

The Resurrection of Jesus: A Methodological Survey and Introduction to the Present Volume

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Introduction

The resurrection of Jesus is a central tenet of historic Christian belief, and, for that reason alone, a matter of great historical significance. Virtually no biblical scholar, early church historian, or theologian disputes this point. However, a great deal of disagreement follows from that initial agreement.

A divergence of opinion has existed in serious historical study of Jesus for over 200 years concerning the historical reliability of the four canonical gospels. During much of this time most scholars have leaned to the skeptical side of the ledger concerning this question. No gospel stories, save, perhaps, the virgin birth narratives, have been as critically scrutinized as those concerning the resurrection. As a result, in the minds of many, the resurrection of Jesus, which undoubtedly lay at the heart of the earliest Christian confession of Jesus as Lord, is often either removed from the picture altogether or moved to one margin or another.

Such skepticism is largely the result of methodological presuppositions founded upon enlightenment thinking. Although many of those whose work was responsible for this sea change were not outright enemies of Christian faith or practice, the law of unintended consequences applies to historians as much as it does to those in other professions, and their skepticism had the effect of either reducing the importance of resurrection in Christian theology or redefining the meaning of resurrection. In what follows we shall attempt to paint a backdrop of roughly 200 years of historical scholarship concerning Jesus and his resurrection.

A Brief Survey of Resurrection Scholarship

In 1778 G. E. Lessing's edition of Hermann Samuel Reimarus's essay, "On the Aims of Jesus and His Disciples" was published.¹ Prior to Reimarus

¹ Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede* (trans. W. Montgomery; pref. F.C. Burkitt; London: Adam, Charles and Black, 1910), 13-14. Hermann Samuel Reimarus, "Concerning the Intention of Jesus and His Teaching," in

there were many harmonies of the gospels,² but there had been no scholarly attempt to study the gospels as historical documents. All that changed with G. E. Lessing's posthumous publication of Reimarus's work in a series Lessing named *Fragmente eines Ungenannten* (Fragments from an Unnamed Author), commonly referred to today as the *Wolfenbüttel* Fragments.³ The influence of Deism upon Reimarus may be seen in his attempt to ground understanding of the historical Jesus in reason (*Vernunft*). Reimarus held that the preaching of Jesus was separate from the writings of the apostles and thus argued that the gospels, written by the evangelists, i.e., historians, not the New Testament epistles, written by the apostles, i.e., theologians, were where one found the historical Jesus. Reimarus defined the essence of religion as "the doctrine of the salvation and immortality of the soul."⁴ No wonder then that denying Jesus' resurrection seemed no great loss.

Reimarus believed that after Jesus' death his disciples stole his body and declared his resurrection in order to maintain their financial security and ensure themselves some standing.⁵ He maintained correctly that Jesus' mindset was essentially eschatological in nature. He rightfully discerned that the historical Jesus is never to be found in a non-Jewish setting, but wrongly saw Christianity as discontinuous with Judaism. Unfortunately he failed to grasp that resurrection was part of the Jewish hope in Jesus' day. Despite his concern to free Jesus from theology, Reimarus's Jesus was not free from the grave.

David Friedrich Strauss, influenced by Hegel's philosophy, pioneered an approach to understanding the gospels in which Jesus' resurrection was understood as myth. Jesus understood mythically is the synthesis of the thesis of supernaturalism and the antithesis of rationalism. As a committed Hegelian, the early Strauss maintained that the inner nucleus of Christian faith is not touched by the mythical approach.⁶ Strauss emphasized not the *events* (miracles) in the gospels (although the book is structured as an analysis of Jesus' miracles), but the *nature* of the gospels. Unlike Reimarus, he was not interested in explaining (away) how events in the gospels took place. Neither was he interested in uncovering the sequence in which the gospels were produced. His interest lay in revealing the nature of the gospels as literature. By focusing on the literary nature of the gospels he anticipated several critical methods

Reimarus: Fragments (ed. Charles H. Talbert; trans. Ralph S. Fraser; Lives of Jesus Series; ed. Leander Keck; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970), 59-269.

