

# **The Resurrection of Jesus. Recent major figures in the debate.**

**By**

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## PREFACE

The resurrection of Jesus is probably the nerve cell among most Christian traditions over the world. Over the past few decades the debate surrounding Jesus' resurrection has led to a multitude of interpretations ranging from complete denial to unhealthy fundamentalism.

With the advances in scientific tools since especially the Enlightenment, and the secularisation among formerly Christian communities, faith in the resurrection of Jesus has become a hotly debated issue.

Analysing major figures in the current resurrection debate, might give one a broader understanding of all the different standpoints. This could lead the reader to a better knowledge and perhaps assist in making an informed decision. The scholars selected for this research are, in alphabetical order:

William L. Craig  
Gary H. Habermas  
Gerd Lüdemann  
A.J.M. (Sandy) Wedderburn  
N.T. (Tom) Wright

This study has not been submitted in any form to any other university and the results represent work done by the author, except where the works of others are acknowledged.

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F.S. (Ferdie) Mulder

## A TRUE STORY

“In the 1930s, a missionary asked an African girl of about six or seven years of age a most pertinent question: ‘Who is Jesus Christ?’ With a smile on her face, she responded cheerfully: ‘He is my Saviour and He lives within my heart.’ As it happens, the missionary had previously studied at the University of Berlin with Professor Adolf von Harnack, one of the most renowned theologians and church historians of the twentieth century. The missionary recalled that one day in class Professor von Harnack was addressing the same question: ‘Who is Jesus Christ?’ Harnack replied that Christ was the greatest man who ever lived. But this liberal theologian would not acknowledge that Christ was the divine Son of God who had died on the cross for our salvation and triumphed over death through the resurrection. In one sense, the young African girl understood the Gospel far better than the brilliant professor with all his theological knowledge.

Years later, the former missionary frequently recounted the story of the great German theologian and the young African girl. He compared her simple faith in Christ with the vast knowledge of the great theologian. She provided a remarkable illustration of Jesus’ teaching that unless we come to Christ with the faith of a little child, we cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. Indeed, the Gospel is so simple that children can understand it very well. The Statement reads: ‘The Gospel is so simple that small children can understand it, and it is so profound that studies by the wisest theologians will never exhaust its riches’

(Vanhoozer 2000:70).

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the dead.

## SUMMARY

In chapter one the question is asked: Is something like the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ really non-negotiable?

To come to an informed understanding of this question, hermeneutical, epistemological and exegetical approaches, underlying the resurrection debate, is analysed in five scholars with divergent interpretations. They are William L. Craig (1); Gary R. Habermas (1), Gerd Lüdemann (2), A.J.M. (Sandy) Wedderburn (3) and N.T. (Tom) Wright (1).

In chapter two, their views on the resurrection are briefly stated. Then their hermeneutical presuppositions are discussed, which indicate that group (1) believes God can intervene in nature, and number (2) & (3) deny it. Group (1) believes that the Bible is a divine book giving credible witness to the resurrection, while numbers (2) & (3) see it as a purely human book with highly contradictive resurrection evidence.

In chapter three crucial texts in 1 Cor. 15, which give the earliest New Testament evidence, are analysed. The texts and interpretations are:

Verse 4 - **kai; oti etafh** (*he was buried*) - For group (1) this phrase refers to Jesus' empty tomb. For number (3) this phrase only allows for that possibility, but rejects it eventually. For (2) this phrase excludes an empty tomb.

Verse 6 - **pantakosivi~ adel foi~** (*[[he appeared also to] 500 brethren*) – For group (1) this phrase is historical. For (2) & (3), this phrase is a redactional addition.

Verses 8-11 - Paul the **eřcaton** (*last*) to see Jesus - For group (1) Paul saw Jesus in *bodily* form. For number (2) Paul had a hallucination and number (3) affirms that possibility.

Verse 44 - **sw̄ma pneumatikon** (*supernatural body*) - For group (1), this phrase indicates that Christians will arise from the dead with a tangible glorified *body*. For numbers (2) & (3) it indicates *no* bodily resurrection.

Verse 50 - **sarx kai; aīma** (*flesh and blood* [cannot inherit the kingdom of God]) – For group (1) this phrase refers to a typical Semitic expression. This means the resurrected body will be without sin and glorified. For numbers (2) & (3) this phrase indicates *no* bodily resurrection.

In chapter four a summary of their exegetical results is given. Furthermore their hermeneutical presuppositions and epistemologies are critiqued. In the case of group (1) critical realism is shown to be a helpful tool, but with reservations.

Forthwith, number (3) is discussed and indicated that his “reverent agnosticism” is the result of (a) 19<sup>th</sup> century liberal theology and (b) his “historical Jesus”. He then expresses faith through (c) existentialism combined with (d) mysticism.

At this stage number (2) is discussed. He concurs with number (3): (a) & (b) & (c). He then utilizes Wilhelm Herrmann’s version of (c). Eventually however, he renounces Christianity all together.

Numbers (2) & (3) are then discussed together to indicate the similarities. Furthermore it is argued that (a) & (b) & (c) represent a deviation from the foundational meta-narratives of the Christian faith. It is then stated that the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ is a foundational Christian meta-narrative which is indispensable.

In the conclusion it is argued that Christian churches should have the courage to confess unashamedly the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, particularly now, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## OPSOMMING

In hoofstuk een word die vraag gevra: Is die liggaamlike opstanding van Jesus Christus werklik ononderhandelbaar? Om tot 'n weldeurdagte begrip van hierdie vraag te kom, is hermeneutiese, epistemologiese en eksegetiese benaderings wat die opstandingsdebat onderlê, aan die hand van vyf vakkundiges met uiteenlopende interpretasies geselekteer, naamlik William L. Craig (1), Gary R. Habermas (1), Gerd Lüdemann (2), A.J.M. (Sandy) Wedderburn (3), en N.T.Wright (1).

In hoofstuk twee, word hul standpunte oor die opstanding kortliks gestel. Voorts word hul hermeneutiese presupposisies bespreek, wat aandui dat groep (1) glo dat God bonatuurlik in die natuur kan ingryp, terwyl nommer (2) en (3) dit ontken. Groep (1) glo dat die Bybel God se Woord is wat geloofwaardige getuienis oor die opstanding bied, terwyl nommer (2) en (3) dit as 'n bloot menslike boek met uiters onversoenbare getuienis oor die opstanding beskou.

In hoofstuk drie word belangrike tekste in 1 Korintiërs 15, wat die vroegste Nuwe Testamentiese getuienis bied, geanaliseer. Die tekste en interpretasies is:

Vers 4 - **kai; oti ejtafh** (*hy is begrawe*) - Vir groep (1) verwys hierdie frase na Jesus se leë graf. Vir nommer (3) laat hierdie frase dit slegs as 'n moontlikheid toe, maar uiteindelik verwerp hy dit. Vir (2) het hierdie frase geen verwysing na die leë graf nie.

Vers 6 - **pantakosioi- ajel foi-** (*[hy het ook aan] 500 broeders verskyn*) - Vir groep (1) bevestig hierdie frase 'n historiese gebeurtenis. Vir (2) en (3) is hierdie frase 'n latere redaksionele byvoeging.

Verse 8-11 – Paulus, die **ešcaton** (*laaste*) om Jesus te sien - Vir groep (1) het Paulus Jesus in liggaamlike gestalte gesien. Vir nommer (2) het Paulus gehallusineer en (3) bevestig hierdie moontlikheid.

Vers 44 - **swima pneumatikon** (*bonatuurlike liggaam*) - vir groep (1) dui hierdie frase aan dat Christene sal opstaan met 'n tasbare verheerlikte liggaam. Vir (2) en (3) bewys die frase dat daar geen liggaamlike opstanding sal wees nie.

Vers 50 - **sarx kai; aiḡma** (*vlees en bloed* [kan nie die koninkryk van God beërwe nie]) - Vir groep (1) verwys hierdie frase na 'n tipies Semitiese uitdrukking. Dit beteken dat die opgestane liggaam sonder sonde sal wees en verheerlik. Vir (2) en (3) dui hierdie frase op *geen* liggaamlike opstanding nie.

In hoofstuk vier word 'n opsomming van hulle eksegetiese gevolgtrekkings gegee. Vervolgens word hulle hermeneutiese presupposisies en epistemologieë ontleed. In die geval van groep (1) word kritiese realisme as 'n bruikbare instrument aangetoon, maar met voorbehoude.

Verder word (3) bespreek, waarvolgens sy "respekvolle agnostisisme" die gevolg is van sy waardering van (a) die 19e eeuse liberale teologie en (b) sy historiese Jesus. Dit het tot gevolg dat hy sy geloof verwoord deur (c) 'n eksistensialisme gekombineerd met (d) mistisisme.

Vervolgens word nommer (2) bespreek. Hy stem saam met (3) t.o.v. (a) en (b) en (c). Hy gebruik Wilhelm Herrmann se weergawe van (c). Uiteindelik verwerp hy egter die Christelike geloof in totaliteit.

Nommer (2) en (3) word voorts gesamentlik bespreek om ooreenkomste aan te dui. Dan word aangetoon dat (a) en (b) en (c) 'n afwyking van die fundamentele meta-narratiewes van die Christelike geloof verteenwoordig. Verder word dit gekonstateer dat die liggaamlike opstanding van Jesus Christus 'n fundamentele Christelike meta-narratief is, wat onvervangbaar is.

In die konklusie word dit beredeneer dat Christelike kerke die moed behoort te hê om onbeskaamd die liggaamlike opstanding van Jesus Christus te bely, veral nou, in die 21ste eeu.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

|                |                                                |
|----------------|------------------------------------------------|
| FM .....       | Ferdie Mulder                                  |
| HTS .....      | Hervormde Teologiese Studies                   |
| JSHJ .....     | Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus  |
| JSNTS .....    | Journal for the Study of New Testament Studies |
| NGTT.....      | Ned Geref Teologiese Tydskrif                  |
| NSRV .....     | New Standard Revised Version                   |
| PSB .....      | Princeton Seminary Bulletin                    |
| QM .....       | Quantum mechanics                              |
| R & T .....    | Religion and Theology                          |
| RSV .....      | Revised Standard Version                       |
|                | (All Bible quotations made by FM)              |
| SPCK .....     | Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge      |
| SWJOT .....    | Southwestern Journal of Theology               |
| TATRI .....    | The Ankerberg Theological Institute            |
| Theol St ..... | Theological Studies                            |
| TRINJ.....     | Trinity Journal                                |

## **HYPOTHESIS**

Why should the current resurrection debate be analysed? Significant opposing views are expressed, based on the same documentary and other source evidence. This clearly indicates that presuppositions come into play.

Presuppositions therefore determine how the resurrection of Jesus is viewed. If one goes out from the presupposition that we live in a closed universe where God cannot supersede or intervene in nature, then belief in the bodily resurrection of Jesus is virtually impossible. Another presupposition holds that God can intervene or supersede in nature, then belief in the bodily resurrection of Jesus is clearly possible. A choice is made for belief in the bodily resurrection of Jesus. Christian churches should continue to confess this meta-narrative.

## 1. Introduction

The resurrection of Jesus is probably the nerve cell among most Christian traditions over the world.<sup>1</sup> Over the past few decades the debate surrounding Jesus' resurrection has led to a multitude of interpretations ranging from complete denial to unhealthy fundamentalism.

With the advances in scientific tools, especially since the Enlightenment, and a growing secularisation among formerly Christian communities, faith in the resurrection of Jesus has become a hotly debated issue.

Studying the text of the New Testament has become for some a confusing endeavour. Dan O. Via's book *What is New Testament Theology?* gives a concise overview of the history as well as new tendencies in current New Testament research.

Jan van der Watt also provides an insightful analysis of the situation in the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa, as it relates to the challenges relating to Scripture. Following these challenges Van der Watt quotes R. Morgan who pleads for a norm to interpret Scripture. He states:

“Is there a scriptural norm which will help to maintain Christian identity? The norm itself would remain scripture, but a rule of faith or creed or christological formula that summarizes the central thrust of Christian scripture would guide its interpretation. Any such criterion is bound to be christological because it is in the crucified and risen Jesus that Christians see the decisive saving revelation of the God of Israel and Creator of the world, the Judge and Saviour” (Van der Watt 2005:256, 31n).

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<sup>1</sup> To illustrate this point one can refer to Jan van der Watt's recent lecture where he indicates that belief in the resurrection is the basis of our faith. He states: “My vraag is: Ons sê ons staan en val by die opstanding, hoekom? Weet julle hoekom? Ek gaan dit nou 'n bietjie probeer verduidelik. Ons geloof in die opstanding van Jesus is die kern van ons geloof omdat dit deel van die teologie in die openbaring van God is. Dit is hoe die Here Hom aan ons openbaar het.” Van der Watt, J.G. 2006. *Wie is die Ware Jesus?* SEMINAAR. 16 & 17 Feb. Moreletapark NG Kerk. [www.moreleta.co.za](http://www.moreleta.co.za)

As the focus of this research falls on the resurrection, it is worth stating Van der Watt's question to his church as it relates to what is negotiable and what not. He states that:

“Wat is die kolf waarsonder krietek nie gespeel kan word nie, of die Rooikappie waarsonder die wolf en Ouma nie kan nie? Sake wat konstituerend vir die wese van die Christendom met sy verhaal is, moet duidelik uitgespel word. Is iets soos die fisieke opstanding van Christus byvoorbeeld werklik ononderhandelbaar?” (Ibid).

Van der Watt's question is probably the most important question any church must deal with: “Is something like the bodily resurrection of Christ really non-negotiable?” (Ibid).<sup>2</sup>

With the above question in mind, an informed analysis of the resurrection debate is necessary. This debate, however difficult it might be, is essential.<sup>3</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg states that “.. the Christian belief in the event of the resurrection of Jesus Christ presupposes an outlook on reality in general that is not shared by everybody” (Pannenberg 1996:62).

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<sup>2</sup> One might on the one hand mention the article of V. Koperski where he expresses his support for Joseph Fitzmyer's “christocentric soteriology” as a key concept for understanding Paul's theology. It is within this context that Koperski wants to study the suffering/death/resurrection of Jesus. Now if someone *a priori* states that he/she wants to read Scripture in a “christocentric soteriological” way, then it is probably clear that such a presupposition will allow Jesus to really rise from the dead. The full title is: Koperski, V. (ed) Bieringer, R. *et al* 2002. *Resurrection Terminology in Paul*, Resurrection in the New Testament. Festschrift J. Lamprecht. Leuven University Press. Leuven. P 265-282.

One might on the other hand mention Wedderburn who states that “It may be that, if historically true, the resurrection of Jesus would cause us to revise our views of history, but first there is that hurdle of ‘if historically true’” (Wedderburn 1999:19). Now when someone reads Scripture *a priori* with the idea that Jesus did not necessarily rise from the dead, then the outcome will most probably be that he never did rise.

<sup>3</sup> An informative article that deals with this issue is: De Mey, P. 1998. *Historical Criticism and the Resurrection of Jesus: A New Tendency in Recent Scholarship*. Louvain Studies 23, p 246-273. See also: Jansen, H. 2002. *Door Simon gezien. Anderhalve eeuw theologisch debat in het Nederlandse protestantisme over de opstanding van Christus. Een systematisch-theologische studie*. Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, Zoetermeer.

In order to answer this question, it was decided to choose five scholars of widely divergent positions to analyse the different strata of understanding as it relates to current resurrection research.<sup>4</sup> They are, in alphabetical order:

William L. Craig

Gary H. Habermas

Gerd Lüdemann

A.J.M. (Sandy) Wedderburn

N.T. (Tom) Wright

The table is set for a great adventure with twists and turns of which for some the outcome is at present not certain. However, as will become clearer, one's hermeneutical presuppositions determine how you live, what you embrace, what you believe about Jesus' resurrection, and ultimately what you believe about God.

Dramatically divergent views on Jesus' resurrection will be analysed. On the one hand Lüdemann will say that Jesus' "body rotted in the tomb" (Lüdemann 1999:4), on the other hand Wright will say, "Jesus was indeed bodily raised from the dead" (Wright 2003:8).

What will become evident is that all of these five scholars base their faith and theology on their own understanding of what exegesis entails. Each of them has their convictions in terms of which they use as exegetical instrumentation.

Wedderburn, for instance, indicates, after his appropriation of Troeltsch's insights with regards to historical criticism, that "The logical conclusion of such an investigation (leads to – FM) .. a historical agnosticism that seems to undermine any profession of faith .." (Wedderburn 1999:96-7).

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<sup>4</sup> With the help and insights of Jan van der Watt and Mike Licona it was decided to work on the five scholars selected. There are several other highly acclaimed scholars who could have been chosen. Some of them were studied as part of this research. They include: Dale Allison, James Dunn, Stephen Davies, Dom Crossan, Robert Funk, Reginald Fuller, Gerald O'Collins; Wolfard Pannenberg; Raymond Brown; Willi Marxen; Jacob Kremer, Andries van Aarde.

Similarly Dale Allison shows how Lüdemann makes it clear that he is in “.. agreement with Hume: the philosopher ‘demonstrated’ that no testimony can establish a miracle” (Allison 2005:216, 68n).

As this is a thesis in New Testament, the relevant Bible texts should be scrutinised seriously. After wrestling with most of the New Testament texts relating to the resurrection of Jesus, it became clear that there are specific texts, which, in a sense function as foundational pillars for current research. This however does not mean that the other texts are unimportant.

The text, which most scholars regard as foundational, is 1 Corinthians 15, and in particular verses 3-11. In this regard Jerome Neyrey indicates that this text “.. has always enjoyed a special place in the New Testament because scholars judge it to be the oldest literary reference to Jesus’ resurrection as well as one of the most comprehensive comments about it” (Neyrey 1988:13). Gerd Theissen even goes so far as to say that “The character of 1 Cor 15:3ff as tradition is undisputed” (Theissen 1996:489).

In this pericope there are several explosive Greek phrases! Only a few are referred to, with a question or two to indicate what is being dealt with:

1 Cor 15:4 - **kai; oti ejtafh**

Does “and he was buried” refer to Jesus’ empty tomb, or not?

1 Cor 15:6 - **pantakosi~i~ ajpel foi~**

Did the 500 brethren really witness an appearance of Jesus, or was it a redaction of Pentecost or a hallucination?

1 Cor 15:8-11- Paul: **ejscaton**

Did Paul really see the risen Jesus, or was it only a vision or hallucination?

### 1 Cor 15:44 - **swima pneumatikon**

What does the resurrection body look like? Is it a ghost, or still a body?

### 1 Cor 15:50 - **sarx kai; aiḡna**

Does “flesh and blood” indicate that the resurrection is only spiritual? Or is it referring to the sinful human nature, which will not rise with the new body?

As will be indicated, scholars interpret these Greek texts differently. On the surface it might appear to the uninformed person that reading the Greek text and understanding its meaning is fairly straightforward. But unfortunately, that is not the case. In this regard, Via states that “historians in their reconstructions of the past do give expression to their own pre understanding, imagination, interests and the force of their social location” (2002:5). Ever since the Enlightenment and the rise of what is commonly referred to as the “historical consciousness”, hermeneutical presuppositions and epistemologies have changed the exegetical landscape to the core.

But does this mean that all texts are relative, and that the resurrection of Jesus is dispensable? Kevin J. Vanhoozer’s says no. He chooses for what he calls a “hermeneutic realism”, which can in short be described as the church being a “humbly confident progressively interpreter” (1998:466).

At the end of all this debating; arguing about the right exegetical methods; which hermeneutical tool is best and whatever else, the bottom line question remains: Did Jesus rise from the dead bodily, and was his tomb empty?

If the answer is no, then Nietzsche is right:

“Gott ist todt! Gott bleibt todt! Und wir haben ihn getödtet!”

