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Resurrecting Old Arguments: Responding to Four Essays

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ABSTRACT

The author is grateful for the attention given to his book *The Resurrection of the Son of God* by the four reviewers. David Bryan is right to highlight the Enoch literature as a more fertile source of resurrection ideas than the book allowed for; but he has overstated his objection. Granted that the stream of thought represented by resurrection is more diverse even than RSG allowed, the book's argument did not hinge on the wide spread of resurrection belief at the time but on the meaning of 'resurrection', i.e. a two-stage post-mortem existence, the second stage being a new embodiment. Bryan's suggested elevation of Enoch, Elijah and others as pre-cursors of the exaltation of Jesus fails in that these figures neither die nor are resurrected. James Crossley's counter-proposal—resurrection stories grew from 'visions' which gave rise to the idea of an empty tomb as an attempt to 'vindicate' the 'ideas and beliefs of Jesus'—fails on several counts, not least because it ignores Jesus' kingdom-proclamation which was not the promulgation of ideas and beliefs but the announcement that Israel's God was going to do something that would claim his sovereignty over the world. Michael Goulder revives the highly contentious hypothesis that the early Church was polarized between the Jerusalem apostles, who believed in a non-bodily resurrection, and Pauline Christians for whom the resurrection was bodily. The claim that Mark 16.1-8 is full of contradictions and impossibilities is rejected. Larry Hurtado warns against downplaying the role of experience both in the Christian life and in describing the devotion and liturgy of the early Church. While cautioning against the use of the word 'metaphor' to mean 'less than fully real', I acknowledge the force of the argument, and suggest the cognitive processes I propose and the devotional life sketched by Hurtado are complementary.

It was Pontius Pilate who declared, 'What I have written, I have written'. The implied reader of the gospels may like Pilate's challengers even less than [210] they like the cynical procurator, but the remark still carries a sense of begging the question, of shrugging the shoulders and walking away. That is, I think, part of the reason why I have always cringed a little at responses to reviews, especially at those that consist mostly of pointing out that if Professor Haupt-Kritik had bothered to read page 397 he could not possibly have accused the injured but innocent author of folly. So, having been pressed

for a written response (in addition to the aural response I made at the time) to the four essays presented at the British Society of New Testament Studies meeting in 2004, I register my reluctance and offer an advance apology for the fact that I shall inevitably lapse from time to time into a genre I find somewhat distasteful.

I am, of course, grateful both for the attention which has been showered on *The Resurrection of the Son of God* and for the many kind words which these essayists and others have said and written about it. (I am still somewhat dazed at the glowing presentation on the book which the novelist P.D. James made at the awards ceremony for the Michael Ramsey Prize.) One would rather have the critics lining up to take pot shots than to have the book ignored. But I confess that I am slightly disturbed to discover that nobody reading these four essays would get any idea of the actual shape of the book's argument, or the differing weight given to the several parts, some of which are here analysed in great detail but most of which are passed over in silence. The book is, I think, more than simply a string of discussions of regular *topoi* on the subject of resurrection in general and that of Jesus in particular, with a historical argument for Jesus' bodily resurrection somehow emerging out of the mound of footnotes. I still believe, and nothing in these four essays remotely challenges this, that the best historical explanation for the rise of the multi-faceted phenomenon we know as early Christianity is the combination of an empty tomb and the sightings of Jesus himself bodily alive (though in a transformed, not merely resuscitated, body) for a month or so after his crucifixion; and that the best explanation for the empty tomb and the sightings is the proposal that Jesus was indeed fully alive again and that his body had been transformed into what I have called a 'transphysical' state.

Perhaps I should say before proceeding further that though I do indeed conceive of this book in terms of a historical argument (and thus as coming into the first of the three categories which Larry Hurtado presents, following Peter Carnley), I am well aware, perhaps more than most readers of the book picked up (for which I must take responsibility), that people are unlikely to come to believe that Jesus of Nazareth was bodily alive in a new way some three days after his execution on the basis of historical argument alone. As Wittgenstein put it, 'it is love that believes the resurrection'.^[1] However, as I say in the book, what historical argument is rather good at doing is clearing away the undergrowth [211] behind which sceptics of various sorts have been hiding, demonstrating that they are not, as they so often claim, mere neutral observers (while Christians, supposedly, are *parti pris* and so their testimony can be discounted), but rather equally influenced by judgments of probability which come, not from looking at the evidence, but from an *a priori* position. One of the reasons the book is so long (not long enough for some; I am always amused when critics tell me off for missing out a proper discussion of some text or issue, a point to which I shall return) is that in reading the secondary literature I became acutely aware that many of those who blithely dismissed the possibility of Jesus' bodily resurrection were resting the force of their argument on a particular point (say, a particular reading of certain key texts) which historical study can show conclusively to be wrong. Since many of these arguments are then repeated *ad nauseam* in other writings, I thought it would be something of a public service to show just how specious they are.

But this, as it were, simply reduces the deficit to zero. While I think I have made a strong historical case for my point, I am well aware that anyone reading my book can come, without any failure of logic or historical insight, to the conclusion of saying, 'I can see that the historical arguments normally advanced against believing in Jesus' bodily resurrection are flawed, and that the historical arguments for saying that he must have been raised from the dead are remarkably good; but I choose to believe, as my starting point, that bodily resurrection has never occurred, and must therefore conclude that, even though I cannot give a historical explanation for the rise of early Christianity and the shape of its central belief, there must in fact be some such explanation which does not involve Jesus' resurrection.' That is the point at which it becomes clear that on this, as on

many ‘ subjects, one does not believe something on evidence alone, and that the cheerful old Enlightenment lie to the contrary needs to be faced down and replaced with a fuller and more many-sided account of how and why humans come to think and believe—and even, we would say, to ‘know’—all kinds of things.

More particularly, I conceive the task of the book on the analogy with Jesus’ response to Thomas in John 20. Thomas begins with the standard skeptical viewpoint common to most non-Jewish thinkers, and many Jewish ones, in the ancient as in the modern world (one of the popular ideas that needs debunking is the belief that people in the ancient world didn’t know the laws of nature and so were liable to believe in things like resurrection, whereas we with the benefit of modern science and technology have discovered that dead people don’t rise and so must resist any attempt to push us back into the ‘ancient worldview’ within which such things might occur). Thomas wants solid evidence. Jesus, and John in writing the gospel, make it clear that faith is more than that kind of thing; but also that it is not less. Jesus invites Thomas to reach out and touch him; that is, he accepts the terms of his question even while leading him beyond it. *The Resurrection of the Son of God* is an attempt to do, in relation to the long-standing and [212] multifaceted historical arguments normally advanced format Thomas-like scepticism which still prevails in many quarters, what Jesus did to and for Thomas: to answer the question in the terms in which it has been put, that is, by means of historical argument, while pointing on to the fact that full Christian faith is not a matter of history alone.

