John Dominic Crossan’s Responses to Questions 15 & 17–36
Not Answered during the Westar Webinar,
“Jesus: Ascension or Resurrection,” September 30, 2020

Question 15
Mathew says: ἠγέρθη γὰρ, καθὼς εἶπεν (“He is not here for he has risen,” RSV), but you don't address the Gospel use of the word resurrection. Could you?

Answer:
Your quote from Matthew 28:6 and its use of the verb egeirō in the passive is not in question and neither, as we saw, is the use of that same verb in Paul’s 1 Cor 15:12–15, with its reciprocity between Jesus’ resurrection and the universal resurrection of the dead (anastasis nekrōn).

The point is whether those first Messianic/Christic-Jewish companions of Jesus could have ever imagined resurrection as an individual resurrection for Jesus alone rather than as the start of the universal resurrection now, as an ongoing and developing through-time process rather than as a single end-time product.

My argument is that they could not do so, did not do so, and would have found the consequent Western iconographic tradition (were they to have seen it!) to be individual Ascension not Universal Resurrection.

Question 17
I had associated the word Ascension with Acts 1:10 (“And while they were gazing into heaven as he went...”, RSV).

Answer:
You are correct that we have a standard first-century Ascension described both in Luke 24:51 (“was carried up”) and Acts 1:9 (“he was lifted up”) so that Luke-Acts, and Luke-Acts alone, makes a clear and chronological distinction between Resurrection (“was raised up”) and Ascension. There is, then, no radical distinction between the imagery for Ascension in the Western and Eastern tradition whereas there is for Resurrection.

Still, in the Western tradition the only difference between the last-stage “hovering” Resurrection and Ascension is guards at the former, disciples at the latter.

Question 18
Do you see parallels to the individual/universal artistic metaphors in Western and Eastern Christian architecture? It seems that the Latin basilica with its linear structure and the Greek “in the round” structure may reflect something similar to the visual metaphors you’ve lifted up in visual arts.

Answer
That is a fascinating question and I think the answer is YES on a very profound level and probably better than I, myself, understand. The Western tradition, as you know, adopted the basilica structure and name where the gaze was directed always to the front of a long structure where the power-proceedings—juridical or political—were enacted.

The Eastern tradition surrounds you with local and universal saints below and the life of Jesus above, up to the angels and Pantokrator in the central dome. The rites and chants behind the iconostasis are not, it seems to my outsider opinion, such a domineering visual focus as in the basilica-style church.
In any case, my wife, Sarah, and I found that any four of the tiny, ancient village churches in the Troodos Mountains of Cyprus, for example, were far more moving than the marbled magnificence of Rome’s four great basilicas.

**Question 19**  
Given your analysis of the escalation of violence and the response of nonviolence, what does this tell us about how we should think of Christian Ethics and its role in the world today?

**Answer**  
I have a problem with the phrase “Christian Ethics” because, all too often, it can refer to a distinction, however named, between “the proclamation” (kerygma) and “the teaching” (didachē)—often with the former far more important than the latter as dogma over ethics.

The problem is that, as we saw with Paul’s baptismal content in Gal 3:27–28 during the webinar, the “teaching” is already part of “the proclamation.” In other words, to accept “the proclamation” about Jesus, that is, to accept his life and vision, execution and resurrection as a transcendental revelation of ultimate meaning, is thereby to accept a certain way of life which stands in confrontation with the normalcy of civilization’s violence. As I suggested, Christianity is not just a question of ethical choice but of evolutionary trajectory.

**Question 20**  
How do you relate the work of Joseph Campbell who does try to present myths as not a lie?

**Answer**  
I may not have been clear enough on the word myth in answer to an earlier question. Let me try again. I just put that word myth into Google and got this result:  

1. a traditional story, especially one concerning the early history of a people or explaining some natural or social phenomenon, and typically involving supernatural beings or events.  
2. a widely held but false belief or idea.

Scholars have always known and used myth in that former meaning. But ordinary everyday discourse seems to intend that second one more often: “the myth, that is, the lie, of white supremacy” (check Google). So, especially when dealing with religion where prejudice may be covert by using 1 but intending 2, I usually avoid the term myth. Especially when such stories involve transcendental claims about actual human beings, for example Augustus or Jesus, I prefer to use the word parable rather than myth. In such cases, of course, we have fictional stories about factual persons rather fictional stories about fictional persons (Good Samaritan or Prodigal Son).

