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Article review
Wright on the resurrection

N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (London: SPCK, 2003).

In 2003, the year he was consecrated bishop of Durham, Tom Wright published his magisterial work *The Resurrection of the Son of God*.[1] This volume of more than 800 pages is a monumental defence of the reality of the resurrection. Immensely learned and circumspect, the book impresses the reader with its academic and theological passion. In my view, Bishop Wright has succeeded in building a theological cathedral of illuminating historical insights, convincing and surprising exegetical observations, and thoroughly argued systematic conclusions. No prophetic intuition is needed to predict that this book will remain a classic among the writings which stimulate further thinking and discourse about this most important and highly controversial topic of faith.

In the following I will join the ranks of those in the academy, the church and beyond who have welcomed and praised this book. I will, however, challenge Tom Wright to reconsider the capstone of his cathedral. This capstone is an understanding of the bodily resurrection – grasped in such terms as 'alive again', 'robustly physical' – which is next to impossible to distinguish from a mere resuscitation. I should like to show that the biblical traditions press for a more sophisticated and yet realistic understanding of the bodily resurrection, and would like to win Tom Wright over to this view because I share his academic, apologetic and pastoral concerns, which are connected with an adequate understanding of the reality of the 'bodily' resurrection of Jesus Christ. To illuminate my main objection, I will contrast a question from the conclusion of Wright's impressive book with the question I think would have to be asked at this point.

> What view of creation, what view of justice, would be served by the offer merely of a new spirituality and a one-way ticket out of trouble, an escape from the real world? (p. 737)

As I would like to show, it is not only theological and academic honesty, but also the biblical texts themselves which challenge us to turn this quote, slightly modified, against the author who, in my opinion, seems

[1] References to this book in the text appear in brackets.

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to underestimate the power and the realism of faith and of the Spirit:

> What view of creation, what view of justice, would be served by the offer merely of – as Wright frequently says – a 'robust physical' resurrected body, not clearly distinguishable from a merely resuscitated body (with, however, some extra magical qualities which the author terms 'transphysical') and a one-way ticket just back into this world, without leaving room for the reality of the spiritual body of Christ?

Wright has written a fascinating book. I deeply share his passion for theological realism. But this realism has to include the spiritual dimensions of reality, and not to support all those who dismiss them as bad supernatural entities or who misuse them for all kinds of subjectivist imaginations and illusions.

Just re-affirmation and re-making of creation?

The book is the third volume in Tom Wright's series dedicated to *Christian Origins and the Question of God*. It follows upon an encompassing study on the Jewish roots of Christianity entitled *The New Testament and the People of God* (1992) and a book on the historical Jesus called *Jesus and the Victory of God* (1996). The work on the resurrection 'started life as the final chapter' of the Jesus book. Yet it can very well be read without a familiarity with the two preceding publications. As such an independent work it will be presented and discussed in the following.

Wright argues for the appropriateness and validity of a historical investigation of the resurrection, for a search for 'historical knowledge . . . that can be discussed without presupposing Christian faith' (p. 22). He rightly fears a theology which starts with 'a closed epistemological circle, a fideism from which everything can be seen clearly but which remains necessarily opaque to those outside' (p. 21). In part 1, 'Setting the Scene', he thus sets out with a broad investigation into 'Life Beyond Death in Ancient Paganism' (pp. 32ff.), 'Death and Beyond in the Old Testament' (pp. 85ff.) and 'Hope Beyond Death in Post-Biblical Judaism' (pp. 129ff.). Wright maintains that the topic of the resurrection had no place in the pagan ideas about life after death. He diagnoses an 'infrequent' belief in the resurrection in the Old Testament canon, but perceives a helpful message in its 'simple and direct' language: 'It involves, not a *reconstrual* of life after death, but a *reversal* of death itself . . . Creation itself, celebrated throughout the Hebrew scriptures, will be reaffirmed, remade' (pp. 127ff).

As I will try to show in detail in the discussion of Wright's reflections on the New Testament witnesses, it is already here that I see the pre-stage of a problem, i.e. the emphasis on a *re*-affirmation and a *re*-making in connection with the resurrection. This emphasis can very well affirm the

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continuity between the pre- and the post-resurrected life and thus the realism of the resurrection. This understanding, however, makes it difficult to fully appreciate the potentials of the *discontinuity* of the transformation involved in the resurrection. In my opinion, this conceptual and hermeneutical decision to centre on the reaffirmation and remaking in connection with the resurrection already emerges in the first parts of the book. Wright's thorough investigation of the resurrection hope in post-biblical Judaism also serves preparatory purposes. Along with the historical and exegetical investigations he repeatedly warns against a confusion of the resurrection with a continued existence of the soul after death or against the misconceptions of a non-bodily revivification. I wholeheartedly agree with these intentions and warnings. The slight but important difference between our interpretations – which, however, implies serious consequences – concerns the specific transformation of the body in the resurrection.

Did Paul see a still physical body of Jesus Christ?

