

A question that persists through this collection is the relation of ‘revelation’ and a more general sense of ‘religious experience’; these are categories that have shifted in Brown’s thought over time, as well as being conceived differently among his interlocutors here. A connecting strand across many of the essays is the idea of ‘divine interaction’ (highlighted by Brewer, p. 11). This category can be nuanced by tracking Brown’s own ‘still developing position’ (as he says for himself, p. 235), given he has latterly preferred ‘interaction’ to ‘intervention’ to depict God’s work in the world. And the implications of such interaction as there may be are explored in vibrant ways not only in Brown’s own work over time but among his colleagues here. This is all to say that this is a rich book, as could only be expected of engagement with Brown’s ‘open-ended way of pursuing systematic theology’ (Brewer, p. 13) and the wide-ranging dealings with Brown’s ‘avowedly unsystematic “system”’ (George Pattison, p. 162) that this book collects together in a lively celebration of Brown’s ways of thinking. Whether or not it is deemed to constitute ‘mainstream theology’, this erudite and stimulating collection deserves to be applauded for profound curiosity in Christian doctrine – a fitting tribute to perhaps Anglicanism’s most prolific contemporary theologian.

Stephen Burns
Pilgrim Theological College, University of Divinity, Melbourne,
Australia

Peter Gant, *Seeing Light: A Critical Enquiry into the Origins of Resurrection Faith* (Durham: Sacristy Press, 2019), pp. vii + 302. ISBN: 978-1-78959-050-0. RRP £24.49 or US\$12.44.

doi:[10.1017/S1740355320000042](https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740355320000042)

This is a remarkably honest book. In fact, the author’s uncompromising commitment to articulating only what a critical reading of the actual New Testament evidence will justifiably allow, constitutes a confronting challenge, not only to the unthinking forces of contemporary fundamentalism and naive biblicism, but also to much of the Christian apologetics of mainline Christian Churches that tend to be wedded to the defence of inherited or preconceived views come what may.

This is not to say that the author is entirely without preconceptions himself. With a first degree in science, Gant candidly puts his cards on the table at the outset: He sets out to address the question of whether a ‘modern Christian’, fully committed to ‘a post-Enlightenment scientific world-view’, can ‘honestly return a clear “Yes” to the question, “Do you really believe that God raised Jesus from the dead?”’ As it transpires, Gant’s own answer to this crucial question is a very positive ‘Yes’, provided, of course, that the contention that ‘God raised Jesus from the dead’ is understood in

accordance with a critical assessment of the available evidence, without inherited preconceptions that tend to fudge and distort the actual New Testament record.

Any reader who hopes for unquestioning confirmation of traditionalist views of the Resurrection of Christ, uncritically understood as a miraculous resuscitation and restoration of Jesus' dead body, such as would leave a tomb empty, will therefore be disappointed.

Because the author sets out in the first instance to satisfy himself in his quest to answer his own fundamental questioning, and not just to produce a survey of recent resurrection theology, there is a tendency for him to articulate his own conclusions on the basis of a discussion of the primary source material, rather than to engage with the pros and cons of the views of secondary theological authors, with whom he may either agree or disagree. Possible alternative interpretations of the evidence are almost always signalled, often with the admission that a conclusive judgment is impossible, but a first-hand engagement with the arguments of others tends to be avoided. As a consequence, footnoting is kept to a minimum. There is no index of contemporary authors, nor a subject index, and there is no bibliography. Instead, the author lays out his own argument and the reasons for his own confidently held conclusions as far as the evidence will allow. At the end of the book 'further reading' relevant to the subject matter of each chapter is provided for those who wish to pursue particular issues.

A very substantial part of this book (the first six chapters) is devoted to a refreshingly careful discussion of the background beliefs of Second Temple Judaism, which provided the historical context for the emergence of resurrection faith amongst the primitive followers of the historical Jesus. Hellenistic Judaism, including Palestinian Judaism, is acknowledged to have embraced a plethora of viewpoints about the nature of the after-life. These range from characteristically Jewish views of a shadowy post-mortem existence in Sheol, to ideas of the immortality of the soul, originally of Greek origin, and the development of belief in the resurrection of the body, particularly it seems in times of persecution and martyrdom. The resurrection of the body was also imagined in different forms (sometimes "like angels" and sometimes more concretely material) and in accordance with different eschatological timelines. In times of political tension and angst, resurrection belief tended to acquire unmistakable apocalyptic colourings associated with the end of the World. Very importantly, in less fraught circumstances the departed were sometimes imagined to by-pass Sheol to go "directly to heaven" immediately after death.

When we finally come in Chapter 7 to the actual New Testament texts relating to the Easter tradition, the author's methodology dictates that what appears to be the earliest stratum of the literary record is privileged over material produced at a later date. Hence, material that appears even to pre-date Paul is treated first. This includes credal affirmations of faith, and surviving remnants of early prayers and hymns, especially, for example, the early Aramaic 'Maranatha', and also the celebrated hymn of kenotic self-emptying that was incorporated by Paul into his letter to the Philippians (Phil. 2.5-11). A high degree of importance is assigned, of course, to the material that Paul explicitly acknowledges to have been received by him, as for example, the summary list of first Easter appearances now found in 1 Cor. 15.3-8. Only then is there a discussion of the theological reflections, and exhortations to behave in accordance with resurrection faith, of Paul's own composition. As Gant

points out, this material from his letter-writing dates roughly from twenty years after the event. Finally, Gant turns to consider the evidence of much later literary composition, the narrative traditions of the Gospel records, starting with Mark around 65–70 AD. Because accounts of more tangible and physical appearances are found in narratives produced much later even than Mark, particularly by Luke, they are deemed to carry less weight.