(Nietzsche:1973:159)

There are however, those who do not want to make a categorical decision for or against Jesus’ bodily resurrection. Several interviews conducted affirm this

statement. The following question was asked: “Did Jesus rise with a body, and does it mean the grave is empty?” Some answers that followed was as follow:

- A.J.M. (Sandy) Wedderburn: “I would have to say I don’t know.”<sup>5</sup>
- Jacob Kremer: “Ahh, may be possible that the grave was deserted ... I don’t know if the grave was empty .. it is not important, no.”<sup>6</sup>
- Markus Öehler: “I would have to say I don’t know ..”<sup>7</sup>
- Ulrich Körtner: “I would say I don’t know ..”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The following extract from the interview with A.J.M. Wedderburn is important here:

- Mulder: “Proffessor Wedderburn, did Jesus rise with a body, and does it mean the grave is empty?”  
 Wedderburn: I would have to say I don’t know.  
 Mulder: Can you expand a bit, let’s say you’ve got two minutes?  
 Wedderburn: I would have to say that that is one possibility of the phenomena. Something happened to the disciples and apparently to Paul ..” (Wedderburn, A.J.M. 2006. *Interview with Mulder, F.* Evangelische Fakultät, Ludwig Maximilian University, Munich, 6 July 2006).

<sup>6</sup> The following extract from the interview with Jacob Kremer is important here:

- Mulder: “If somebody would ask you, let say, you do an enterview on the radio and somebody asks you the question: prof Kremer, did Jesus rise with a body, and does it mean that the grave is empty? What would your answer be?”  
 Kremer: Ahh, maybe possible that the grave was deserted, but it is no proof, no proof ... a critic of mine professor ‘Schubracht’, he is very against me, because I said ‘I don’t know if the grave was empty .. it is not important, no’ ...  
 Mulder: So the empty grave is not that important?  
 Kremer: No, no, it’s got nothing to do.  
 Mulder: OK.  
 Kremer: Probably it is an expression of the church, but we know nothing” (Kremer, J 2006. *Interview with Mulder, F.* Evangelische Fakultät, Vienna, 5 July 2006).

<sup>7</sup> The following extract from the interview with Markus Öehler is important here:

- Mulder: “You as a Christian, would you say ‘I believe that the tomb was empty, or is it a non-question?”  
 Öehler: I think it’s a non-question .. I think the problem with Paul would be against me, for I would be on the side of the Corinthians ...  
 Mulder: So if someone ask you streight the question ‘Was Jesus raised bodily, and is the grave empty?’ What would your answer be?  
 Öehler: I would have to say I don’t know .. the question would be, was it Jesus’ body from the cross, with all the marks .. or is it a transfigured body like Paul says .. so I would say, if the body is (not) raised in the moment of death, then I don’t have to say that the tomb was empty, it can be different ..” (Öehler, M. 2006. *Interview with Mulder, F.* Evangelische Fakultät, Vienna, 5 July 2006).

<sup>8</sup> The following extract from the interview with Ulrich Körtner is important here:

- Mulder: “Your personal view, do you believe that Jesus was raised bodily from the dead, and that the grave is empty?”  
 Körtner: I would say I don’t know if the grave is empty or not. And if the grave would be found and it would not be empty I’ll be convinced that Jesus went into eternal life by God ..” (Körtner, U. 2006. *Interview with Mulder, F.* Evangelische Fakultät, Vienna, 5 July 2006).

This *in-between-position* could be related to the *partial* acceptance of the abovementioned “historical consciousness” as the brainchild of classical 19<sup>th</sup> century liberal theology. Foundational to this movement was Gotthold E. Lessing’s famous “great ditch”, which consequently holds that we do not have access to the Easter events (McGrath 2002:285; Bennett 2001:130).

The inability to answer “yes” to the question of Jesus’ bodily resurrection may in some way be related to the above theology.

But, if the answer to the question is “yes,” then God exists, and then there is hope beyond the grave.

For two thousand years, Christian scholars have consistently found it possible to use hermeneutical presuppositions, epistemologies and exegetical tools, to confirm the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ.

It will be shown that for the Christian faith, the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ is the basis of its existence (Van der Watt 2005:256). This meta-narrative which determines its confessional identity, permeating all spheres of life, is non-negotiable. It will therefore become apparent, that, although Christians should be fully informed and trained in the different hermeneutical presuppositions, epistemologies and exegetical aids that are available, those which *a priori* rejects the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ are not conducive for the well-being of the Christian faith.

The Christian church has the responsibility, especially now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, to re-affirm in clear uncompromising manner, its faith in the greatest event in the history of mankind (Van der Watt 2005:257).

Shortly before his death, Rev. Frikkie Kelber (1910-1990†), a Dutch Reformed minister who believed in this resurrection with conviction, phoned his daughter and said: “Elreza, if they phone you and say: ‘Frikkie Kelber is dead’, don’t believe them, for then I truly live!”<sup>9</sup>

## **2. Summary of scholars’ view regarding the resurrection and their hermeneutical presuppositions.**

In this section there will be three aspects dealt with. Firstly, a brief summary of the five scholars’ understanding as they relate to the resurrection of Jesus, then their hermeneutical presuppositions, followed by their view of Scripture.

### **2.1 Craig**

#### **2.1.1 Summary**

William L. Craig wrote a very thorough exegetical volume on the resurrection: *Assessing the New Testament Evidence for the Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus*, published in 1989.

In this volume, which he indicates as a “long-term project” he makes a strong plea for the historicity of Jesus’ resurrection, which includes the bodily resurrection as well as the empty tomb as historically highly plausible.

Craig believes that Paul saw the risen Jesus, and that his experience was not a vision or hallucination as some scholars believe. He agrees that Paul’s experience was different from that of the other witnesses, but that it was the same Jesus whom they had encountered.

In his argumentation, one scholar in particular is mentioned often: Hans Grass and his influential and critical *Ostergeschehen und Osterberichte* that was

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<sup>9</sup> Orally informed through Elreza Mulder. 31/10/2006.

published in 1956. Craig's level of argumentation is of the highest quality as it becomes evident that he grapples with all the difficult and challenging theories, relating to the resurrection.

Craig literally deals with every New Testament reference concerning the resurrection, starting with Paul and working through the Gospels, including books like James, Hebrews and Revelation.

### **2.1.1 Hermeneutical presuppositions**

In the introduction to Craig's volume *Assessing the New Testament Evidence for the Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus* he quotes Norman Perrin who “.. maintains that because the gospels are primarily pieces of theology, the question ‘What actually happened on that first Easter morning is alien to these ancient religious texts’” (1989:xiv).

Craig responds by indicating that he simply cannot “.. subscribe to such a viewpoint ... I cannot commit myself existentially to it unless I am also convinced that it is true. This is not to take the standpoint of theological rationalism with regard to the resurrection, for certainly God's Spirit may move in the hearts of men to persuade them of the truth apart from considerations of evidence.” (Ibid). Craig thus indicates that faith and history should not be mutually exclusive but related to each other.

Craig's strong emphasis on historicity is evident when he states that “I am primarily interested in the question of the historical credibility of the resurrection accounts, not their theology, except insofar as the latter impinges upon the former. Hence, I am unashamedly pre-occupied with the question of what actually happened” (Craig 1989:xiv-xv). Although no direct evidence was found that Craig associates himself with the Third Quest, it is surmised that his historical work could point in that direction. In the analysis of N.T. Wright, the

issue is further expounded.

With regard to presuppositions, Craig states that “ .. there is a difference between innocuous and vicious presuppositions” (1989:xvi). It might be illustrated as follows:

- (a) Innocuous: “A presupposition remains innocuous as long as it does not enter into the verification of the hypothesis” (Ibid).
- (b) Vicious: “A presupposition becomes vicious .. when it actually enters into the argumentation and purports to be a ground for the acceptance of the hypothesis” (1989:xvii).

From what follows, it is clear that Craig wants to work with (a) which, for Craig “.. presupposes (1) Markan priority, (2) the independence of John from the synoptics, and (3) that Mk. 16:8 represents the original conclusion to that gospel” (Ibid).

With regards to (b) Craig also makes the noteworthy statement that “.. I am committed theologically to the doctrine of inspiration and, hence, to the historical reliability of scripture. This presupposition remains, however, innocuous, since in no place in this work do I argue for the credibility of an account on the basis that it is inspired and therefore authoritative” (Ibid).

Craig rejects the hermeneutical position that deems the universe and history as a closed system. In this regard Craig indicates how Rudolph Bultmann<sup>10</sup> works with an “.. *a priori* assumption of history and the universe as a closed system” (1989:320,19n).

Craig then quotes Richard R. Niebuhr in stating that Bultmann retained uncriticized the nineteenth century idea of nature and history as a closed system, which forced him to insist that the resurrection is only the wonder of faith” (Ibid).

Craig continues by making the statement that “theological conceptions cannot

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<sup>10</sup> Here Craig quotes from Bultmann’s reply to his critics, in *Kerygma and Myth*, 1: 197.

change historical events; *a priori* constructs of what can and cannot have happened will be broken by the facts themselves” (1989:338). Besides, the objection contains a fundamental misunderstanding of faith, which has plagued post-Bultmannian theology. Bultmann construed faith in epistemological categories, opposing it to knowledge based on proof. Historical evidence is, therefore, not merely irrelevant to faith, but actually inimical to faith. Because faith cannot be based on evidence, the decision to believe necessarily involves risk and uncertainty (Ibid).

Craig clearly indicates that such a position can be seen in the well-known book by Willi Marxen, *The Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth*. Craig indicates how Marxen believes that “Jesus wanted a daring faith. A verifiable resurrection, on the other hand, would have given Jesus his legitimation. Who he was would be a matter of certainty. It would no longer be a venture for the witnesses to enter the life of faith. Indeed, it would have been a counsel of wisdom; it would have been simply stupid not to do what Jesus said” (Ibid). Craig indicates that Marxen’s dichotomy is typically Bultmannian. Accordingly he states, “It may have been that those first witnesses experienced Jesus’ legitimation and then no longer needed to believe” (Ibid).

The best illustration which Craig makes in this regard is probably when he quotes Van Daalen who states that “.. faith is a leap in the dark. That such a leap in the dark is a risk worth taking can only be found out by actually doing it” (Ibid). Craig clearly rejects this position by stating that “This catastrophic misunderstanding springs from the error of taking faith as an epistemological category, a way of knowing. It ignores the fact that in biblical usage, faith is not merely *assensus*, but *fiducia*. Because faith is a whole-souled trust or commitment, it cannot in any way be opposed to either knowledge or evidence. On the contrary, Paul and the gospels invite us to believe on the basis of the evidence .. No biblical writer could construct a dichotomy such that if one saw the risen Jesus, then one no longer needed to believe ..” (1989:339, 31n).

### **2.1.1.1 Craig's view of Scripture.**

Craig states that “.. I am committed theologically to the doctrine of inspiration and, hence, to the historical reliability of scripture. This presupposition remains, however, innocuous, since in no place in this work do I argue for the credibility of an account on the basis that it is inspired and therefore authoritative” (1989:xvii). This statement is quite interesting, as Craig affirms his commitment to the inspiration and historical reliability of Scripture, but in his research on the resurrection, he doesn't employ that presupposition to explain or validate his exegesis.

## **2.2 *Habermas***

### **2.2.1 Summary**

Habermas clearly believes in the bodily resurrection of Jesus. He has consistently over the past two decades employed a now well-known strategy to establish the 'probable historical fact' of the resurrection of Jesus. He states “At least eleven events are considered to be knowable history by virtually all scholars:

- (1) Jesus died due to the rigors of crucifixion and
- (2) Was buried.
- (3) Jesus' death caused the disciples to despair and lose hope.
- (4) Although not as frequently recognised, many scholars hold that Jesus was buried in a tomb that was discovered to be empty just a few days later
- (5) At this time the disciples had real experiences that they believed were literal appearances of the risen Jesus.
- (6) The disciples were transformed from doubters who were afraid to identify themselves with Jesus, to bold proclaimers of his death and Resurrection, even being willing to die for this belief.
- (7) This message was central in the early church preaching and

- (8) Was especially proclaimed in Jerusalem, where Jesus had died shortly before.
- (9) As a result of this message, the church was born and grew,
- (10) With Sunday as the primary day of worship.
- (11) James, the brother of Jesus and a sceptic, was converted to the faith when he also believed he saw the resurrected Jesus.
- (12) A few years later Paul the persecutor of Christians was also converted by an experience that he, similarly, believed to be an appearance of the risen Jesus (Habermas 1987:20-1).

Habermas indicates that except for the empty tomb, “virtually all critical scholars who deal with this issues agree that these are the minimum known facts regarding this event” (Ibid).

For Habermas “the historical Resurrection becomes the best explanation for the facts, especially because the alternative theories have failed. Therefore, it may be concluded that the Resurrection is a probable historical event” (1987:22-3). Habermas even goes so far to say “It is .. (my - FM) .. conviction that by utilizing only four of these accepted facts, a brief but sufficient case can be made for the historicity of the Resurrection” (Ibid). The four Habermas chooses for this purpose are:

- (1) Jesus’ death due to crucifixion,
- (2) The subsequent experiences that the disciples were convinced were literal appearances of the risen Jesus,
- (3) The corresponding transformation of these men,
- (4) And Paul’s conversion experience, which he also believed was an appearance of the risen Jesus.

Habermas states, “of these facts, the nature of the disciples’ experiences is the most crucial” (1987:25).

The above approach is consistently employed right through Habermas' books, articles and public debates. This is confirmed by his latest 2006 article in which he once again states, "building upon agreed data, various reasons are given to establish the reality of the disciples' experiences" (2006:288).

## 2.2.2 Hermeneutical Presuppositions

One should state from the start that Habermas is not a New Testament Science specialist in the first place. He is a professor of philosophy and apologetics at Liberty University, Lynchburg, Virginia. A philosophical orientation is clearly evident in his work. This approach forms a substantial part of Habermas' approach for understanding the resurrection, which makes it important to describe how he goes about on this hermeneutical endeavour.

After carefully reading through several of his books and articles, it became quite clear that the normal methodological tools which New Testament scholars employ, are not necessarily on the foreground in Habermas' approach. Instead of him "choosing" current exegetical tools i.e. the "Third Quest" as NT Wright does, Habermas analyzes all the different approaches as an apologist and makes general conclusions.

One must have respect for Habermas' substantial knowledge of resurrection literature.<sup>11</sup> Even Dale Allison refers to Habermas' knowledge of the idiosyncratic hypotheses' related to the resurrection (Allison 2005:213n).

Habermas describes his methodology as follows: "My methodology .. (is - FM) .. to use only those data that are recognized as historical by virtually all scholars, including sceptics" (Habermas 2004:44-7). It will be useful to keep in mind how and why Habermas has decided on this kind of work ethic. It all goes back to his PhD study at Michigan State University (a secular institution), where he was told

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<sup>11</sup> See Habermas' recent article in which he discusses developments since 1975: Habermas, G.R. 2005. *Resurrection Research from 1975 to the Present: What are Critical Scholars Saying?* Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus, 3.2 (2005), pp. 135-153

specifically that he could not use the New Testament as evidence, unless the individual passages could be affirmed by ordinary critical standards, apart from faith. This led Habermas to develop what he now calls the "minimal facts" (Ibid). Allison indicates that Habermas can be described as an apologist. He explains further "Apologists, of whom Gary Habermas is a good representative, strive vigorously .. to verify their faith, and they convince themselves that robust probability is indeed on their side" (Allison 2005:339).

What follows then, is not pure New Testament Science, based primarily on exegetical methodology, but Habermas' preferred way of articulating his own hermeneutical approach. This might be what he had in mind with his debate with the atheist Anthony Flew when he states, "this method helped us to keep from talking past one another. Further, it more clearly isolated a conclusion to which we regularly returned: our presuppositions and prior worldview commitments play a large role in our intellectual commitments" (Habermas 2005:89).<sup>12</sup>

Habermas is a staunch opponent of what he calls Naturalistic Science. The main problem here, he holds, is the complete exclusion from a personal God who can intervene in history.

Habermas states, "Frequently following and updating David Hume's influential essay 'Of Miracles,' recent philosophical scepticism often focuses on the relationship between miracle-claims and the laws of nature. Some scholars question whether empirical evidence exists for such claims" (1987:15).<sup>13</sup>

Habermas notes five major problems that generally apply to these sceptical doubts:

- (1) "First, most of these philosophical objections are attempts to mount up the data against miracles in an a priori manner (that is, before or in

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<sup>12</sup> This debate occurred twenty years after their first such debate. See: Habermas, G.R. in Ankerberg, J.F. (ed) 2005. *Resurrected? An Atheist and Theist Dialogue – Gary R Habermas and Antony GN Flew*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. New York. p 89.

<sup>13</sup> This statement goes back to the first debate between Habermas and Flew. See: Habermas, G.R. in Miethe, T.L. (ed) 1987. *Did Jesus Rise from the Dead? The Resurrection debate – Gary Habermas and Anthony Flew*. Harper & Row Publishers. San Francisco. p 15.

spite of the factual evidence) so that no facts could actually establish their occurrence .. the statement that we must always assume a naturalistic explanation is .. an a priori assumption against miracles” (1987:16). Against this Habermas states that “We cannot disallow miracles by utilizing faulty definitions, by assuming the evidence needed to prove one’s view, or by arguing in a circular fashion” (Ibid). Stephen T. Davies concurs when he states, “surely Habermas is right that a priori reasoning, understood in this sense, is something to be avoided. We should base our conclusions on the evidence available to us ..” (Davies 1993:171).<sup>14</sup>

- (2) “Second .. these philosophical objections are also mistaken in not allowing for the real possibility of external intervention in nature .. the issue of the supernatural” (Habermas 1987:17). Habermas’ point is that “because the supernatural is at least possible, any claimed evidence for such an event must at least be seriously considered, for if there is even possible evidence for a supernatural act it would make a strong claim to being evidence that is superior to our current evidence regarding the laws of nature” (Ibid).
- (3) “Third, these philosophical objections generally treat the laws of nature in an almost Newtonian sense as the final word on what may occur”(1987:19). Against this position Habermas states “these laws should not be utilized as any sort of barrier to the occurrence of miracles” (Ibid).
- (4) “Fourth .. strict empiricism ignores both the empirical evidence for miracles and the fact that the strict forms of verificational standards are themselves nonverifiable.” Habermas’ response to this is that “Miracles cannot be ruled out by this method because methodology rules itself out in the process” (1987:19).

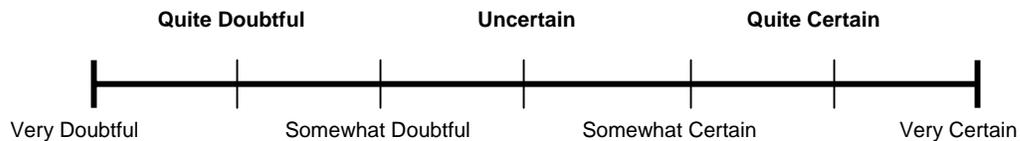
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<sup>14</sup> Davies however also gives criticism as it relates to Habermas’ use of historical facts. See: Davies, S.T. 1993. *Risen Indeed - Making Sense of the Resurrection*. SPCK. Eerdmans Publishing Co. Grand Rapids, Michigan. p 171.

- (5) “Fifth .. the philosophical approach mentioned here frequently ignores the strong historical evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus” (1987:19). Habermas states that “Theists are often requested to provide such evidence; it should not be ignored or ruled out a priori when it is given” (Ibid).

In his book with Mike Licona *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, it is stated, “When it comes to history, we can only speak of probability, not 100 percent certainty. However, do not be discouraged that in historical terms Jesus’ resurrection cannot be established with absolute certainty” (Habermas *et al* 2004:31). This is a noteworthy statement, which seems to indicate that “absolute certainty” goes beyond the first reference to “probability”. Habermas uses a “line graph” with a full spectrum of historical certainties (Table 1):

**Table 1: Habermas line graph**



(2004:31)

It seems that Habermas qualifies his earlier statement of “absolute certainty” after discussing the above graph by using the phrase “reasonable historical certainty” which, accordingly fits somewhere between “somewhat certain” and “very certain” (2004:32).