**Question 21**  
Regarding the Koine Greek language of the Lord’s Prayer, what is the best translation of its ending, "Deliver us from ______"?

**Answer**  
This is a case where it is almost impossible to separate straight translation from interpretation and meaning.

A more-or-less literal translation of Matt 6:13a and Luke 11:4b would be: “do not into-lead us into temptation” (double “into”/eis in Greek).
Matthew 4:1 said that “Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.” (Matt 4:1 and 6:13a have the same Greek root for “tempt—” in both cases but different Greek verbs for “into-lead” and “led.”)

That combination of “led by” and “to be tempted” in Matthew was very much softened in Luke 4:1–2. Here Jesus “was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil.”

One rather obvious interpretation of “temptation” (peirasmos) in Matt 6:13a, would be to link it backwards to those “temptations” in Matt 4:1. Beyond that linkage, we would have to move into wider areas of interpretation—but we should probably always start there—I think.

**Question 22**
What do the raising of the dead parables mean in this context? Why is it that Lazarus is raised having begun decomposition?

**Answer**
Aklepios, born of a divine father and a mortal mother, invented and practiced healing so successfully that the story (or myth, in its original meaning) arose that he could restore the dead back to life. And so, Zeus had to kill him to keep balance in the universe.

His shrines—for example, Epidaurus in Greece—record those healing successes from, as it were, its “Department of Medical Records,” but the stories recorded his resurrections from, as it were, its “Department of Public Relations.” Believe the actual healings but understand the resurrection-hyperbole as their proof—no less and no more!

So also, for Jesus. He was a great healer and that reputation led to the enthusiastic hyperbole that he could raise the dead. So far so good—but the case of Lazarus in John 11 is turning an earlier “resurrection” story into an “anti-resurrection” story.

In John 11, the author mocks and derides the idea of bringing a four-day-dead and decomposed corpse out of the tomb, as well as the idea of a general resurrection.

Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” (11:24–26).

Once that is established as “here-and-now, ongoing-resurrection,” or “here-and-now resurrected lives,” Jesus goes along with the Lazarus-resurrection “for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you—God—sent me.” (11:42.)

There are metaphors and anti-metaphors, parables and anti-parables, and John is very good at those latter operations—as here, with Lazarus.

**Question 23**
Is there any difference between metaphor and myth other than, as Dr. Crossan says, myths are synonyms for untrue?
Presuming the answer to Question 22 above, I would add that as a “metaphor” it is more like a visionary moment or programmatic vision (recall my examples: “New Deal” vs. “Third Reich” in the early 1930s) which must be lived out into a story or narrative, a parable or a myth.

Shakespeare’s metaphor of “the poisoned chalice” is lived out, embodied in, or incarnated as his play “Macbeth.” Colossians’ metaphor “you HAVE BEEN raised with Christ” (3:1) becomes a reality and becomes a story only if it is lived out communally. If not, it remains or becomes a dead or “morticed” metaphor which is, of course, a metaphor of a metaphor.

**Question 24**
Regarding the Koine Greek of the Lord’s Prayer, what is the best translation of its ending: Deliver us from ____ violence?

**Answer**
Please see my answer to Question 21 above.

**Question 25**
What is the Greek meanings of “Christos”?

**Answer**
Israel’s faith was in a God of justice who created and controlled this world.

Israel’s experience—located on the Levantine coast’s highroad of first, north-south and then, west-east inter-imperial wars—was of unjust violence and of one or another, imperial controller.

Such religio-political cognitive dissonance could only be sustained by the certainty that God would overcome someday.

There had eventually to be a Great Divine Cleanup of the World. Not an “end of the world,” as if creation had been a mistake, but an end of evil and violence, war and injustice.

It would be the final or climactic, the last or eschatological (with eschaton Greek for last) way of the world.

When that great heavenly cleanup started, would it need or have an earthly regent or representative?

If yes, would it be an angel or a human? If human, would it be a brilliant general or simply one suffused with transcendent power? Would it be king, prophet, priest, or other?

In anglicized Hebrew, such an eschatological regent was called a Messiah, and in equivalent anglicized Greek, a Christ—that is, a/the “Anointed One.” The anointed for that position was as God’s plenipotentiary (having full power to take independent action) in the *Extreme Makeover: World Edition*.