The initial puzzle of the absolute silence of Paul in relation to the story of the empty tomb, and its sudden first appearance only much later in Mark's Gospel therefore bulks large. It is certainly strange that Paul does not refer to it, even when defending resurrection faith or expounding the nature of the resurrected body. This indisputable fact, along with the apparently primitive emphasis on the exaltation and glorification of the Raised Christ and his heavenly status 'at the right hand of the Father', coupled with visionary experiences by contrast with apparently later more concrete materializing representations of the Raised Christ, lead Gant to the conclusion that in the first stratum of the Easter tradition the resurrection was thought of less as a historical event involving the restoration of Jesus to this world and more as a revelatory disclosure 'from heaven' that was perceived by faith.

What then are the contours of primitive Easter faith as Gant understands it? Rather than belief in a miraculous intervention of God to interrupt and reverse the natural order, faith is said to arise as a form of reflection upon natural events. These are quite explicitly said to have been 'the history of Israel and the completed life and death of Jesus'. This is then coupled with a set of emergent convictions about God and the future of the world. Thus, faith becomes a way of interpreting the story, first of Israel and then of Jesus, so as to endow it with theological significance.

At this point Gant reveals his fundamental dependence on Willi Marxsen in *The Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth* (1970). Indeed, Marxsen is in a sense his theological mentor so far as his understanding of the nature of faith is concerned. For Marxsen the real Easter event is 'the coming to faith' of the first disciples, rather than a post-mortem historical event to which faith was a response. The Easter miracle is thus the 'coming to faith' itself.

Somewhat surprisingly, at one point, Gant even affirms (with Schillebeeckx) that faith is the gift of God (p. 286). The danger here is that, if faith is said to be God's gift to some while God withholds it from others, it is hard to see that faith does not get assimilated to a kind of gnostic secret insight. Perhaps Gant is on firmer ground when he himself says that the judgment of faith rises more naturally as the outcome of a process of reflection.

In any event, it has to be said that this is a very minimal approach to the understanding of faith. Instead of involving a cognitive claim in response to some kind of experience *after* Jesus' crucifixion and death, faith is said to 'emerge' from the completed life and death of Jesus understood in the context of the history of Israel, along with gradually clarifying convictions about God's plan for the future of the world. Even the original experiences of 'heavenly visions' are not said to form part of the original content of faith. Rather, the first visionary experiences are said to 'trigger' the response of faith insofar as they prompted the first Christians to engage in theological reflection on the significance of the historical Jesus. Gant thus underlines his conviction that the history of Israel and the story of Jesus' life and death provide an adequate basis for the judgment of faith.

Likewise, in an all-too-brief discussion of the Spirit of God (pp. 217–21) it is clear that faith is not so much a cognitive response to the concrete experience of the Spirit which is identified as ‘the Spirit of the living Jesus’. Rather, reflection on the Spirit of God is simply an item of ‘further understanding’ (p. 285) which is also precipitated in the course of the emergence of faith. As such it claims a place in the (more verbal) post-Easter theological reflection that is ‘imposed on the events of Jesus’ life and death by his followers’ (p. 284).

This means that the outcome is a non-cognitive understanding of faith. The first Christians are said to have come to the conviction *that* Jesus was in some mysterious way ‘in heaven’, but this was not an outcome of a post-mortem encounter *with him*. What gives content to the experience of faith is not exactly an encounter with the Raised Jesus himself, but ‘encounters with Godself mediated though visionary “seeings” of the gloriously transformed, heavenly Jesus Christ’ (p. 284). It is thus primarily the revelatory activity of God that is pointed to when the first Christians affirmed that ‘God raised Jesus from the dead’. Clearly, it is no accident that Gant’s book bears the title of *Seeing Light* rather than *Seeing the Raised Christ*. The crucial question is whether this understanding of things is an adequate account of the origin of resurrection faith amongst the first Christian believers. Some of us would frankly want to mount a case for a more cognitive understanding of things. Even so, this is a significantly interesting and challenging book. It would be a mistake to underestimate its importance.

Peter Carnley
Formerly Primate of the Anglican Church of Australia and
Archbishop of Perth, Western Australia

N.T. Wright, *History and Eschatology, Jesus and the Promise of Natural Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019), pp. xxi + 343. ISBN 978-1-4813-0962-2. doi:[10.1017/S1740355320000121](https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740355320000121)

If there were to be a prize for bravery in theology it should surely be awarded to N.T. Wright. This publication of his Gifford Lectures of 2018 shows him to have gone on an adventurous expedition, well out of the comfort zone in New Testament Studies in which we usually find him, and into the alien and fiercely challenging philosophical world of Natural Theology. Certainly, Wright appears to be entirely undaunted as he boldly engages with historical attempts to say something about God on the basis of a (general) revelation that is alleged to be available to all men and women everywhere, simply employing natural cognition and reasoned reflection.

Wright initially indicates that his purpose is to establish a channel of communication between the various departmental ‘silos’ into which the study of theology is usually organized. But he in fact does a lot more than this. After first arguing that Jesus was a part of nature, he contends that ‘the history of Jesus . . . is itself part of the study of the natural world’ (p. 271), which should therefore be included within the raw material of nature generally, which comprises the data upon which a