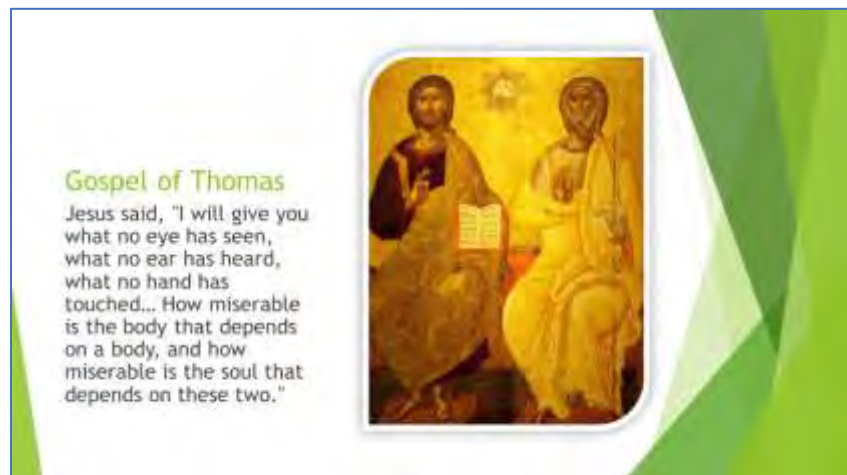
Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe." A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."



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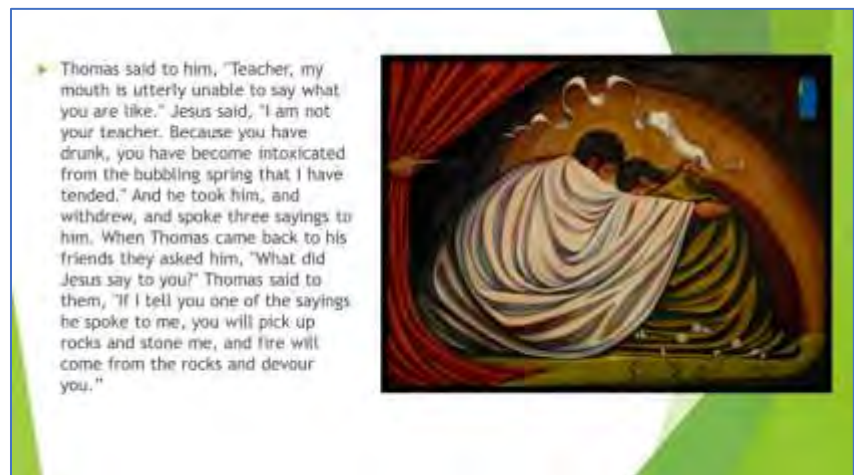
Today’s text from the Gospel of John is crucial in understanding the view of the early church. Together with the story of the Empty Tomb, it constitutes the most dramatic evidence of the physical resurrection of Jesus’ body. On the other hand, we should understand that there were also communities in the early church which took a completely different view. The Gnostics for example, portrayed Thomas as the disciple that Jesus trust most fully. In the Gnostic idea, Thomas was truly “Didymus” the spiritual twin of Jesus. Here’s an excerpt from the Gospel of Thomas:

Jesus said, "I will give you what no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, what no hand has touched... How miserable is the body that depends on a body, and how miserable is the soul that depends on these two."



In the Gospel of John, Thomas is the least spiritual of the disciples, and also the least faithful, but he demands physical evidence of the resurrection. But among the Gnostics, he was the MOST faithful and the most spiritual. In fact, in the Gospel of Thomas, it was Thomas that Jesus alone that trusted with his secret teachings:

Thomas said to him, "Teacher, my mouth is utterly unable to say what you are like." Jesus said, "I am not your teacher. Because you have drunk, you have