² See: Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 13-15.

³ See H. S. Reimarus, *Reimarus: Fragments*. At the time of publication, Lessing was librarian to the Duke of Brunswick at the ducal library in Wolfenbüttel, hence the name of the series.

⁴ Reimarus, *Fragments*, 61.

⁵ Reimarus, *Fragments*, 243-50.

⁶ David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* (ed. Peter C. Hodgson; trans. George Eliot; Life of Jesus Series; ed. Leander E. Keck; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), lii.

that would arise in twentieth-century New Testament studies. Whereas Reimarus had proposed two possibilities: natural or supernatural; Strauss proposed two different categories for interpreting the gospels: mythic or historical. Unlike Reimarus Strauss did not attribute the non-historical to deliberate deception on the part of the apostles, but to their unconscious mythic imagination.⁷ Strauss maintained that the biblical narratives were written well after they occurred and were embellished through years of oral retelling and religious reflection.⁸ The biblical myths, according to Strauss, are poetic in form, not historical or philosophical.⁹ In his second book on Jesus, *Das Leben Jesu: für das deutsche Volk*,¹⁰ Strauss abandoned Hegelian categories for moral categories. Eventually Strauss repudiated entirely any attachment to Christianity, and died a committed materialist.¹¹

Albrecht Ritschl and Adolf von Harnack are representative of a number of scholars who understood Jesus primarily as a great moral teacher whose life and teachings had a decisive impact upon the psyche of the early church. Conditioned by Kant's critique of rationality and the subsequent Protestant reaction of stressing ethics and piety, they combined ethics with something akin to pop psychology in an effort to understand the historical Jesus with the result being that the historicity of the resurrection was irrelevant for them. Both men understood Jesus primarily as a great moral teacher, whose life and teachings had a decisive impact upon the psyche of the early church. According to Ritschl the proper object of study is the *observable experience* of the church because the statements in Scripture become "completely intelligible only when we see how they are reflected in the consciousness of those who believe in Him."¹² He also taught not only that the kingdom of God and the message of Jesus were ethical in nature, but also that Jesus was the bearer of God's ethical Lordship over humanity.¹³ Ritschl's moralizing theology focused on Jesus' death, not his resurrection. For von Harnack, Jesus' message of the kingdom emphasized: (1) the kingdom of God and its coming; (2) God the Father and the infinite value of the human soul; and (3) the higher righteousness and the commandment of love.¹⁴ In other words, Ritschl and von

⁷ Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, 39-92.

⁸ Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, 49.

⁹ Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, 53.

¹⁰ Strauss, *Das Leben Jesu: für das deutsche Volk. Bearb. von David Friedrich Strauss* (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1874).

¹¹ Robert Morgan, "Strauss, David Friedrich," in *Historical Handbook of Major Biblical Interpreters* (ed. Donald K. McKim; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 367.

¹² Albrecht Ritschl, *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation: The Positive Development of the Doctrine* (ed. H. R. Mackintosh and A. B. Macaulay; Clifton, NJ: Reference Book Publishers, 1966), 1.

¹³ Ritschl, *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*, 385-484.

¹⁴ Adolf Harnack, *What Is Christianity?* (trans. Thomas Bailey Saunders; New York: Harper & Row, 1957), 19-78.

Harnack combined ethics with psychology in an effort to understand the historical Jesus. The historicity of Jesus' resurrection was simply not an issue for either man.

William Wrede responded to such ideas by insisting that the psychological theories of 19th century life of Jesus work were derived from somewhere other than the text. Wrede wrote: "And this is the malady to which we must here allude—let us not dignify it with the euphemism 'historical imagination.' *The Scientific study of the life of Jesus is suffering from psychological 'suppositionitis'* which amounts to a sort of historical guesswork."¹⁵ Wrede's chief concern was with the messianic secret. He believed that the early church understood historically that Jesus *was made* messiah at his resurrection, not that he *was revealed* as messiah through the resurrection.¹⁶ The idea that Jesus was the messiah before his resurrection was merely the result of the early church's theological reflection on his then-evident messiahship.¹⁷ Simply put the messianic secret was Mark's attempt to harmonize history with theology.¹⁸

