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Risen Indeed: Making Sense of the Resurrection (Book Review)

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For Christians struggling to understand our proper approach to science, Jeeves offers some very important observations. He rightly points out how values affect into our understanding of so-called facts. Descriptive labels such as "learning disabled," "immature," or "self-actualized" are in reality value judgments about how we view responsibility and what types of behavior we find important. The same can be said for much in brain science when we casually describe someone with clinical depression as having a "chemical imbalance."

By distinguishing between "world views" and "world pictures," Jeeves helps us understand how we should approach the findings of science. By world view he means "a set of fundamental beliefs about the ultimate nature of reality" (125). World views speak about the ultimate source of our existence and the fundamental purpose and character of the created order. World pictures on the other hand are conceptual models concerning that created order. To be sure, they are affected by our world view but they are also dependent on the physical reality that they address.

Risen Indeed: Making Sense of the Resurrection, by Stephen T. Davis (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans), 1993, 219 pages, paperback, \$16.95. Reviewed by Michael Williams, Associate Professor of Theology

Davis has a straightforward agenda in this book. He wants to defend the classical doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and articulate the importance of the doctrine for the Christian faith. This double purpose comes from two observations regarding the status of the doctrine: (1) "Many believers today either ignore or misconstrue Christian teachings about the subject," and (2) "Even those Christians who can affirm credal statements about bodily resurrection often find that the doctrine plays no foundational or ordering role in their understanding of themselves or their faith" (viii). The two fundamental questions relative to the resurrection of Jesus Christ are these: (1) What happened on Easter morning?, and (2) What is its significance? These two questions complement the purpose of the book.

Davis has produced a creative and insightful exercise in philosophical apologetics. He does not disappoint in his promise to offer a reasoned defense of the resurrection. He lays out three ways Christians historically have understood the resurrection of Christ. (1) Jesus actually, historically and bodily, arose from the dead. (2) Jesus arose from the dead, but it was not a bodily resurrection or a historical event, as we understand such things. The resurrection took place in a spiritual realm which transcends history and the

phenomenal realm. We might say that the resurrection was a "spiritual" event. (3) Jesus did not actually arise from the dead in any real sense. He arose "in our hearts." That is to say, while the story of the resurrection has no historical referent, it does have a historic significance for us as a morality tale, or as an illustration of some psychological truth.

Thus, world pictures can be value laden, and therefore subject to interpretation, but they are often accurate summaries of the creation. Thus, they serve a useful purpose in organizing a wide array of scientific outcomes. Problems arise when we confuse these issues and "world views are smuggled into world pictures and presented as if they were an intrinsic part of those world pictures" (125). Jeeves argues that while world pictures do come with presuppositions, they are working models more dependent on the area of inquiry than on the particular world view.

Thus, Christians may share the same world view, but have completely different descriptions about the nature of mind and brain. Each may remain true to the shared understanding of that world view. Likewise, non-Christians may have completely different world views from our own, yet share a common picture of one aspect of reality. Jeeves concludes that we can take comfort from the fact that while world pictures may constantly change with new discoveries and insights, God's sustaining grace will keep his care over us and our ultimate view of his world intact.

The third option, the Kantian interpretation of much of the liberal theological tradition, suggests that the factual question of the resurrection is irrelevant. What is far more important is the psychological event of faith. Davis expends considerable energy dealing with the Kantian/pietist interpretation. Aside from the faulty fact-value dichotomy implicit within the position, Davis suspects that what really motivates it is a naturalistic worldview and a backreading of naturalism into the substance of the biblical affirmation of the resurrection (37ff).

Davis confessionally responds that the resurrection of Jesus means little if it did not happen (ix, 192). While this is certainly the place to start, Davis is aware that a confessional affirmation does not constitute a defense of the event. The apologetic for the resurrection, over against a naturalism which claims that history is a closed nexus of cause and effect, must establish the plausibility of both supernaturalism (the

reality of a transcendent realm or power) and the possibility of divine intervention in history (miracle). Thus he begins the book with a critique of the Humean objections to miracles. Davis adequately shows that Hume's objections will not stand, and along the way gives a solid definition of a miracle. A miracle is an event "that (1) is brought about by God and (2) is contrary to the prediction of a law of nature that we have compelling reason to believe is true" (10).