The title of this response is deliberately ambiguous. At one level, I am aware that what I mostly have to do in responding to the essays is to resurrect arguments which I deployed in the book, and hope to breathe new life into them once more. At another level (and this applies to some of the essays more than others) my counter-charge is that the writers are themselves attempting to revive arguments which ought to be considered dead beyond the hope of resurrection. (I envisage some of my adversaries’ arguments taking personified form and asking them, as Samuel asked Saul, ‘Why have you disturbed me, by calling me up?’) No doubt opinions will vary on which arguments deserve resurrection and which do not. I can but try to make my point.

1. David Bryan: Enoch and Friends

I am especially grateful to David Bryan, whose work on the Jewish literature of the period has long impressed me. The short answer to him is to put my hand up and admit that he knows more about the Enoch literature than I ever will, and that when he tells me I should have said this or that about it I willingly concur and only regret that I did not ask his opinion before going to press. The same is true of the remarks he quotes from Marcus Bockmuehl about my scanty treatment of the rabbinic material. (This, of course, is where the question comes in as to how long the book might have become if I had asked specialists in every field for this kind of help.) But let me make one or two comments by way of oblique reply.

First, Bryan’s suspicions about the division between chapters 3 and 4 (‘Death and Beyond in the Old Testament’ and ‘Hope Beyond Death in Post-Biblical Judaism’) are largely unfounded. I agree that I have given a superficial appearance of undermining a diachronic approach, since the Old Testament and the other literature to be examined overlap chronologically, and that this renders the phrase ‘post-biblical’ unfortunate. (Perhaps I should note that I normally call the relevant period ‘Second Temple Judaism’, but that since I was deliberately extending the survey beyond AD 70 that term becomes awkward too. A colleague of mine in Montreal once conducted an entire seminar on the question of what the period should be called, and I do not think firm conclusions were reached.) But I had and have no interest in implicitly privileging the canonical Old Testament in my survey, as though it contained the truth while the other writings declined away from it. I merely had to divide the material somewhere—I remember my frustration

when the single chapter, as it then was, reached beyond a [213] hundred pages and I concluded that I had better find some obvious way of splitting it—and I decided that it would be less confusing (not least to those beginning the subject) to do it in the way I did rather than to second-guess tricky questions of dating for complex documents and to essay an exact diachronic developmental scheme, which my overall thesis did not need and which would in any case be extremely difficult to establish with any security.

Bryan's suggestion, growing out of this, that I have failed to take into account the possibility that questions of theodicy are driving some quite early proposals about resurrection may be right in one way. Certainly I did not factor the *Book of Watchers* into my account of the *development* of resurrection belief. But I am somewhat puzzled by the suggestion, which Bryan seems to imply, that there are two alternative schemes for development: an 'inner-biblical explanation', which he says I offer, and one which, influenced from elsewhere, involves reflection on theodicy. My view was, and is, that theodicy is indeed a major driving force, whether in Hosea, Ezekiel, Isaiah 40-55, Daniel or for that matter 2 Maccabees: if God is God, he must not for ever allow death (and its cognates, including judgment on God's people) to have the last word. Bryan seems to mean by 'theodicy' a kind of reflection which must have come from non-canonical sources. While I have no reason to disagree with his suggestions (a) that the *Book of Watchers* is influenced by non-Jewish and/or non-canonical ideas and (b) that these ideas involve theodicy, I do question his at least implicit further proposals (c) that the earlier canonical references to resurrection were not themselves to do with theodicy and (d) that the *Book of Watchers* plays a key role in the development of belief in resurrection that we then find in, say, Daniel, 2 Maccabees and the other relevant later sources. I do not think it is easy to track the progress of ideas in such a linear fashion in a period like this where many sources that people at the time knew well are lost to us and where books which we happen to have in nice modern editions were unknown to almost everybody at the time. Clearly the Enoch literature is influential in some circles, but how influential, and on whom, and with what results, I think it is difficult to say.

The central section of Bryan's paper ('Transforming a Delta into an Estuary') seems to me overstated. The point he is making, which I completely take, is that there was more variety in the detail of resurrection belief than I have allowed for; not least, to be specific, in that some texts (e.g. the *Book of Dreams* [1 Enoch 83-90]) envisage only the righteous being raised while others predict a resurrection of all humans. This distinction runs of course through the New Testament and the Fathers as well, as I have noted though not discussed in detail in relation to the relevant passages. I do not think that books which leave the unrighteous dead unresurrected are to be placed in a separate category, though no doubt one could carry on with sub-categories and sub-sub-categories (a task I find quite congenial, but which I had to forswear for much of the book as it threatened to turn itself, like its parent series, into a multi-volume opus) several degrees further than even [214] Bryan suggests. As for the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, I am happy to be told that they are more Christian than I thought they were; nothing much hinges for me on adjudicating between currently competing scholarly views on this topic. I tried to be cautious in following Puech on finding some evidence in Qumran for resurrection belief, and yes, I should have noted the apparent popularity there of *Jubilees* with its more Philonic perspective. Again, nothing actually hinges on all this for my overall thesis.

Nor, in the last analysis, would it matter if I were to give up my strongly held minority position on the Wisdom of Solomon—though the likelihood that Paul knew the work and alludes to it here and there, not least in Romans, makes pursuing the question more worthwhile. (Since it is quite clear that Paul believes in bodily resurrection, something none of my interlocutors is prepared to challenge, the question of whether Wisdom does so too will not affect our reading of Paul, but the importance of the book in early Christianity makes the topic of more than passing interest.) The point I was making, which I do not think Bryan has fully taken on board in his accusation of sleight of hand at

the crucial point, is that the righteous, according to Wisdom, can expect a two-stage post-mortem future, not merely the single stage of passing into a blessed and disembodied immortality; and that, despite the constantly reiterated pseudo-argument of some who should know better (Bryan of course does, and this is not aimed at him), discovering ‘immortality’ in a document does not mean that the writer does not believe in ‘resurrection’. Indeed, belief in resurrection (life *after* ‘life after death’) positively demands that there be some kind of intermediate state in which those to be raised in the future are safe in God’s keeping in the present. It seems likely to me that the author of Wisdom was attempting to combine this belief in resurrection with some elements at least of a Platonic scheme; in this he has not been alone, as some much later would-be Christian teaching bears witness. I think by far the strongest reading of Wisdom is to see a basically Pharisaic resurrection belief expressed (as in Josephus) in cautious but clear enough terms, but with borrowings from a more Platonic way of thinking, not least about the soul, which peeps through here and there without affecting the more fundamental position.