According to Wrede one must distinguish between historical and literary-critical questions, and literary-critical questions should be dealt with before historical ones. In this way Wrede was able to point to messianic passages in the gospels as support for his hypothesis, and problematic texts were thus neatly excised in the interest of historical tidiness. The result was predictable: truncated gospels resulted in a truncated picture of Jesus. Wrede's Jesus lacked both messianic consciousness and theological creativity. While Wrede allows that the messianic secret grew out of resurrection belief, his focus is consistently upon the effect of resurrection belief rather than the basis for belief in the resurrection.

On the same day in 1901 that Wrede published his book on the messianic secret, Albert Schweitzer published his *The Mystery of the Kingdom of God: The Secret of Jesus' Messiahship and Passion*.¹⁹ Schweitzer pictured Jesus as thoroughly conscious of his messianic role. In fact it was this messianic consciousness that motivated Jesus to do all that he did. In contrast to Wrede, Schweitzer understood Jesus as a messianic hero, along the lines of Nietzsche's cult of the hero (*Übermensch*).²⁰ Schweitzer's Jesus was a heroic figure, who sought to usher in the kingdom through his decisive sacrifice of himself. Schweitzer saw the messianic themes, which Wrede understood to be later

¹⁵ William Wrede, *The Messianic Secret* (trans. J. C. G. Greig; Cambridge: James Clarke, 1971), 6.

¹⁶ Wrede, *The Messianic Secret*, 216-19.

¹⁷ Wrede, *The Messianic Secret*, 219-30.

¹⁸ Wrede, *The Messianic Secret*, 219-30.

¹⁹ Albert Schweitzer, *The Mystery of the Kingdom of God: The Secret of Jesus' Messiahship and Passion*, (trans. Walter Lowrie; New York: Macmillan, 1950).

²⁰ Schweitzer saw his philosophy of reverence for life as a superior version of Nietzsche's concern for life lived to fullest degree. Albert Schweitzer, *The Philosophy of Civilization* (trans. C. T. Campion; London: A. & C. Black, 1946), 174-6.

creations, as central to any understanding of Jesus. Tragically, although the idea of resurrection is clearly in the mind of Schweitzer's Jesus, his summary concludes, "On the afternoon of the fourteenth of Nissan, as they ate the Paschal lamb at even, he uttered a loud cry and died."²¹ Related to the resurrection, Schweitzer contributed no more than any 19th century liberal Jesus scholar.

In addition to Schweitzer's critique of the liberal historical Jesus project, there was the influence of the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* (history of religions school). The influence of Ernst Troeltsch upon Jesus studies cannot be overestimated. Troeltsch, the leading philosopher of the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* saw Christianity, like all religions, as a historical phenomenon within its own time. Consequently Jesus was no different than any other historical figure, nor was the resurrection different than any other event in history. One cannot insist, like Martin Kähler, that faith in Jesus is not subject to historical critique;²² the historian is bound to explain movements in terms of causal events *in the natural world*.²³ Troeltsch's commitment to naturalistic explanations, *à la* his criterion of analogy, made the historian's role in relation to Christian origins into one of explaining simply how Christianity came to be, not one of seeking to answer direct questions concerning Jesus. Any critical judgment concerning the historicity of Jesus' resurrection was thus illegitimate.

The shadow of Rudolf Bultmann falls over any attempt to understand New Testament theology in the twentieth century. Understanding the gospels as collections of fragments meant to address particular needs of the early church, not as single documents chronicling the life of Jesus, Bultmann saw the primary purpose of form criticism to be the discovery of the origin of the particular units of oral tradition that lay behind the written pericopae of the gospels.²⁴ In *Jesus and the Word* he declares, "I do indeed think that we can now know almost nothing concerning the life and personality of Jesus, since

²¹ Schweitzer, *The Mystery of the Kingdom*, 173. Following Schweitzer's summary of the life of Jesus, there is a one page postscript that focuses upon recognition that the nature of Jesus is bound forever to be a mystery to modern man, and that modern culture can only be revived by grasping the nature of his conscious sacrifice for others. It fittingly concludes with a sentence reminiscent of Nietzsche: "Only then can the heroic in our Christianity and in our *Weltanschauung* be again revived" (Schweitzer, *The Mystery of the Kingdom*, 174).