For Habermas, “Twelftree sets the standard for belief that something was really said or truly happened at the point when the reason for accepting it significantly outweighs the reasons for rejecting it. If there are no reasonable opposing theories, a finding of historicity is the default position” (Ibid).

Habermas and Licona make an important distinction at this point by stating “The Christian has the Holy Spirit who testifies to her that Christianity is true and that she belongs to God. The historical certainty we have of Jesus’ resurrection only reinforces that God’s Spirit has indeed spoken to us” (2004:33).<sup>15</sup>

It was indicated in the beginning, that Habermas is a philosopher and not a New Testament scholar in the first place. It is therefore not surprising that no literature could be found which indicates where Habermas positions himself in terms of New Testament methodologies.<sup>16</sup> He prefers to work with “those data that are recognized as historical by virtually all scholars, including sceptics” (2004:89). It is surmised that Habermas comes close to NT Wright’s line in terms of the Third Quest. Habermas’ rejection of naturalistic approaches, and the mention of the Third Quest which has dominated over the past twenty years or so, might give some indication in this regard (2001:182).<sup>17</sup>

### 2.3.1 Habermas’ view of Scripture

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<sup>15</sup> In his debate with Flew, Habermas also states that “.. there’s a point at which you’ve got to say, either, ‘I do’ or ‘I don’t’ exercise faith. The point at which one says, ‘I do’ is what Christianity is all about. It’s certainly more than the facts alone ..” (2005:73).

<sup>16</sup> Personal correspondence with Mike Licona indicates that Habermas does associate with critical realism and the Third Quest (23/10/2006).

<sup>17</sup> Three reasons may be given for this statement:

- In this regard Habermas has an interesting article which refutes naturalistic approaches to the resurrection. The Third Quest (although varied) is clearly held as opposing these premises. See: Habermas, G.R. 2001. The Late Twentieth-Century resurgence of Naturalistic Responses to Jesus’ Resurrection. TRINJ, Vol 22 no 2. p 182
- In this same context, Habermas quotes Raymond Brown who states that “The criticism of today does not follow the paths taken by the criticism of the past. No longer respectable are the crude theories ... Occasionally some new mutation of the ‘plot’ approach will briefly capture the public fancy, but serious scholars pay little attention to these fictional reconstructions” (2004:183). Habermas’ response to this statement is telling. He says “This aspect of recent thought is actually quite amazing” (Ibid).
- But perhaps the best indication of Habermas’ comfort with the Third Quest is his book *The Historical Jesus. Evidence for the life of Christ* (1996), in which he clearly intends to establish hard historical facts in his analysis of the early church period.

Habermas comes from a tradition that firmly believes that the Bible is infallible. That would further entail that it is inspired by the Holy Spirit and is normative for all of life. In this regard Habermas states: “As pointed out long ago by Benjamin B. Warfield, the evidence for inspiration is unrefuted, and claimed discrepancies in Scripture should only be viewed as difficulties to be addressed and answered (2002).<sup>18</sup>

In conclusion, it becomes clear that Habermas works with a historical method, which allows for the possibility of miracles. In this way, he distances himself from classical liberal theology. However, in his apologetics for the resurrection, he works with those facts, which virtually all scholars, including sceptics accept. With the little he then has, he still believes that he builds a solid case for a historical, bodily resurrection.

### **3.3 Lüdemann**

#### **3.3.1 Summary**

Lüdemann is probably one of the most controversial New Testament scholars at present. His book *The Resurrection of Jesus, History, Experience, Theology*, which was published in 1995 created significant theological debate all over the world.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> This comes from the electronic article: Habermas, G. 2002. *Jesus and the Inspiration of Scripture*. *Areopagus Journal*. January. Electronic copy. <http://www.garyhabermas.com> (16/10/2006).

<sup>19</sup> Lüdemann’s book created a significant debate, with supporters and opposers starting in Germany, and then moving over to Europe and the United States. It even landed in South Africa where most of the responses were negative. One positive review however came from Pieter J.J. Botha, now part of the South African version of the *Jesus Seminar* called the *New Reformation*. Botha states that “This study is highly commended and recommended: it is timely, relevant and remarkably positive” (Botha, P.J.J. 1996. *What really happened to Jesus: a historical approach to the resurrection*. *Review*. R & T, Vol 3/1. University of South Africa. p 308).

In research that was done by the writer at the Evangelische Universität, Wien, as well as the Ludwig Maximilian Evangelische Universität in Munich, several books were found in which scholars go into public debate with Lüdemann. Here follow some of them:

(a) Wermke, M. (Hg.) 1999. *Tod und Auferstehung Jesu Christi. Theologische und religionspädagogische Annäherungen*. RPI. Rehburg-Loccum.

In this book he goes about applying what some would call the *classical* liberal historical-critical approach to assess the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus in the New Testament.

In his research he comes to the conclusion that 1 Cor 15:1-11 represents the earliest historical data from the church as it relates to Peter and Paul's "visions" of the risen Jesus. He accepts only their experiences, and believes that all the others are based on these two.

Lüdemann strongly rejects the empty tomb, starting in 1 Cor 15:4, and then working through the Gospels to confirm this theory. He further regards the women's testimony as later reductions.

He then goes on to apply depth psychology and related instruments to analyse both Peter and Paul's apparent psychological orientation before and after their "visionary" experiences. From this, he concludes that their "visions" were hallucinations, which exclude any possibility of Jesus really appearing to them in bodily form.

As for the other "witnesses" to the resurrection, Lüdemann believes that "mass psychology" can be used to explain what occurred.

Lüdemann closes the book with a section on whether one can remain a Christian after all the "historical facts" which he uncovered. To this he answers with great passion "Yes!"

In the final section he refers to Wilhelm Herrmann (Both Rudolph Bultmann and Karl Barth's teacher) and shows his appreciation to him in helping him maintain some form of faith. One quotation he makes is worth mentioning:

"Indeed, I can conceive a man getting a most vivid impression of Jesus' power, just when he sees that this historical appearance

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(b) Lüdemann, G. & Wischnath, R. 1998. *Der disput in Furstenwalde Streit um die Auferstehung. Eine Dokumentation Wichern.* Wichern-Verl. Berlin.

(c) Boer, I. Lüdemann, G. Verweyen, H. *et al* 1999. *Osterglaube ohne Auferstehung? Diskussion mit Gerd Lüdemann.* Herder. Basel.

(d) Bommarius, A. (Hrsg.) 1995. *Fand die Auferstehung wirklich statt?* Parerga Verlag. Dusseldorf, Bonn.

(e) Thiede, C.P. & Lüdemann, G. 2001. *Die Auferstehung Jesu – Fiktion oder Wirklichkeit? Ein Streitgespräch.* Drunnen Verlag. Basel.

has been swathed in a thick mist of legends, and that, nevertheless, the glory of the inner life breaks through all these veils, a man who thinks he sees this has, at any rate, a firmer ground for his faith than another who *determines* to believe in the resurrection of Jesus in order that he may have his feet planted on a fact that overcomes the world” (Lüdemann 1995:253,706n).

He then builds a faith around his view of the historical Jesus, which shows us an ethical way to live in this world. This however excludes even the remotest possibility of a resurrection and life after death.

It is quite interesting to note, that Lüdemann has since changed his view and renounced the Christian faith all together. Perhaps an excerpt from his famous “*A Letter to Jesus*” from his 1999 book *The Great Deception*, articulates his new position adequately:

In addressing Jesus Lüdemann states: “Despite profound experiences with your God ... your hopes for the future died. They clashed with brutal reality .. And had not your followers .. proclaimed belief in your resurrection, all your words and deeds would have been blown away like leaves by the wind ... But you did not return, because your resurrection did not take place, but was only a pious wish. That is certain, because your body rotted in the tomb – that is, if it was put in a tomb at all and was not devoured by vultures and jackals ... No authentic religion can be built on projections, wishes and visions, not even if it appears in such a powerful form as that of the Christian church, which has even exalted you to be the Lord of the worlds and coming judge. But you are not the Lord of the worlds, as your followers declared you to be on the basis of your resurrection, nor did you want to be ... You deceived yourself, and your message has been falsified by your supporters for their own advantage, contrary to the historical

truth. Your teaching was a mistake, since the messianic kingdom did not materialize” (1999:2-4).

### 3.3.2 Hermeneutical presuppositions

Lüdemann has certainly become one of the most provocative New Testament scholars to study. It is no understatement to recognize at least three theological phases in his academic career. So for instance:

- (1) In 1984, he still held to the view that the Christian God exists and that Jesus was raised from the dead with a spiritual *body*;<sup>20</sup>
- (2) In 1994, he declared that God did not raise Jesus from the dead;
- (3) In 1999 he “said goodbye to Christianity with a ‘Letter to Jesus’ (2002:88). In 2002 he states, “I have come to the conclusion that my previous faith, derived as it was from the biblical message, has become impossible” (Ibid).

Maybe a good starting point here is Lüdemann’s analysis of Maurice Goguel which states “most of those who have occupied themselves with the resurrection of Jesus have unconsciously had a preconceived notion or prejudice which often cannot be backed up historically” (1995:5). Lüdemann affirms this and goes on to say that “.. in what follows it will also be important time and again to become aware of one’s own presuppositions and to ask critically behind them” (Ibid).

This affirmation of Lüdemann makes one think of Albert Schweitzer’s famous statement that Historical Jesus Research are determined by the person who is doing the research.<sup>21</sup> Possibly in line with this, Lüdemann quotes Karl Jaspers who indicates “Anyone who is in final possession of the truth can no longer talk

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<sup>20</sup> In 1984 Lüdemann was of the opinion that “There is a consensus in research that according to 1 Corinthians 15, all Christians will be given a resurrectional body after the parousia and that the transformation results is a *soma pneumatikon*, which is contrasted with the earthly body, the *soma psychikon*” (1984:241-2).

<sup>21</sup> With regards to Andries van Aarde’s book “*Fatherless in Galilee*,” Jurie le Roux quotes from Albert Schweitzer’s book *The quest of the historical Jesus*. Le Roux states: “Schweitzer was reg. Wie hom met die historiese Jesus besighou, sê eintlik meer van homself of haarself as van die historiese Jesus. En hierin is die aantreklikheid en uitdaging van Van Aarde se boek oor die historiese Jesus geleë” (Le Roux, J.H. 2002. *Andries van Aarde se Vaderlose Jesus*. HTS 58(1). Universiteit van Pretoria. p 97).

properly with others – he breaks off real communication in favour of the content of his belief” (1995:8).

However, Lüdemann states quite early “the present book is to be understood in the way on which Gerhard Marcel Martin understands his work on the Gospel of Thomas” (1995:6). Martin writes: “ ‘I think that it is good, for once, for people who feel such a close bond with the Christian tradition that they are almost imprisoned in it and no longer know the real meaning of what has been handed down, for once to be shown their own tradition as if it were an alien one” (Ibid).

J.C.O’Neill is probably right when he states that “Lüdemann works from the assumption that the historian cannot give a supernatural explanation of any historical event; it would be immoral. The work of Kant has made any such realism philosophically untenable. All divine forces must be imminent, as F.C. Bauer insisted” (O’Neill 1996:154).

Lüdemann states, “The term ‘experience’ relates to the subjective side of the disciples ... which are to be distinguished from theology. In my view this division already presupposes a partial result, since *it is assumed (and in my view this cannot really be disputed) that at the beginning we do not have the statement ‘God has raised Jesus from the dead’, but a particular experience of this which later found expression in a theological statement like the one mentioned*” (Lüdemann 1995:20, 261, 195n). This makes it clear, that Lüdemann’s point of departure is an *a priori* rejection of the resurrection.

Lüdemann borrows much from Walter Bauer<sup>22</sup>, in terms of his methodology. After quoting Bauer in his *Introduction of Heretics, The Other Side of Early Christianity*, Lüdemann makes the following statements: “Bauer’s method is wholly rooted in historicism ... (he - FM) is similarly the representative of a profane church

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<sup>22</sup> Göttingen patriotic and New Testament scholar who wrote *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (as described by Lüdemann in *Heretics, The Other Side of Early Christianity*, p 9-10).

historiography, the topicality and fruitfulness I shall be going on to demonstrate. The fact that I have taken over his approach does not mean that I always agree with the individual results of his work” (1996:10-1). Lüdemann then explains some of his differences with Bauer. But, and that might be the key here, on the same page Lüdemann affirms that he has taken over Bauer’s approach, which is “wholly rooted in historicism” (1996:10).

In line with this statement Lüdemann states in his book *The Resurrection of Jesus, History, Experience, Theology* that “the investigation which follows will look in a purely historical and empirical way at the historical context .. taking into account the requirement of David Friedrich Strauss to express myself without ambiguity and reserve, leaving all caution aside” (1995:14-5).

Countless examples of a kind of historicism can be detected in Lüdemann’s work. One possible example might be from his book *The Great Deception*, when he makes the following statement: “.. if already in the New Testament the majority of sayings and actions of Jesus were put into his mouth .. now it is time to identify the most important of those indisputably inauthentic sayings and actions of Jesus in a form which can be generally understood and at the same time make a selection from the few surviving authentic sayings and actions of Jesus on which there is a consensus” (1999:xxiii). Lüdemann’s application of this position can be illustrated by his handling of Mark 4:35-41 where Jesus stills the storm. Lüdemann concludes that “The modern picture of the world has no room for this so called nature miracle, and one cannot change one’s picture of the world at will ... Jesus did not still the storm, even if the early Christians dreamed that he had and made it into a historical event” (1999:70-1).

Lüdemann provides us with a list of the “History of Religions School” of Göttingen. This group centred around A. Eichhorn, W. Wrede, H. Hackmann, A. Rahlfs, J. Weiss, W. Bousset, E. Troeltsch and W Heitmüller. Lüdemann states that they have an “uncompromising dedication to the study of early Christian texts from a strictly historical perspective, subject to no dogmatic compulsions ..”

(2002:88). Lüdemann then states that “I see myself as in the tradition of this school and practise a strictly historical exegesis of the New Testament in the framework of the religions of the Hellenistic period” (Ibid).

To sum up Lüdemann’s hermeneutical position, his closing paragraph in *A letter to Jesus*, from his book *The Great Deception*, is essential. He states “the Enlightenment, which is grounded in reason, with all its criticism of claims to revelation and privileged knowledge of every kind, remains a firm ingredient of the modern world. Only enlightenment makes possible a constructive dialogue between the members of the different nationalities and cultures, and it alone would be in a position in the coming millennium to make peace between people of the most different ideologies and religions” (1999:9).<sup>23</sup>

Heinz-Dieter Knigge indicates how Lüdemann’s vision hypothesis (of which the hallucination theory is his articulation thereof - FM) is actually intrinsically part of Classical Liberal German theology, which of course is grounded in complete rationalism” (Knigge 1997:28). Knigge states that “Auch für die Visionshypothese ließe sich Entsprechendes zeigen – die wurde bereits 1835/36 von David Friedrich Strauß in ‘Das Leben Jesu kritisch bearbeitet’ aufgestellt” (Ibid). Lüdemann himself asserts in his book *The Unholy in Holy Scripture* that “Theology must again link up with the great historical, philological and philosophical achievements of liberal theology” (Lüdemann 1997:135).

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<sup>23</sup> During Lüdemann’s interview with the *Evangelische Kommentare*, the question was asked: “Here among other things the tension between religion and science, myth and rationality becomes clear. You resolve this tension almost completely in favour of rationality. But in the course of the discussion on postmodernity it has proved how abidingly relevant myths are for us human beings. Doesn’t your exegesis neglect this insight?” On this Lüdemann’s reply was “That is a charge which is frequently levelled at me, but I don’t find it relevant. Certainly I make use of historical criticism. Who would claim that that is unnecessary? However, I would only be a rationalist if I explained the Easter faith, intellectually ... But through my historical work I come to put a strong emphasis on the emotional side of the origin of the Easter faith ... However, I am convinced that the tomb was full and that Jesus’ body decayed. For human beings die, and must come to terms with certain realities. Here it is simply a matter of a sober contemplation which talks honestly about certain things ... But that is far from being rationalism” (Lüdemann, G. 1997. *The Unholy in Holy Scripture*. The Dark side of the Bible. SCM Press. London. xvii.)

Knigge goes on to say that “Ich vermute deshalb, daß es nicht ganz unfair ist, von einem pragmatischen Fundamentalismus bei Lüdemann zu reden” (Knigge 1997:28).

Quite a number of statements in Lüdemann’s book *The Resurrection of Jesus, History, Experience, Theology* give one the impression of how Lüdemann uses his historical method. Here are some of them: “investigate the historical truth – honestly and regardless of other factors” (1995:vi); “autonomous historical reason” (1995:13); “purely historical and empirical way” (1995:14-5) and “ruthlessly honest quest for truth” (1995:19).

One notable aspect of Lüdemann’s methodology is that he tries to use depth psychology in combination with the historical critical method of exegesis. He himself states “any considerations from depth psychology that are advanced must be capable of demonstration from the text. (Where that happens, in each instance they will be presented in direct association with the exegesis and without any great theoretical apparatus)” (1995:7). This approach, which Lüdemann employs, has created significant negative critique.<sup>24</sup>

To conclude: Lüdemann’s recent remarks about historical criticism are thought provoking. He states “Theology becomes a valid academic discipline insofar as it employs the historical-critical method's three presuppositions of causality, the potential validity of analogies, and the reciprocal relationship between historical phenomena” (2005:35).

### 3.3.2.1 Lüdemann’s view of Scripture

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<sup>24</sup> Wilhelm Egger gives a summary of how depth psychology works: The “biblical texts are viewed in their function as auxiliary forces in a process of spiritual maturation, a function which dreams and fairy tales, etc. can also exist. Thus, the biblical texts serve as a kind of mirror in which the reader can make out the stages of the process of human maturation.” Quoting Kassel, Egger states further that “ ‘.. In the imagination a biblical saying is transposed into an I-statement’.” Egger, W. (ed) Boers, H. 1996. *How to Read the New Testament. An Introduction to Linguistic and Historical-Critical Methodology*. Hendrickson Publishers. Peabody, Massachusetts. p 216.

About a year after Lüdemann's now famous book *The Resurrection of Jesus, History, Experience, Theology*, he authored *Heretics, the other side of Early Christianity*. With regards to the aforementioned he remarks that "The sometimes vigorous controversies in the church and theology in public over my book on the resurrection published last year are the internal context in which I am now presenting this book" (Lüdemann: 1996:xv). He then continues that " .. it seemed necessary in the interest both of historical truth and of Christianity itself to make a critical examination of another pillar of church and theology, namely holy scripture and its authority" (Ibid). It is within this context that Lüdemann's conclusions include the following, relating to his view of Scripture:

- (1) "The view of the Bible as the Word of God or as holy Scripture belongs to a past time. Today it hinders understanding. The Bible is the word of human beings" (1996:219).
- (2) ".. holy scripture is the word of man (and not the word of God) .. It is the collection of the victorious party, which following a well-tried recipe, excluded and suppressed the documents of the groups that it had overcome" (1996:xvi).
- (3) Lüdemann quotes Lessing in saying that "the appeal to the writings of the New Testament as intrinsically binding on the faith is a dogma of the Catholic church. From this fact ... anyone may draw the conclusion he thinks to be good and right" (1996:xv).<sup>25</sup>

It is clear that J.S. Semler and G.E. Lessing, as indicated by Lüdemann himself greatly influenced his understanding of Scripture. In this regard he states that ".. it is impossible to overlook the historical distance between every possible theology today and the primitive Christian period .. the gulf between .. history and proclamation .. makes it impossible for us to continue to offer a serious defence of the inspiration of the writings of the New Testament or even to identify Word of

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<sup>25</sup> Clinton Bennett quotes Lessing as saying that "if no historical truth can be demonstrated, then nothing can be demonstrated by means of historical truths ... to demand of me that I should form all my metaphysical and moral ideas accordingly ... is the broad, ugly ditch which I cannot get across ... If anyone can help me to cross it, let him do it. I beg him, I adjure him" (Bennett, C. 2001. *In Search of Jesus. Insider and Outsider Images*. Continuum. London & New York. p 100 [Lessing, G.E. 1956:53-5])

God and holy scriptures” (1996:2). Lüdemann’s view of history then, to a large extent makes it impossible to call the Bible the *Word of God*, not even the *Word of God in human language*. For Lüdemann then, the Biblical text is exactly the same as any other ancient text with no higher authority whatsoever.

