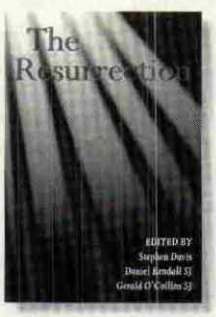
If Christ Be Not Risen . . .

Scholars debate the meaning of the Resurrection.

The Resurrection: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Resurrection of Jesus, *edited by Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O'Collins (Oxford University Press, 368 pp; $35, hardcover). Reviewed by D. A. Carson, research professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.*



Books on the resurrection of Jesus are many. What makes this one distinctive is its scope. Its chapters include contributions from biblical studies, systematic theology, the philosophy of religion, homiletics, liturgy, fundamental theology (in the Catholic definition), the study of religious art, and literary criticism. Theologically, the contributors range from confessional conservatives such as William Craig to a variety of liberals (though in the current mix of outlooks these categories are inadequate and leave me uneasy).

The sheer diversity makes the book as interesting as it is difficult to review. The contribution of some of the essays is primarily to the history of thought about the Resurrection. Thus, after sketching the history of biblical expressions for resurrection, Alan Segal argues that second-temple Jews were divided: on the one side were "millenarian" movements that

lionized the Jewish martyrs who lost their lives in the expectation of bodily resurrection at the end of time; on the other were those intellectuals who embraced some form of the Platonic idea of the immortality of the soul, emphasizing continuity of consciousness beyond death. Segal argues that the martyrdom context influenced Christians living in the shadow of the Cross. Eventually immortality was subsumed under resurrection in both Judaism and Christianity, though in characteristically different forms.

No less interested in historical development is Marguerite Shuster, who demonstrates how central the resurrection of Jesus is in the line of preacher-theologians that runs from Paul through Augustine, Luther, Barth, and Thielicke. In each instance, these Christian thinkers understood the resurrection of Jesus to be a *bodily* resurrection, however transformed his body was, and tied Jesus' resurrection to our resurrection at the End. Moreover, they defended this confession against major currents of intellectual thought in their own day that took contrary positions.

Another group of essays belongs to the stream of classical apologetics: they focus on the historical reality and credibility of the Resurrection. William Craig's essay is a critique of the work of John Dominic Crossan, whose reconstruction of Jesus' resurrection, Craig charges, is based on idiosyncratic methods and presuppositions embraced by no major New Testament scholar.

William Alston argues for the substantial historical credibility of the New Testament Resurrection accounts. His procedure is primarily to refute suggestions that this or that detail is *not* historical. In particular, he interacts with the work of Reginald Fuller.

Stephen Davis asks what it is the first witnesses "saw." He refutes theories that argue their "seeing" was some kind of visualization, "grace-assisted seeing." On the axis from "sight" to "insight," Davis situates the "seeing" of the first witnesses at the "sight" end. Even when the two disciples on the road to Emmaus failed to recognize Jesus, it was not because they required some special grace to make the connection, but because their eyes were *withheld* from "seeing" Jesus: in other words, the actual textual evidence suggests that normal vision would have enabled them to see the resurrected Jesus had their powers not somehow been restrained.

Summarizing some of the work in one of his books, Carey Newman examines the theological logic at work in the New Testament's identification of Jesus as "Glory." This not only signals the dawning of the eschatological age, but opens a "breach" in Jewish monotheism by identifying Jesus as the divine presence. Tied as it is to the resurrection of Jesus, this glory-language not only supports the view that high Christology was early, but indicates that the parting of the ways between Jews and Christians began rather early as well.

None of this suggests that all the contributors to the symposium are convinced by these arguments. In her reply to Alston, Sarah Coakley suggests that while he effectively parries Fuller's dogmatic skepticism, Alston downplays the redactional (and, in her view, therefore probably unhistorical) elements of the Gospels.

In his reflection on the summit, John Wilkens distances himself from Davis's argument that if a modern camera had been present in the first century, it would have been able to capture an image of Jesus' resurrection body on film. In his response to a largely survey essay by Gerald O'Collins, Peter Carnley argues that one can neither prove nor disprove John Hick's conjecture that the Resurrection appearances are psychogenic projections. In Carnley's view, it doesn't really matter: a contemporary theology of the Resurrection should focus more attention on how to construct an "epistemology of faith" that enables us to identify the "Spirit of Christ" in our experience with the crucified Jesus.

Richard Swinburne argues that, in coming to an informed opinion as to what really happened, one must not only examine the detailed historical evidence but also evaluate the general background evidence. Here he includes, on the negative side, the obvious human experience that people do not normally rise from the dead, and, on the positive side, various arguments from natural theology, and especially the argument that the celebration of the Eucharist on the first day of the week constitutes admissible historical evidence for Jesus' resurrection on what came to be called "the Lord's day."

Inevitably, some contributions approach the subject with self-conscious reliance upon, or at least interaction with, postmodern assumptions. Alan Padgett insists that it is illegitimate to bracket off Christian faith, including faith in the resurrection of Jesus, from "scientific" knowledge. The ideology (he calls it a "myth") that these two domains are mutually incommensurable needs to be rejected. The way forward is a postmodern approach that is holistic and humble, that recognizes the "prejudice of perspective" in science as in religion, that refuses to rule out the pursuit of objectivity even while not succumbing to the kind of subjectivity that drowns in a sea of relativism. The resurrection of Jesus becomes the "test case" for Padgett's arguments.

Francis Schüssler Fiorenza is equally willing to critique foundationalism. He probingly explores how one should affirm the resurrection of Jesus with fundamental theology once the foundationalism that has long characterized fundamental theology is set aside.

Some of the essays reflect on the ethical implications of the Resurrection. Brian Johnstone argues that while the Resurrection of the crucified Jesus has been at the heart of the Christian *kerygma,* it has not been at the heart of moral theology and Christian ethics. He sets out to explore what such an ethical system might look like, focusing not least on an ethics of transformation. Janet Martin Soskice argues that for Paul, belief in the Resurrection has implications not only for "corporeality" (bodiliness) but for "corporateness," as she ties the personal body of Jesus to the body of Christ that is the church.

The strength of the book is also its weakness. It could not usefully serve as a textbook (unless the course were on contemporary theology, using the resurrection of Jesus as a test case). There is no focused and balanced theology of the Resurrection, no systematic presentation of critical issues, no obvious basis for selecting which people will be discussed (apart from the idiosyncratic preferences of the essayists).

Why, for instance, is there extended evaluation of the views of Reginald Fuller, and only passing comment on Wolfhart Pannenberg? Above all, the diversity of the contributors, for all that it adds interest to the book, means that there is no developing line of thought, no overarching stance with which to engage—though I confess I wanted to say "Yes, but . . ." to many of the essays.

Nevertheless, this volume remains a useful reflection of the breadth of current discussion about the resurrection of Jesus, and for that we can be grateful. CT