

reserves literary excellence for the passages where literary excellence exists in the original. That's part of being "literal." If the original is abrupt, let the translation be abrupt. (A recent review of the ESV in *JETS* lauds versions that use the word "behold" and deprecates versions that translate the original Greek word as "listen" because "behold" is iambic and flows smoothly, whereas "listen" is trochaic and too abrupt. Of course, the Greek word translated "behold" happens to have a trochaic rhythm. Really, it doesn't matter.)

Despite my negative remarks, *The Word of God in English* is a thought-provoking and sometimes persuasive book. Readers will be alerted to why a literal translation matters and to how much is lost in a dynamic equivalent version. Teachers would do well to assign at least parts of the book to students who have to do their own translations from Hebrew or Greek. Ryken knows a lot about English style. In a great many instances there is no reason why a translated passage should be not only accurate, but beautiful. Ryken offers many useful pointers about how to achieve this. Even teachers will gain a new appreciation of the Bible's literary beauty.

Kutztown University
Kutztown, Pennsylvania

ED CHRISTIAN

Wright, N.T. *The Resurrection of the Son of God*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2003. xxi + 817 pp. Hardcover, \$49.00.

With the issuance of *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, N. T. Wright adds volume 3 to his monumental series *Christian Origins and the Question of God*; the first and second volumes appearing under the titles *The New Testament and the People of God* (1992) and *Jesus and the Victory of God* (1996). The fourth volume in the series is slated to be on Paul, with a fifth volume to address the subject of "why the Gospels are what they are."

In the preface, Wright states that the length of the book is to be attributed in part to his seeking to correct a "misleading" understanding among current NT scholarship that "the earliest Christians did not think of Jesus as having been bodily raised from the dead; Paul [being] regularly cited as the chief witness for what people routinely call a more 'spiritual' point of view" (xvii). Nevertheless, he assures the reader that he has only cited a few examples "here and there," preferring rather to attend to the primary sources.

Wright describes the book as a "monograph with a single line of thought." He acknowledges that his argument is not a novel one, but instead claims his "point of entry" as the unique contribution to scholarship. This entry point is "the study of the way in which 'resurrection', denied by pagans but affirmed by a good many Jews, was both reaffirmed and redefined by the early Christians" (xvii-xviii). Wright asks the question, "So what did happen on Easter morning?" This, as a historical question, is the "central theme of the present book" (4). While acknowledging the problem of intertwining history with theology, he seeks to answer this question by means of two subquestions: "What did the early

Christians think had happened to Jesus, and what can we say about the plausibility of those beliefs?" (6).

In chapter 1, Wright lays out the arguments he is going to counter, followed by his own proposals, which he offers as "excellent, well-founded and secure historical arguments against each of these positions" (7). These arguments (7), which function as Wright's analysis of current critical scholarship, are:

- (1) that the Jewish context provides only a fuzzy setting, in which "resurrection" could mean a variety of different things; (2) that the earliest Christian writer, Paul, did not believe in *bodily* resurrection, but held a "more spiritual" view; (3) that the earliest Christians believed, not in Jesus' bodily resurrection, but in his exaltation/ascension/glorification, in his "going to heaven" in some kind of special capacity, and that they came to use "resurrection" language initially to denote that belief and only subsequently to speak of an empty tomb or of "seeing" the risen Jesus; (4) that the resurrection stories in the gospels are late inventions designed to bolster up this second-stage belief; (5) that such "seeings" of Jesus as may have taken place are best understood in terms of Paul's conversion experience, which itself is to be explained as a "religious" experience, internal to the subject rather than involving the seeing of any external reality, and that the early Christians underwent some kind of fantasy or hallucination; (6) that whatever happened to Jesus' body (opinions differ as to whether it was even buried in the first place), it was not "resuscitated", and was certainly not "raised from the dead" in the sense that the gospel stories, read at face value, seem to require.

Wright intends to argue against each of the above positions by clarifying the Jewish, Pauline, and early Christian viewpoints; by reexamining the Gospel accounts; and by asserting that the only reason Christianity began as it did was that the tomb really was empty and that people did meet the resurrected Jesus.

The introductory chapter includes a review of and answer to current scholarly arguments proposed both by those who insist that the search for the historicity of the resurrection *cannot* be done, and by those who posit that it *should not* be done. Wright's historical methodology is then briefly restated, having been more fully presented in part 2 of *The New Testament and the People of God*. Following the introductory chapter of the present volume, Wright explores background ideas to the concept of resurrection, both in the Greek world and that of the Jews. Chapter 2 examines the concepts of "soul" and "life beyond death in ancient paganism," ranging from the writings of Homer to Plato and beyond. Chapter 3 takes up a similar quest in the documents of the OT, with chapter 4 providing background material from postbiblical Judaism, including though not limited to examinations of the ideas of the Sadducees, Pharisees, Rabbis, and Targumim, along with discussions on Josephus, the Qumran writings, and Pseudo-Philo.

