

## Preface

This book, along with its companion volume *The Reconstruction of Resurrection Belief*, is the fortuitous product of retirement. The windfall of an unforeseen teaching opportunity, and a precious gift of time, free of pastoral and administrative responsibilities of the kind that dominated life in full-time Christian ministry, enabled me in 2010 to return to some sustained theological work once again. This was a huge privilege, which has come with all the surprising sweetness of something entirely unplanned.

I am grateful to the Acting President of the General Theological Seminary of The Episcopal Church in New York, Lang Lowry, and to the Interim Dean of the time, Bishop Peter Lee, for inviting me to come out of retirement to fill a temporary teaching gap during a difficult period of the Seminary's institutional history. Initially this was to be for only one year, but when for various reasons this morphed into a longer commitment than was at first envisaged, it was with no sense of calamity; indeed, it became natural to think instead in terms of life's providential ordering. Believe it or not, my wife Ann and I submitted to the twenty-four hours of flying time from Perth in Western Australia to New York and return, following different routes and on a variety of airlines, on at least twelve occasions between 2010 and 2013—so many times, in fact, that I have actually lost the exact count.

Amongst other things, this provided the opportunity to revisit the theology of the Resurrection of Christ, which I first tackled in *The Structure of Resurrection Belief*, as long ago as 1987. By 2010 it was well overdue for a critical review and revamp. I am particularly grateful to the students of the Systematic Theology classes of the Seminary during the years from 2010 to 2013 for wrestling with the New Testament resurrection traditions, and for squarely facing the challenge of producing a theology of the Resurrection of Christ for today, in the language of today, and hopefully with some traction in the context of contemporary ways of viewing the cosmos and the human experience of life within it.

This seminary course on the Resurrection of Christ was repeated a number of times over these years, with N. T. Wright's magisterial 2003 book *The Resurrection of the Son of God* as the set text. I hope its author appreciates my contribution to his increased sales during this period. Members of these classes worked carefully through

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Wright's book, and at the end of the term were asked to write a critical review as the primary item of their course assessment. I am indebted to them for wrestling with the complex issues it raises, and for persisting with its detailed prose. I am also grateful to them for providing a sounding board as I endeavored to unpack Wright's arguments, and to highlight what appeared to me to be the book's most concerning problems. The key issues canvassed with them in lectures are now presented in what follows in this book, which I dedicate to them.

Then, as this teaching assignment was ending, my name was suggested to the very lively Episcopal Parish of St. Peter, Morristown, New Jersey, where there was a temporary position in ministry with a focus on Adult Education. The parish teaching sessions between the two major community Eucharists at 10am of a Sunday morning, that were attended by upwards of about fifty keen-to-learn adults, allowed for the further airing of the theology of the Resurrection of Christ—though not just the Resurrection, but also other equally demanding topics: the Persons-in-Communion of the Trinity, St. Mark's Redaction of the Gospel, and Issues in Christian Moral Theology. I am very grateful to the Rector of the Parish, the Reverend Janet Broderick, for making all this possible, and to Mikael and Beth Salovaara, for attending to the logistics of our time and accommodation at St. Peter's. Ann and I remember appreciatively the contribution of Constance Silverman to the decorative flair and enthusiasm that Beth brought to this enterprise, and we salute the lively and welcoming group of "informed laity" who were adventurously prepared to tackle the challenges of thinking theologically. Hildegard Bucking is to be thanked for her role in stretching our minds in a different direction by organizing us into a parish group to learn and to play Bridge. It was a huge amount of fun.

These New York/New Jersey assignments have undoubtedly helped me clarify my own thinking about what is without doubt the most abidingly important subject in the specifically Christian theological tradition. Indeed, there is no substitute for having to work through the issues of philosophical and systematic theology with as much intellectual honesty as can be brought to the task and with the aim of producing a reasonably coherent statement of a position, than to have to communicate it to others, and then defend it in the cut-and-thrust of critical discussion and questioning.

On the other hand, mere thinking *about* the Resurrection does not get us very far without a concrete experience of the fundamental reality that we identify in faith as "the presence of the Raised Christ." The prayerful and humanly enriching worship, and the vibrantly caring community life of both Seminary and Parish, provided ample avenues, not just for engaging in some systematic thinking, but for the experience of engagement with the concrete reality to which St. Paul referred as "the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:2), and which in faith we still claim to have to do today. After all, there are "two stems" of knowledge, as Immanuel Kant once explained them: with one stem things are thought; with the other, experienced reality is encountered, identified,

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and named. Without the thoughts we are “blind” to what there is to be perceived and known; without the concrete experience that “fills” them such thoughts are empty.

For the last three years since 2015, now back to a more normal form-of-life, re-united with our children and delightful grandchildren, and comfortably settled in our East Fremantle townhouse with an undemanding pocket-sized garden to care for, it has at last been possible to massage the verbal precipitate of these years of teaching and talking since 2010 into what I hope is a coherent and helpful publishable form.

I am indebted to my very good Perth friends for their continuing care and support through all this: amongst them especially, the Warden of Wollaston Theological College, Gregory Seach, not least for providing a home for my library; David Wood, for being prepared to read a very early draft of what started life as a single book that then become two; and Susan Maushart who is always on hand to provide computer and publishing advice. I especially want to thank Luke Hoare whose keen critical eye, and the technical expertise he brought to the pressured work of checking references and copy editing, has been an invaluable help to me—in fact, life-saving.

Needless to say, I am grateful also to Dr. K. C. Hanson, the editor-in-chief of Wipf and Stock Publishing, and the team of dedicated staff who work behind the scenes in this splendid publishing house. They have been unfailingly prompt, generously courteous, and very impressively professional. The company’s Author Guide, especially for those having to learn the intricacies of *The Chicago Manual of Style*, is remarkable for its attention to detail and helpful clarity.

I also thank Bishop Tom Wright for generously receiving the first news that his big 2003 book on the Resurrection was to be subjected to critical public scrutiny. I know he is accepting of the fact that the *The Resurrection of the Son of God* was unlikely to remain unassailed in perpetuity. On the other hand, he is to be thanked for producing *The Resurrection of the Son of God* in the first place. It remains the “reigning paradigm” of the approach to the Resurrection understood as an event of past historical time, that must necessarily therefore be approached employing the methods and techniques of critical historical research. I happen to come at it from quite another angle, but I fully appreciate the sustained and detailed argument that has been mounted for handling the Resurrection as a “historical event.”

Finally, I wish to thank my loving wife, Ann, who is a very gifted teacher, and a writer in her own right, but who has tended to shelve many of her own interests in her steadfast commitment to managing our joint well-being and the stable organization of our lives during these busy years. As well as caring for our two children and their spouses, and four grandchildren, especially through those times when we were separated by the “tyranny of distance,” Ann has ensured that I have not been distracted from the task in hand and has kept me focused on the goal of completion. Certainly, I feel much loved and supported. Words are inadequate to express how appreciative I am of her care right through what has been an eight-year-long project that has gobbled up much more of our time and mental energy than I ever imagined it would—and

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probably much more than I should have permitted. Hopefully, we may now both look forward to some time of relative tranquility together, and to the pleasures of “growing old in the company of friends.”

Despite the fact that there is always more to be said about what is essentially a “mystery” and thus “beyond words,” I think these books are probably just about as good as I can do on the topic of the Resurrection of Christ. Now that this project is finished, at least roughly to my own satisfaction, it will be up to others in a new generation to continue the discussion in whatever way they will.

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