The community of acceptance would immediately be a Messianic/Christic form of Judaism. “Anointed” is an adjectival title and titular claim—be it accepted or rejected by others.

The big left-over question: would the Messiah/Christ use violent or nonviolent resistance to unjust imperial violence?
Question 26
Is the human notion of “god” a metaphor?

Answer
Yes, of course, but that still leaves us with the basic problem that metaphors can be good or bad even initially (and we will learn which—good or bad—belatedly by what happens to our humanity). And, even when good, they have to grow, develop, and change, or else they become old and tired, dying and dead, or “morticed” (notice those metaphors for metaphors).

Let me make a suggestion. Bracket “God” in the metaphor of theism or a/theism for a moment since both are locked, I think, in theological morbidity.

Think instead of evolution and the Big Bang—with these three unanswerable questions:

- Why “being,” rather than “non-being?”
- Why “being” as dynamic, rather than static?
- Why “dynamic being” as absolutely fair to everything and everyone, in ways far beyond at least our acceptance, if not our understanding (fair alike to viruses and people but people have intelligence ...)?

And, yes, I realize that is a trinitarian complex of unanswerable questions!

Granted all that, God is a metaphor, not for Person but for Mystery, and that Mystery is recognized only by us, as humans. It was not created by us, as humans, but is transcendental to us and probably is, for better or worse, known or unknown, the origins of all our creativity.

It is, of course, not a separated Supreme Being but the integrated Supremacy of Being—as there, dynamic, and absolutely just. Or, as Emily Dickinson put it: Not "Revelation"—'tis that waits, / But our unfurnished eyes—

Question 27
Christianity in the West came "from the East" of course. Even in Christian Rome at the earliest stage, Greek was used for a while. I suppose, even thinking about resurrection in the West originally came "from the East."

Regarding resurrection, when did they diverge? Why did they diverge? In short, why did the West create a more "individualized" version of the resurrection, different from its (Eastern) source with a more universal nuance?

Answer
In the pre-Christian Jewish and Greco-Roman worlds, the possibility of Individual Ascension for extraordinary persons (however such were judged) was accepted culturally as a general option (however one might debate this or that proposed case).

When one brought up the exclusively Jewish concept of Resurrection, that is, the general or universal resurrection at end-time, it was almost inevitable that individual Ascension would—and did—pull it towards the anomaly of individual Resurrection.

Granted that rip-tide, the image of Individual “Resurrection” (by 400 CE) and of Universal Resurrection (by 700 CE) were both there in Christianity’s first millennium. Either—or some combination of both—could have become normative by 1000 CE for all of Christianity (full details in my book, Resurrecting Easter).
But after the East/West split, the West went with Individual, the East with Universal Resurrection. That split was hardened, of course, when Venice high-jacked the Fourth Crusade in 1204 to destroy Constantinople rather than “liberate” Jerusalem.

Still, the West had to deal with two problems after that Resurrection split: 1) The theological problem of translating Greek Hades as Latin Hell and explaining how Jesus had emptied hell and 2) The iconographical problem that images of the Universal Resurrection were all over the West in churches and on manuscripts.

Solution: they were renamed the “Harrowing (Destroying) of hell” or “The Descent into Hades/Hell/Limbo.” In other words, call it anything, but not Resurrection (Anastasis)!

Question 28
Please see my answer to Question 25 above.

Question 29
Matt 28:6 reads “He is not here; he has risen, just as he said.”

See my answer to Question 15 above.
To repeat, does Matt 28:6 intend the oxymoron of Individual Resurrection or the redundancy of Universal Resurrection—that is, like Paul, that Jesus’ is already the start of the ongoing general or universal Resurrection? And I repeat: can that happen without also having an ongoing general judgment and an ongoing option of heaven or hell every day right now here on earth? The intra-Jewish systemic shift of Jesus’ vision was to propose that what others—like John the Baptist—imagined as soon-future divine interventions were already-present processes.

Question 30
Current science of human consciousness claims that basic “metaphors” operate extremely swiftly in the human mind, and these govern hasty judgment, prejudice, aggression, and violence in human interaction. To what degree does the metaphor of anastasis that you are discussing offer a “slowing” of these fast acting (hasty) frames of mind?