More urgently, I wish to refute the suggestion that I was squashing various diverse views into one ‘main stream’ ‘in the interests of apologetics’. The fact that Bryan can say this indicates to me that he has perhaps not fully understood the role of this entire section within the argument of the book as a whole. My argument was not, ‘Most Jews at the time believed in resurrection; therefore this is what probably happened to Jesus’. Indeed, one apparently strong counter-apologetic argument which I have often met, and now meet in another form in Crossley’s paper, consists of saying ‘Most Jews believed in resurrection; so it was natural that the disciples turned to this solution after Jesus’ death’—in other words, the more ‘mainstream’ it was the less we need take the disciples’ claims seriously. Rather, my argument depended not on the frequency or predominance [215] of the idea of resurrection but on *what ‘resurrection’ as a belief or idea actually consisted of*. At that point, it made no difference to me whether ‘resurrection’ was the mainstream belief of Judaism or an odd variation held by only a few; what mattered to me was what ‘resurrection’ itself meant. I was concerned (and a glance at the secondary literature will show how necessary this was) to head off any suggestion that because Judaism in the period contained quite a variety of beliefs about what happened to people after they died this meant that the word ‘resurrection’ itself was slippery and could mean a wide variety of different things, including (for instance) some kind of spiritual exaltation which would be perfectly compatible with Jesus’ body remaining in the tomb. My point, which neither Bryan nor anyone else has challenged, is that this is not so, and that, despite the slipperiness of current usage both in the church and in the academy, ‘resurrection’ always referred, in ancient Judaism and first-generation Christianity, to a two-stage post-mortem life in which the second stage would involve a physical body, whether the same one or one in some way transformed.

This brings me to the final and I think most innovative part of Bryan’s fascinating paper: his attempt to suggest that the translation of Enoch and Elijah, and perhaps Moses and others, ought to be seen as a key part of the background to the rise of the early Christian belief that Jesus had been exalted to heaven.

Let me say, first, that I should of course have included considerably more discussion of the speculation about these figures in the Second Temple period. (The hypothetically enlarged book my interlocutors seem to envisage is by this stage heavier than, and probably included within, the *Guinness Book of Records*.) But let me quote against Bryan what he himself says of these figures: that the language of ‘resurrection’ was not used of them ‘because, in the minds of the authors and their communities, they had not died’. Well, precisely. It may well be that the people who wrote about the exaltation of Enoch and the others did hold to a complete-human-being anthropology—though to cite Philo on this point, speaking of the whole being of Moses being transformed into ‘mind’ (*Moses* 2.288), seems a bit of an own goal, since the passage goes on to speak very firmly of Moses’ body being buried while he himself takes ‘his

upward flight to heaven' (2.291). The whole point of resurrection, by contrast, is that someone first dies and is then given new life, which on Bryan's account is precisely not what happened to the people concerned. His closing paragraph on the subject, which attempts to align such Jewish speculations with Ephesians' stress on the heavenly ascent of Jesus, seems to me a bit squashed as far as its argumentation goes, and the tell-tale 'surely' in the crucial sentence ('then you would *surely* see their exaltation [i.e. that of Enoch and the rest] as akin to that of Jesus') is an indication of an argument that has become suddenly imprecise and requires extra rhetoric to cover its gaping holes. The fact that neither in Ephesians nor in other Pauline passages do we find the 'transformed and glorious Jesus' of Revelation 1 or indeed Mark 9 ought to warn us against supposing that Paul (or the author [216] of Ephesians, whoever s/he was) would have acquiesced in the suggestion that Jesus had simply joined a select company of exalted ones. (Any suggestion that 2 Cor. 4.1-6 constitutes an exception ought to be firmly resisted.) That would hardly explain the central Pauline motif that Jesus, in virtue of his resurrection and exaltation, was now the one and only Lord of the world, the Man in whom the promises of Psalm 8 had at last come true. If three or four others were already in heaven in just the same way as Jesus, the point might be somewhat blunted.

In particular, Bryan's closing suggestion that Enoch, Noah, Moses and Elijah form the background to the claim that Jesus rose again on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, which means, I take it, that 'the scriptures' in question in 1 Cor. 15.4 are scriptures which speak (or which can be made to speak) of people being taken straight to heaven, is the one thing in his whole paper which made me rub my eyes in disbelief, coming as it does from such a fine and careful scholar. As Bryan himself says, Enoch and the rest did not die; that (according to scripture in the case of Enoch and Elijah, and to some traditions in the case of Noah and Moses) was the whole point. The tradition quoted in 1 Cor. 15.4 is precisely about someone who was well and truly dead and who, on the third day, was well and truly alive again. As far as Paul was concerned, this did indeed mean (the point Bryan is questioning) that 'resurrection' had split into two: Jesus first, others later. Had anyone been able to come back at Paul and say 'but Paul, you know there are three or four people at least who are already resurrected', I do not think he would have written 1 Corinthians 15 in the way he did.

One closing note. Bryan implies, here and elsewhere, that the idea of resurrection splitting into two is the main variation which I plot between Second Temple Jewish resurrection belief and that of the early Christians. It is, in fact, only one of several. For the others, which I see as equally important if not more so, I refer the reader to *RSB* 476-79, 681-82. But all this brings us, not before time, to the much more direct challenge to my central argument, which is offered by James Crossley.

2. James Crossley: *History and the Empty Tomb*

If Bryan has probed some of the preliminary, and very important, stages in my overall argument, Crossley has taken me on much nearer its heart. He argues first that the rise of belief in Jesus as Messiah did not, after all, require his resurrection, as I suggest; second, that non-bodily 'visions' of Jesus would have been sufficient to generate belief in an empty tomb; third, that the main gospel narratives of the resurrection are much more likely to be inventions than based on accurate memory; and fourth, that the arguments I make for seeing the resurrection narratives as based on early oral tradition are not convincing. For these reasons, he concludes that the stories of Jesus' bodily resurrection grow, not from a [217] historical event as such, but from the need of the disciples to vindicate Jesus' beliefs and ideas and to ground their own beliefs in him.

It is this latter point which, I suggest, undermines Crossley's attempt at every stage. He never addresses the nature of the Jewish hope within which Jesus' proclamation was heard, and which the earliest Christians declared had been fulfilled. Hence he can reduce Jesus' message to a set of 'beliefs and ideas' which needed to be 'vindicated'. The basic

claim of Jesus of Nazareth, however, was not that he was offering a collection of beliefs and ideas which (perhaps in contra-distinction to those of his contemporaries) might eventually be shown to be true, but that God's kingdom was arriving in and through his own presence and work. That is the backdrop against which all theories about the rise of Christianity must be set.