Part 2 deals with the topic 'Resurrection in Paul' (pp. 209ff.). Tom Wright – and here I agree, of course – leaves us in no doubt that the resurrection is connected with 'a transformation' of the body of Jesus Christ and the bodies of 'those who belong to the Messiah'. He speaks of a 'new, incorruptible bodily life' (p. 271), which is the result of a '*transformation*, going through the process of death and out into a new kind of life beyond, rather than simply returning to exactly the same sort of life, as had happened in the scriptures with the people raised to life by Elijah and Elisha' (p. 273). He clearly states: 'resurrection was not resuscitation, but transformation into a non-corruptible body' (p. 276). Wright demonstrates convincingly that Paul's complex perspective on the resurrection is firmly rooted in Judaism. He also underlines that Paul develops 'new linguistic tools to articulate the fresh position to which he had come' (p. 273), for instance the differentiation between flesh and body, *sarx* and *soma*.

I should like to turn to these observations briefly. It is important to see that Paul, by this differentiation, greatly surpasses all dualistic anthropologies of the past and the present which try to muddle through with duals like 'body and soul', 'body and spirit', 'body and mind', etc. Paul clearly sees that our body is not only a 'robust physical' entity, shaped by other material and physical realities (e.g. by eating and drinking), but that this 'robust physical' entity is also highly shaped by all kinds of mental and spiritual activities and realities. These mental and spiritual activities and realities, with their strong impacts on our bodies, are either primarily directed and nourished by earth- or world-orientated powers and realities or by the Spirit of God. On this level

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of claiming priority Paul can strongly underline the opposition between the powers of 'flesh and spirit' (cf. Rom 8:4ff.).

Paul certainly could not have the scientific knowledge of our days which informs us that materially the body changes completely within a number of years. Yet with his ingenious differentiation of 'flesh and body' he offers us potentials to understand the complexity of the body which is shaped by both material and spiritual realities and powers. He even goes beyond this triadic orientation of flesh–body–spirit by differentiating the human spirit and the Spirit of God. Furthermore, he sees that our 'heart' and our mind and intellect can serve different spirits, some of which want to bring us under the dominance of the flesh. Without a clear awareness of the complexity of this view of the body it is impossible to grasp what the biblical traditions have in mind when they speak of the resurrection of the body and why they even envision some eschatological hope for the 'embodied' flesh which – left to itself and its own powers – is doomed to decay. Although it is Paul who develops such ingenious conceptual tools, several of these differentiated anthropological realities – which, again, are not adequately presented in dualistic anthropologies and worldviews – are also grasped by other biblical authors.

Wright shows how much the focus on the resurrection shapes Paul's whole perspective on the history of God with the creatures, how the 'controlling narratives' of the Jewish tradition which included 'creation and exodus, the foundation stories within any Jewish worldview' (p. 274), are reinvested by Paul in order to speak of 'the new creation and the new exodus'. Wright can fascinate his readers by bringing together a careful analysis of the key passages in Paul's letters which (may) refer to Paul's encounter with the risen Lord (Gal 1:11–17; 1 Cor 9:1; 15:8–11; 2 Cor 4:6; 12:1–4), and the texts in Acts which deal with Paul's conversion (Acts 9:3–9; 22:6–11; 26:12–19). In a summary 'When Paul Saw Jesus' (pp. 375ff.) he does not only offer his own constructive conclusion; he also states clearly which positions and moves he would like to critique and refute.

According to Wright, many interpretations of Paul's encounter with the resurrected Christ and his conversion present one, two or three of the following 'moves' which he rightly regards as inadaquate and misleading:

(1) a move 'from a vision of heavenly light, as in Acts, to a "purely subjective experience"';
(2) a move 'from this supposedly Pauline "subjective experience of inner illumination" to the hypothesis that this was the sort of thing all the apostles experienced';
(3) a move 'from this universal non-objective experience to a denial of Jesus' bodily resurrection' (p. 393).

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One can indeed see tendencies of these 'moves' in many famous interpretations of the resurrection accounts, elements of the first two of them even in such classics as Bultmann and Pannenberg. Against all of them Wright boldly wants to affirm Jesus' bodily resurrection. He states that a careful reading of the texts leads to the conclusion that Paul 'had seen the risen Jesus in person, and that his understanding of who this Jesus was included the firm belief that he possessed a transformed but still physical body' (p. 398). It is very important to explain what is meant here by 'seeing in person' and by a 'still physical body'. Wright seems to be convinced that the resurrection is no resuscitation, but rather a transformation. However, at this stage of his book it is very difficult to grasp what kind of transformation he envisages. His fear that Paul's 'seeing' of the Resurrected One could be falsely interpreted as merely seeing a heavenly light and thus as a merely subjective impression seems to dominate the interpretation in such a way that the differentiation between resurrection and resuscitation becomes blurred. What is meant by the still physical body that Paul saw?