Lüdemann then disassociates him from the following approaches:

- (1) He “stands apart from a Word of God theology according to which ‘an authoritative revelation which can be ascertained methodologically provides an objective basis for the presentation of Christian teaching’ ..” (1996:3)
- (2) He “stands apart from a kerygmatic theology according to which theology is essentially the exegesis of scripture ..” (Ibid).
- (3) He “stands apart from the trend in scholarship which seeks to combine historical-critical work with a salvation-historical view” (Ibid).

In Lüdemann’s conclusion of the *Origin of the New Testament Canon* section in *Heretics*, he states that “Historical consideration of the origin of the New Testament makes the walls of church and theology, in so far as they are grounded in the New Testament as a Word of God, collapse like a house of cards” (1996:206).

On the question “Do you yourself still take your stand on Scripture .. ?” Lüdemann replied “No – for reasons of conscience .. I (cannot - FM) take my stand on scripture, since the Bible is not the Word of God but a work of the catholic church of the second century” (1997:xxiii).

A final statement to underscore Lüdemann’s focus on historical criticism entails: “Nothing is so paralysing for historical criticism than seeking the solution of historical problems outside it or even in a divine intervention. The natural methodological principle must be to infer the unknown primarily from the known. In other words, it is important to begin with completely clear facts and from there to argue back to what is less certain” (1996:7-8).

From the above discussion it becomes quite clear that Lüdemann works with a very sharp historical methodology. He affirms that the Göttingen school and other related scholars with the same rigorous historical approach have influenced him greatly. It is also quite clear that Lüdemann reveals a rationalism which excludes the possibility of a transcendent God, intervening in history. The result is that the Bible becomes only the words of men, excluding any metaphysical element.

### **3.4 Wedderburn**

#### **3.4.1 Summary**

A.J.M (Sandy) Wedderburn's major work on the resurrection *Beyond Resurrection* was published in 1999. In this volume he uses the historical-critical method in assessing the New Testament evidence for Jesus' resurrection.

His results lead him to state that the New Testament evidence is so confusing that this apparent disunity should be universally accepted. Accordingly then, for Wedderburn the best option in the light of his analysis is to become a "reverent agnostic."<sup>26</sup> This position however excludes the kind of historical criticism which ends up in a dogmatism. Apparently Wedderburn has Gerd Lüdemann in mind here.

A further significant aspect of this work is that Wedderburn admits that he moves beyond what the writers of the New Testament had intended. Accordingly, he ends up deconstructing the resurrection in such a way that even the slightest chance of life beyond the grave is excluded. It is then obvious that the bodily resurrection of Jesus is rejected.

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<sup>26</sup> Probably close to this position is Peter de Mey's understanding of Rudolf Pesch, Edward Schillebeeck and Hansjürgen Verweyen when he states that they "... accept the negative conclusion ... of the New Testament accounts of the empty tomb and the appearances .. that they are not able to demonstrate the truth of the resurrection. They place this kind of reasoning by concentrating on Jesus' earthly life and message" (De Mey 1998:261-2). See also Michael Martin who states that "I conclude that the available evidence should lead a rational person to disbelieve the claim that Jesus was resurrected from the dead .. Consequently, there are good reasons to reject one of fundamental doctrines of Orthodox Christianity" (Martin 1991:96-7).

In Wedderburn's re-interpretation of the resurrection, he goes on in stating that nothing new is added in the post- Easter faith that is not already known in the pre-Easter faith.<sup>27</sup> Wedderburn will however agree that something mysterious did happen to the disciples, but leaves the door open for a psychological explanation to some extent.

In the remainder of the book Wedderburn deals with the implications of his findings. He comes to a re-interpretation of the Christian God and although he somehow still wants to believe in a personal God, this utterly unknowable mysterious God, is not omnipotent. Accordingly, this God can be associated with process theology and panentheism.

Wedderburn ends up still believing in Jesus, but not a triumphant Son of God who is raised bodily from the dead. Instead, finding his "que" with Paul and John, a "realized eschatology" helps him to believe in a resurrection which is probably exclusively for the here and now.<sup>28</sup>

In conclusion, two excerpts of what Wedderburn describes as a "vulnerable faith" can be mentioned:

- (1) "I can see no other way for Christians to go once they see how mysteriously inscrutable this founding event of the Christian church really was, once they see that intellectually a form of agnosticism, of

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<sup>27</sup> This view of Wedderburn is probably in line with De Jonge who states that "The only possible conclusion is that the movement after Jesus' death was the continuation of that which had begun before it in response to his person, preaching and actions" (De Jonge 2002:49). In Wedderburn's eyes, De Jonge is however probably too absolutistic when he states that ".. it can be supported on solid grounds" (Ibid). Later De Jonge states that ".. the history of the church did not begin with the appearances or the discovery of the empty tomb, but with the historical Jesus himself .." (2002:51).

<sup>28</sup> The following excerpt of the discussion with Wedderburn in July 2006 is relevant here:

Mulder: "If you would have to explain to your own child in two three minutes, what you were trying to say in your book *Beyond Resurrection*, what were you trying to establish?"

Wedderburn: I think I would say that one can't prove anything about either Jesus after life .. And it is therefore better to concentrate on the present, to pick up .. in the fourth gospel about the resurrection which is now. You have the two parts, the one resurrection which is about after death which is the more traditional view. But we also have in Paul and in John the idea that resurrection is now, and that experience is in a form of death .." (Wedderburn, A.J.M 2006. *Interview with Mulder, F.* Ludwig Maximilian Universität, Munchen. 06 July 2006).

suspension of judgement, is the only adequate response to the nature of the evidence” (Wedderburn 1999:221).

- (2) “those of Jesus’ followers .. whose lives most closely mirror the way of life of Christ would be left affected by this shift in perspective, for they have found the meaning of the worth of their living in a costly service of God and of others here in this suffering world, and look not for triumphalist manifestations of divine power either in this world or in another” (Ibid).

### 3.4.2 Hermeneutical presuppositions

As will be evident in this analysis, Wedderburn does not give us a clear and systemised analysis of his hermeneutical methodology. But, after carefully reading and re-reading his book *Beyond Resurrection* several statements can be quoted to indicate in which direction he thinks. This discussion might be a bit longer as the other scholars, but is due to the fact that Wedderburn’s position in this regard, is more difficult to define.

Wedderburn states that “If theology and faith really need history, then theology and faith need to take history on its own terms: they need to listen to historians and to historical arguments. They need to cut their coat according to their cloth ... they need to tailor their assertions in such a way as to let history be history” (Wedderburn 1999:7) In the same context Wedderburn states that “the claim to objective historical investigation is a spurious one” (Ibid).

Wedderburn states however, that he rejects what one can possibly call “absolutistic” propositional approaches where “The argument takes on a ‘Heads I win, tails you lose’ character – whatever the evidence, one way or other, it is all pressed into the service of the thesis that is to be proved” (1999:8). Wedderburn reacts strongly and states that “This game has also been rigged!” (Ibid).

### 3.4.2.1 A different sort of “history” and “historicity”?

Wedderburn quotes Pannenberg who indicates that “The traditions of Jesus’ resurrection would be subject to evaluation as unhistorical if:

- (a) the Easter traditions were ... *literarily secondary constructions* in analogy to common comparative religious models not only in detail, but also in their kernel,
- (b) the Easter *appearances* were to correspond *completely* to the model of self-produced *hallucinations*,
- (c) the tradition of the *empty grave* of Jesus were to be evaluated as a *late legend*” (Wedderburn 1999:18)

To this Wedderburn replies that “Whether all this can realistically ... be claimed ... is another matter” (Ibid).

Wedderburn makes a profound statement when he states that “It may be that, if historically true, the resurrection of Jesus would cause us to revise our views of history, but first there is that hurdle of ‘if historically true’” (1999:19). The word “if” before “historically” have obviously been put there on purpose.

### 3.4.2.2 Re-enter the question of history

Wedderburn pleads for a thorough historical investigation of the New Testament evidence for the resurrection. After his endeavour on that path he states that “The logical conclusion of such an investigation ([which includes his understanding of – FM] historical criticism .. radical questioning .. causal explanations .. as Ernst Troeltsch indicates) seems therefore to be, apparently, a regrettable and thoroughly unsatisfactory ‘Don’t know’, a historical agnosticism that seems to undermine any profession of faith, unless one somehow manages to anchor it independently of any historical occurrences” (Wedderburn 1999:96-7). From this statement it seems that Wedderburn comes to the conclusion that

faith and history are sharply opposed to one another.<sup>29</sup>

The above said, Wedderburn makes the following notable point: “If we were to level one criticism at Gerd Lüdemann’s study it would be this: he displays in his thoroughgoing historical criticism a dogmatism that is not in keeping with the agnosticism which the nature of the evidence demands” (1999:97).

In line with his analysis of Lüdemann, Wedderburn states that “As far as the resurrection of Jesus itself is concerned, a decisive historical judgement is to my mind epistemologically improper and impossible; a ‘reverent agnosticism’, as Robert Morgan rather deprecatingly calls it, is not only a ‘safe policy’, but also the surest and the most soberly scientific and scholarly” (1999:97-8).

Wedderburn makes an interesting statement when he implies that “there is a sense in which, when a writer writes and publishes a work, that piece of writing is launched on a course, a history, which the writer can no longer control or predict, as it is read and interpreted by successive generations of readers who come

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<sup>29</sup> The following excerpt from the interview with Wedderburn is relevant as it relates to classical liberal theology:

Mulder: “What will your answer be to those who argue that your book *Beyond Resurrection* shows significant similarities with 19th century liberal theology?”

Wedderburn: Mm, certainly the lines were often characterized by rather far fetched naturalistic explanations for phenomena from Reimarus on, and that is certainly not a line which I want to follow.

Mulder: But if you look at all the times you quote D.F. Strauss and other guys who are of that school, and the way some of the arguments are structured, some have critiqued your book and said it is almost as if some of the statements that you make are not tentative, cautious, it’s almost in a fixed, absolutistic way some of the arguments are portrayed. I’m perhaps too general when I say that, one should be careful to say it like that.

Wedderburn: What I think .. a Durham college e-mailed me .. a church historian said that I was in complete denial (about the resurrection?) and I said in reply that he misses the point entirely .. that one shouldn’t know, in other words that one could be agnostic, in distinction then of Lüdemann who very categorically states that things didn’t happen the way they wanted to explain it.

Mulder: Yes, I read that in his book.  
But to get to that agnostic approach, could it be correct in some instances, your first section, that the way you structure them, that the arguments that lead to this hypothesis that you state, some of them the way you argue them, the way it is formulated, in some instances it could be positivistic the way you handle the historical critical approach, a certain lens, the way you ?

Wedderburn: It is inevitable ..” (Wedderburn, A.J.M. 2006. *Interview with Mulder, F. Ludwig Maximilian Universität, München*. 06 July 2006).

under its influence” (1999:272).<sup>30</sup>

### 3.4.2.3 Wedderburn’s view of Scripture

Wedderburn says it quite a few times that he wants to move beyond what the New Testament writers meant with the texts they left us. He states that “It will be clear .. that I do not regard the biblical writers as having said the last word .. and that presupposes certain assumptions about the nature of the revelation of truth through the documents of the New Testament, if indeed one wants to use the perilous term ‘revelation’ at all” (Wedderburn 1999:106).

As Wedderburn referred to the word “revelation”, what follows relates to how he understands Scripture. He states that “the documents of the New Testament .. are human products, human responses to what human beings perceived to be divine action and movement in historical events in which they had themselves participated or of which they had heard of others. They were human attempts to respond adequately to what they had seen and heard and experienced. As human, and therefore fallible attempts they should not be regarded as the only possible adequate responses, even for their own day and age, let alone for later periods” (1999:107).<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Wedderburn’s footnote here is also interesting. He states that “Another popular technical term today is *Wirkungsgeschichte*, sometimes translated ‘history of influence’ .. in which an account is given of the way in which a text, large or small, has been understood, applied and appropriated by its readers down the centuries.”

<sup>31</sup> The discussion with Wedderburn as it relates to the Bible as the Word of God:

Mulder: “Professor, if you can try to sum up your view of Scripture in a paragraph or two, what would your statements be?”

Wedderburn: It’s the only access we have to the Christian faith and context, and for that reason Scripture is indispensable. But on the other hand, they’re only temporary limited signposts that indicate how people saw it then.

Mulder: How would you answer a person who is more of the traditional line who says the Bible is the Word of God? Would you use different words? I think of three possibilities, very general, some conservative people will say it is the Word of God, then you would find people who say it is the Word of God in human language, and some people might say it is the words of men and the testimony about things of God or whatever. There are roughly three different approaches perhaps, I’m not sure whether you agree on that?

Wedderburn: Well the first point I would like to make, a negative point, and if one say it is the word of God .. a metaphor which then one would take it with a pinch of salt.

“We can and should learn from these attempts to express Christian faith ..” (1999:108) From this it is clear that for Wedderburn, the New Testament writers probably gave the following generations, including us, nothing which is decisive.

Relating to the Philosophy of Language, Wedderburn wants to take seriously “.. those literary critics who seem to be saying that meaning of a text is in the eye of the reader .. there is a sense in which the text does indeed say that to me, if reading it, interacting with it, has led me to believe this. For according to some extremer version of ‘reader-response criticism’, ‘the meaning’ of a text is what a reader makes of it” (1999:109).

Wedderburn’s quotes from S. Brown’s ‘Reader Response’, that “If meaning is actually generated by the experience of reading, rather than residing “in” the text, then we must accept a Copernican revolution in interpretative theory” (Ibid). And further: “For the reading experience is not guided by the ‘intention of the author’, to which appeal is often made, but by the interest of the reader” (Ibid).

Wedderburn’s reply to these statements of Brown is “that is all well as long as:

- (a) it is recognized that a given text can have several meanings and one of those will usually be at least one meaning intended by the original author;<sup>32</sup>
- (b) for many who read the biblical text their ‘interest’ is going to be in hearing what the original author was saying;
- (c) the meaning for readers in different contexts, situations and centuries will of course differ; and

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Mulder: Would you define it as the words of men about God?

Wedderburn: It is certainly that yes. Whether that is enough I don’t know, because one also has to allow for the phenomena of the reception of these words, in which people hear what they believe God is speaking to them through those words” (Wedderburn, A.J.M 2006. *Interview with Mulder, F.* Ludwig Maximilian Universität, Munchen. 06 July 2006).

<sup>32</sup> Wedderburn indicates that “it is an irritating feature of Morgan and Barton, *Biblical Criticism*, esp. p 258, that this work continues to talk of ‘the meaning’ of the text, a phrase which seems to stem from an outdated hermeneutic, and to apply it to a literary criticism which should surely recognize a plurality of meaning – as the quotation of Via’s reference to ‘a multiplicity of possible meanings’ on this same page shows” (Ibid).

- (d) it is to be asked of what significance the ‘context’ of a text is here, and whether the ‘context’ is purely literary and textual or also includes the historical setting of the text (as well as of its readers then and down the centuries)” (1999: 273, 263n).<sup>33</sup>

Following the above analysis Wedderburn states that “If .. it is the authority of the writers which makes the text authoritative, then the meaning of the text which can claim that authority cannot be divorced from the meaning intended by the authoritative author and still remain authoritative .. Unless (if one - FM) .. could claim that what one understood by the text was what *God* meant by these words ..” (1999:109).

To sum up, Wedderburn’s understanding of serious historical work leads him to the point where “reverent agnosticism” is the only viable option. This position, rejects absolute propositional positions, which according to Wedderburn includes someone like Lüdemann. What follows further is that the Scriptures do not have the last word, but is open to go “beyond” what its intention was. And lastly, for Wedderburn, the Philosophy of language helps him to understand that all texts, including their meaning are probably somewhat relative.

## 3.5 *Wright*

### 3.5.1 Summary

Several scholars have offered short summaries and reviews of Wright’s *The Resurrection of the Son of God*. Instead of just copying one of those, it was perceived that for the purpose of this thesis the following offers a helpful guide.

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<sup>33</sup> The discussion with Wedderburn as it relates to absolute truths:

Mulder: “If I can ask another difficult question professor, how would you define truth?

Wedderburn: I wouldn’t.

Mulder: What can you say, or what would you dare to say, or risk to say, if anything, what would you say?

Wedderburn: I think that one can never attain it .. one is always working with probabilities” (Wedderburn, A.J.M 2006. *Interview with Mulder, F.* Ludwig Maximilian Universität, Munchen. 06 July 2006).

Wright states from the start, that he “intends to challenge (the - FM) dominant paradigm in each of its main constituent parts” (Wright 2003:7). In general terms, this view holds the following:

- (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. Of course, different elements in this package are stressed differently by different scholars; but the picture will be familiar to anyone who has even dabbled in the subject, or who has listened to a few mainstream Easter sermons, or indeed funeral sermons, in recent decades. The negative burden of the present book is that there are excellent, well-founded and secure historical arguments against each of these positions” (Ibid).

Against this, Wright wants to establish:

- (1) “a different view of the Jewish context and materials,
- (2) a fresh understanding of Paul and
- (3) all the other early Christians, and
- (4) a new reading of the gospel stories; and to argue
- (5) that the only possible reason why early Christianity began and took the shape it did is that the tomb really was empty and that people really did meet Jesus, alive again, and
- (6) that, though admitting it involves accepting a challenge at the level of worldview itself, the best historical explanation for all these phenomena is that Jesus was indeed bodily raised from the dead” (2003:8).

In his chapter on “Easter and history” Wright goes on to make the following remarks (Some parts are freely interpreted):

- (1) The world of second-Temple Judaism supplied the concept of resurrection, but the striking and consistent Christian mutations within Jewish resurrection beliefs rule out any possibility that the belief could have generated spontaneously from within its Jewish context.
- (2) Neither the empty tomb by itself, however, nor the appearances by themselves could have generated the early Christian belief.
- (3) However, an empty tomb and appearances of a living Jesus, taken together, would have presented a powerful reason for the emergence of the belief.
- (4) The meaning of resurrection within second-Temple Judaism makes it impossible to conceive of this reshaped resurrection belief.
- (5) The other explanations sometimes offered for the emergence of the belief do not possess the same explanatory power.
- (6) It is therefore historically highly probable that Jesus’ tomb was indeed empty and that the disciples did indeed encounter him giving every appearance of being well and truly alive.

- (7) The proposal that Jesus was bodily raised from the dead possesses unrivalled power to explain the historical data at the heart of early Christianity (2003:686-7,718).

Whichever way one looks at it, virtually all New Testament scholars agree that Wright's monumental work *The Resurrection of the Son of God* is an apologetic for the bodily resurrection of Jesus.

### 3.5.2 Hermeneutical presuppositions

It is widely accepted that Wright is probably one of the engineers behind what is now regularly referred to as the "Third Quest".<sup>34</sup> Thus, Wright's hermeneutical methodology and presuppositions are quite important and will require a broader understanding.