²² Ernst Troeltsch, *Die Bedeutung der Geschichtlichkeit Jesus für den Glauben* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1929), 34. For an insightful discussion of Troeltsch's significance for biblical interpretation see Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Interpretation and Philosophical Description*, 69-74.

²³ Ernst Troeltsch, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1912-25), 2:734. Troeltsch is particularly critical of Christian theologians who attempt to use part of the historical-critical method, but reject the presuppositions of it (Troeltsch, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 2:730).

²⁴ Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (trans. John Marsh; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963), 3-4.

the early Christian sources show no interest in either, are moreover fragmentary and often legendary; and other sources about Jesus do not exist.”²⁵ Bultmann posited that due to infighting between Palestinian and Hellenistic believers sayings were attributed to Jesus that he did not utter. This leads Bultmann to declare: “One can only emphasize the uncertainty of our knowledge of the person and work of the historical Jesus and likewise of the origin of Christianity.”²⁶ The result was not only that form criticism focused on something other than Jesus, i.e., the *Sitz im Leben* of the early church, but also that its foremost proponent announced that historical Jesus research could not succeed.

Bultmann’s objections to historical Jesus research were not only methodological, but also philosophical and theological. Influenced as he was by Kierkegaard and Heidegger, as well as the early Barth,²⁷ Bultmann thought that historical knowledge of Jesus’ personhood (*Persönlichkeit*) was secondary in importance to existential knowledge of his word.²⁸

Bultmann’s approach is first to recognize that the New Testament is mythological in nature, and second to demythologize the New Testament myths. Bultmann openly draws upon Heidegger’s categories of existence and being to interpret the New Testament.²⁹ He thus emphasized Easter faith over the fact of the resurrection, i.e., the bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead. The effect was that the resurrection of Jesus became unnecessary for Christian faith and perhaps even impossible.

A brief ray of hope shined through in the “New Quest of the Historical Jesus,” championed by Ernst Käsemann, and the rise of redaction criticism.³⁰ Redaction criticism, primarily developed by Günther Bornkamm and Hans Conzelmann,³¹ with its focus upon whole gospels as well as the individual pericopae, stressed the role of the evangelist before that of the community or tradition. In doing so it sought to answer the question: “What is the theology

²⁵ Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word* (trans. Louise Pettibone Smith and Erminie Huntress Lantero; New York: Scribner’s, 1958), 8.

²⁶ Rudolf Bultmann, “The Study of the Synoptic Gospels,” in *Form Criticism: Two Essays on New Testament Research* (ed. R. Bultmann and Karl Kundsinn; trans. Frederick C. Grant; n.p.: Willett Clark, 1934 / reprint, New York: Harper Torchbook, 1962), 17.

²⁷ Other influences on Bultmann include Luther, Collingwood, and the history of religions school, as well as the liberal theology of his teacher, Harnack. For a general discussion of influences upon Bultmann, see Thiselton, *The Two Horizons*, 205-51.

²⁸ Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word*, 9-12.

²⁹ Bultmann, “New Testament and Mythology,” in *Kerygma and Myth* (ed. Hans Werner Bartsch; trans. Reginald Fuller; London: S.P.C.K., 1953), 11-12.

³⁰ Ernst Käsemann, “The Problem of the Historical Jesus,” in *Essays on New Testament Themes* (trans. W. J. Montague; London: SCM, 1964), 15-47. The New Quest began in 1953 with a speech by Ernst Käsemann to a group of Bultmann’s former students.