Wright wants us to understand that Luke adds 'that Paul's seeing of Jesus was accompanied by dazzling light. He never says, however, that Jesus appeared to Paul either as the source of that light or as being of light' (p. 390). In order to prevent the threat of a dissipation of the bodily resurrected Lord into a light appearance which could mean a loss in objectivity, Wright wants to hold on to three elements in this experience: first, a dazzling light which, however, is just 'accompanying' the encounter; second, the audition in which the resurrected Jesus identifies himself; and third, a personal encounter with a 'still physical body'. I do not see this third element either in the witnesses of Paul or in Acts, which state that Paul's fellows could not share his full experience (either 'hearing a voice but seeing nobody' (Acts 9:7), or they saw the light, but did not hear the voice (Acts 22:9)). There is no indication of the third element, the 'still physical body' – beyond the visual physicality of a powerful light which makes Paul fall to the ground and blinds him for three days (Acts 9:9) or at least until he comes to Damascus (Acts 22:11). Together with the self-identifying and calling voice, this light appearance constitutes 'what Paul saw'. It is difficult to grasp why the falling and blinding should not account for an 'objectivity' of this experience, not to speak of the powerful and far-reaching conversion of Paul's life. The lack of an intersubjective sharing of this experience, however, should warn us against too straightforward and too simple attempts to testify to the objectivity of the resurrection.

In my view, there is no basis in the texts (and there is no need, either) to speak of an encounter with a 'still physical body' which was merely 'accompanied by dazzling light' in order to secure the objectivity of Paul's resurrection experience. A blinding light that throws a person to the ground

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and a call that dramatically changes a life can hardly be confused with a merely subjective impression. And the unique event at Damascus does by no means support a 'move' towards the opinion that 'this was the sort of thing all the apostles experienced'. Finally, although there are many open questions about how to relate Paul's seeing of the risen Lord to the encounters witnessed to by the gospels, there is no lack of convincing power in the constellation without a 'personal encounter with a STILL physical body'.

The resurrected body – a robustly physical body?

Part 3 deals with the New Testament and early Christian writings apart from Paul and from the 'Easter stories' in the gospels (pp. 401ff.). It partly also deals with the questions I have raised. It does so by introducing the terms 'transphysical' and 'transphysicality' (p. 477; cf. pp. 616–17, 678–9). Wright comments: 'This new mode of embodiment is hard to describe, but we can at least propose a label for it'. With this new term Wright intends to put 'a label on the demonstrable fact that the early Christians envisaged a body which was still robustly physical' (pp. 477–8). The reasons for Wright's insistence on a 'still robustly physical' body seem to be convincing. The early Christians 'did not say that they had seen signs of the heavenly presence of Christ. They said that Jesus of Nazareth had been raised from the dead' (p. 479). Wright strengthens his point by reflecting on the Jewish and scriptural traditions that could have been used by the early witnesses to explain what had happened to Jesus (for instance, Daniel 12:1–3). But what in fact is the meaning of 'still robustly physical', if Wright's affirmations are to be maintained that the 'resurrection is no resuscitation' and 'a transformation happened to the pre-Easter body of Christ' (cf. pp. 587, 594 and often)?

Wright tries to support his view by a reconstruction of the 'worldview' held by early Christianity which, as he says, shows 'a robustly bodily form of resurrection belief' (p. 583). Against existentialist eschatologies he argues that the realism of the early Christians, their commitment to live and work in history, to shape communities and to centre their symbolic world around the witness to Jesus Christ and his discipleship clearly speaks against a fixation on a Lord 'gone to heaven'. 'If the Christians had believed . . . that their aim should be to join him there in the future, and indeed to experience some anticipations of that blessing in the present, why should the present world be of any concern to them?' (pp. 582–3). But this does not yet answer the question on what kind of 'still robustly physical body' of the resurrected Christ the 'robustly bodily form of resurrection belief' was concentrated. The 'central task of reading the Easter accounts' of the gospels, dealt with in part 4 of the book, should be of some help in answering this burning question.

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The Resurrected One – 'a human being among human beings'?

In part 4 Wright convincingly argues that the evangelists did not depend on Paul's resurrection message of the resurrection. They did not just embellish this message with some more or less strange, bewildering and entertaining stories about personal encounters with the post-Easter Jesus Christ. Instead, 'we must assume that each of the evangelists had access to ways of telling this story which went back via different, though ultimately related, oral and perhaps written traditions'. Paul's account 'looks like a brief summary of the other stories' (p. 591) – an account which ignores many differences in the details of the stories but also omits elements common to all the evangelists (e.g. the role of the women as the first witnesses to the resurrection). Wright summarises commonalities and differences between the evangelists' accounts (pp. 613–14). In an ingenious step he highlights a common 'surprise of the resurrection narratives' in the form of a 'strange silence' and a strange witness. A common strange silence and a common strange witness indicate that the resurrection narratives of the gospels all refer in similar, yet – with regard to the details – in different ways to events that surprisingly happened in real space-time.