A good starting point here is Wright's last two paragraphs in his book *The Challenge of Jesus*. Relating to what postmodernity entails, he states: "What seems like knowledge is really the reflection of your own world, your own predispositions or inner world. You can't trust anything; you have to be suspicious of everything" (Wright 2000:152). Then Wright asks the question: "But is that true?" and then answers "I believe, and I challenge my readers to work this out in their own words, that there is such a thing as a love, a knowing, a hermeneutic of trust rather than suspicion, which is what we most surely need in the twenty-first century .." (Ibid).

In a previous article, Wright proposes that "we should not be frightened of the postmodern critique. It had to come" (1998).<sup>35</sup> For Wright this is "necessary judgment on the arrogance of modernity, and it is essentially a judgment from

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<sup>34</sup> In this regard Gerd Theissen's analysis in *The Quest for the Plausible Jesus* was studied. Especially pp. 4, 67, 99, 141, 147, 151, 330, 336. The full title is: Theissen, G. & Winter, E. transl. Borring, M.E. 2002. *The Quest for the Plausible Jesus. The Question of Criteria*. Westminster John Knox Press. Louisville, Kentucky.

<sup>35</sup> Wright, N.T. 1998. The Resurrection and the Postmodern dilemma. Originally published in *Sewanee Theol. Rev.* No 41.2. [http://www.ntwrightpage.com/Wright\\_Resurrection\\_Postmodern.htm](http://www.ntwrightpage.com/Wright_Resurrection_Postmodern.htm) (16/10/2006)

within. Our task is to reflect on this moment of despair within our culture and, reflecting biblically and Christianly, to see our way through the moment of despair and out the other side .. There is no way back to the easy certainties of modernism, not even a ‘Christian’ modernism” (Ibid).

But then once again, Wright states that “The radical hermeneutic of suspicion that characterizes postmodernity is essentially nihilistic, denying the very possibility of creative or healing love. In the cross and resurrection of Jesus we find the answer: the God who made the world is revealed in terms of a self-giving love that no hermeneutic of suspicion can ever touch; in a Self that found itself by giving itself away, in a Story that was never manipulative, but always healing and recreating; and in a Reality that can truly be known, a Reality that, being known, reveals a new dimension of knowledge, the dimension of loving and being loved” (1998).<sup>36</sup>

Wright also makes the following interesting statement: “There is a sense in which Reimarus was right and Melancton wrong. Christianity does itself a radical disservice when it appeals away from history, when it says that what matters is not what happened but ‘what it means for me’. At the same time, though, Reimarus, by being right, turns out two centuries later to have sawn through the branch he looked forward to sitting on. Having appealed to history in the hope that it would destroy Christianity, his programme in fact puts Christianity in touch once more with roots it had forgotten, allowing the tree access to fresh spring life” (1999:661-2).

Before discussing Wright and the “Third Quest”, a short introduction to his version of “Critical realism” is necessary.<sup>37</sup> In this context, Robert B. Steward’s following statement is useful: “One must .. allow a text to speak fully – to allow for

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> See also D.J.C. van Wyk’s analysis of Wright with regards to Critical Realism in: Van Wyk, D.J.C. 2000. *Die Relevansie van Historiese Jesus-navorsing vir kerk en teologie: ‘n Hermeneutiese vraagstelling*. Universiteit van Pretoria. DD Skripsie. p 86-8.

historical, literary, and theological meaning in texts. To this end, worldview analysis, narrative criticism, and critical realism serve as useful tools” (Steward 2006:64-5).

Steward quotes Wright as saying that critical realism “acknowledges the reality of the things known, as something other than the knower, while also fully acknowledging that the only access we have to this reality lies along the spiralling path of appropriate dialogue or conversation between the knower and the thing known .. Related to the efficacy of language, critical realists do not hold that the texts are derivative of an objective world, but they do insist that the texts may represent and *refer* (emphasis – FM) to an objective world” (2006:59-60).

Wright goes on to state that “This method recognizes that all knowledge of the past .. is mediated not only through sources but also through the perceptions .. personalities, of the knowers. There is no such thing as detached objectivity .. But this does not mean that all knowledge collapse into *mere* subjectivity. There are ways of moving towards fair and true statements about the past” (Wright 2003:29).

### 3.5.2.1 Critical Realism

As stated above, in terms of epistemology, Wright associates himself with critical realism.<sup>38</sup> A thorough analysis of this theological position is too complex to discuss in great detail here. Only a few short remarks are made.

One should be careful to put all the scholars who associate with critical realism in the same camp. There are scholars of almost irreconcilable dispositions who use this term. For instance, Wright would probably to some degree disagree with George Lindbeck’s “cultural linguistic” model, which is, according to George Hussinger a “pragmatic” position accommodated in a form of realism” (Hussinger 2003:47,12n).

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<sup>38</sup> For a good understanding of Wright’s understanding of critical realism, see: Wright, N.T. 1992. *The New Testament and the People of God. Christian Origins and the Question of God: Vol 1.* p 32-45.

Wright probably comes closer to Kevin J. Vanhoozer's "hermeneutical realism". Vanhoozer asks the question: "Just how confident can we be as interpreters that we have discovered the meaning of the text rather than ourselves and our projections?" (Vanhoozer 1998:462). To this he answers that "The short response is to say both that *our knowledge must be tempered by humility, and that our skepticism must be countered by conviction*" (Ibid). With this goes an attitude of being a "humbly confident progressively interpreter" (1998:466).<sup>39</sup> With this, Wright probably agrees whole heartedly!

With the above in mind, it is evident that Wright pleads for a "more nuanced epistemology" where "knowledge can be a form of stewardship .. in one sense, a form of love. To know, is to be in a relation with the known, which means that the 'knower' must be open to the possibility of the 'known' being other than had been expected or even desired, and must be prepared to respond accordingly, not merely to observe from a distance" (Wright 1992:45).

In conclusion Wright states that "The stories through which (critical realism – FM) .. arrives at its (potentially) true account of reality are, irreducably, stories about the interrelation of humans and the rest of reality ... the crucial stories themselves are ... a vital element in the relationship both between those who share a worldview and between holders of different worldviews. This model allows fully for the actuality of knowledge beyond that of one's own sense-data, while also fully allowing for the involvement of the knower in the act in the act of knowing. Such a model has, I believe, a lot of mileage. It may serve as something of an Ariadne's thread to guide us through the labyrinths of New Testament study" (1992:45).

### 3.5.2.2 The "Third Quest"

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<sup>39</sup> As part of the reading program for this degree, Kevin Vanhoozer's 1998, almost 500 page long book "*Is There a MEANING in the TEXT?*" was thoroughly read.

Wright states that “the historical quest for Jesus is necessary. It is necessary for the health of the church.” He states that “the Third Quest can stimulate and reinvigorate our view both of Jesus and, ultimately, of God.”<sup>40</sup>

In his book *The Contemporary Quest for Jesus*, he states it emphatically: “.. the pursuit of truth-historical-truth- is what the Third Quest is all about. Serious historical method, as opposed to the pseudo-historical use of homemade ‘criteria’, is making a comeback in the Third Quest” (Wright 2002:35).

The next point in his argument is quite important: “The much-vaunted ‘normal critical tools’, particularly form criticism, are being tacitly (and in my view rightly) bypassed in search for Jesus; inquiry is proceeding by means of a proper, and often clearly articulated, method of hypothesis and verification” (Ibid).

In analysing this method Wright states that “There is now a real attempt to do history seriously. Josephus, so long inexplicably ignored, is suddenly and happily in vogue. There is a real willingness to be guided by first-century sources .. Jesus’ message is evaluated .. for the meaning it must have had for the audience of his own day ... we do not need to detach Jesus’ sayings from the rest of the evidence, and examine them in isolation” (1999:85).

Ben Witherington states how “Wright draws especially on the insights into the social, political and religious milieu of Galilee that have arisen with recent research -- the so-called Third Quest of the historical Jesus” (Witherington 1997).<sup>41</sup> With regard to Wright, Steward states that “The Third Quest has sought to ground Jesus within the Judaism of the first century and has been far less sceptical than the Renewed New Quest concerning the value of the canonical Gospels as sources for the life of Jesus” (Steward 2006:14).

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<sup>40</sup> This quote comes from Wright’s undated internet article: Wright, N.T. *Jesus and the Quest*. <http://www.anglicancommunioninstitute.org/articles/jesusquest.htm> (16/10/2006)

<sup>41</sup> Internet article: Witherington B 1997. The Wright Quest for the Historical Jesus. *The Christian Century*, November 19-26, pp. 1075-1078. <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=37> (16/10/2006)

Wright indicates a few advantages which the Third Quest has over the previous Quests:

- (1) It takes the total Jewish background extremely seriously.
- (2) Practitioners have no united theological or political agenda .. the diverse backgrounds of the scholars involved serve to provide checks and balances .. a measure of critical realism is both possible and increasingly actual.
- (3) There has increasingly been a sense of homing in on the key questions which have to be asked if we are to make progress (Wright 1999:89).

The questions, which Wright regard as leading to his “progress” consists of:

- How does Jesus fit into Judaism?
- What were Jesus’ aims?
- Why did Jesus die?
- How and why did the Early Church begin?
- Why are the Gospels what they are? (Ibid).

Following these questions Wright states that “.. we should not be put off from undertaking, and advancing, the Third Quest by the fears of those who say it will be useless for the practice or the theology of the church. Having lived with this dilemma for several years, I am convinced that the way out is forward, not backwards. We must take the historical questions and challenges on board; we cannot retreat into a private world of ‘faith’ which history cannot touch (what sort of a God would we be ‘believing’ in if we did?) “ (1999:122).

A last insight that is important here is the fact that Wright does not separate the historical Jesus and the Jesus of faith from each other. As Van Wyk indicates in this regard, Wright has to a great degree taken over this view from Kähler (Van Wyk 1999:97).

From what has been said it is quite clear that Wright wants to ground his methodology on proper historical research. He also wants to do it in a “critical

realism” way, indicating that he is open for what the evidence and developments in science have to offer. He however rejects certain strands of historical scholarship, particularly form criticism. This becomes quite evident in his book *The Resurrection of the Son of God* as he has his doubts about the existence of the Q source.

### 3.5.3 Wright’s view of Scripture

Wright believes that the Bible is a divinely authoritative book, which through the power of the Holy Spirit works and performs God’s purposes through his children.

In his recent book *The Last Word: Beyond the Bible Wars to a New Understanding of the Authority of Scripture*, Wright states that “the phrase ‘authority of scripture’ can make Christian sense only if it is a shorthand for ‘the authority of the triune God, exercised somehow through scripture” (Wright 2005:23).

But how does God exercise that authority? Wright indicates, “Again and again, in the biblical story itself we see that he does so *through human agents anointed and equipped by the Holy Spirit*” (1991:16).

It is therefore “not merely a divinely given commentary on the way salvation works (or whatever); the Bible is part of the means by which he puts his purposes of judgment and salvation to work” (1991:20). This holds further that the Bible “is designed to function through human beings, through the church, through people who, living still by the Spirit, have their life molded by this Spirit-inspired book” (Ibid).

Wright makes the noteworthy statement that we should allow the “Bible (to – FM) be the Bible, and so to let God be God—and so to enable the people of God to

be the people of God, his special people, living under his authority, bringing his light to his world” (1991:29).

To sum up, John R. Franke believes that Wright “takes a middle road between evangelical insistence on biblical inerrancy and the modernist tendency to dismiss biblical authority as an expression of ‘anti-intellectual pre-modernity’ ” (Franke 2005).<sup>42</sup>

### **3 Crucial selected texts and their interpretation**

Once one embarks on a thorough study of the New Testament evidence for the resurrection of Jesus, most scholars regard 1 Cor 15:3-11 as foundational for a proper understanding of the evidence for Jesus’ resurrection. The views of the five selected scholars will now be scrutinized.

#### **3.1 1 Cor 15:3-5**

##### **3.1.1 Craig**

As is generally agreed by most scholars Craig states that here we have a “pre-Pauline formula of the primitive church” (Craig 1989:1).

Craig, who differs quite substantially from Grass in other respects indicates here that “ .. it is difficult to imagine Paul's not receiving at least the contents of this formula soon after his conversion, and, as Grass observes, had he not received the formula itself before or at least during the Jerusalem visit, it is difficult to imagine his adopting it later as a veteran preacher. This would seem to point to a Palestinian origin of the basic formula” (1989:18).

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<sup>42</sup> This comes from: Franke, J.R. 2005. *Review of “The Last Word: Beyond the Bible Wars to a New Understanding of the Authority of Scripture”* <http://www.amazon.com/Last-Word-Understanding-Authority-Scripture/dp/0060816090> (27/10/2006).

Craig indicates how “The solution that may best account for the data would be that the *Urgestalt* of the formula stems out of the mother church in Jerusalem and that Paul, after his conversion, received the formula itself as it was used in Damascus” (1989:19). In following Jeremias and Conzelmann, Craig states, “This would satisfy the linguistic demands of both Jeremias and Conzelmann as well as the non-linguistic probabilities discussed” (Ibid).

### 3.1.2 Habermas

Habermas is of opinion that “the Resurrection was proclaimed by the earliest eyewitnesses. This is especially based .. on 1 Cor 15: 3ff, where virtually all scholars agree that Paul recorded an ancient creed” (Habermas 1987:23).

In his book *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ* he states further that “The importance of the creed in 1 Corinthians 15:3ff. can hardly be overestimated” (1996:157). Here we detect testimonies that link the resurrection appearances to the earliest eyewitnesses who actually participated in the events. Habermas also states “most New Testament scholars who have pursued the subject have concluded that Paul received this list from Peter and James in Jerusalem on his first visit to the city” (1987:157). This creed also “.. is not just a nameless creed that some Christian church somewhere repeated at a church service .. the value of the creed is twofold: it is *early* and it is *eyewitness*” (1987:94).

As can be expected then “This confession links the historical life of Jesus, and the central Christian message of the gospel, in particular (vv. 3-4), with those eyewitnesses who testified to his resurrection appearances” (1996:30).

This creed is “a powerful argument, not arrived at by fundamentalists, but by critical scholars” (1987:68).

### 3.1.3 Lüdemann

Dale C. Allison indicates that Lüdemann, like the majority of NT scholars regard this section as a pre-Pauline formula (Allison 2005:233).

Lüdemann states that “1 Cor 15:3b-5 .. probably had the purpose, *first*, of providing a ‘historical’ guarantee of his resurrection .. *secondly*, Paul was evidently concerned to continue up to himself the tradition .. according to verse 8 Paul received the same vision as all the other people listed in this sequence ..” (Lüdemann 1995:33).

Lüdemann states further that the “appearance tradition” comprises of “different formulae .. being put side by side” (1995:35). Lüdemann then clearly states that Jerusalem was the origin of the tradition, based on verse 11, where Paul’s ‘kerygma was identical with that of the apostles’” (1995:36).

Lüdemann agrees with most scholars that “the formation of the appearance traditions mentioned in 1 Cor 15: 3-8 falls into the time between 30 and 33 CE, because the appearance to Paul is the last of the appearances and cannot be dated after 33 CE” (1995:38).

### 3.1.4 Wedderburn

Wedderburn indicates that it “is right to speak of ‘earliest times’ here, for in all probability this statement gives the content of the Christian faith which Paul himself had received, a content which may well go back to the time of Paul’s conversion ..” (Wedderburn 1999: 113). Wedderburn then cites evidence that Paul is here quoting a traditional formula:

- (1) “receive” and “hand on/ down” as technical terms for the transmission of tradition;
- (2) Untypical expressions;
- (3) The fact that the references to Christ’s death and burial in this context are superfluous;
- (4) The parallel structure of the two verses (vv. 3b and 4b).

Wedderburn however goes on to state “There are a number of signs that we are not dealing with a unitary tradition” (Wedderburn 1999: 114).

It is not necessary to go into much detail here. The important thing is that Wedderburn, as does most New Testament scholars agree that we have here the earliest tradition of the Easter appearances.

### 3.1.5 Wright

Wright starts this section by indicating how “Bultmann famously criticized Paul for citing witnesses to Jesus’ resurrection, as though he considered it an actual event, instead of being merely a graphic, ‘mythological’ way of referring to the conviction of the early Christians that Jesus’ death had been a good thing, not a bad thing” (Wright 2003:328).<sup>43</sup>

Against this, Wright puts it emphatically that “Bultmann was simply wrong: the resurrection of Jesus was a real event as far as Paul was concerned, and it underlay the future real event of the resurrection of all God’s people” (Ibid).<sup>44</sup>

In following Richard Hayes, Wright states, “This is the kind of foundation-story with which a community is not at liberty to tamper. It was probably formulated within the first two or three years after Easter itself, since it was already in formulaic form when Paul ‘received’ it” (2003:319).

In relation to verse 3b-8 Wright indicates, “It is quite possible that the whole passage was common tradition” (Wright 2003:319). However he states that Paul probably inserted ‘to me’, ‘most are still alive’ as well as adding verse 6-8, or that he combines to different traditions.

The point for Wright is that the Corinthians are aware of this tradition(s) and that “he can appeal to it as unalterable Christian bedrock” (Ibid). It is then not surprising how Wright reacts to Lüdemann’s traditio-historical analysis in this regard. He calls it “almost entirely worthless” (Ibid).

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<sup>43</sup> Wright quotes from: Bultmann in Bartsch 1962-4, 1.38-41, 83.

<sup>44</sup> In this regard Wright indicates how Bultmann has been followed by many: a recent example is Patterson 1998, p 218.

### 3.2 *The Significance of the formula*

The significance of this formula is a given. All the above scholars agree that here we have the first written source/s of the resurrection tradition. It might therefore be a fair statement to make, that what we find here, could either indicate a deviation in the later Gospels, or continuity with this early tradition. In order to illustrate this importance, the following possible parallels can be shown (Table 2):

**Table 2: I Cor 15:3-8 parallels with Narrative tradition**

| <b>I Cor 15:3-8</b> | <b>Narrative tradition</b>                                                         |
|---------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 15:4                | Mark 8:26; 16:9-11/ Matt 28:1,9f / Luke 5:1-11; 22:31; 24:34/ John 20:11-18;21:1ff |
| 15:5                | Matt 28:16-20/ Luke 24:36-49/ John 20:19-23                                        |
| 15:7                | Luke 24:13ff/ John 20:11ff                                                         |
| 15:8                | Acts 9:1ff; 22:3ff; 26:9ff                                                         |

<sup>45</sup>

In the light of the importance of this formula, and the five selected scholars' substantial contribution to the debate, what follows will be a selection of vital texts in this source/s followed by other important texts in I Cor 15.

It should however be noted that it is impossible at this stage, to give a thorough and *detailed* analysis of each of the five scholars' research on these texts. Craig, Habermas and Wright for instance, agree on several issues. So do Lüdemann and Wedderburn. Instead of repeating identical arguments, the focus will be on trying to find interesting contributions to the debate.

### 3.3 - 1 Cor 15:4 – *kai; oti ejtarfh*

This short phrase “and was buried” has caused significant debate among scholars. On the one hand you have those who believe it refers to the empty tomb whereas others, usually the more critically inclined see no such evidence.

<sup>45</sup> This analysis is a reworking of Theissen & Merz's analysis (1998:486).

As will be indicated below Craig, Habermas and Wright fall into the first category, and Lüdemann and probably Wedderburn in the other.

### 3.3.1 Craig

Craig believes that verse 4 refers to the empty tomb of Jesus.

Craig states that “A great number of critics assert--often without argument--that the second and fourth lines of the formula are subordinated to the first and third lines ... But this manner of exhibiting the formula biases the issue in advance” (Craig 1989:45).

Craig indicates “It may be said that the first and third lines are parallel *in* construction and likewise the second and third lines; but this only shows parallelism, *not logical subordination*” (1989:46). Following this assertion Craig states that “.. it needs to be seriously called into question whether “shorter” implies “earlier,” especially given the probably very great age of the formula in I Cor. 15 .. it is incorrect to say even that the second and fourth lines are later insertions” (Ibid).