Part 2 examines resurrection in the Pauline writings. Here also Wright shows himself true to his attempt to be as far-reaching as space allows, looking in depth at all of the Pauline corpus. This includes an analysis of various texts, such as Paul's speaking of his "death" and "coming alive again" (220), which are open to interpretation as only allusions to Jesus' resurrection. Wright first examines the

bulk of the Pauline corpus, where allusions to resurrection abound, before turning his full attention to the key passages of 1 Cor 15 and 2 Cor 4:7-5:10.

Part 3 examines documents from early Christianity, ranging from the concept of resurrection in the Gospels outside of the Easter stories themselves to the rest of the NT writings. Wright also examines the noncanonical early Christian texts from the Apostolic Fathers through Origen, including documents from Early Syriac Christianity and the Nag Hammadi literature.

Wright's main argument thus far is that a bodily resurrection is the best explanation of why the early Christians focused on the Jewish concept of resurrection—ignoring the denials of such a possibility from the pagan world—but “redefined” it “beyond anything that Judaism had said, or indeed would say later” (553). As supporting evidence for this slight “mutation” of the Jewish conception of resurrection by the early Christians, Wright spends a chapter looking at the similar redefinition that he believes took place with the early Christians' assertion of Jesus as the Messiah.

After laying this foundation, in part 4 Wright examines the Easter stories in the Gospels. His reason for placing them last in the discussion is that “it is therefore important that we come to them having already acquired as clear an understanding as possible of what that early church seems to have believed about resurrection in general and that of Jesus in particular” (587). He argues that the Gospel accounts are “chronologically as well as logically prior to the developed discussions of the resurrection which we find in Paul and many subsequent writers” (612). After looking at various options for the origin of the narratives and addressing some of the “surprises” found in them, he analyzes each of the four accounts individually.

Part 5 begins with Wright's assertion that two events can now be “regarded as historically secure” (686). They are the empty tomb and the meetings with the risen Jesus. He then presents his argument in a seven-step demonstration of these two “facts.” The crux of his argument lies at the center of his seven-step demonstration. The empty tomb by itself might have caused some consternation for a time, but not much more. Meeting Jesus, without an empty tomb, would have raised the assumption of hallucinations or apparitions. However, taken together they provide a “sufficient condition” (692) and indeed a “necessary” (706) one for belief among the early Christians that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead. This is Wright's key conclusion, which historians will, no doubt, debate.

One refreshing aspect of *The Resurrection of the Son of God* is the open dialogue with critical scholars who hold opposing views to that which Wright himself presents. Without being acrimonious, Wright manages to state clearly his position, which is often at odds with other interpretations. This is especially helpful to the student/scholar who is new to the field, allowing one to quickly learn lines of argument without possessing a prior degree of competency.

The willingness to engage history and theology with a balanced critique is a courageous attempt to reengage two disciplines that, as Wright himself recognizes, have been at odds with each other for some time. His attempt to

look critically at texts and their interpretations without fear that it will crush either his faith or his mind is laudable.

The Resurrection of the Son of God presents a wide breadth of coverage of the primary source material. This almost overwhelming presentation has to stand out as one of the chief reasons for its almost assured position as a future classic in the field. No respectable library should be without this volume. Though the style is notably academic, Wright manages to break the doldrums of reading an 800-page tome by inserting personable moments at various points in his monologue. For instance, while preparing to enter the "dangerous" territory of part 5, Wright comments that it reminds him of trying to finish a round of golf in the late evening, only to have the automatic sprinklers come on from all sides (686).

As might be expected, at times Wright's own theology appears to influence his interpretation. He himself acknowledges complete objectivity is impossible. For instance, in his analysis of Justin Martyr's understanding of the resurrection of body and soul and any intermediate state that might exist, Wright comments: "[Justin] offers no theory about an intermediate state, but from his cautious treatment of the question of the soul we may assume he would think in terms of continuity of soul while awaiting renewal of body" (503). This assertion is open to question. How does being "cautious" on the question of the soul imply continuity? Or is Wright reading his personal understanding into Justin's?

On a different note, in Wright's analysis of the Apologists, he devotes the same amount of space to Justin Martyr as he does to Tertullian, when Tertullian wrote so much on the topic that he could probably warrant a book by himself. However, though Wright often discusses the understanding of the soul as it appears in the documents at hand, with Tertullian this discussion is completely absent. It would seem that Tertullian should have warranted closer study regarding his understanding of the soul. This does not imply that Wright's conclusions would be altered as a result, but with the stated attempt at completeness of coverage, this is a definite oversight.

One small complaint regarding the physical construction of the book: in the review copy, at least, handling the pages left ink smudges on the fingers. Other than that, the book is remarkably well bound for such a large volume and opens easily for reading.

Overall, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* is a well-researched, well-argued, and well-written defense of the Christian faith in the resurrection.

Berrien Springs, Michigan

THOMAS TOEWS