(1) They all tell their stories 'with virtually no embroidery from the biblical tradition' (p. 599, cf. pp. 599ff.);
(2) as in the case of Paul and Acts, they link the resurrection of Christ with a missionary imperative but they do not directly elaborate on personal and communal eschatological hope (p. 602ff.);
(3) quite different from Paul and the biblical traditions – especially Daniel – the resurrected Jesus 'is never depicted . . . as a heavenly being, radiant and shining' (pp. 604ff.);
(4) although 'women were simply not acceptable as legal witnesses' which explains why 'the tradition which Paul is quoting . . . has carefully taken the women out of it' (p. 607), all evangelists speak extensively of the presence of the women as the first witnesses to the empty tomb and to the resurrection appearances. Wright bluntly asks, if only one of the witnesses had spoken of this fact: 'Would the other evangelists have been so slavishly foolish as to copy the story unless they were convinced that, despite being an apologetic liability, it was historically trustworthy?' (p. 608)

It is with agreement and gratitude that I have followed Wright so far. I meet with great difficulties, however, when he states that the resurrected Jesus, in some respects, appears as 'a human being among human beings' and at the same time merely qualifies that 'Jesus is almost routinely depicted

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in these stories as having a body with properties that are, to say the least, unusual' (p. 605). Just a body with 'unusual properties' – this might well refer to winners of Olympic gold medals. As I have argued elsewhere, there is no indication in the resurrection narratives of the Bible that after Easter the resurrected Jesus Christ lived together with his followers as he had done before. Exclamations like: 'Sorry, Jesus, that I did not recognise you immediately!' or 'It is so good that you are back, Jesus ("alive again")!' are absolutely unthinkable. To play this down with the assertion that there was also 'discontinuity', that this body was 'somehow transformed' (p. 609 and often), 'somehow different' (p. 611 and often) and that the body of the Resurrected One had 'properties that are, to say the least, unusual' blurs the clear perspective on the messages given by the New Testament texts. It also blurs a clear perspective on the realistic eschatological expectations and hopes to which these texts lay the ground.

The gospel testimonies to the resurrection present a complicated picture. They consistently emphasise the tension between palpable impressions on the one hand and, on the other, experiences of an appearance. With regard to the resurrection, they consistently emphasise the tension between theophany and doubt. The resurrection of Jesus is clearly not a physical reanimation. Much more happens in Jesus' resurrection than in the raising of Lazarus or of Jairus's daughter. While a few resurrection testimonies, if we isolate them, seem to suggest a confusion of the resurrection with a reanimation, the biblical witnesses give a clear overall picture.[2]

The Emmaus story is particularly revealing. The eyes of the disciples are kept from recognising the risen Christ. In the ritual of the bread their eyes are opened. But it is already the next verse that says, 'He vanished from their sight'. Instead of complaining about a ghost, the disciples remember the earlier experience supporting this new view of Jesus Christ which, however, had not initially served as a revelation to them, 'Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?' (Luke 24:30ff.).

It is characteristic of the resurrection appearances that they 'establish a reality'. Or more precisely, there is a transformation of existence and reality which stems from them. The resurrection appearances have nothing to do with passing impressions. Also, they are 'founded in reality' in

[2] Cf. Michael Welker, 'Theological Realism and Eschatological Symbol Systems: Resurrection, the Reign of God, and the Presence in Faith and in the Spirit', in T. Peters, R. Russell and M. Welker (eds), *Resurrection: Theological and Scientific Assessments* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), pp. 31–42; in greater detail, 'Die Wirklichkeit der Auferstehung', in H.-J. Eckstein and M. Welker (eds), *Die Wirklichkeit der Auferstehung* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, Neukirchener, 3rd edn, 2007), pp. 311–31.

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their connection back to the pre-Easter Jesus, his life and his work, even though they do not raise the issue of his reappearance, and although he is experienced in a new form. Despite the degree to which these experiences of the resurrection are accompanied by fear, uncertainty and even doubt – as the biblical texts show again and again – they lead to faith and the sending forth of witnesses. What kind of experiences do we have before us according to the witnesses of the gospels?

'The two things which must be regarded as historically secure when we talk about the first Easter are the emptiness of the tomb and the meetings with the risen Jesus' (p. 686).

What does the empty tomb reveal?

Wright repeatedly speaks of 'the tomb-plus-appearances hypothesis' (pp. 707, 711) and regards these 'elements' as the 'key non-negotiable historical bedrock' (p. 629). Most scholars would agree with him so far. They would probably also share his conviction: 'The empty tomb alone would be a puzzle and a tragedy. Sightings of an apparently alive Jesus, by themselves, would have been classified as visions or hallucinations, which were well enough known in the ancient world' (p. 686).

All four gospels bear witness to the empty tomb. In this they show similarities: the presence of the women in general and of Mary of Magdala in particular; the coming on 'the first day of the week'; the strange interpreting messenger or messengers in the tomb or in front of it. Even among these commonalities there are differences which indicate that the witnesses refer to different traditions. They cannot provide a clear common answer to the questions whether there was one messenger or whether there were two of them, whether they were of earthly or heavenly origin, present in the tomb or outside of it, encountered by 'the women' or by Mary of Magdala alone. They do not speak with one voice on how many women were involved and whether male disciples were with them or not; finally, whether the witnesses were sent to Galilee, about 120 km away, to encounter the resurrected Christ, or whether they were to stay in Jerusalem. Apart from the common framework of first day, women, explicitly and prominently Mary of Magdala, messenger(s) in or at the tomb, they all agree in one respect, namely that the tomb was empty.