Craig’s position is that “The four-fold *oti*.. serves the function of marking each statement as being of equal emphasis with the others in the series” (1989:47).

Craig believes that this formula refers to historical events, which naturally follow one another. He states that “I think that a much more plausible explanation concerning the ordering of the events is, not that they are logically ordered so that one serves as evidence for another, but that they are chronologically ordered so that one historical event naturally follows another .. Christ died, was buried, rose, and appeared. The order is linear and historical .. the agreement of both structure and content imply that we have here four equally weighty statements describing chronologically successive events” (1989:49).

### 3.3.1.1 “He was buried”

Next we analyse Craig’s apology for an empty tomb, implicated in the phrase “He was buried”.

Craig states that “.. it seems to me that the empty tomb is implied in the sequence of events related in the formula. For in saying that Jesus died--was buried--was raised--appeared, one automatically implies that an empty grave has been left behind .. a dead-and-buried man was raised itself seems to imply an empty grave” (Craig 1989:88).

To substantiate this claim, Craig is of the opinion that “.. the verb **eǧhgertai** seems to imply that the grave is left empty .. The verb **eǧeirein** can also have the sense of ‘to draw out of,’ as out of a hole” (1989:89-90).

Taking a general example Craig states that “.. even today were we to be told that a man who died and was buried rose from the dead and appeared to his friends, *only* a theologian would think to ask, ‘But was his body still in the grave?’ How much more is this true of first century Jews, who shared a much more physical conception of resurrection than we do” (1989:91).

The question can be asked ‘Why does Paul not specifically refer to the empty tomb?’ Craig’s answer is as follows: “Paul does not want to prove that it (Jesus’ resurrection – FM) is physical, for that was presupposed by everyone and was perhaps what the Corinthians stuck at. He wants to prove that the body is in some sense spiritual .. Hence, the mention of the empty tomb would be beside the point” (1989:92). Building on this argument Craig is of the opinion that ‘he was buried’ comes from the early church’s kerugma: “The formula is a summary statement” with no need of stating the empty tomb by name (1989:92-93).

### 3.3.1.2 Acts 2:24-32

Following the above, Craig deals with Acts 2:24-32. He states that “The tomb is

certainly alluded to in the preaching in Acts 2:24-32. The pointed contrast between David's death and burial and Jesus' not being held by death is the fact that whereas David's tomb is with us to this day, God raised (**ajesthsen**) Jesus up" (Craig 1989:93). Craig states that the empty tomb seems clearly in view here. Another reference to the empty tomb which Craig finds is Paul's speech in Antioch of Pisidia, which, according to Craig "follows point for point the outline of the formula in I Cor. 15:3-5: '... they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead .. (Acts 13:29-31)" (Ibid). Craig's conclusion here is that "No first century Jew or pagan would be so cerebral as to wonder if the tomb was empty or not ... it may be that the evidence of the appearances so overwhelmed the testimony of legally unqualified women to the empty grave that the latter was not used as evidence" (Ibid). This last point is captivating, as the gospels' testimony about the empty tomb is primarily built on the evidence of the women. Craig deals with this issue later in his book.

A very interesting possibility, which Craig puts on the table, is that "The mention of the empty tomb would not pass well with the structure and rhythm of the formula in any case, since the subject of each sentence is **Cristos** and the empty tomb is not something that Christ did" (1989:93,16n).

### **3.3.1.3 Other evidence for the empty tomb**

Craig indicates that if Mark's narrative contains an old tradition coming out of the Jerusalem community (which he believes to be probable), "then Paul would have had to be a recluse not to know of it" (Craig 1989:113). Craig indicates how this point is somehow usually overlooked.

Craig states that "Not only would the disciples not believe in a resurrection if the corpse were still in the grave, but they could never have proclaimed the resurrection either under such circumstances" (Ibid). He continues that "This presupposes that there was a tomb of Jesus, i.e. that his body was not cast into a

criminals common graveyard. But the burial tradition of Jesus is one of the surest traditions concerning his death and resurrection which we have” (1989:114, 46n). See how Craig here refers to the empty tomb as “one of the surest traditions” (Ibid).

On another point, referring to Paul’s visit to Jerusalem, Craig asks the question: “Is it too much to imagine that during his two week fact-finding visit Paul would want to visit the place where the Lord lay? Ordinary human feelings would suggest such a thing” (1989:114). Following this statement Craig state, “So I think that it is highly probable that Paul not only accepted the empty tomb, but that he also knew that the actual grave of Jesus was empty” (Ibid).

Another notable statement, which Craig makes, refers to the possibility of Paul knowing about the empty tomb even before his conversion. Craig states “.. if Paul had been in Jerusalem prior to his trip to Damascus, as Acts reports, then he probably would have heard of the empty tomb then, not indeed, from the Christians, but from the Jewish authorities in whose employ he was. For even if the Christians in their enthusiasm had not checked to see if the tomb of Jesus was empty, the Jewish authorities could be guilty of no such oversight” (1989:114, 47n). With this in mind Craig makes the conclusion that “So ironically Paul may have known of the empty tomb even before his conversion” (Ibid).

#### **3.3.1.4 The evidence of the Gospels**

The reason for discussing the empty tomb evidence outside of 1 Cor 15:4, is partly because Wedderburn and Lüdemann believe that verse 4 excludes the empty tomb. Following this theory, they then continue to reject the empty tomb traditions even in the gospels. This leads to the complete denial of the empty tomb. It is therefore appropriate to analyse Craig’s interpretation, as it relates to the gospels.

Craig is of the opinion that “All the gospels concord with the pattern of events

recorded in the formula of I Cor. 15: that Jesus died, was buried, was raised, and appeared” (Craig 1989:168).

#### **3.3.1.4.1 *Traditional material***

While it is widely accepted that both Matthew and Luke share the same stream of tradition as Mark, Craig states that the “narrative of John is apparently literarily independent of Mark and serves to confirm the cardinal points of the burial pericope: that late on the day of Preparation Joseph of Arimathea asked for and received permission from Pilate to take the body of Jesus, that he did so, wrapping the body in linen, and that he laid the body in a tomb. This much, at least, would seem to be traditional” (Craig 1989:169-170).

#### **3.3.1.4.2 *Joseph of Arimathea***

The whole tradition surrounding this figure has created significant discussions amongst New Testament scholars.

Craig is of the opinion that Joseph of Arimathea was a historical person and that the gospel narratives go back to historical data. Craig recently said in his debate with Bart Ehrman that “We have got good, early, independent sources that in fact Jesus was buried by a Jewish Sanhedrist in a tomb ..” (Craig 2006:35).

Craig indicates, “it seems possible that Joseph was a disciple or at least a sympathizer of Jesus” (1989:176). To substantiate this claim Craig makes the following points:

- (1) his daring to ask Pilate for a request lacking legal foundation,
- (2) his proper burial of Jesus’ body alone,
- (3) his laying the body in his own, expensive tomb is acts that go beyond the duties of a merely pious Jew.
- (4) But perhaps most importantly, Matthew and John give independent testimony of the fact that Joseph was a disciple of Jesus. (Ibid).

Point (4) indicates for Craig “Joseph's discipleship is not a redactional inference, but has traditional roots” (Ibid). Thus, “To regard this tradition as a legendary development may not take seriously enough the evidence of Mark that Joseph did act in a manner that befits a disciple more than a Sanhedrin member” (Ibid). Craig states on another point, “John states that many even of the authorities believed *in* Jesus but were afraid to confess it (John. 12:42-43), and he describes Joseph in the same way. It is not even impossible that Joseph refrained from attending the meeting that condemned Jesus or that he abstained from the vote, as Luke indicates” (Ibid).

Craig maintains that it is thus probable that Joseph could have been a secret believer.

#### **3.3.1.4.3 *The granting of Jesus' corpse***

In this section, it seems likely that Craig agrees that apologetics is evident in the argument. However he states that “.. one cannot regard a narrative as unhistorical simply because it is apologetic; the question of apologetics concerns the intention of a passage, not its historicity. An apologetic intention may sometimes tell us why an evangelist *includes* an incident, not why he *invents* an incident” (Craig 1989:177). As is obvious, this statement of Craig goes against much of classical liberal German scholarship.

#### **3.3.1.4.4 *The burial in the tomb***

Some scholars believe that John's interpretation of the burial is only a theological reinterpretation. Accordingly, Craig states how “It has been suggested that the amount of spices brought by Nicodemus (about 75 modern pounds) reflects John's desire to make Jesus' burial a kingly one” (Craig 1989:184). Craig's argument against the theological reinterpretation is that “by the same token, it might also have been Joseph's or Nicodemus's, who knew that Jesus had been

unjustly condemned by their own council and crucified as King of the Jews” (Ibid). It is quite interesting that Craig refers to Gamaliel’s death in AD 50, when “his follower Onkelos burned 80 pounds of spices ..” (Ibid). For Craig, it is then quite possible that the spices were in fact substantial. This and other elements convince Craig that “the burial procedure carries the mark of authenticity and seems quite plausible” (1989:185).

#### **3.3.1.4.5 *The tomb was Joseph’s own***

Craig states “Matthew, Luke, and John all agree that the tomb was new and unused (Mt. 27:60; Lk. 23:53; In. 19:41). Matthew states that it was Joseph’s own. Both these details are very likely, as a body of a condemned criminal would defile the bodies of other family members resting in the tomb .. The gospels give the impression that Joseph had a specific tomb in mind, not that it was a chance discovery” (Craig1989: 186). Following this, Craig believes “there is good reason to believe that all the gospels presuppose that it was his own ... Prescriptions for rock tombs are laid down in Mishnah BB 6.8. The tomb was shut with a large stone, which was made fast with a small stone” (Ibid). According to the last statement then, Craig wants to make the point that the procedure was not exceptional in Jesus’ case.

Craig shows how archaeological discoveries have revealed three different types of rock tombs in use during Jesus’ time. That is:

- (1) *kokim*
- (2) *acrosolia*
- (3) bench tombs

Craig explains as follows: “In a very expensive tomb, a round disc-shaped stone about a yard in diameter could be rolled down a slanted groove to cover the entrance. Although it would be easy to close the tomb, it would take several men to roll the stone back up away from the door. Only a few tombs with such disc-

shaped stones have been discovered in Palestine, but they all date from Jesus' era" (1989:187).

Following the above description Craig indicates, "it is evident from the gospels' descriptions of the empty tomb that it was either of the *acrosolia* or bench type of tomb with a roll-stone" (Ibid). For Craig it is clear that a *kokim* sort of tomb is precluded. Thus, Joseph's tomb is described as being a bench or *acrosolia* tomb; these types of tombs were scarce in Jesus' day and were reserved for persons of high rank. But such tombs were in fact used in Jerusalem during this period, Craig indicates, arguing that the tombs of the Sanhedria attest to that. Craig states the interesting fact that near the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the traditional site for Jesus' grave, archaeological excavations have come up with *acrosolia* tombs from Jesus' time. In the gospel of John, it is added that the tomb was in a garden (In. 19:41) (Ibid).

For Craig it is then quite plausible that the detail is historical. He states, "The word *khpos* means 'plantation' or 'orchard,' a *khpos* could contain rock tombs" (Ibid). To this Craig adds that "Significantly one of the four gates in the North Wall of the city was called the Garden Gate, and Josephus attests to gardens outside the North Wall.<sup>46</sup> The tombs of the Hasmonean high priests John Hyrcanus and Alexander Jannaeus were in this area<sup>47</sup>, and so it may have been a prestigious place for burial" (Ibid). Craig also states that in AD 350 Cyril of Jerusalem said that the remains of a garden were still to be seen next to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which Constantine had recently built over the traditional site of Jesus' tomb.<sup>48</sup>

In conclusion to the above argument, Craig believes that "the expensive bench or *acrosolia* tomb with a roll-stone and the location of this tomb in some sort of orchard near the tombs of other notables is consonant with the description of Joseph as a wealthy member of the Sanhedrin" (1989:188).

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<sup>46</sup> Craig quotes Josephus in *Jewish War* 5. 57, 147, 410.

<sup>47</sup> Craig quotes Josephus in *Jewish War* 5.259.

<sup>48</sup> Craig quotes Cyril in *Catechesis* 14.5; PG 33. 829B.

#### 3.3.1.4.6 *The women witnesses*

Craig, as does most New Testament scholars, indicates the strangeness of the women being witnesses of the empty tomb. We don't have to discuss Craig's arguments in this regard as what he says is widely accepted and well known.

Therefore only the following statement will do: “.. the reason why the unqualified women are named as witnesses is most likely because, like it or not, they were the witnesses, the disciples lying low in fear of reprisals by the Jews against themselves as followers of Jesus” (Craig 1989:191).

#### 3.3.1.4.7 *The guard at the tomb*

Here we find a significant theory, which Craig postulates. He states that “Behind the story as Matthew tells it seems .. lies a traditional history of Jewish/Christian polemic, a developing pattern of assertion and counter-assertion:

*Christian: "The Lord is risen!*

*Jew: No, his disciples stole away his body.*

*Christian: The guard at the tomb would have prevented any such theft.*

*Jew: No, his disciples stole away his body while the guard slept.*

*Christian: The chief priests bribed the guard to say this" (Craig 1989:207).<sup>49</sup>*

Craig indicates, “It is not said that the guard see the resurrection or even that this

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<sup>49</sup> Lowder rejects Craig's claim here. Lowder states that: “But Craig assumes without argument that the Jewish polemic arose *directly* in response to the initial Christian proclamation of the resurrection, rather than in response to the later *story* of the empty tomb ... Second, Jewish polemic was just that -- polemic. Polemical rumors need neither a basis in historical fact nor even sincere belief among those who spread them” (Lowder, J.J. 2001. *Historical Evidence and the Empty Tomb Story. A Reply to William Lane Craig*. [http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/jeff\\_lowder/empty.html](http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/jeff_lowder/empty.html) (16/10/2006).

is the moment of the resurrection. After the women leave, some of the guard go to the Jewish authorities, who bribe them to say that the disciples stole the body. This story has been spread among the Jews until this day, adds Matthew. Matthew's account has been nearly universally rejected as an apologetic legend, though the reasons for this assessment are of unequal worth" (1989:211). Once again here, Craig indicates that an apologetic motif does not necessarily imply an unhistorical reduction (Ibid).

#### **3.3.1.4.8 *The disciples' inspection of the tomb***

Craig indicates that Lk. 24:12 was regarded by Wescott and Hort as a Western noninterpolation (Craig 1989: 230). Craig however indicates how this text's presence in the later years discovered p75 has convinced an increasing number of scholars of its authenticity (Ibid).

Another interesting postulation Craig makes, refers to the disciples being absent in Jerusalem. He states that "Sometimes it is said that the disciples could not have been in Jerusalem, since they are not mentioned in the trial, execution, or burial stories" (1989:244). Against this argument Craig makes the suggestion that "... an obvious and, I think plausible answer to this is that the disciples were hiding for fear of the Jews, just as the gospels indicate" (Ibid).

As was indicated at the beginning of this section, debate over the empty tomb tradition has been substantial of late. Craig has even more arguments that can be stated, but what has been indicated, probably gives a good enough idea of the way Craig interprets his sources.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> To add one extra point here: Craig believes that the temperature inside the tomb would have been such that had the body remained there, it would still have been recognizable after 40 days or more. Against this, Lowder states the following: "I asked Craig in private correspondence (May 1, 2000) what he thought the average temperature was inside Jesus' tomb after his death, but he did not provide a temperature in his reply (June 27, 2000). Instead, he simply reiterated the altitude of Jerusalem and the fact that caves can be cold even in the summer. True, but the issue is whether the temperature in a cave at the time would have been cool enough to keep the body recognizable" (Lowder, J.J. 2001. *Historical Evidence and the Empty Tomb Story. A Reply to William Lane Craig*. [http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/jeff\\_lowder/empty.html](http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/jeff_lowder/empty.html) (16/10/2006).

Thus, for Craig it is highly probable that the empty tomb goes back to what actually, historically happened.

### 3.3.2 Habermas

Habermas provides us with a long list of scholars who like him, believes that Jesus' tomb was found empty (Habermas 2004:287, 27n).<sup>51</sup>

For Habermas, it is quite clear that Paul believes Jesus' tomb was empty. He states in this regard that “.. (1 Cor. 15:3-4) .. strongly implies the empty tomb, especially in the context of Jewish thought” (1996:157). With this in mind it is then not strange that Habermas states that “We .. have strong data for Jesus' tomb being empty” (2005:40).

Also worth mentioning here, is the relatively critical scholar Dale Allison's submission to the “apologists”<sup>52</sup> when he states “Paul's language in 1 Cor 15 may .. assume an empty tomb. The sequence is burial followed by resurrection. If this creates any image in the mind's eye, surely it is of a tomb first being filled and then being emptied. It is indeed difficult to know what else one might envision ... the apologists have a point. Why did Paul say that Jesus was raised if he did not mean that he was raised? Why not just: ‘He was buried and he appeared to Cephas?’ ” (Allison 2005:314-5).

Habermas lists several arguments in favour of the empty tomb. We only look at three interesting ones he uses:

- (1) The Jerusalem factor
- (2) Enemy attestation
- (3) The testimony of women

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<sup>51</sup> One special observation can be made here. Habermas includes a list of prominent critical scholars who accept the empty tomb in the book he co-authored with Mike Licona. There he mentions Jacob Kremer's *Osterevangelien-Geschichten um Geschichte*. In a personal conversation with Kremer in July of this year the writer came under the impression that he no longer accepts that the tomb was empty. His words was: “.. a critic of mine professor ‘Schubracht’, he is very against me, because I said ‘I don't know if the grave was empty .. it is not important, no” (Kremer, J. 2006. *Interview with Mulder, F.* Katolische Theologische Fakultät, Vienna, 5 July 2006).

<sup>52</sup> Which clearly refers to Habermas.

### 3.3.2.1 The Jerusalem factor

Habermas states how “Paul says that Christ was dead, in the grave, and then raised. This strongly implies an empty tomb, especially for a Jewish audience, because the Resurrection of the body was the common view. Additionally, how could Jesus’ Resurrection have been successfully proclaimed in Jerusalem if his body could have been produced?” (Habermas 1987:71).

In his more recent book with Mike Licona *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* they state that “His enemies in the Jewish leadership and Roman government would only have had to exhume the corpse and publicly display it for the hoax to be shattered. Not only are Jewish, Roman, and all other writings absent of such an account, but there is a total silence from Christianity’s critics who would have jumped at evidence of this sort .. this is not an argument from silence” (2004:70).

Against this view, some scholars are of the opinion that Jesus’ critics did not expose his corpse, because by the time they would have done so, the body would have been unrecognisable. Habermas’ reply to this is the following:

- (1) In the arid climate of Jerusalem, a corpse’s hair, stature, and distinctive wounds would have been identifiable, even after fifty days.
- (2) Regardless of the condition of his body, the enemies of Jesus would still have found benefit in producing the corpse.

Habermas states “Jesus’ enemies had every reason to produce his body, regardless of its condition” (Ibid).

### 3.3.2.2 Enemy attestation

Habermas claims, “The empty tomb is attested .. (by - FM) Jesus’ enemies .. as well, albeit indirectly” (Habermas 2004:71). It is Habermas’ view then that his argument is not from silence. “Rather, than point to an occupied tomb, early critics accused Jesus’ disciples of stealing the body. There would have been no need for an attempt to account for a missing body, if the body had still been in the tomb” (Ibid). It was indirectly admitted, “that the body was unavailable for public

display. This is the only early opposing theory we know of that was offered by Jesus' enemies" (Ibid).

### **3.3.2.3 The testimony of women**

Habermas firmly believes that the women represent a significant proof of the empty tomb. He states that "If the account of the empty tomb had been invented, it would most likely not have listed the women as the primary witnesses, since in that day a woman's testimony was not nearly as credible as a man's" (Habermas 2004:73).