This means that, even though Jesus of Nazareth was indeed a very different figure to the two characters, Simon bar Giora and Simeon ben Kosiba, with whom I draw a partial parallel, the parallel holds precisely to this extent: Jesus, like Simon and Simeon, was interested in (and his hearers rightly took him to be interested in) events that actually happen, things that actually come to pass. Granted he was not leading a violent revolution (though of course some have tried to suggest that he was), but this does not mean that all that Jesus was expecting was that he would die quite soon (after giving utterance to some important 'ideas' and 'beliefs'). It is interesting that Crossley is prepared to allow the historicity of Jesus' predictions of his death, but it is surprising that, having done this, he makes no mention of the simultaneous and repeated prediction of Jesus' resurrection. Of course, were he to do so he might well go on to say that the disciples were simply trying to 'vindicate' this particular 'idea' when they said that he had indeed been raised; but this would lay him open in turn to the counter-charge that the stories of Jesus' death were hardly made up to 'vindicate' those particular predictions. That is, we all agree that Jesus really was crucified, even though the stories of that event might look as though they were invented simply to 'vindicate' Jesus' prophecy of the event; in other words, the fact that a narrative has the capacity to demonstrate the truth of a previous prediction does not automatically render it historically worthless. My basic point is that Jesus did not simply teach certain ideas, but rather launched a kingdom-movement, albeit of a particular type; and that if after his violent death nothing had happened it is simply impossible, as a matter of history, to explain why his followers should continue not a movement devoted to teaching a set of ideas, but the same kingdom-movement, with Jesus (not, say, his brother James or some other suitable candidate) as its king.

This brings Crossley to a long, and to my mind very confused, discussion of 'visions'. There are several oddities in this account; for instance, he suggests that I have allowed my argument to become skewed because, in controverting Crossan's vision-arguments, I am basically dealing with 'Hellenistic' visions [218] rather than the different kind of phenomena which (he says) were experienced by the early Christians. What he seems to mean by this is that (a) when people have visions, the content of the vision is determined by the cultural context they are already in; (b) thus, when the early Christians had visions, they interpreted them in terms of resurrection because they were first-century Jews and because they were followers of Jesus, whose 'beliefs' required vindication; (c) that these visions, and this context, were very different to the supposedly 'Hellenistic' visions which I have rejected as an explanatory grid. I am not sure how secure (a) is; there are many accounts of people from utterly non-Christian contexts experiencing visions of Jesus; and there may well be, for all I know, similarly cross-cultural phenomena in quite other traditions. This calls into question, too, the absolute disjunction postulated by (c). But, as to (b), I was at pains to show that one simply cannot argue that because the disciples were first-century Jews they interpreted their particular visions as an indication that Jesus had been raised from the dead. I cannot stress too strongly that people in Jesus' world were well used to reports of visions, and indeed ghosts; when the disciples saw Jesus walking on the water in Mark 6, and were unsure whether he was a ghost or a real living person, this was not an indication, as Crossley seems to suppose, that people in that culture could not easily, under normal conditions, tell the difference between the two, but rather that the conditions were abnormal. Again, Crossley concludes his key discussion by saying that a (presumably non-bodily) vision 'would strongly imply that Jesus' message had been vindicated'. To this we must reply, first, that if Jesus' message was about God's sovereign rule breaking in upon Israel and the world, a non-bodily vision would imply no such thing; second, that whether we are talking about first-century Jewish culture or the wider Hellenistic world a non-bodily vision of someone

recently dead would certainly indicate, not that they had been raised from the dead, but that they had not; and third, that a non-bodily vision of someone recently dead would prove nothing about the ‘validity’ or ‘vindication’ of the ideas they had held and taught during their lifetime. One might imagine a friend and follower of Hitler seeing a vision of the Fuhrer shortly after his death, and concluding that his death, as confirmed by the vision, meant that he had been wrong all along.

For all these reasons, a historically grounded account of the whole period must reject Crossley’s suggestion that ‘a vision could be interpreted in a bodily sense with the assumption of an empty tomb’ while at the same time the empty tomb was itself historically inaccurate. Crossley has not considered the possibility that people might go to the tomb and see for themselves; but, more particularly, he has not come to terms with the argument I mounted step by step in chapter 18 of *RSG*. Precisely within the Second Temple Jewish culture in which ‘resurrection’ was about new bodily life, but in which ‘resurrection’ also was seen as a large-scale end-time event, simultaneous with the transformation of the whole cosmos, (a) any suggestion that *one* person might be raised from the dead all by [219] himself would be completely unexpected, and (b) any ‘vision’ which appeared to be of someone alive again after a time of being dead would be interpreted, not as ‘he must have been raised, therefore there must be an empty tomb even though nobody has found or mentioned one’, but as ‘this is one of those visions of people recently dead that so many traditions, our own included, have often reported; this means he is well and truly dead, and though he will rise again at the last day, along with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and more recent heroes like the Maccabees, he is at the moment with God awaiting that day of resurrection’. This is the point where the story of Peter in Acts 12 makes its point: the believers praying behind the locked door think that the person standing outside is Peter’s ‘angel’, in other words, that he has been executed in the prison and that they are experiencing some kind of visitation which indicates, not that Peter is alive, but that he is dead. Precisely within the first-century Jewish cultural context which Crossley correctly sees as the right matrix for interpreting his hypothetical non-bodily vision, this is what such an event would have to mean.

Crossley then attempts to show, against my argument that the gospel resurrection narratives reflect very early, and only lightly edited, oral tradition, that on the contrary they belong in the genre of Jewish imaginative fiction about heroes of the past. He does somewhat shoot himself in the foot when he declares that the tales about the patriarchs in *Jubilees* and similar books ‘could hardly be said to give genuine historical insight as to what really happened millennia ago’; the point is precisely that the gospels purport to tell their readers what happened just a few years ago, at a time when there were plenty of people around who could back them up, or indeed controvert them. How Crossley thinks that the book of Esther and its subsequent traditions provide a ‘particularly relevant’ example is beyond me: traditions developing over three or four centuries can hardly be compared with traditions which, as I have argued, show remarkably little development over three or four decades. To say that stories like the Esther traditions are historically inaccurate ‘and it is hardly going too far to assume something similar was happening in the gospel traditions’ is indeed ‘a point that should not have to be made’, but not in the sense which Crossley intends. One should not make points like that, not because they are obviously correct but because they are clearly nonsense. When Crossley says ‘the correct ideology is what matters’ he means that inconsistencies in the details of the story are irrelevant since Matthew and the others were concerned to propagate their ‘ideology’ irrespective of the facts (a somewhat anachronistic use of ‘ideology’, but we let that pass); but the impression on this reader at least is that it is Crossley who is driven by his ideology to say that, since bodily resurrection cannot have happened, something must be wrong with the argument that says it did, though to date he has not been able to figure out what it is.

Haggadic legends about figures in the distant past, written to justify a belief in the present, are in fact very significantly different to the resurrection narratives. [220] The

latter (a) are not primarily about odd things Jesus did or said, but rather about something that happened to him; (b) concern a figure of very recent memory, not Moses or Abraham or someone else from long ago; and (c) are written not to justify or vindicate a particular idea, theory or belief, but to *articulate* the belief without which there would not have been an early Christianity in the first place, namely the belief that God had raised Jesus from the dead. The resurrection stories are not of the same type as those which seek simply to 'make heroes greater'. They were written to declare that something had happened. If it had not, they were not simply embroidering a legend a bit further, but, as Paul put it, wasting their time on futile faith.