The empty tomb traditions supported by both the Christian and Jewish sides, but for different reasons, principally allow at least four differing interpretations:

(a) physical reanimation of the pre-Easter Jesus – an interpretation often defended in the past and sharply attacked by critics of the resurrection;

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(b) theft of the body, explicitly pondered in Matthew and John;
(c) a 'drawing away' in an unimaginable, miraculous or even a magic fashion; and
(d) the mistaking of an empty tomb for the real tomb – an option which has been adopted only occasionally and only by few commentators.

It is very important to see with Tom Wright that the stories of the empty tomb alone are not sufficient to evoke belief in the resurrection.

- According to Mark the result of the experience of the empty tomb is, 'And they went out and fled from the tomb; for trembling and astonishment had come upon them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid' (16:8).
- Matthew speaks in some detail about the rumour that the body had been stolen by the disciples (28:11ff.; cf. 27:62ff.; and 28:15, a story 'still told among the Jews to this day').
- Luke 24 notes that the disciples fail to believe the women's report, 'these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them' (24:11). Only Peter runs to the grave but – finding only the shroud and sudarium there – leaves in confusion 'wondering at what had happened' (24:12).
- According to John 20, Mary of Magdala fetches Peter and the beloved disciple when she sees the open tomb, and after they have seen for themselves that it is empty, she breaks into tears over the stolen body. 'They have taken away my Lord and I do not know where they have laid him' (20:13b). It is only about the 'other disciple', who reaches the tomb first and goes in second, that the gospel says, in rather a cryptic way: 'he went in and saw and believed' (20:8). This 'belief', however, obviously has no impact on Mary.

The stories of the empty tomb are not stories of triumph. On the contrary. They contain propaganda from the opposition that the disciples, full of deceit, were tomb raiders; they show fear and silence; disbelief, even among the disciples; amazed confusion; mourning over the supposed theft of the body. What we are confronted with is an entire typology of failure to recognise the resurrection and its proclamation. In all this, one message perseveres – that the body of the pre-Easter Jesus has disappeared. Does this then mean that the dead Jesus simply got up and walked away in order to turn up again later to everyone's surprise?

The variants of the four evangelists have one decisive point in common: the fact that the empirically and socially perceivable body of the pre-Easter Jesus is withdrawn. That is, the story of the resurrection provides us with absolutely no material for pathological investigations, no material for medico-legal

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autopsies or coronary inquiries. The empty tomb traditions speak in unison of a *withdrawnness* of the pre-Easter body – in whatever way that is to be classified – and this fact has to be respected.

No simple recognition

Can we, at this point, fill the strange void with the help of Wright's 'tomb-plus-appearances hypothesis' or the 'tomb-plus-appearances combination' (pp. 707, 711 and often)? Can we say that the withdrawn body appears 'thoroughly alive again' (pp. 686, 688, 703 and often), 'a substantial body' (p. 691), 'alive once more' (p. 710), having come 'back to life' (p. 722)? Can we gladly point to the breaking of the bread and the eating of the fish in Luke 24 and to the feeding of the disciples on the beach of the Sea of Tiberias in John 21 in order to support this move? I do not deny that this could be an option which could even support a resuscitationist perspective on the resurrection. However, it is exactly the 'tomb-plus-appearances combination' which cautions us against this move. Despite the few incidents just mentioned, the witnesses of the gospel do not allow us to overrule the message from the empty tomb: The pre-Easter body of Jesus Christ is withdrawn! For they all speak of the immense difficulty of the disciples to reidentify and recognise the resurrected Jesus. And this could not have been a problem if he had been 'thoroughly alive again'.

We recognise a person by his or her face, his or her eyes, his or her voice, his or her movements, gestures. A 'substantial body', 'alive again', 'alive once more', 'back to life' should provide the witnesses with such potentials of recognition. But nothing, really nothing, of this kind is mirrored by the gospels.

- Mark does not offer 'appearance stories' at all. It might be, as Wright thoughtfully argues, that the original ending was lost (cf. 617ff.). The so-called 'later ending' states that the risen Christ appeared and that he 'appeared in another form' (16:12), and it repeatedly emphasises that several appearances only generated disbelief in the resurrection reports (16:11, 13, 14).
- The appearance to the women that we find in Matthew is characterised by their bowing down in worship (28:9); the appearance before the disciples is similar in this respect (28:17). The resurrected Christ shows himself to be the divine Lord and receives the corresponding response. The witnesses fall down before him (*proskynese*). But at the same time we find that 'some doubted'. I can agree with Wright's conclusion that Matthew's 'risen Jesus was sufficiently "bodily"' to witness against a 'disembodied "life after death"' – but that he was also 'sufficiently different . . . to appear and to disappear in unpredictable ways, and to be doubted' (p. 646).

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What do we find in Luke and in John who, as Wright occasionally says, offer a more 'bodily' account?