All this said, Habermas says, "It should be noted that the empty tomb, by itself, proves little. If there were no credible accounts of appearances, it could be explained away by suggesting that someone stole the body" (Ibid). This statement makes it clear that was it not for Jesus' appearances in conjunction with the empty tomb, we would certainly not have enough evidence to believe that Jesus was bodily raised. Accordingly then, Habermas states that "However, the empty tomb does not stand alone .. If the tomb was empty because Jesus rose from the dead, then God exists and eternal life is both possible and available" (2004:74).

Habermas also discusses several theories, which try to counter the empty tomb. His argument against the wrong tomb theory as it relates to the women is worth mentioning.

This theory holds that the women and the disciples went to the wrong tomb and, having discovered it empty, concluded that Jesus had risen from the dead. Habermas lists six major problems, which beset the wrong tomb theory:

- (1) Even if the disciples went to the wrong tomb, this does not account for their belief that they had seen the risen Jesus.
- (2) The testimony of the Gospels is that the empty tomb convinced no one but John.

- (3) The church persecutor Paul's conversion was based on the appearance of the risen Jesus, not on the empty tomb.
- (4) Merely an empty tomb would not have convinced the sceptic James. Like Paul, James was convinced by an appearance.
- (5) No sources support the wrong tomb theory.
- (6) The evidence suggests that the tomb's location was known, because a well-known man, Joseph of Arimathea, buried Jesus in his own tomb (2004:97).

Concluding in this regard Habermas also states, "there is no evidence that his disciples went to the wrong tomb. In fact, there is good reason to believe the disciples went to the correct tomb" (2004:98).

To conclude, Habermas clearly believes that Jesus' tomb was empty. As has been indicated earlier, however he acknowledged that the empty tomb by itself proves nothing. But, Habermas is certain that the tomb truly was empty, and in conjunction with the appearances clearly indicate that Jesus was raised bodily from the dead.

### 3.3.3 Lüdemann

Lüdemann rejects the historicity of the empty tomb.<sup>53</sup>

Lüdemann asks the question: "Does Paul .. know the tradition of the empty tomb?" Following this question he quotes a "traditional" answer, in this case by Paul Althaus from his work *Die Wahrheit des kirchliche Österglaubens. Einspruch gegen Emanuel Hirsch*: "The notion that the empty tomb was empty has been a necessary part of Easter faith from the beginning. So people must also immediately have been certain of the empty tomb .." (Lüdemann 1995:45). To this Lüdemann replies: ".. this reflection, which is at first sight illuminating, comes

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<sup>53</sup> Theissen & Merz agree with this statement by stating that "For him the tradition of the empty tomb is an unhistorical apologetic legend" (1998:482).

up against the observation that Paul explicitly rejects the ‘resurrection’ of flesh and blood .. For that reason alone it is questionable whether the apostle was interested in the empty tomb” (Ibid). Lüdemann also makes it clear that “the statement about the burial of Jesus (verse 4) is connected with the death and *not* (emphasis – FM) the resurrection” (Lüdemann 1995:46).

Lüdemann concludes this section by stating that Paul “did not explicitly” make a connection between an empty tomb and the bodily resurrection (1995:47).

### **3.3.3.1 Mark 15: 42-47**

Lüdemann immediately links 1 Cor 15:4 with the empty tomb traditions in Mark 15:42-47 and John 19:31-37 in order to try and search for any historicity. In Mark he mentions that the burial of Jesus is associated with Joseph of Arimathea, and in John that Jews buried Jesus (Lüdemann 1995:39).

We will briefly look at Lüdemann’s discussion of Mark 15: 42-47. Only a few interesting claims which Lüdemann makes will be discussed:

Verse 43: Lüdemann states that “ ‘and when evening had come’, is redactional” (1995:40).

Verse 44: Lüdemann states “Certainly Mark would have preferred to report a burial of Jesus by his followers. However, as he had no tradition and on the other hand a report was going around about the burial of Jesus by a counsellor Joseph of Arimathea, he made .. improvements to Joseph’s character” (Ibid). To sum up, Joseph of Arimathea’s “characterization as ‘eminent’ is redactional” (Ibid).

Verse 46: “The information about the rock tomb with a stone rolled in front of it is redactional ..” (Ibid). Lüdemann states further “It is striking that Joseph *buys* linen. That implies that it is new ... the new linen may derive from the redaction, which shows an interest in protecting the

burial of Jesus from any disrespectful element” (Ibid). Following the above statement Lüdemann states that “Jesus was certainly not buried in his family tomb in Nazareth, which would have been an essential feature of an honourable burial ... there is no anointing of the *body* of Jesus, which is known as part of the burial ritual .. Is there not a suspicion here that Mark wanted to reinterpret the tradition of a dishonourable burial?” (Ibid).

In the conclusion to this section Lüdemann concludes, “Mark was confronted with the tradition of a burial which was in some way dishonourable and reinterpreted” (1995:41).

Lüdemann clearly comes to the conclusion that Jesus did not have a honourable burial and that there was no empty tomb.

### **3.3.3.2 John 19:31-37**

After Lüdemann’s discussion of the John 19:31-37 text, he concludes with the following section.

Lüdemann says, “We can no longer say where Joseph (or Jews known to us) put the body” (1995:45). Lüdemann then follows Crossan in his *The Historical Jesus: The life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*, in saying that “‘Nobody knew what had happened to Jesus’ body’ “ (Lüdemann 1995:191, 294n). Evidently not even the earliest community knew. For given the significance of the tombs of saints at the time of Jesus, it can be presupposed that had Jesus’ tomb been known, the early Christians would have venerated it and traditions about it would have been preserved ..” (Ibid).

This understanding leads Lüdemann to state that: “The summary note about the burial contained in the kerygma of 1 Cor 15:4 leaves the detail of the burial open, just as the note of Jesus’ death there ..” (Ibid).

### 3.3.4 Wedderburn

Introductory to the empty tomb, Wedderburn states that a “Christian reinterpretation of ‘resurrection’ does not *compel* us to abandon the empty tomb and appearances of Jesus’ risen body; it merely creates room for that, allows for that possibility” (Wedderburn 1999:86).<sup>54</sup> To back up this statement, Wedderburn states, “if one goes back to the nature of the experience of Paul and tries to gauge its nature, it is not expressly said to involve an empty tomb, and seems to be visionary and at least in part private to him” (Ibid). It is clear that Wedderburn wants to contend here that we cannot have any certainty that the tomb of Jesus was really empty or not.<sup>55</sup>

Commenting on verse 4 Wedderburn indicates that “It is true that, somewhat desperately, some scholars have clutched at the words ‘and was buried’ (v.4), and have seen this as evidence that Paul must have been aware of the tradition of the empty tomb” (Ibid).<sup>56</sup> Wedderburn indicates that “.. it is dangerous to infer

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<sup>54</sup> In the informal discussion with Jos Verheyden, Wedderburn’s “agnostic” position was discussed as it relates to the evidence of the empty tomb. He was asked what his opinion was in this regard. Verheyden’s answer was that he is not 100% convinced that the evidence for the empty tomb is persuasive. He qualified this statement by indicating that he is not certain, and that he should not be quoted as saying that the empty tomb has not happened. He indicated that there is always the possibility, but that the empty tomb tradition was not signed by a Roman magistrate. (Verheyden, J. 2006. *Interview with Mulder, F.* University of Pretoria. 10 August 2006).

<sup>55</sup> The following section in the discussion with Wedderburn is applicable here:

**A:**

Mulder: “I asked one question of quite a few professors. Now I’ve got a good idea what you’re going to answer me, but if you mind me asking it again .... I ask it on purpose. If somebody asks you over the radio for instance: Professor Wedderburn, did Jesus rise with a body, and does it mean the grave is empty?”

Wedderburn: I would have to say I don’t know.

Mulder: Can you expand a bit, let’s say you’ve got two minutes?

Wedderburn: I would have to say that that is one possibility of the phenomena. Something happened to the disciples and apparently to Paul ..”

**B:**

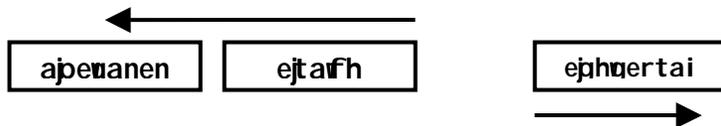
Mulder: “If they were to recover another letter of Paul and the church fairly agree that it is authentic, and there would be a very explicit mention of the empty grave, will that be more conclusive evidence for you in relation to lets say 1 Cor 15: 3-5?”

Wedderburn: “I don’t think so, no. All that we know of the course of Paul’s life is that he was not there in a position to know it first hand” (Wedderburn, A.J.M. 2006. *Interview with Mulder, F.* Evangelische Fakultät, Ludwig Maximilian University, Munich, 6 July 2006).

<sup>56</sup> Here Wedderburn refers to Craig, ‘Historicity’, p 40-41; Nauck, ‘Bedeutung’, p 247-248, and indicates that Nauck “claims that Paul’s whole argument presupposes this” (1999:270, 226n).

from the mention of Jesus' burial an awareness of a subsequent reversal and undoing of that burial. At any rate, as Marklein and others have seen, 'he was buried' is attached to the death of Jesus, not his resurrection"<sup>57</sup> One can illustrate this as follows:

**Table 3: "he was buried" is attached to the death of Jesus:**



Hereafter Wedderburn goes even so far as to suggest that Paul's emphasis on discontinuity in 1 Cor 15: 36-44 could easily be understood as "a new creation, created out of nothing as in the original creation of all things" (Ibid). In this instance Wedderburn follows Lüdemann in questioning whether Paul ".. was likely to be interested in the empty tomb" (Ibid). Wedderburn puts it quite crudely when he states that "the emptiness of the tomb could imply that the crucified and buried flesh and blood of Jesus was indeed on its way into the kingdom, and that, Paul maintains, would be improper" (Ibid).

Wedderburn states further "it cannot be ruled out that the manner of Jesus' burial made it impossible to discover the body and that this gave rise to the tradition of the empty tomb"<sup>58</sup> (1999:96).

<sup>57</sup> One might also quote in support of Wedderburn here, H.J. de Jonge who states that "the idea of the resurrection of Jesus in the gospels is quite different from that which we find in Paul and the tradition behind him: for the gospels suggest that Jesus, in the body, left the tomb and returned to earth. In my view that was not how Paul saw it .." (De Jong 2002:43).

<sup>58</sup> In agreement with Wedderburn, Lowder argues that "If Jesus had been buried with others--possibly the two thieves or *lestai* allegedly crucified with him--then the unambiguous identification of Jesus' corpse would be problematic, since prior to his resurrection neither his followers nor his enemies were expecting his resurrection. As A.J.M. Wedderburn writes 'such a fate for Jesus' body would at any rate also explain how neither the disciples nor the Jewish authorities could subsequently prove anything either way by investigating graves: the relevant one would have held the remains of others, so that it would not be empty; equally, however, the fact that it was not empty would not disprove the Christians' claims unless Jesus' remains could be identified (p 62) .... This is Wedderburn's insight: if Jesus was buried with others, then it would have been problematic at best for either side to try to prove something by pointing to Jesus' burial place, even if they had been so inclined' " (Lowder, J.J. 2001. *Historical Evidence and the Empty Tomb*

### 3.3.4.1 Failure to produce Jesus' body

Wedderburn asserts that in Matt 28: 13-15 the accusation is made that the disciples had stolen Jesus' body. This would imply that the body or remains of Jesus could not have been produced to refute the claims of the Christians. Wedderburn then states the conservative view to this statement which entails that “.. it is perhaps also surprising that there is no trace of any attempt to disprove the Christians' claims by producing just any human remains and claiming them to have been those of Jesus” (Wedderburn 1999:61). Wedderburn rejects this claim by stating that “The argument just does not seem to have been conducted along those lines: there is no evidence that there was ever any opening up of tombs to produce a body or demonstrate the lack of one” (Ibid).

Regarding the fate of criminals being crucified, Wedderburn makes two statements:

- (1) “.. the anomaly of a condemned criminal being allowed to be buried in such a way should give us cause for thought.” This refers to a possible honourable burial (Ibid).
- (2) “the form of burial accorded the corpses of such offenders was usually more likely to have been that of being thrown into a common grave, or more precisely a criminals' grave” (1999:62).<sup>59</sup>

Against James Dunn<sup>60</sup>, Wedderburn then states, “it is surely surprising that the first Christians did not venerate a spot where, in Dunn's view, nothing less than

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*Story. A Reply to William Lane Craig.* [http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/jeff\\_lowder/empty.html](http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/jeff_lowder/empty.html) (16/10/2006).

<sup>59</sup> Wedderburn also quotes Betz who indicates that “.. Jesus' grave seems to have remained unknown for 'over 300 years' and no one bothered”, in his opinion it was only 'rediscovered' when that became necessary in 326.

<sup>60</sup> The following extract in the discussion with Wedderburn is important here:

Mulder: “What about that critique of James Dunn where he disagrees with you on the empty grave? Where he says that beyond reasonable doubt that there was this tradition of secondary burials where Jews would after the decay of the body would go and collect the

the beginning of God's new creation had been supposed to have occurred. Was that not in itself reason enough to note and remember and cherish the site, regardless of whether it contained Jesus' remains or not" (1999:64). To this Wedderburn adds, "There was, after all, by way of contrast, an early interest in the place of Jesus' birth" (Ibid).

Wedderburn implies that it is likely that Jesus' body was in an unknown grave and that its identification was difficult. He states, "It is .. more likely that it was the difficulty in identifying the body or the grave again which would have caused this part of the tradition to have been suppressed; this is of a piece with the care of the Gospels' accounts .." (Ibid). For Wedderburn this "care" most probably implies an apologetic concern. Accordingly, he indicates, "mistakes could all too

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bones. And in order to do that it was common knowledge, it was not a question of they had to particularly say it in this text we have of Jesus. It was common knowledge in the Herodian time they would come after so many days and they would know who it was. It is not irrational on that basis to make the hypothesis that you would not be irrational to believe that there was an empty grave?

Wedderburn: The way that argument works, we've got no evidence for the secondary burial in the case of Jesus because it was known that there were no bones to put in an ossuary.

Mulder: Because?

Wedderburn: Because it was known that there were no bones to put in an ossuary, because they were taken to some other form of .. you couldn't put them in an ossuary.

Mulder: But what about all the evidence that we have from the Jewish quarters as well, that they claim that there is absolutely no evidence that there was any other argument used by the Jews or whoever it was. They said that His body was stolen, that's the argument they use, they are not using any of the other arguments which they could've used, which was available to them. That is what professor Dunn is trying to say I think, that there is no textual evidence, no other argument that they use

Wedderburn: Such as?

Mulder: Well, I've just read it and I think what Dr NT Wright is also perhaps trying to say.

Wedderburn: I'm trying to think what a, I make the .. apologetic argument that Jesus had stood up and risen, had it been refutable they could've gone to the grave and said here it is. But that presupposes that the critics of early Christianity as much as the proponents of it knew where the thomb was, and where the body was to be found. But Crossan is possibly right in saying that the body would have just been thrown in a mass grave. Now the disciples against their particular opponents are not going to say that" (Wedderburn, A.J.M. 2006. *Interview with Mulder, F.* Evangelische Fakultät, Ludwig Maximilian University, Munich, 6 July 2006). It is interesting that Wedderburn sides here with Crossan as it relates to the empty tomb.

See also p 102, footnote 83 where Dunn, a longtime colleague of Wedderburn at Durham, England, raises several substantial disagreements with Wedderburn's interpretation of the data particularly as it relates to the empty tomb.

easily have occurred here, that it was here that the Christian tradition and claims were vulnerable..” (Ibid).

Continuing his argument with Dunn, he asserts that “.. this piece of evidence ... is in fact much more ambivalent than Dunn allows .. (it - FM) could equally well point (to - FM) Jesus’ body (being - FM) thrown into a common grave, where it would be next to impossible to say after a short while whether his remains were there or not” (Ibid). A logical conclusion would thus entail that “This would hardly be a site to be venerated” (Ibid).

Noteworthy however, is that immediately following his discussion with Dunn, Wedderburn adds that “.. something have happened on that day” but, that something however “.. may simply have been a fruitless search for a body” (1999:65).<sup>61</sup>

### 3.3.5 Wright

Wright acknowledges the fact that much debate has circled around this verse. According to Wright, the most likely reason for its inclusion in the tradition is the following:

- (1) To certify that Jesus was really dead.<sup>62</sup>
- (2) Jesus’ body being raised to new life.
- (3) Thus, “leaving an empty tomb”

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<sup>61</sup> Wedderburn agrees with Selby’s criticism (and indeed the title of his book .. ‘Why do you seek the living among the dead’, Luke 24:5): “Poking around in an empty tomb .. is a distraction ..” (1999:127). Wedderburn adds that perhaps one can only avoid being thus distracted if one realises that this life can exist and be credible regardless of the question whether Jesus’ grave was emptied of its occupant or not” (Ibid).

<sup>62</sup> One thinks here of Friedrich Schleiermacher who held to the swoon theory, meaning that Jesus did not really die: Habermas, G. 2001. *The late twentieth-century resurgence of naturalistic responses to Jesus’ resurrection*. Trinity Journal, Fall 2001. p1.

[http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qa3803/is\\_200110/ai\\_n8955945/pg\\_3](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3803/is_200110/ai_n8955945/pg_3) (16/10/2006).

As is the case with William L. Craig and Gary Habermas, Wright holds that the empty tomb is a logical conclusion here.<sup>63</sup>

Wright further states that “The fact that the tomb itself, so prominent in the gospel accounts, does not appear to be specifically mentioned in this passage, is not significant; the mention here of ‘buried, then raised’ no more needs to be amplified in that way than one would need to amplify the statement ‘I walked down the street’ with the qualification ‘on my feet’” (Wright 2003:321).<sup>64</sup> This explanation is clearly contra Wedderburn’s theory that the “buried” relates to the dying and not to the “rising”, as ground for rejecting the empty tomb being in mind here.

Wright goes on to state that “The best hypothesis for why ‘that he was buried’ came to be part of this brief tradition is simply that the phrase summarized very succinctly that entire moment in the Easter narratives” (Ibid). Interesting here, is Wright who adds in the footnote “Hengel’s substantial paper should silence the suggestion (of Wedderburn 1999, 87 - FM) that the argument is advanced ‘somewhat desperately’” (2003:321, 21n).

It might just be worthwhile to look at Wright’s general understanding of the empty tomb, as it is such a fundamental component of his understanding of Jesus’ resurrection.<sup>65</sup> To begin, it might be appropriate to quote Dale C. Allison’s statement when he refers to Wright as “the most prominent recent example of *Orthodox belief* in the traditional apostolic line. He together with Wolfhart

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<sup>63</sup> In his debate with Bart Ehrman, Craig indicates how “N. T. Wright ... would say that the empty tomb and appearances of Jesus are just as certain as the death of Caesar Augustus in AD 14 or even the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70” (Craig 2006:37).

<sup>64</sup> In the brief discussion with Jos Verheyden he mentioned that N.T. Wright wrongly assumes that the gospels give us history. Rather, Verheyden explained, the gospels give us stories, and if you take that seriously, then you have no evidence in the gospels, that the women have seen the tomb where Jesus have been buried. He went on to say that the women may have believed they saw Jesus’ empty tomb, but we have no hard evidence. (Verheyden, J. *Interview with Mulder F* 2006. University of Pretoria. 10 August 2006).

<sup>65</sup> Craig however indicates that Wright could have discussed more evidence for the empty tomb in his book *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Craig, W.L. in Steward, R.B. 2006. *The Resurrection of Jesus. John Dominic Crossan and N.T.Wright in Dialogue*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press. p 139ff).