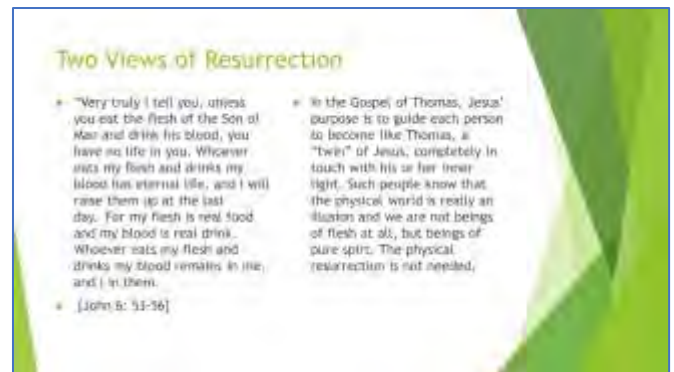
become intoxicated from the bubbling spring that I have tended." And he took him, and withdrew, and spoke three sayings to him. When Thomas came back to his friends they asked him, "What did Jesus say to you?" Thomas said to them, "If I tell you one of the sayings he spoke to me, you will pick up rocks and stone me, and fire will come from the rocks and devour you."



What are we to make of these two Thomases – one the least blessed and least faithful, the other the most blessed and most faithful? The answer lies in two views of the Resurrection, rooted in two views of the purpose of Jesus coming.

Two Views of Resurrection

In the Gospel of John – and indeed in virtually all of the New Testaments writings starting from the letters of Paul – the purpose of Jesus coming is to sacrifice himself on the cross so that we can inherit eternal life by having faith in the atoning grace of his death and resurrection, and by partaking in the sacraments of baptism and holy communion.



“Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.⁵⁵ For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. [John 6: 53-56]

In the Gospel of Thomas, Jesus’ purpose is to guide each person to become like Thomas, a “twin” of Jesus, completely in touch with his or her inner light. Such people know that the physical world is really an illusion and we are not beings of flesh at all, but beings of pure spirit.

Some Gnostics believed that Jesus didn't even HAVE a physical body, that he didn't actually die on the cross. This doctrine was known as "Docetism." It was condemned in the 2nd Letter of John: "Many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh; any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist."

The text of the Gospel of Thomas only became known to us in the mid 20th century. This discovery – together with many other gnostic writings discovered at the same time – has given us a great insight into the culture of the early Christian church. Elaine Pagels, author of "The Gnostic Gospels" is one of many scholars who believes that the story of Doubting Thomas is actually a reaction against Gnosticism, and perhaps directly against the Gospel of Thomas in particular. This would certainly explain both why Thomas is denigrated in John's Gospel, and also why the story of Doubting Thomas so dramatically emphasizes Thomas' supposed conversion from a denier of the physical resurrection to its most fervent supporter.

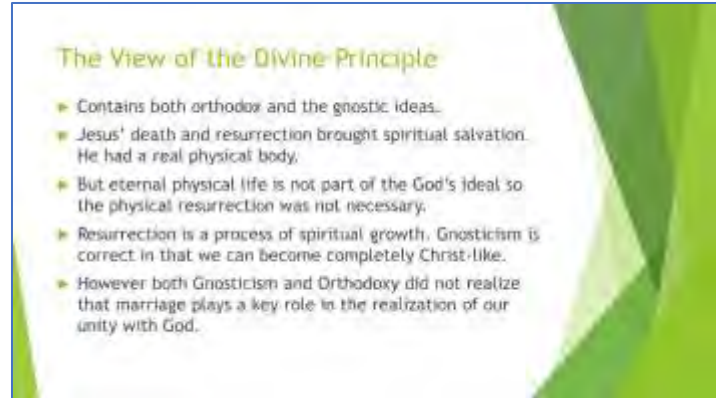
How do we resolve the quandary of the "two Thomases?" Before I joined the Unification Church I often listened to the recorded sermons of the Rev CL Franklin, Aretha Franklin's father. He was not only one of the most powerful preachers I have ever heard but also one of the wisest. This is how he dealt with the issue of Doubting Thomas.



"I don't know how God raised, his son. I'm not concerned about whether it was bodily or spiritual. I believe that Jesus liveth tonight. And the reason I know he's alive... he's living in me life."