- Luke strongly accentuates the tension between Jesus Christ as palpably manifest and as an appearance – and not only in the Emmaus story. He does not only drastically underline the apostles' disbelief and the fact that they regard the story of the empty tomb as 'utter nonsense'. He stresses that the eleven, after they have heard the resurrection testimonies, react to the appearance of the resurrected Christ with fear, supposing that they see a spirit (24:37). The resurrected Christ shows them his hands and feet – and they still refuse to believe; finally he eats something before their very eyes. But then – a fact also stressed in Mark – he is drawn away from them and lifted up into heaven (24:51). Palpability and a 'drawing away' accompanied by fear and doubt: these elements are bound together in the resurrection appearances.

How could Luke repeatedly report that the disciples 'did not recognise' the resurrected Jesus Christ (24:16; 24:37; 24:41) if he was 'robustly physical', 'alive again', 'back to life'? Why could not his face, his eyes, his voice, his body as such convince them of his new resurrected presence? Why were the 'markers' of the breaking of the bread, the opening of the scriptures, the wounds of the cross and the eating of a fish of such revelatory importance? Wright again toggles between a 'physical body of some sort' (p. 654) and a 'transphysical' body that 'can appear and disappear, is not always immediately recognized, and so on' (p. 654, cf. p. 659). I wish I were able to find traces in Luke which would convince me that the resurrected Christ was just 'not always' immediately recognised, that Emmaus and the 'upper room' appearance were exceptions to the rule that Jesus was seen 'alive again' 'as a firmly embodied human being' – simply with 'new, unexpected and unexplained characteristics' of his body (pp. 660, 661).

- John also stresses the simultaneous occurrence of the palpably manifest Jesus Christ with aspects of an appearance: the Resurrected One can show the witnesses his hands and his side and yet walk through closed doors to his disciples. In a second encounter, again with the doors locked, the doubting Thomas is invited to touch the wounds, to which, having done so, he does not respond, 'It's so good to have you back, Jesus!', but rather pronounces the confession, 'My Lord and my God!' (John 20:28), which Wright adequately characterises as 'the fullest confession of faith anywhere in the whole gospel' (p. 664).

John emphasises that in the final revelation at the beach the disciples see Jesus and 'do not know' him (21:4), and when they 'know' him they 'do not

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dare to ask: Who are you?' This is clearly not an encounter with a 'robustly physical body' in the way of a living and 'eating together', 'human among human'! A (probably symbolically) successful fishing at the command of the Lord (21:6ff.), a feeding, again with the bread and fish motifs (21:12ff.; cf. the feeding miracles, Matt. 14:13ff. and 15:32ff.; Mark 6:30ff. and 8:1ff.; Luke 9:10ff. and John 6:1ff.; but also the connection with 'fishing' disciples in Matt. 4:19; Mark 1:17; Luke 5:10; and finally the parable of the reign of God, Matt. 13:47), a forgiving and reconciliatory encounter with Peter (21:15ff.; cf. John 18:25ff.; Matt. 26:69ff.; Mark 14:66ff.; Luke 22:54ff.), and the missionary sending, common to all the gospels: this is what we read in the last chapter of John.

In a very subtle way Wright analyses the 'rehabilitation and commissioning of Peter' and his installation as an 'under-shepherd' (p. 676; a nice contrast to the christomorphic aspirations of the present pope and his predecessor). He is quite sure that the gospel depicts the resurrected Jesus as a 'real, palpable, a physical person capable of performing physical acts including cooking breakfast' (p. 678). On the other hand he beautifully and, in my view, adequately formulates: 'The brief account is heavy with the strangeness of new creation . . . It seems to reflect a primal moment of simultaneous recognition and puzzlement, an awareness of something they could hardly put into words except as a question, and a question they dared not to ask' (p. 679).

Both bowing down in worship *and* doubt, doubt *and* profession to the Lord and God; questions they do not dare to ask: the resurrection reports do not point to simple empirical experiences which can be reproduced at will. By stressing their character as appearances, by stressing the variety of appearances, the drawing away – to the point of disappearance at the moment of recognition – and by generally emphasising the aspects of not seeing, not knowing, not daring to ask and doubt, these texts work constantly and in an extremely powerful way against the impression that here we have to deal with a mere reanimation. Yet at the same time, and in this I fully agree with Wright, they also work against the impression that the experiences were simply fanciful imaginings, self-created fantasies or psychogenic phenomena in that they stress an intense palpability through hearing, seeing, touching and eating.

What do these complicated testimonies refer to? They clearly do not refer – as some fundamentalists or critics of the resurrection suppose – to a physical reanimation of the pre-Easter Jesus. Even though the testimonies are quite different and empirically not reproducible, they contradict any supposition of being the result of an illusion or a fantasy. These varying, differing testimonies point to a complex historical event, to a new reality. The conviction that Jesus is dead and that his mission and his person have failed

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is replaced by the experience that he himself is present in a living way. This is not a sudden, psychotic change of opinion or one that has been achieved through various tricks, nor is it counter-propaganda or a well-intentioned and rapidly spreading infectious fantasy. Admittedly, the pre-Easter Jesus does not reappear as a biological, natural-empirical event. However, with unequalled power and force, the Resurrected One, the post-Easter Jesus, makes himself present in the resurrection as a cultural-historical event. And this event is as little an illusion as the discovery of justice or mathematics.