³¹ Günther Bornkamm, Gerhard Barth, and Heinz Joachim Held, *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew* (trans. Percy Scott; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963); Hans Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke* (trans. G. Buswell; New York: Harper & Row, 1960).

of this gospel?”³² The hermeneutical effect of redaction criticism was to focus on how the gospel stories relate to each other, which led to reading the gospels as whole stories, not just as disparate fragments. This led to a renewal of interest among biblical scholars in theology. But as seen before with form criticism and the history of religions school the focus was still not upon Jesus, or the resurrection, but upon the theology of the evangelists. As a result the resurrection fared no better in the New Quest than it had during the so-called No Quest.

Any attempt to understand contemporary scholarship on the resurrection must reference the work of Munich systematic theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg. In *Jesus—God and Man*, Pannenberg, informed by the New Quest, surveyed attempts to ground New Testament Christology in Jesus’ pre-Easter claims to authority and decisively rejected them. Instead, he maintained that “Jesus’ claim to authority stood from the beginning in relationship to the question of the future verification of his message through the occurrence of the future judgment of the Son of Man.”³³ Accordingly, the resurrection of Jesus is the foundation of any Christology from Below. The resurrection of Jesus by revealing that Jesus is the Son of Man and that God is revealed in Jesus establishes the identity of Jesus. Moreover it also makes sense of the Gentile mission as an expression of Jewish eschatology and thus serves as the key to understanding the gospels and Paul according to Pannenberg.³⁴

In establishing the historicity of the resurrection Pannenberg surveyed two major lines of evidence for the resurrection: reports of appearances of the risen Jesus and the empty tomb and found that they arose independently and therefore mutually complement each other. He also noted and rejected several common objections to seeing the resurrection as historical. He thus deemed the resurrection as “historically very probable, and [...] to be presupposed until contrary evidence appears.”³⁵

Pannenberg’s most significant contribution, however, is his discussion of theological objections (most of these coming from “Christian” scholars) to viewing the resurrection as a historical event because it was in one way or another of a “unique” nature—and thus something beyond historical reach, i.e., something real in some sense but not historical. He asserts: “There is no justification for affirming Jesus’ resurrection as an event that really happened, if it is not to be affirmed as a historical event as such. Whether or not a particular event happened two thousand years ago is not made certain by faith but only by historical research, to the extent that certainty can be attained at

³² Grant R. Osborne, “Redaction Criticism” in *New Testament Criticism and Interpretation* (ed. David Alan Black and David S. Dockery; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 199-224.

³³ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man* (trans. Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968), 66.

³⁴ Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man*, 66-74.

³⁵ Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man*, 105.

all about questions of this kind.”³⁶ While agreeing that faith in Jesus’ resurrection could not be the result of an isolated individual fact, Pannenberg insisted that primitive Christianity did not make a strong distinction between fact and meaning; rather than being separated from one another the two belong most closely together.³⁷

One dares not ignore the work of Christian-turned-atheist, New Testament scholar Gerd Lüdemann on the resurrection of Jesus. Lüdemann appeals to psychology to make sense of the resurrection narratives and the birth of Christianity. According to Lüdemann, Peter felt so guilty about his denial of the now-dead Jesus, that he came to believe that he had been forgiven by the resurrected Jesus as the result of a stress-induced hallucination. “Under the impression of Jesus’s proclamation and death, there finally awoke in Peter the ‘And yet. . .’ of faith. Thereby the crucified Jesus showed himself to be the living Jesus, so that Peter could once again apply to himself—and this time with profound clarity—God’s word of forgiveness present in Jesus’s work.”³⁸ Saul’s conversion was also the result of guilt as he labored under the yoke of the Law, and his zeal in persecuting Christians was a manifestation of a secret inner attraction to the Christian message. According to Lüdemann, “[I]f one had been able to analyze Paul prior to his Damascus vision, the analysis would probably have shown a strong inclination to Christ in his subconscious; indeed, the assumption that he was unconsciously Christian is then no longer so far-fetched.”³⁹ On the Damascus road Saul hallucinated that he saw the risen Jesus, resulting in Paul’s conversion to the faith he once persecuted. “The guilt complex which had arisen with the persecution was resolved through the certainty of being in Christ.”⁴⁰ Peter and Paul’s experiences soon spread among the early Christians, and before long others who did not share their trauma, also saw hallucinations of the risen Lord. Lüdemann understands the empty tomb as legend that serves a useful purpose in that when questions arose as to where the body was, “it could immediately be reported that the women had found the tomb empty and later that Jesus had even appeared to the women at the tomb.”⁴¹

Among contemporary Jesus scholars concerning Jesus’ resurrection John Dominic Crossan and N. T. Wright stand out. Working from post-

³⁶ Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man*, 99.