Crossley ends up, in this section, with fine rhetoric but mere assertion; like Bryan but much more so, when the argument is weak we hear the repeated tell-tale word, 'Surely', which means, more or less, 'I very much want to assert this but I can't at the moment tell you why'. We hardly need to be informed that one should approach the resurrection narratives with sceptical incredulity; that is how the great majority of readers from the first century to the twenty-first have come to them. The question is, how else do you explain the rise of early Christianity, and the particular shape it took? Matthew, Luke and John may or may not be 'monumental embellishments' of Mark, but Crossley has hardly proved the point by asserting it. And the fact that the resurrection narratives 'ground some of the most important Christian beliefs in the resurrection' (a rather odd way of putting it; does he mean 'ground the most important Christian belief, namely, that of Jesus' resurrection'?) is certainly true, but by itself no more justifies the implicit reductionism ('they made up these stories to ground beliefs they already had') than my telling the story of my granddaughter's birth to ground my belief that she is indeed my granddaughter implies that I have made up the stories because I want to claim grand parentage of this delightful little girl. When the belief in question is that Jesus has been raised from the dead, inventing stories which give an account of this supposed event merely pushes the question one stage further back: why on earth would a group of first-century Jews, soon after the death of their would-be Messiah, come to have this belief in the first place and then want to make up stories to justify it? (Anyone who at this point is tempted to reply 'cognitive dissonance' is invited to read *RSG* 697-701.)

In fact, however, the resurrection narratives have several features which strongly suggest that they are not simply inventions to support beliefs reached on other grounds. Crossley considers my account of these, but does not to my mind succeed in refuting my points.

First, he admits that his reply to me about the non-appearance of biblical material in the stories is 'tentative' and 'speculative': his proposal is that the resurrection narratives have carefully avoided biblical exegesis because, like the Areopagus address, they are addressed to pagans not Jews. That has the merit of being ingenious, but is very unconvincing. Why should the evangelists, who **[221]** have made such dramatic use of scripture throughout the rest of their narratives, suddenly refrain from doing so here? Were Gentiles supposed only to read the final chapter?

Second, Crossley tries to counter my point that the resurrection narratives, unlike virtually every other mention of Jesus' resurrection in the New Testament, nowhere mention the Christian hope for future resurrection. This remains, in fact, a damaging point against Crossley and Casey, to whom he refers: this was a primary Christian belief, and if the resurrection narratives were written as fictitious vehicles for setting out and vindicating Christian beliefs, it would be bound to come in somewhere. Crossley lamely concludes that the stories are [only?] vindications of Jesus. Well, they certainly are that, but this hardly tallies with the line he has taken up to that point, that they are back-projections of Christian belief.

I pass over the third point, that the portrait of Jesus is precisely not the sort of thing one would have expected if some Second Temple Jews had wanted to produce an account of the resurrection of a recently dead leader. Crossley's 'answer' to this (that the stories

‘simply highlight a belief the early Christians held’) scarcely constitutes a reply. More important is his suggestion about the fourth point, where like many others I highlight the role of the women, and press the point that nobody inventing such stories would give them pride of place in testimony. It simply will not do to suggest, as Crossley does, that their role within Jesus’ ministry ‘may have made their testimony more acceptable for some’. Not only does that contradict his earlier point, that the stories were written for Gentile outsiders, who, as we know from Celsus, were quick to mock such an unlikely story ‘verified’ by such an incredible set of witnesses. It suggests that the implied reader of the narrative is someone who is already within the Christian fold, which John at least explicitly denies (20.31). The key thing to note in all these four points, which Crossley never really begins to come to terms with, is that the normal account of the resurrection narratives within mainstream New Testament scholarship—namely, that after a brief and dubious statement by Mark the other evangelists created their stories out of whole cloth in the post-70 period—is simply incredible. These stories, for all they have been lightly edited by the evangelists, go back to the very early oral period, and were regarded as too important, in this character of primary testimony, to be significantly altered. This does not of course settle all the questions of detail and consistency. But it puts down some markers about the character and origin of the stories which should not be overlooked.

Crossley’s view of Mark is indeed interesting. I have not yet had a chance to read his book and assess the strength of his radical proposal for a very early date for the gospel, and look forward to doing so. But I have to conclude that his attempted rebuttal of my argument does not amount to very much. In particular, he has made no attempt to deal with the actual step by step account I give, in [222] chapter 18, of why a vision by itself would not generate belief in an empty tomb, and for that matter why the discovery of an empty tomb by itself would not generate visions, and why therefore any account of the rise of Christianity must take seriously the strong historical probability that both occurred. Nor does he even begin to examine my subsequent argument, that the main rival accounts for why such stories would come to be written, or why early Christianity got going in the first place, fall by their own weight. But when we consider this area of discussion, our thoughts turn naturally to someone who has written about such things more than once: Michael Goulder.

3. Michael Goulder: Conflicting Traditions

Michael Goulder’s views about Christian origins and the resurrection stories are well known, and there are few surprises in his short piece. I am naturally sorry that because of his ill health he was unable to read the whole book, but I am glad that he was able to get hold of my earlier article which does indeed adumbrate some of the main lines of the fuller treatment. Like all his friends, I am delighted that at the time of writing he is apparently well enough to be typing, one-handed, his next book (on John), and we hope for more of the stimulating exchanges with him we have come to enjoy.

His present piece is particularly interesting for its application of a nineteenth-century theory which Goulder has revived: that the early Church was characterized by a major ideological split between Paul and the Jerusalem leadership, and that this explains, not least, the main polemical lines in 1 Corinthians. Clearly it is impossible for me to set out here all the reasons why I reject this thesis, and why I strongly prefer the account given by Richard Hays of 1 Corinthians as Paul’s attempt, not to counter either the Jerusalem leadership or a type of Jewish ‘realized eschatology’, but to address the Corinthians in their muddled attempts to put together the Christian message with their innate pagan beliefs.[2]

Goulder, by contrast, proposes that the Jerusalem leadership held the view that Jesus’ resurrection was a matter of ‘spiritual’ transformation, rather than the ‘bodily resurrection’ which he ascribes to Paul. This is remarkable in itself; Goulder, never one to shirk controversial proposals, has stood on its head a more usual position, which is that

Paul held a 'spiritual' view of the resurrection (based on the common misreading of the *soma pneumatikon* in 1 Corinthians 15) while some other, less Hellenized and more Jewish, early Christians stuck to a view of bodily resurrection. [223]