But this event is not simply the discovery of a new order and truth – rather the person and the life of Jesus is present and highlighted here in a new way. The pre-Easter life and body continues in a new way, extends far beyond itself, yet remains faithful to itself. He, Jesus of Nazareth, is risen. In his stubborn yet enormously rich individuality, and thus 'bodily', he is present 'again'. But this does not mean that his biological body is 'alive again', but rather his entire life which was borne by the biological and mental-spiritual body, but which now seeks and finds a new body for those and in those who witness to him, a new body to be the bearer of his earthly, historical existence. In order to make this understandable, we have to appreciate the connection between the life of the resurrected Christ and that of the pre-Easter, historical Jesus. We have to see that with the resurrected Christ a new form of life and existence appears: his life in a body mediated by the Spirit and by faith in him. Yet we have to differentiate this faith in him – this faith of which Paul so aptly says that it has come with Christ – from such things as Bultmann's individualistic 'certainty of essentiality' (*Eigentlichkeitsgewissheit*) and from other so-called subjectivist concepts of faith which do not begin with and root in the reality of the resurrected Christ.

The fullness of the person and life of Jesus Christ present in the resurrection

The witnesses recognise the risen Christ in what he says to them, in the breaking of the bread, in the greeting of peace, in his opening of the scriptures to them and in other signs. They also recognise the risen Christ in appearances of light which directly contradict a confusion of the resurrection with a physical reanimation. What is important is that a *multiplicity* of *different* experiences of evidence occasion the certainty that Christ is and remains present among us in a bodily way! On the one hand, Wright insists that there was an immense polyphony of oral witnesses to the resurrection, which the Gospels take up. Obviously there was an amazing resistance to shaping the individual witnesses in a 'convergence to simplicity'. Wright also repeatedly and full of subtle insights insists on the difference between historical and empirical verification ('But with history things are seldom

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straightforward', p. 693). On the other hand, in what A. N. Whitehead would have called 'a fallacy of misplaced concreteness', he follows the route of a physicalist, recuscitationist approach towards the reality of the resurrection. The complexity and the fluidity of 'the body', so impressively perceived by the biblical witnesses, is blurred, if not lost. We will have to appreciate the 'body' with intrinsically mental and spiritual dimensions. And we will have to imagine a 'transphysical' state in which the 'sarkic' and physical dimensions are not fully left behind but transformed in a way that will make Paul's talk of a 'spiritual body' meaningful and convincing. This will also remind us that – as Paul puts it – we do no longer know Christ *kata sarka*, according to the flesh (1 Cor. 15:44), and that the 'first witnesses' did not 'see' him in this way either.

We do not have any witnesses to the disciples at Emmaus, staring at the broken bread, or to Peter and the others following Jesus' footsteps on the Tiberias beach. Wright occasionally likes to invite these quasi historical, empirical images ('footprints by the shore', p. 737). But whoever cannot stop speculating about the physicality of the broken bread and the eaten fish and the breakfast-cooking Jesus should take into consideration that possibly some (not all) of the resurrection witnesses testify to the body of Jesus Christ in a representative way, thus preshadowing the post-Easter body of Christ with its different members. The Lord's supper and the synoptic remarks about the resurrection of John the Baptist and the early prophets (Matt. 14:2; Mark 6:14; Luke 9:7, 19) should give us impulses to ponder these complicated possibilities of a 'realistic representation of the body' more thoroughly. They seem to be better compatible with the witnesses in the gospels than an approach which comes close to a resuscitationist view.

The certainty that Christ is risen does not mean that Christ is now present in the same way as the pre-Easter Jesus was present. Instead *the whole fullness of Christ's person and life* are present 'in the Spirit and in faith'. For a naturalistic and scientistic way of thinking it is hard to make sense of this presence of the whole fullness of a person and a life 'in the Spirit and in faith'.[3] That is why this way of thinking keeps getting stuck between the advantages and disadvantages of a physical reanimation. By contrast, the risen Christ becomes present in a way that retains the multidimensionality of his person and influence, as well as the multidimensionality of access to his person and influence. The powers of love, the powers of forgiveness, the powers of healing, the powers of special attention to children, to the weak, to the rejected, to the sick and to the suffering are communicated with the presence

[3] See J. Polkinghorne and M. Welker (eds), *The End of the World and the Ends of God: Theology and Science on Eschatology* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 2000).

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of the risen Christ. The powers of struggle with the so-called 'principalities and powers', for example, with political and religious powers in the search for justice and truth also take shape in the presence of the risen Christ. The person and life of Jesus Christ thus make a multiplicity of powers for transformation and renewal available. These powers 'in the Spirit and in faith' should by no means be belittled as mere subjectivist impressions and wishful thinking.

The link back to the pre-Easter Jesus and the connection with the risen Christ grow out of experiences that can accurately be termed 'testimonies'. This term on the one hand points to the personal authenticity and certainty of the experience and, on the other hand, to its fragmentary and perspectival character. From the retrospective view of a multi-year discussion, particularly in the Roman Catholic Church, Francis Fiorenza has emphasised that this character of testimony is indispensable. He has shown that these necessarily manifold testimonies push toward metaphorical speech when they refer to each other and seek to handle the complex reality to which they perspectivally point. Finally, he has called attention to the fact that these testimonies seek an anchoring in actual and symbolic actions that become ritual forms.[4] Testimonies to the resurrection are kindled in the vocative address, in the breaking of the bread, in the greeting of peace, in the opening of the scriptures, and in other ritualisable actions and signs.