³⁷ Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man*, 109.

³⁸ Gerd Lüdemann, “Die Auferstehung Jesu,” in *Fand die Auferstehung wirklich statt?* (ed. Alexander Bommarius; Düsseldorf: Parega Verlag, 1995), 25.

³⁹ Gerd Lüdemann, *The Resurrection of Jesus: History, Experience, Theology* (trans. John Bowden; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 26.

⁴⁰ Lüdemann, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 26–7.

⁴¹ Lüdemann, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 174–5.

Bultmannian presuppositions informed by postmodern literary criticism,⁴² Crossan insisted that since Jesus was a Jewish peasant, following his crucifixion, Jesus was probably never properly buried, given that victims of crucifixion were typically either left on the cross to be eaten by wild animals or buried in shallow graves, in which case the result was certain to be the same.⁴³ Part of the terror of crucifixion was the certain knowledge that one would not receive a decent burial and thus one's body would almost certainly be devoured.⁴⁴ He concluded, "With regard to the body of Jesus, by Easter Sunday morning, those who cared did not know where it was, and those who knew did not care."⁴⁵ Crossan posited a procession in the tradition "from burial by enemies to burial by friends, from inadequate and hurried burial to full, complete, and even regal embalming."⁴⁶ Therefore the passion narratives do not relay accurate historical information concerning either Jesus' death or his burial, but rather reflect "the struggle of Jesus' followers to make sense of both his death and their continuing experience of empowerment by him."⁴⁷ If the gospels are incorrect about his burial, then they are also wrong about his resurrection.

In more recent work, Crossan has distinguished between the *mode* and the *meaning* of Jesus' resurrection, and insisted that the most important question concerning the resurrection of Jesus was not one of *mode*: "Is bodily resurrection to be understood as literal or metaphorical?" Crossan allowed that then as now there is a spectrum of understanding running from 100% literal to 100% metaphorical.⁴⁸ One may understand resurrection either literally or metaphorically, so long as one takes its *meaning* seriously as general resurrection and apocalyptic consummation already begun, i.e., as long as one engages in making the world more just. He asserted, "Bodily resurrection is not about the survival of us but about the justice of God . . . *bodily* resurrection was not a philosophical vision of human destiny but a theological vision of divine character."⁴⁹

⁴² For a detailed treatment, see Robert B. Stewart, *The Quest of the Hermeneutical Jesus: The Impact of Hermeneutics on the Jesus Research of John Dominic Crossan and N. T. Wright* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2008), 27-75.

⁴³ John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus, A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994), 123-26.

⁴⁴ Crossan, *Jesus, A Revolutionary Biography*, 125-27.

⁴⁵ John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1991), 394.

⁴⁶ Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 393. C.f. Crossan, *Jesus, A Revolutionary Biography*, 156-8.

⁴⁷ John Dominic Crossan and Richard G. Watts, *Who Is Jesus? Answers to Your Questions About the Historical Jesus* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1996), 121.

⁴⁸ John Dominic Crossan, "The Resurrection of Jesus in Its Jewish Context" in *Neotestamentica* 37/1 (2003): 55.