Goulder begins by lining up Jewish stories of ancient heroes interceding in heaven with Paul's view of the intercession of Christ (Rom. 8.32). This, he suggests, could have generated the idea that Christ was risen again. I argued in detail that this could not work, precisely because of such parallels; when Judas Maccabeus dreamed that he saw Onias and Jeremiah interceding for Israel, this did not lead him to conclude that they had already been raised from the dead, and the clear and explicit resurrection theology of 2 Maccabees, the book where this scene occurs, is not that the righteous go straight from death to a heavenly existence called 'resurrection', but rather that they *will* be raised in the future, following their present time in 'heaven'. This is the answer, too, to Goulder's similar citation of 2 Maccabees 7. The point is not that the martyrs would like their bodies to be transformed, certainly not along the lines of Philo's comment about Moses' body and soul being turned into 'mind', but rather that they want their proper, physical bodies back again—no doubt without wounds and pain, but basically the same bodies. That is what resurrection is all about. In fact, as I showed in some detail in the book, there is no agreement in pre-Christian Judaism on whether 'resurrection' would involve transformation (as in Daniel 12, where the righteous shine like stars, a tradition which gave birth to vivid elaborations in e.g. 2 *Baruch*), or whether it will mean getting pretty much the same body back again. This is one of the points where the whole early Christian tradition on the subject of what 'resurrection' will in fact mean demonstrates a considerable sharpening up of pre-Christian Jewish ideas; and this sharpening up is one of the phenomena which cries out for more explanation than Goulder, and other reductionists, are able to provide.

Goulder's exegesis of 1 Corinthians 15, which follows, depends wholly on his larger argument, already referred to, according to which the letter reflects a Peter/Paul polarization. There is no space for detailed exegesis of the letter, or indeed the chapter. I make only one point. Goulder says the 'deniers' base their belief on an exegesis of Psalm 8, referring it to resurrection, whereas Paul takes the Psalm to refer to the Parousia. This is an example of 'mirror-reading', where the exegete infers someone else's understanding of a text by a kind of reverse projection from what Paul actually says. I find it deeply unconvincing. Psalm 8 is a regular favourite of Paul's (e.g. Phil. 3.21), and there is no reason to think he is citing it in order to controvert someone else's use of it, or that such a use suggested that it referred to a present resurrection reality in which Jesus had already overcome death itself in some final way.

Goulder then draws from his exegesis the point, against me, that there was after all a spectrum of belief on the subject in early Christianity. Actually, even if I were to grant his Peter/Paul polarization, this would not completely follow, since both sides would still claim to believe in 'resurrection', and my point was that there is no evidence within earliest Christianity for the kind of spectrum we see in Judaism, which included some who denied any future life. But Goulder's [224] argument is in any case vitiated by the complete absence of any evidence within the first generation of Christianity for anyone using the word 'resurrection', against all its previous usage, to mean non-bodily 'spiritual survival' rather than 'bodily resurrection after having died'. We should note, against all attempts to suggest to the contrary, that 'resurrection' entails the actual previous death of the one subsequently raised. If someone 'has not really died', then they cannot be 'resurrected'. This may be difficult for people today to grasp, granted the multiple confusions in our contemporary church and world about what Christian belief about death and beyond actually is, and what language we can use to get at it most clearly. It would have been quite clear both to Paul and to the Jerusalem leaders. It is not a matter of 'survival after death' somehow 'implying bodily resurrection', as Goulder says at the end of his essay. It is a matter of someone being actually dead and then God doing a new thing.

One final point at this stage. Goulder questions which ‘scripture’ could be meant by ‘according to the scriptures’ in 1 Cor. 15.4, and suggests as ‘the best candidate from a weak field’ Lev. 23.11-12. This is a complete misunderstanding. Paul does not mean that there are one or two biblical prophecies which, taken by themselves, point in this direction. He refers to the entire scriptural narrative, stretching forward as it does towards the climax of God’s purpose for Israel, and characterized throughout by the powerful grace which brings hope out of disaster and life out of death.[3]

This brings us to Goulder’s treatment of the gospel narratives. He caricatures the view that Mark is truncated; this is now certainly not a matter of consensus, and Goulder of all people is not one to be impressed by such things if it was! His caricature of what a truncated Mark would mean (eaten by mice? police at the door?) is absurd to anyone who has glanced at one of the Dead Sea Scrolls, almost all of which are truncated precisely where you would expect a scroll to be at its most vulnerable, that is, at the beginning and the end. The rest of Goulder’s account of the gospels in his present paper consists largely of (a) a dismissal of Mark 16.1 -8 as a tissue of contradictions, which is easier said than demonstrated, and (b) a projection once more of the Peter/Paul polarization on to the screen of hypothetical early Christianity (Petrine Christianity held a ‘spiritual’ view of resurrection; Mark, as a Pauline Christian, wants to say ‘actually, it involved an empty tomb’; the Petrine Christians say ‘we never heard of such a thing’; Mark responds, ‘No, that’s because the women said nothing to anyone’). The silence of the women is interesting, but whatever Mark means by it he cannot mean that they *never* said anything to anyone, otherwise nobody would ever have known that anything at all had happened; he must therefore mean that the women *to begin with* said nothing to anyone, but that later they did spill the beans. The [225] only question is then, how much later? Very soon, I would suggest; about a generation later, according to Goulder’s implicit hypothesis. This is not an attempt ‘to evade the problem of the women’s silence’; rather, Goulder’s (and Crossley’s) proposal is an attempt to evade the problem of the women’s presence in the stories in the first place.

Finally in respect of the gospels, I think it is absurd to dismiss as ‘canonical prejudice’ the suggestion that the ‘Gospel of Peter’ is a developed legend but that the canonical gospels are not. Goulder has not, I think, seen the arguments I summarized in my earlier response to Crossley, but I believe they are telling. If we know anything about likely trajectories of development within such narratives, we can see that the gospel resurrection stories have precisely not developed in the ways we would have suspected (developed exegetical allusions; application to the future hope of Christians; predictable ‘shining-like-a-star’ portrait of Jesus; the women airbrushed out of the account). This is solid argument, not prejudice. And if Luke and John have ‘felt the desirability of extending the physical emphasis’, it is fascinating—almost funny, in fact—that they simultaneously speak of Jesus appearing and disappearing and finally ascending into heaven. The view that these stories grew bit by bit into more ‘physical’ accounts as the church flexed its Pauline muscles is an interesting bit of fiction, but bears no relation to any actual first-century development that we are able to plot on the basis of evidence. I have learned much from Michael Goulder, and salute with respect his noble efforts to make scholars think again on all kinds of topics. But on this one I find him profoundly unconvincing, not because of overheated questions of orthodoxy or otherwise but because of those comfortably cold rocks, history and logic.

4. Larry Hurtado: *Thinking and Feeling?*

I am very grateful for Larry Hurtado’s penetrating paper, and more or less agree with its central thrust. I am therefore bound to provide some account of why I left myself open to this kind of question in the way I obviously did. I have already commented, in the general introduction to the present paper, on the question of historical argument in relation to how people come to faith—a question which is indeed cognate with the main point

Hurtado makes later on.