Answer
I am not sure I understand the basis for this question. First, even if a metaphor “operates extremely swiftly in the human mind,” the necessary attempts to live it out and create reality from it take time and impose constraints on the metaphor itself. Second, since metaphors are the building blocks of reality and can create heaven or hell on earth, we should be very careful with them and begin by acknowledging their creative power rather than thinking of them as simply rhetorical flourishes.

Third, Anastasis is a metaphor for nonviolent resistance to violent injustice. This is embodied in Jesus and the cross on which he was executed—as liberating our human species (embodied in Adam-and-Eve as its biblical representatives) from Death (embodied in Hades, both as the Warden of Death and the Prison of Death). In short, Christian Anastasis challenges the future trajectory of human evolution.

Questions 31–33.
These were not questions but notes of appreciation—and, as such, they are very much appreciated right back.

My talk intended to suggest that the Jesus Seminar still has a lot of unfinished business—at least for its individual Fellows. The study of the historical Jesus has had three stages so far: 1) the Christian Historical Jesus, 2) the Jewish Historical Jesus, and 3) the “Roman” Historical Jesus (that is, homeland Judaism under
Roman occupation). And finally this fourth stage, the Evolutionary Historical Jesus (that is, how does nonviolent resistance to the violent normalcy of civilization speak to human evolution?).

**Question 34**

If the western tradition of Jesus is that he is God on earth, can Jesus be ascended into a god if he is already supposed to be the god? How would that affect singular resurrection for the West and universal resurrection for Eastern traditions?

**Answer**

In that early first century people had inherited two models for understanding interaction between the divine and the human here on earth.

The Downward Model, or *theophany*, involved a, or the God appearing on earth in male or human form. In that case, of course, divinity had simply assumed humanity. Or, as you or I might assume a Halloween costume but would not be, say, an actual pirate. Such a divine-human was not, of course actually or truly human. This model was, by the way, considered and held by some, but heard and rejected by others, for Jesus.

The Upward Model, or *apotheosis*, involved an actual human being who had done something of extraordinary value for the human race—or at least our part of it. This meant that they had manifested some aspect of divinity itself, and could and should be called, if male, “Son of God” or, more simply if hyperbolically, “God.” That is—the revelation, manifestation or representation of God on earth. Such a person would be taken up to heaven for immortal life at death and often, retroactively, their conception might be ascribed to a theophany-visititation (like Aphrodite to Anchises for Aeneas or Apollo to Atia for Augustus).

When Jesus was acclaimed as *Divine, Son of God, or God*—or as *Lord, Savior of the World, or Redeemer from Sin*—those were titles of Augustus, “taken” from him and acclaimed for Jesus. That was a quiet and nonviolent act of high treason (*majestas*) and it raised, for example, this question: if Augustus and Jesus both claimed to have established peace on earth, how was that peace different? Use the titles to understand the claims and then see if those claims still have contemporary validity.

**Questions 35–36**

If we are living resurrected lives, is there still a posthumous chance of salvation? Is everyone saved if they are already in the process of resurrection here on earth?

Are people judged directly after death if they are living resurrected lives? Hypothetically, would they go to heaven or hell right after, or wait in "Hades" for the universal resurrection event?

**Answer**

This involves an invalid cross-over from one system to another: from *salvation in this life* (with heaven and hell as daily choices and final judgment as an *evolutionary* outcome) OR salvation in an afterlife beyond this earth (with heaven or hell as future locations after final judgment by divine tribunal).

The term Universal Resurrection or *Anastasis* is not about liberation from hell (as *punishment for some*), but from Hades (as *death for all*). It is about avoiding the death of our species (symbolized in *Adam and Eve*)—of ourselves, as the most endangered and endangering of all species.

When Greek *Hades* was translated into Latin *Hell*, that confusion of systems tied Western theology in knots, with Jesus liberating individual humans from eternally inescapable *hell*. 
In 414 ce, for example, Bishop Evodius asked Bishop (Saint) Augustine that obvious question, based on 1 Pet 3:18–21, about an “emptied hell.” Augustine admitted his “perplexities on the subject.”

His basic answer was that Jesus only liberated those prophets who had foretold his advent and recognized him on his descent into hell. But, of course, Adam and Eve are not prophets but humanity, in symbol.

In any case, Augustine, in some exasperation with the whole subject, asked, “If sacred Scripture had said, without naming hell and its pains, that Christ, when He died, went to that bosom of Abraham, I wonder if anyone would have dared to say that He ‘descended into hell?’” (Letter 164).