Each chapter takes up a different aspect or implication of the resurrection doctrine. For example, the second chapter (Resurrection and History) includes an excellent discussion of Troeltsch's historical-critical principles (30-34). Davis wants to defend the full historicity of the resurrection because he is convinced that Jesus was risen bodily from the grave. Here he looks at the empty tomb tradition and the biblical testimony to the bodiliness of the resurrected Christ. This naturally brings him into conflict with the second option noted above, the idea of a "spiritual" resurrection. Davis expresses not only dismay but also apparent bewilderment that conservative Christians "ignorantly hope for something after death more like the immortality of the soul or even reincarnation than bodily resurrection" (viii).

Davis effectively shows that the concept of a spiritual body is a contradiction in terms. Understood in popular Platonic terms (the most likely source for the doctrine [86, 90]), the noun ("body") is modified by an adjective ("spiritual") which actually negates it (45-46). Thus, to say that Jesus was raised in a spiritual body, or that we will be so raised, is like saying that the grass is not-green green.

Davis's understanding of the apologetic concern is worthy of note. He holds to an apologetic strategy which he calls "soft apologetics." Soft apologetics is not an attempt to show the irrationality of a rejection of Christian claims, but a defense of the plausibility of the Christian faith. Where hard apologetics attempts to argue that the Christian position is the only rational option (something which Davis doubts is possible [174]), soft apologetics is an attempt to

show that Christians are within their intellectual rights to believe that Jesus was raised from the dead. Davis's humility concerning apologetic strategy complements an equivalent humility regarding the product of apologetics. The aim of the apologetic enterprise is not evangelism, though for some it might pave the way for faith, but to provide cogent arguments which buttress Christian claims, and thus demonstrate the plausibility of the faith and defend it against detractors.

The second purpose of the book, to demonstrate the importance of the resurrection doctrine, is not carried out as successfully as the first, the rational defense of the doctrine. While Davis does a good job with the biblical materials relevant to the resurrection of Christ, he lacks the theological background to mine the significance of the resurrection. In short, he articulates and defends the resurrection, but is not up to the task of getting at its existential import. Of course the resurrection of Jesus is the guarantee and model of the general resurrection at the end of the age. A good portion of the book concerns a defense of the bodily resurrection of Christ and a consideration of issues relative to the general resurrection (continuity of human identity, the intermediate state, temporary disembodiment, etc). And Davis addresses them all with vigor and philosophical expertise – all the more reason why the one chapter devoted to the meaning of the resurrection is such a let down.

The bodily resurrection of Christ forms the continuity of Davis's work, but he fails to capitalize upon that continuity. Nowhere does he discuss the relationship between redemption and creation, and how the resurrection constitutes the essential link between them. The doctrine of creation makes no appearance in the book at all. Without such a discussion, the issues of the book remain as so many alphabet blocks upon a table, not quite spelling anything. Yes, the resurrection declares God's victory over death (198ff); but it also declares the nature of that victory.

Philosophical apologetics, even one as exegetically informed as Davis's, is no replacement for theological analysis.

God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams, by David F. Wells (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans) 1994, 256 pages, hardback, \$19.99; *Consulting the Faithful: What Christian Intellectuals Can Learn from Popular Religion*, by Richard J. Mouw (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans) 1994, 84 pages, paperback, \$6.99. Reviewed by Michael Williams, Associate Professor of Theology.

In 1993 Wells wrote *No Place for Truth*, a broadside against what he called the "hollowing out" of the confessional underpinnings of modern evangelicalism and its acceptance of a psychological

and selfist view of reality and a utilitarian and managerial approach to the church. Wells diagnosed the root of the crisis of evangelicalism as a "sell out" to modernity, a wholesale acceptance of an ethos that