By keeping the fullness of the life of the risen Christ present, faith has the power to give access to insight and knowledge. This power of faith is no matter of indifference to secular thought, either. Think of a loved one who has died, and ask yourself who she is. Is she the child in the yellowed photograph? Is she the shadow in the dim recollections from my own early days of childhood? Is she the contoured person to whom I related for large parts of my life? Is she the emaciated, death-drawn face into whose eyes I looked with great sadness on her deathbed? The answer will be: she is all this, and yet she is much more than is revealed by these few retrospective glances at an entire life's path. But 'all this' and much more accompanies us, at least in the depth dimensions of our life and experience. What forms of insight and knowledge are appropriate for rendering 'all this' present? At this level, the struggle for theological insight becomes open and revealing for non-religious experience and insight.

There has been a good deal of thought on the adequate forms of imagination and memory, forms which allow us to relate faith and the

[4] Francis Fiorenza, 'The Resurrection of Jesus and Roman Catholic Fundamental Theology', in S. T. Davis, D. Kendall and G. O'Collins (eds), *The Resurrection: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Resurrection of Jesus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 213–48, 238ff.

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memory of the historical Jesus in all his fullness, as presented by the living, resurrected Christ. But in order to comprehend Christ's presence in Spirit and faith it is crucial to see that it is the Crucified One who encounters us as the Resurrected One. The living resurrected Christ neither comes to us from a neutral situation, nor does he come into a neutral situation. He comes out of the night of betrayal and out of the chaos of the cross. In his repeated remarks about the revolutionary potential of the resurrection reality and the corresponding faith Wright at least hints at this dimension.

'On the third day': alive again after 72 or 48–72 hours – or a new life after real death?

Wright states that 'despite perplexity and scepticism, billions of Christians around the world regularly repeat the original confession of Easter faith: on the third day after his execution, Jesus rose again' (p. 3). And he asks the pointed question: 'So what did happen on Easter morning?' (p. 4) In an extremely learned and thoughtful investigation he arrives at the conviction that 'the tomb really was empty and that people did meet Jesus, alive again, and that, though admitting it involves accepting a challenge at the level of worldview itself, the best historical explanation for all these phenomena is that Jesus was indeed bodily raised from the dead' (p. 8).

I agree with almost every word of this statement, but would object to the words 'alive again', because the continuity between the pre- and post-Easter body must not be emphasised in such a way that the discontinuity and the transfiguration of the body cannot be appreciated. The strength of Wright's approach is that he addresses Jesus' bodily existence even to the point of his physical self-reference. He has to in this way because his reading of the 'third day' locates the bodily resurrection in natural space-time only. Something must have happened to the dead physical pre-Easter body at a specific moment on or after the third day. This perspective presses for the resuscitation view. I agree that on this basis there is no better option. The problem is that the resuscitation – even on the level of sophistication achieved in Wright's interpretation ('robustly physical', 'transphysical') – conflicts with most of the biblical witnesses when closely read.

A different perspective opens up, when the 'third day' does not stand for hours 49 to 72, but rather for 'dead beyond any doubt', beyond any hope of a recovery or even of mere resuscitation. This does not deny Wright's conclusion: 'For the earliest Christians, to speak of Jesus' resurrection was to speak of something that, however . . . earth-shattering, however much it drew together things earthly and heavenly, was still an earthly event, and needed to be exactly that' (p. 736). This earthly event, however, was not the presence of a 'substantial body . . . alive again'. It was the presence of the

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resurrected body which was able to draw the pre-Easter Jesus in a new mode of bodily existence together with his witnesses in the power of the Spirit to live among and to work against the principalities and powers which seemed to have won on the cross. For it was mighty global politics and traditional religion, two types of law (the Jewish and the Roman law), public opinon, Jews and Gentiles, friends and foes who conspired in the will of the world to work against God's revelatory, saving and ennobling presence. Out of deepest despair and agony and out of death beyond doubt we see the light of the resurrection shine. 'For a fuller picture, we would need to factor in the New Testament's talk of the divine Spirit, the one who, the Christians believed, had been instrumental in God's raising of Jesus from the dead' (p. 735). It might be – and I am inclined to think so – that the puzzling polyphony of the biblical witnesses and their resistance to homogenise their views is not only due to their will to historical honesty and truth, but to the guidance of this Spirit.

Tom Wright has written a fascinating book, one of the most impressive theological books I have ever read. I could only wish that his passion for theological realism would induce him to take the next step and see that this realism can more explicitly include the spiritual dimensions of reality. The passion for theological realism should not nourish those who dismiss the spiritual dimensions of reality as bad supernaturalism. Theological realism should rather affirm and help to explore the spiritual dimensions of reality in the light of the resurrection of the Son of God.

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