I am glad, too, that after some uncertainty as to whether I was describing a resuscitation or a transformed body, Hurtado is clear that I am referring to the latter rather than the former (I confess that, never having seen the television series 'E.R.', I had to infer what he was talking about; there are times when the historian feels more at home in the first century than the twenty-first!). But I would caution against the use of the phrase 'real body' as a substitute for 'spiritual body'; the word 'real' is one of the slipperiest in the language (note how people will say 'in a very real sense' when what they mean, from another point of view, could equally well be described as 'in a very unreal sense'—and how the same phrase can often simply indicate 'I badly want to assert this but I haven't quite figured out how'). 'Real' can mean 'physical' (in some sense) as opposed to imaginary or material ('was the thief *really* there in the room, or did you just dream it?'), but it can equally well mean almost the opposite ('I know you say parachuting is easy but when you sit on the jumping ledge you discover what it's *really* like', that is, you encounter all those non-material things like imagination, terror and self-reproach).

Perhaps more important is the question of whether the use of resurrection language to denote the daily life of the Christian is best described as 'metaphorical'. Here we run up against our old friend, the popular use of 'metaphor' and its cognates to mean 'not fully real' (that word again—and Hurtado uses it in that sense when he speaks of the 'very real availability of Jesus' resurrection-power'; I wanted to ask, what does the word 'very' add to the word 'real', and what does the phrase 'very real' add to the noun 'availability'?). I sigh as I write it again: the word 'metaphorical', and its opposite 'literal', *refer to the way words refer to things, not to the sort of things that are being referred to*. It is a simple mistake to suppose that 'metaphorical' means 'abstract' and that 'literal' means 'concrete'. If I refer to the General Synod of the Church of England as 'a nest of vipers' (not, of course, that I would dream of doing any such thing), I am using a metaphor to *denote* a concrete reality (a gathering of people in a particular place) and to *connote* both the idea of a snake-pit in general and the biblical echoes of the phrase in particular. When Hopkins speaks of 'the fine delight that fathers thought', he is referring to an abstract entity (the mysterious inspiration that comes upon the poet) in terms of the metaphor of begetting, whose connotations spread out into the rest of the poem ('leaves yet the mind a mother of immortal song'). If I say 'the cat just got the cream', I might be speaking literally, denoting an actual cat caught with its whiskers in the jug, or I might be speaking metaphorically, denoting the all-too-concrete event of a cunning businessman pulling off a shady but highly profitable deal, and connoting the feline equivalent. If I say 'Einstein's theory of relativity', I am referring literally to an abstract entity; while if I say 'Einstein's box of magic tricks' I am referring metaphorically to that same abstract entity. You can, in other words, denote both concrete and abstract entities with either literal or metaphorical language; but the language, by itself, says nothing about the concreteness or otherwise of the thing you are talking about.

The purpose of this little linguistic diversion is to be clear that we are talking about the same things before I engage the point at issue: when I say that Paul uses resurrection language metaphorically to denote the power of Jesus, and/or the Spirit, in Christian living, the word 'metaphorically' does not at all suggest that this power is not actual, or question the idea that such power can enable [227] people to do things they otherwise would not, and not to do things they other-wise would. It certainly does not mean that the power in question is merely a matter of abstract feelings or emotions (it is a moot point whether such things should be referred to as 'abstract', since they involve concrete nerves, blood and so on), important though feelings and emotions are. Thus, when Hurtado says that 'the gift of the Spirit to believers is not metaphor but powerful reality', I want to say (a) whoever doubted it? and (b) whoever thought, more importantly in terms of understanding one another, that one could not refer to 'powerful reality' in metaphorical language? Indeed, is that not often the best way of conveying the meaning of 'powerful reality'? I might say 'the Spirit enables you to do things you otherwise could

not', which is about as literal as I can make it; but is it not much more powerful to say 'the Spirit will make you leap like a stag and soar like an eagle'? Is it not bizarre to imagine that to say something is 'metaphorical' means it is 'less real'?

The crunch of all this is that when I say that Paul uses the language of resurrection as a metaphor for the incorporation of believers into Christ, and for the life that they are thus enabled to live, I am not at all saying that the language is not powerful, indeed perhaps the most powerful language Paul could draw on, nor that the reality which he is thereby denoting is not itself powerful, life-changing and dramatic. Just the reverse. What I am saying—and this is enormously important precisely in contradicting the many reductionistic accounts that have been given both of Jesus' resurrection and, indeed, of Christian experience!—is that when Paul speaks in Romans 6 and elsewhere of being 'raised with Christ' it is vital that we do not suppose that he is talking, as Hymenaeus and Philetus seem to have done (2 Tim. 2.16-17), about a 'resurrection' which 'is past already'. That is the high road to the gnostic literature of the second and third centuries, with its denial of bodily resurrection and its use of the language of 'resurrection' to denote the present spiritual experience of 'gnosis'—another metaphorical use, to be sure, but a very different one from Paul's, and not capable of being derived from Paul's without major changes of worldview along the way. The point, in other words, is not to allow Romans 6 to undermine Romans 8, where Paul predicates future bodily resurrection—concrete resurrection, referred to in literal language—for those of whom, in chapter 6, he had predicated past and present 'resurrection' in baptism and holiness.

None of this is to deny that Paul may well have thought of baptism, membership 'in Christ' and the sharing of *koinonia* with other Christians in much more concrete, physical terms than we (certainly in the modern West) have been in the habit of doing. The fact of Paul's being so much the patron saint of protestantism has no doubt stood in the way of such a 'realistic' account of what he was talking about, and part of the Christian task in our own day may well be, as Hurtado hints, to recapture something of the sheer vital realism of personal and ecclesial life. But the fact remains that when he speaks of believers in the [228] present as being 'raised with Christ' he is not referring to the kind of ultimate concrete 'resurrection' which is the literal home base of the language in question, as in (e.g.) Rom. 8.11 and Phil. 3.21. That is the point I was making. If Hurtado wants to press me and suggest that baptism and holiness are genuine, powerful anticipations of that ultimate new life, I am happy to agree, and would be interested to hear him explore this in terms of ecclesiology and sacramental theology.

All this brings us to the last and in many ways the most important of Hurtado's points. He draws attention to the fact that I speak regularly about beliefs and cognition, attempting to explore the implicit trains of thought and articulation within early Christianity, whereas of course he, in his rightly famous published work, has explored the religious experience of the early Christians and particularly their devotion to Jesus within the framework of ongoing Jewish monotheism.[4] Can these two accounts be dovetailed together? Which drives which?