⁴⁹ Crossan, "The Resurrection of Jesus in Its Jewish Context," 42-43. For more, see Robert B. Stewart, "The Hermeneutics of Resurrection: How N. T. Wright and John Dominic Crossan Read the Resurrection Narratives," in *The Resurrection of Jesus: John Dominic Crossan and*

On the other hand, Wright, influenced by critical realist presuppositions coupled with a well-articulated worldview analysis,⁵⁰ argued that one cannot separate the resurrection from the birth of early Christianity. It is the resurrection that makes sense of what follows, i.e., the establishment of the Christian community with its own distinctive story, praxis, and symbols.⁵¹ Given that Jesus was not the first or the last to lead a messianic movement, and that such self-proclaimed messiahs were routinely put to death, Wright asks, why did his movement live on without replacing him as leader? The best explanation, he concludes, is the resurrection.⁵²

In *The Resurrection of the Son of God* Wright spent over 500 pages demonstrating how the afterlife was understood and talked about, *and what the relevant terms meant*, in ancient pagan writings, the Old Testament, post-biblical Judaism, and various Christian writings (letters of Paul, the Gospels, Acts, Hebrews, General Letters, Revelation—and non-canonical early Christian texts).⁵³ He followed this historical and literary *Tour de Force* by arguing that while neither the empty tomb nor the subsequent sightings of the risen Jesus by themselves constituted a sufficient cause for resurrection belief, both taken together would.⁵⁴ Although Wright stated his position with humility, as a committed critical realist should, he also argued it with great passion.

No doubt there are other significant names that could be mentioned in this brief survey of how scholars have understood texts discussing the resurrection of Jesus but space does not permit such a full treatment. We hope, though, that this brief treatment has allowed readers to see the importance of method in Jesus research. Further, this background helps to situate the discussion in the present volume concerning Michael Licona's *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach*. His is a groundbreaking work concerning historical method within the context of those who have preceded him. And Licona's *The Resurrection of Jesus* is certainly a welcome addition to this significant conversation.

N. T. Wright in *Dialogue* (ed. Robert B. Stewart; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 58-77; and John Dominic Crossan, "Appendix: Bodily-Resurrection Faith," in *The Resurrection of Jesus: John Dominic Crossan and N. T. Wright in Dialogue* (ed. Robert B. Stewart; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 171-86.

⁵⁰ For a detailed treatment, see Stewart, *The Quest of the Hermeneutical Jesus*, 77-124.

⁵¹ N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (COQG 2; Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1996), 658-9; N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (COQG 1; Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1992), 399-401, 460.

⁵² N. T. Wright, "How Jesus Saw Himself," *Bible Review* 12 (1996): 29.

⁵³ N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (COQG 3; Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003).

⁵⁴ Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 686-93.

The Present Volume

STR is delighted to have a guest editor on board for this volume: Dr. Robert Stewart (New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary). Along with editorial oversight on the volume, Dr. Stewart has co-written the present essay. He is a philosopher who is well-acquainted with Dr. Licona's work in particular and resurrection studies in general. With his assistance, this edition of *STR* is devoted to engaging *The Resurrection of Jesus* from a variety of perspectives. Dr. Michael Licona currently serves as Associate Professor in Theology at Houston Baptist University, and his monograph represents the most recent and significant contribution to resurrection scholarship. As mentioned, the historiographical approach that he advances sets his research apart in the field; this approach positions him to argue constructively and, for many, persuasively for the plausibility of the resurrection of Jesus.

The present volume of *STR* addresses Dr. Licona's research from four primary angles: a resurrection specialist (Dr. Gary Habermas, Liberty University), a philosopher who assesses the viability of historical claims (Dr. Timothy McGrew, Western Michigan University), and a philosopher of history who has written on the logic, truth, and demonstrability of history (Dr. C. Behan McCullagh, LaTrobe University). Each of these scholars is well-seasoned and very well-published. And they have all had an influence on Licona's thought and research, as indicated in his bibliography of *The Resurrection of Jesus*. For these reasons, they are eminently suited to dialogue with Dr. Licona's *The Resurrection of Jesus*. Dr. Licona then offers a response to each of these scholars in a reply essay.