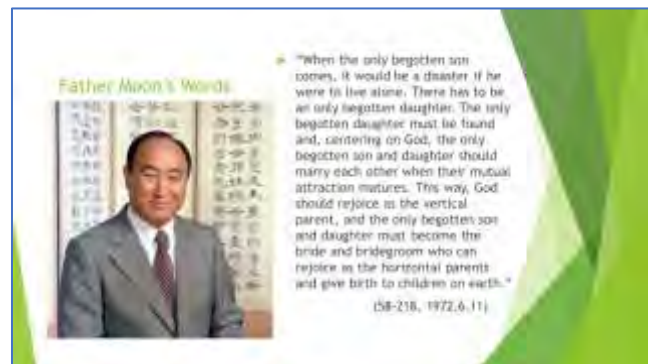
I've always like that approach. The important thing is not whether Jesus' body literally rose from the grave, but the fact that he is still alive spiritually, that he's still a living influence. And he's still the model of how we should live, loving God with our whole heart and loving our neighbor as ourselves.

Divine Principle goes one step further. It combines both the orthodox view Jesus' death and resurrection bring spiritual salvation AND the gnostic insight that we are all supposed to become Christ-like, so the physical resurrection would be unnecessary.



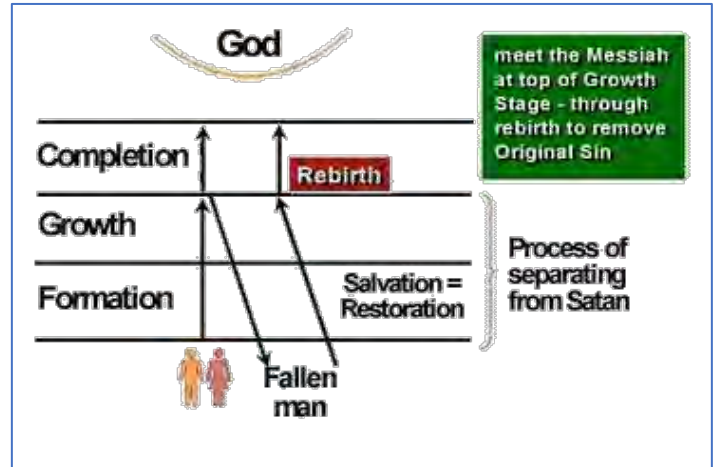
In DP, Jesus, as the Second Adam, was supposed to find a Second Eve. As Rev. Moon stated:

“When the only begotten son comes, it would be a disaster if he were to live alone. There has to be an only begotten daughter. The only begotten daughter must be found and, centering on God, the only begotten son and daughter should marry each other when their mutual attraction matures. This way, God should rejoice as the vertical parent, and the only begotten son and daughter must become the bride and bridegroom who can rejoice as the horizontal parents and give birth to children on earth.” (1972.6.11)



This idea goes against both the orthodox teaching that Jesus came to die AND the Gnostic “heresy” that the physical body is evil. Many Gnostics were so serious about this that they believed marriage itself was absolute against God’s will, for it results in more children – more spirits trapped in their physical bodies. Many Orthodox Christians also saw marriage as less than ideal, choosing to follow a solitary path of devotion as monks, believing this brought them closer to Jesus. But for Unificationists, Jesus came not to die, but to live, to marry, and together, with his Bride, show us the way we should live.

In Divine Principle, resurrection doesn't mean to rise from the physical grave. It means to come alive spiritually, to experience rebirth, and to grow to spiritual maturity. Once each of us becomes spiritual mature, we can then marry, have children, and fulfill God's blessing to "be fruitful and multiply."



So today, as we celebrate Easter, let's remember Jesus sacrifice, his death and resurrection which provide the grace of spiritual rebirth. And let's also remember the original hope of God, that Jesus, as the Second Adam, would find his Bride, establish the ideal of True Parents, and show us all the way to do the same. Let's demine that we will fulfill the hope of God and Jesus, to do "even greater things" that Jesus did, by fulfilling the ideal of True Family.