Let me first rebut the charge that I have been 'disdainful' of 'religious experience'. I understand why Hurtado might think me guilty of this, and perhaps need to explain. Ever since I began graduate work in the early 1970s I have been aware that the dominant school at the time—the post-Bultmann German Lutheran group which included people like Bornkamm and Conzelmann—were using the language of 'experience' to denote what was, for them, the central phenomenon of Christianity. One of Bornkamm's collections of essays was called *Early Christian Experience*,[5] and was mostly devoted to Pauline exegesis; as though the real point of Paul's letters was that they gave you access to the 'reality' which stood behind arguments and exegesis, the reality of a primitive experience which it was the task of exegesis and particularly preaching to reproduce as nearly as possible. That, of course, was famously the thesis underlying the work of Bultmann and his followers on the gospels: that the gospels gave us access, not

to 'facts' or 'events' (as though we might try to base our faith on such things and thus falsify it as 'faith', turning it instead into a 'work'!), but to the *experience* of the early Church, which we might then hope to emulate in our own personal and ecclesial life. That was the thinking behind form criticism; not that by the study of the forms we might eventually get back to Jesus (as English readers often supposed) but that by such study we might understand the place of this or that kind of Jesus-story within the experience of the early Church, and might thus be able to use the gospels ourselves in a world where 'objectification' of events was anathema and 'experience' was the one thing needful. Ultimately, of course, this brings together the existentialists' desire for 'authentic experience', over against the inauthenticity of having something foisted on one from outside. [229] with the Lutheran stress on *pro me*, according to which it is not enough to know that Jesus is the Saviour, but one must know that he is the Saviour 'for me'. All of this and more lies behind the word 'experience' as I have met it within a great deal of New Testament scholarship of the last generation.

I have come to believe, ironically, that this kind of stress on 'experience' falsifies the reality of the actual 'experience' of the early Christians themselves. The root of early Christian experience was the discovery that Jesus was alive again after his shameful and cruel death. But this cannot be reduced to 'experience' alone; and, in a book on the resurrection in particular, I was constantly aware that most of the people with whom I was in constant dialogue, explicitly or implicitly (J.M. Robinson, J.D. Crossan, and many others) were only too eager to reduce the language of 'Jesus has been raised from the dead' to 'we have had a remarkable experience'. Once you make that move, the tomb is still full (if there was even a tomb in the first place), Jesus is still safely dead, and the worldview of the European and American Enlightenment can live to fight another day. Of course, the reductionism I have in mind has often thrived in pietistic circles as well as those of critical scholarship: 'You ask me how I know he lives? He lives within my heart!' In New Testament terms, that is a statement not about Easter but about Pentecost.

This then is why I am (not disdainful, but) cautious about the word 'experience' and the Pandora's box of philosophy and ideology which it can open up. But this does not at all mean that I wish to belittle, or to marginalize as a proper object of study, the devotional and liturgical life of the early Church. Rather, it is to urge that they be integrated with the early Christian beliefs about things that actually happened in the real world and the theological significance these things possessed. When Paul announced Jesus as Lord in a new town, people did not just respond by working out the logic of what a crucified and risen Messiah might mean. They felt (to borrow with shameless anachronism from a later century) their hearts strangely warmed, they experienced the presence and love of the living God in the Messiah, Jesus, and they discovered the power of the Spirit of Jesus generating in them a new faith, hope and love. All of that is clear from passage after passage; the first couple of chapters of 1 Thessalonians make the point as well as anywhere. And I am quite clear that the preaching and practice of the Christian faith in our own day must include, centrally, the appropriate equivalents of all this.

But I am equally clear that this 'experience' desperately needs to be balanced by the articulation and cognitive exploration of things that have actually happened in terms of what such things mean, the worldview they generate, and the consequences they produce not least in the larger social and political realm. My rejection of Bultmann is cognate with my worry about a Christianity-the modernist kind whether the conservative modernism of the pietists or the radical modernism of the 'liberals'—which reduces Christian faith to its private meaning, [230] or even to the shared private meanings within an inward-looking sect. One of the places where the Enlightenment has triumphed over the New Testament is in the assumption that religion is about what people do with their solitude, and that public affairs and life must forswear religion in the name of tolerance. Another obvious result of a concentration on 'experience' is the collapse (regularly observed within church history ancient and modern) of experience-based religion into antinomianism: it felt good at the time. The earliest Christians, by contrast, declared that

‘Jesus is Lord’; and they didn’t just mean ‘Jesus is my Lord’, still less ‘when I think of Jesus I feel good about myself’. They meant that Jesus was Lord and that Caesar wasn’t. They meant that Jesus had the right to tell them what to do and what not to do, however they felt about it at the time. And the reason they were able to go on saying this was not because of ‘experience’ pure and simple, but because of something that had happened, from which they drew logical, not merely psychological, conclusions: the creator God had raised Jesus from the dead, and he was therefore Israel’s Messiah, the world’s true Lord, and the strange second self of Israel’s God himself. Those conclusions, when pondered, will produce all kinds of ‘experiences’, but cannot be reduced, à la Feuerbach, to terms of them alone.

Of course we can, if we wish, speak of the disciples’ ‘experience of the risen Jesus’, but at that point our language has become fuzzy, moving to and fro between ‘religious experience’, ‘visions’ and ‘actual meetings’. All sense-data, all imagination, all flutters in the diaphragm, can be referred to as ‘experience’. I am all for the vivid ‘experience’ of Jesus, through the gospel and the Spirit, which turns human lives and communities upside down. I am all for the clear articulation of the faith which says that, whether I ‘feel anything’ at the moment or not, God did in fact raise Jesus of Nazareth from the dead, and that this constitutes the deepest reality in the cosmos. And I am all for bringing rich experience and clear articulation into line with one another. Which takes priority at any given point, or in any particular person, may have more to do with personality types, or indeed with the state of one’s digestion, than with the study of Christian origins.

I have not done justice to the many things that Larry Hurtado raises in his paper, but this question of the relation between ‘experience’ and thought-out affirmations of truth is, I believe, central. I do not think it need divide us; I doubt if either of us wishes to deny what the other wishes to affirm. We are both committed, I take it, to the larger task of uniting thinking and feeling, cognition and ‘experience’, within the church and the individual Christian life. I trust this exchange has taken that task one small step further.

[231]

Conclusion

The four essays have touched only parts of RSG, and I have addressed only parts of the essays. It is nearly three years since I finished writing the book, and during that time such scholarly work as I have been able to do has focused more on Paul than on resurrection itself. But I have been pleased to discover that the issues I tried to raise in the book are still full of life. I am grateful to my interlocutors, and the editor of this journal, for the compliment they have paid me in giving attention to my work, and I trust that our dialogue will be fruitful in uncovering the real issues and thus in enabling the academic study of Christian origins to attain greater clarity and the Church to go to its task with greater fidelity.

[1] L. Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value* (trans. Peter Winch; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 33 (emphasis original).

[2] Richard B. Hays, *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel’s Scripture* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005). The title essay is reprinted from *New Testament Studies* 45 (1999), pp. 391-412.

[3] See *The New Testament and the People of God* (London and Minneapolis: SPCK and Fortress Press, 1992), pp. 241-43.

[4] See particularly L. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), which was in the press at the same time as *RSG*.

[5] Gunther Bornkamm, *Early Christian Experience* (London: SCM Press, 1969).