Following upon this critical engagement, *STR* is delighted to host a roundtable discussion on this important work. Other contributors include: Dr. Daniel Akin (President of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary), Dr. Craig Blomberg (Denver Seminary), Dr. Paul Copan (Palm Beach Atlantic University), Dr. Michael Kruger (Reformed Theological Seminary), and Dr. Charles Quarles (Louisiana College and Caskey School of Divinity). The roundtable is helpful in that it allows scholarly interaction via a "conversational" format. Each contributor provides a thoughtful response to Licona and to one another in the dialogue, and for this, we are grateful. The roundtable emerged as a result of an ongoing conversation (both popular and scholarly) regarding *The Resurrection of Jesus*, the potential value of the work, as well as its potential drawbacks. Many scholars have noted its significance and value, to be sure, and this is confirmed in the roundtable dialogue.

One of the important issues to arise in the discussion is the relationship between biblical interpretation and biblical inerrancy. Dr. Licona takes an approach to Matt. 27:52-3 that views the raised saints at the time of Jesus' death as *possibly* an apocalyptic symbol or something akin to it. At present, it seems he is undecided about the precise interpretation. This view has, at the very least, implications related to the doctrine of inerrancy, as the dialogue

surfaces. In our view, one of the constructive elements to emerge from the roundtable is firmer exegetical warrant for an interpretation of the raised saints in Matt. 27:52-3 as an historical event. It is interesting that Dr. Craig Blomberg, a Matthean specialist, suggests at the close of the discussion: "I do think *this* forum has helped solidify my interpretation of the raising of the saints as historical." We are pleased that *STR* has provided an avenue to further discussion in Christian scholarly community.

Each of the contributors was carefully sought out. Dr. Akin is a theologian and New Testament scholar with extensive expertise in hermeneutics. As a seminary president, Dr. Akin also brings a distinctive perspective to bear on Licona's work. Dr. Blomberg needs little introduction as a major New Testament scholar, with a commentary on Matthew (New American Commentary) and extensive publications in the gospels and biblical interpretation. Dr. Copan serves as professor of philosophy at Palm Beach Atlantic and has written extensively in the area of apologetics and interpretation, including his most recent works *Is God a Moral Monster* (Baker Academic) and *Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Religion* (Routledge). As such, he is well-equipped to explore the apologetic value of Dr. Licona's monograph. Dr. Kruger is professor of New Testament and Academic dean at Reformed Theological Seminary and has written extensively in the gospels. He was specifically asked to speak to the question of the raised saints in Matt. 27:52-3. His most recent publication is *Canon Revisited* (Crossway). Charles Quarles is Research Professor of New Testament and Greek, Dean of the Caskey School of Divinity, and Vice President of Faith and Learning at Louisiana College. Amongst his many publications is *Midrash Criticism* (University Press of America) as well as an edited volume entitled *Buried Hope or Risen Savior* (B&H Academic). *STR* would like to thank each of these scholars for their interaction with Dr. Licona in the roundtable and the constructive discussion that proceeds as a result. In our judgment, the tone of the roundtable discussion as well as the interaction in the essays is open, charitable, discerning, and honoring to the Lord Jesus Christ. May we always emulate such scholarship under his lordship!

Our Savior is risen indeed, and because of this, the Church of God lives under a distinctive moral order. It is the order of the Kingdom of God that is now, and not yet. As Oliver O'Donovan states,

The resurrection carries with it the promise that "all shall be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:22). The raising of Christ is representative, not in the way that a symbol is representative, expressing a reality which has an independent and prior standing, but in the way that a national leader is representative when he brings about for the whole of his people whatever it is, war or peace, that he effects on their behalf. And so this central proclamation directs us back also to the message of the incarnation, by which we learn how, through a unique presence of God to his creation, the whole created order is taken up into the fate of this particular representative man at this

particular moment of history, on whose fate turns the redemption of all. And it directs us forward to the end of history when that particular and representative fate is universalized in the resurrection of mankind from the dead. "Each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ [1 Cor. 15:23]." ⁵⁵

The Church, and thereby each of the Christian scholars who participate in this volume, looks to the risen Lord as the model and direction of its life, its work, its worship. As he has lived, so we live, as he is raised, in him we shall be raised as well. In him, by, him, and through him, all things will be new (Rev. 21:5).

⁵⁵ Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics* (second edition; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 15.