Pannenberg holds that ‘without an empty tomb, they are sure, Christian faith is empty’” (Allison 2005:201).

Wright clearly then confirms that “The two things which must be regarded as historically secure when we talk about the first Easter are the emptiness of the tomb and the meetings with the risen Jesus” (Wright 2003:686).

Wright qualifies this statement when he argues “Once we locate the early Christians within the world of second-Temple Judaism, and grasp what they believed about their own future hope and about Jesus' own resurrection, these two phenomena are firmly warranted” (Ibid).

Although mention is made of the following section at the introduction, it is vitally important here, to come to a clearer understanding of Wright’s position.

Wright’s understanding of the empty tomb is placed in the context of seven steps, which he indicates as follows:

- (1) To summarise progress so far: the world of second-Temple Judaism supplied the concept of the resurrection, but the striking and consistent Christian mutations within Jewish resurrection belief rule out any possibility that the beliefs could have been generated spontaneously from within its Jewish context.
- (2) Neither the empty tomb by itself, however, nor the appearances by themselves, could have generated the early Christian belief. The empty tomb alone would be a puzzle and a tragedy. Sightings of an apparently alive Jesus, by themselves, would have been classified as visions or hallucinations, which were well enough known in the ancient world.
- (3) However, an empty tomb and appearances of a living Jesus, taken together, would have presented a powerful reason for the emergence of the belief.

- (4) The meaning of resurrection within second-Temple Judaism makes it impossible to conceive this reshaped resurrection belief, emerging without it being known that a body had disappeared, and that the person had been discovered to be thoroughly alive again.
- (5) The other explanations sometimes offered for the emergence of the belief, do not possess the same explanatory power.
- (6) It is therefore historically highly probable that Jesus' tomb was indeed empty on the third day after his execution, and that the disciples did indeed encounter him giving every appearance of being well and truly alive.
- (7) This leaves us with the last and most important question: What explanation can be given for these two phenomena? Is there an alternative to the explanation given by the early Christians themselves? (Ibid).

As was shown in the introduction, Wright concludes with “The proposal that Jesus was bodily raised from the dead possesses unrivalled power to explain the historical data at the heart of early Christianity” (2003:718).

Thus it is clear that for Wright, the empty tomb of Jesus is a foundational necessity for the Christian belief in the resurrection of Jesus.

Although the focus in this research is not on the “after three days”, it might just be worthwhile to name one or two points which Wright makes. It is relevant in Wright’s case, as a “proof texting” and reinterpretation of “after three days” might just make his whole argument in I Cor 15:4 weaker.

Wright states “The phrase ‘after three days’ looking back mainly to Hosea 6:2, is frequently referred to in rabbinic mentions of the resurrection” (2003: 322). Thus, Wright acknowledges that such a tradition might exist. But, he immediately goes on to state that “This does not mean that Paul or anyone else in early Christianity

supposed that it was a purely metaphorical statement, a vivid way of saying ‘the biblical hope has been fulfilled’ (Ibid).

Wright says no, “not only was Jesus’ resurrection in principle a dateable event .. but it was always something that took place, not immediately (against recently Jacob Kremer<sup>66</sup>) upon his death, but a short interval thereafter” (Ibid).

### **3.4 1 Cor 15:6 – *pantakosini~ ajdel foi~***

As will be indicated below, Craig, Habermas and Wright regard the appearance of Jesus to the 500 brethren as historical whereas Lüdemann and Wedderburn understand it as a redactional interpolation, which actually refers to the Acts 2 Pentecost. Lüdemann goes on to indicate that Pentecost should be understood as mass ecstasy.

#### **3.4.1 Craig**

Craig believes that the 500 brethren was part of the original formula. He states that “Paul seems to go to great lengths to spell out the chronological sequence of appearances ..” (Craig 1989:33).

Craig believes that we “have here the testimony of a man who actually talked with Jesus’ brother and one of his principal disciples, both of whom claimed to have personally seen Jesus risen again from the dead, during a two-week period

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<sup>66</sup> The following extract from the interview with Jacob Kremer is important: Kremer states: “.. For instance, when has happened the resurrection? At the moment of death of Jesus Christ. Luke: Today you will sit with Me in Paradise .. soon you will be with me and the Father, it was the evening of the Friday. And therefore the writing about the time .. it is a time that is already in Abraham, Sinai and all of it. I have here a difference with the Archbishop of Vienna .. and for me it was very much interesting, a colleague of mine, perhaps you know him, ‘Gishbert Grashappe’, he has written a book too, the resurrection, and he has said because the distinction between soul and life, there’s a great distinction, but in the Holy Scriptures, the narratives of the resurrection, no point is there the distinction between life and soul. And therefore my position is: Jesus is resurrected yes, in the moment of His death. Death and resurrection at the same time. And then the picture of the explanations. And many Christians come to this .. and this is my position” (Kremer, J. 2006. *Interview with Mulder, F.* Evangelische Fakultät, Vienna, 5 July 2006).

in Jerusalem about six years after the event” (1989:34). Craig therefore believes that “.. it must become clear that Paul makes no mistake here with regard to the succession of events” (Ibid).

Craig also indicates that “Of all the appearances, this one would seem to be the most difficult to accept historically. Yet here it is in a tradition related confidently by a man who had ample opportunity to confirm its historicity” (1989:57). Craig believes that Paul is so sure of what he has received here, that he “.. adds a personal comment of his own that most of these people are still alive, though some have died. This seems to show that he had personal knowledge concerning individuals” (Ibid). Thus, Craig believes that “.. the appearance was not merely hearsay for him nor a meaningless cipher in an ecclesiastical formula” (Ibid). Craig indicates that Paul would never have said this had the event not taken place.

#### **3.4.1.1 Pentecost?**

Craig also touches on the theory that the 500 brethren are actually referring to Pentecost. He states that “Some .. identify this appearance with .. Pentecost.” Craig rejects this theory (Craig 1989:58-9).

Craig explains his standpoint by referring to Matthew 28:17 where the author adds the cryptic phrase “.. **oilde; epistasan** ..” It could be argued that the phrase may not be a redactional or theological device, but a historical reminiscence, referring to other Galilean disciples who had assembled with the Eleven” (Ibid). Craig indicates further that recent discussions of the **oilde;** construction have shown that this expression can probably be used to refer to a group distinguishable within a larger group and that the subgroup can be either contained within the larger group or completely distinct from it” (Ibid). Craig follows McKay who concludes that **oilde;** were a minority of a larger group led by the eleven and did not necessarily contain any of the eleven themselves”

(1989:61).<sup>67</sup>

Craig goes further to discuss the likelihood of thousands who flocked to hear Jesus in Galilee. He implies that “It was in Galilee that, according to the gospels, the thousands had flocked to hear Jesus, and it cannot be ruled out that 500 persons should come together there” (Ibid). From this Craig concludes that “So if Matthew's account harks back to a historical incident, it is not impossible that this was the appearance to the 500 brethren” (1989:62).

A last notable insight, which Craig makes here, refers to information we get from Josephus.<sup>68</sup> This relates to the Galilean inhabitants of which recent archaeological excavations have uncovered the remains of a first century 4,000-seat amphitheatre at Sepphoris in Galilee. This, Craig holds “seems to give ample evidence that an assembly of five hundred Christian brethren in Galilee is not at all implausible” (Ibid).

### 3.4.2 Habermas

Habermas believes that the appearance to the 500 is credible. He states “group appearances are mentioned in the Gospels as well as Acts. Therefore the earliest witnesses, and indeed all of them we know of, taught that several of Jesus' post-mortem appearances were to groups” (Habermas 2004:107). Habermas thus accepts Paul's testimony when he states that “Paul .. testifies that Jesus on one occasion had appeared to more than 500” (2004:159).

In connection with the possibility of a group hallucination, Habermas states that “.. such phenomena are not collective or contagious, being observed by one person alone and taking place at a wide variety of times and places” (1987:25).

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<sup>67</sup> Craig quotes from K.L. McKay's *The Use of hoi de in Matthew 28:17*.

<sup>68</sup> Craig states that the figure is disputed. He quotes from Josephus' *Jewish War* 3. 41-43.

He argues further that “.. for anyone to prove that more than one person saw a hallucination, they would have to go against much of the current psychiatric and psychological data about the nature of hallucinations” (1987:84).

Allison clearly sums up Habermas’ position when he indicates, “The apologists for the faith say that the sightings of Jesus must, given the reports, have been objective. One person can hallucinate, but twelve at the same time? And dozens over an extended period of time?” (Allison 2005:269).

### 3.4.3 Lüdemann

Lüdemann clearly rejects the following statement made by Hans Conzelmann regarding this issue: “The development from a christophany (viz. Like I Cor 15:6) to this theophany is unimaginable, especially as the Spirit is not mentioned in the earlier version of the Easter christophanies” (Lüdemann 1995:103).<sup>69</sup>

Lüdemann has a thought-provoking theory regarding the 500 brethren. He states, “I shall go on to give reasons for supposing that this appearance is a kind of foundation legend of the Christian community and can be derived from the event which historically underlies Acts 2 (= Pentecost)” (1995:100).<sup>70</sup>

With the above in mind it clearly follows that Lüdemann compares I Cor 15:6 with Acts 2:1-13. Only a few statements are mentioned which Lüdemann states in connection with the Acts Pentecost:

- (1) The word “Pentecost” already indicates tradition.<sup>71</sup>
- (2) The speaking in “other tongues” is ambiguous and might correspond to I Cor 14.

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<sup>69</sup> Keep in mind that it is Lüdemann who quotes Conzelmann. See p 227, 421n. Lüdemann obviously rejects the statement.

<sup>70</sup> In this he follows C. Hermann Weisse; Joachim Jeremias (who suggests it) and S. Maclean Gilmour. (Lüdemann 1995: 100, 225, 403n).

<sup>71</sup> Here Lüdemann follows Eduard Lohse. See p 226, 403n.

- (3) “The Lukan conviction of the universal scope of Christianity underlies the equipping the members of the new movement with the languages of all other peoples by the Holy Spirit on the very day of the founding of the Christian religion” (1995:102).

Lüdemann continues to discuss what he calls the “historical nucleus” behind Acts 2 as an appearance to more than 500 brethren. Some interesting remarks are:

- (1) “the tradition underlying Acts 2:1-4 is historically quite plausible. Probably this glossolalic event<sup>72</sup> took place at the Pentecost after the Passover when Jesus died ..” (Ibid).
- (2) “the features of the theophany have probably been introduced into Acts 2 at a redactional stage” (Ibid).
- (3) “there is no reason for a split into two traditions (the theophany – I Cor 15:6 and the Spirit – Acts 2:1-4 - FM) .. since for Paul from the beginning Christ is identical with the Spirit” (1995:103).

After the above discussion Lüdemann comes to the following intermediate conclusion: “(that – FM) .. the appearance to more than 500 brethren is identical with the event described by the substratum of tradition in Acts 2 may be said to be true” (1995:106).

### **3.4.3.1 Mass Psychology**

Then follows another stage in Lüdemann’s book. Here he focuses on “conclusions from research into mass psychology” (Lüdemann 1995:107). He starts off with research by Gustav le Bon after which he confirms that “Here one could say that the members of a mass have a formally infectious influence on one another” (1995:106). Then Lüdemann quotes Paul Wilhelm Schmiedel who “refers with good reason to mass visions of Thomas a Becket and Savonarola

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<sup>72</sup> Lüdemann indicates that there are comparable phenomena in TestJob 48-52.

after their deaths as analogies to the appearance to the ‘more than 500’ (1995:107).

In conclusion here, Lüdemann mentions that “The appearance before the ‘more than 500’ as a historical phenomenon can plausibly be represented as mass ecstasy which took place in the early period of the community. Given the nature of mass psychology, the stimulus towards it may have been provided by one or more individuals” (Ibid).

The above makes it clear that Lüdemann has Peter in mind as he states “Peter saw the crucified Jesus alive (as did the Twelve)” (Ibid). Lüdemann explains further “At the next great festival, the Jewish feast of Weeks (= Pentecost) .. This preaching ... which were generally present formally led to religious intoxication and an enthusiasm which was experienced as the presence of Jesus, indeed as the presence of the Risen One as Peter had seen him ... and thus gave the group an incomparable thrust” (Ibid).

In conclusion, it is clear that Lüdemann rejects the historicity of the reference to the 500 brethren, as it relates to 1 Cor 15:6. His interpretation links the 500 to what Luke described as Pentecost. But even that event is reinterpreted through mass psychology to create an explanation, which excludes any kind of real appearance of Jesus.

#### **3.4.4 Wedderburn**

Wedderburn does not ascribe to the historicity of the appearance to the 500 brethren.

He mentions that “There are ... those who think that Paul’s mention of the appearance of the risen Jesus to ‘more than five hundred brethren (1 Cor 15:6) is

a variant of the same tradition which Luke narrates as the outpouring of the Spirit at the Pentecost in Acts 2:1-13” (Wedderburn 1999:77).<sup>73</sup>

Concluding from the above statement, Wedderburn indicates that “That makes it the more intelligible that the Fourth Gospel should associate the gift of the Spirit with an appearance of the risen Jesus (John 20:22), in marked contrast to Acts ... and again it is the same Gospel that speaks of the Paraclete, the ‘spirit of truth’, as ‘another Paraclete’, that is, besides Jesus himself (14:16)” (Ibid). In the same context, Wedderburn is of the opinion that Paul, “on occasion” relates to “the risen Jesus ... *qua* risen, with the Spirit (1 Cor 15:45)” (Ibid).

Wedderburn discusses a few scholars in support of his theory. Only a few interesting remarks are being referred to:

- (1) I Cor 15:6 “must be a reference to the church *after* Pentecost .. an experience of power .. which transformed and empowered .. this power was .. ‘that same Spirit which the disciples had experienced in the presence of Jesus while he was still amongst them ..” (1999:85).<sup>74</sup>
- (2) “.. It is not the resurrection appearances that power the church, but the coming of the Spirit”,<sup>75</sup> Wedderburn makes the following suggestion: “It is then legitimate to ask whether the resurrection does not as a result become somewhat redundant ..” (Ibid).
- (3) “Jesus means something to our world because a mighty force streams forth from Him and flows through our time also” (Ibid).<sup>76</sup>

It is clear that Wedderburn grapples with what “spirit” could and should mean for us today. He enters into quite a debate with Peter Carnley and others. In the end he concludes that “they see that, despite the apparent disavowal of Jesus in his shameful and accursed death, he is nevertheless, paradoxically, God’s anointed one” (1999:85).

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<sup>73</sup> In Wedderburn’s footnote on this statement he quotes Lüdemann, who regards it as “mass extacy”, and then interestingly his own name as well, referring to ‘Traditions’, p 52. (p 269, 207n)

<sup>74</sup> Wedderburn refers to Alistair Kee. *From Bad Faith to Good News* p 80.

<sup>75</sup> Wedderburn refers to D.J. Davies p 80.

<sup>76</sup> Wedderburn refers to A. Schweitzer, *Quest* p 270, 222n.

It is quite clear that Wedderburn rejects the historicity of the 500 brethren.

### **3.4.5 Wright**

Against i.e. Wedderburn, Wright strongly rejects the view that the 500 brethren refer to Pentecost. He confirms, “Attempts have been made to line up the appearance to the 500 with Luke’s account of Pentecost” (Wright 2003:324). For him “This is not only unnecessary, but virtually impossible” (Ibid).

Wright qualifies this strong statement by stating “The suggestion does as much violence to Luke’s account of Pentecost as it does to Paul’s account of a resurrection appearance which he expressly distinguishes from other types of Christian experience” (Ibid).

Clearly contra Wedderburn’s interpretation of Paul, but especially Colossians, Ephesians and John, Wright mentions, “Experiences of the Spirit and seeing the risen Jesus are never, in early Christian writings, assimilated to one another” (Ibid). Instead Wright suggests that the appearance to the 500 brethren “is far more likely ... an occasion like that reported in Matthew 28:16-20” (Ibid).

Wright states that “The crucial note here, at the end of verse 6, makes it clear that Paul .. is referring to the 500: though some are now dead, most are still alive, and – the strong implication – they could be interrogated for their own accounts of what they saw” (2003:325).

Wright’s argument does make sense, at least for the fact that no evidence exists for counterclaims of alleged brethren among the 500 still alive at the time.

## **3.5 1 Cor 15: 8-11- Paul: *eřcaton***

Paul’s appeal to being the last of those who encountered the living Jesus has also lead to significant debate. The nature of this appearance in particular has been foundational not just for those who hold to the bodily resurrection of Jesus,

but also to those who deny it. As will be indicated below, Craig, Habermas and Wright believe that Paul really encountered the living Jesus, in bodily form. They do accept that the appearance was different from the others, as Jesus was glorified, due to the fact that the appearance was after his ascension.

On the other hand, Lüdemann very categorical, and Wedderburn in the same direction indicate that Paul had a visionary experience which was the result of a hallucination.

### 3.5.1 Craig

Craig believes that Paul, just like the other witnesses he mentions, witnessed an appearance of Jesus. Craig indicates that “Paul .. sturdily insisted in language reminiscent of the gospel that he, too, had ‘seen Jesus our Lord’ (I Cor.9:1)” (Craig 1989:69).

By including himself in the list, Craig believes that Paul implicitly asserts to have been the recipient of a genuine appearance of Jesus, and not simply a vision. Craig clearly states that Paul was familiar with religious visions, as is evident in II Cor. 12:1-7, whereas what he saw on the Damascus road was no mere vision (1989:70).<sup>77</sup>

Craig further declares how “.. use of **εἰσκατόν δε; παντῶν** (I Cor. 15:8) also indicates that the appearance to him was not repeated” (1989:72).

Craig accepts that a vision of Christ so much later than the appearance to the Twelve would naturally have been regarded with suspicion, but Craig also adds that Paul was accordingly anxious to include himself with the other apostles as a recipient of a genuine, objective appearance of the risen Lord (Ibid).

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<sup>77</sup> In the footnote related to this statement Craig indicates that “Hoffmann appeals to Paul’s use of **ἀποκαλύψαι** in Gal. 1:15 as evidence of the appearances’ being eschatological, visionary experiences. But this train of inferences is multiply flawed .. these theophanies and epiphanies themselves prove that heavenly visions were not always at issue, but very often earthly or anthropomorphic appearances ... the perfect tense in I Cor. 15:4 indicates that Christ’s resurrection is a permanent state ... the uses of **ὡφθαλμοῦ** with regard to angels, Jesus’ transfiguration, and other heavenly beings is decisive refutation of the view that a numinous context implies heavenly visions with no physical elements ... the notion of “revelation” to characterize eschatological realities does not imply non-physicality either, unless pure visions are meant, in which case these are, as we said, sharply distinguished by Paul from resurrection appearances” (1989:71, 30n).

Now the following statement, which Craig makes, is informative. He confirms, “Paul in no sense implies that the foregoing appearances were the same sort of appearance as the one to him. He is concerned here, not with the how of the appearances, but with who appeared” (1989:74). Craig believes he is rather “trying to level up his own experience to the objectivity and reality of the others. He wants to say that what he saw was every bit as much a real appearance of Jesus as that which they saw” (Ibid).

Craig follows Raymond Brown who postulates that “Paul recalls the tradition of the appearances of Jesus to show that, even if he came out of time and last of all, he did see the risen Jesus, just as did the other well-known apostles” (1989:73, 31n).

### **3.5.1.1 Vision or appearance?**

Against those scholars who regard Paul’s appearance as visionary, Craig states that Paul’s appearance “.. cannot be characterized without further ado as purely visionary and subjective, for it is portrayed as involving extra-mental accompaniments, namely, the light and the voice” (Craig 1989:75).

Craig quotes Grass who believes that “.. participation of Paul's companions in the experience is due to objectifying tendencies. Had the experience been objective, then Paul and his companions should have all seen and been blinded by the light and all heard the voice. If they did not, then the experience must have been visionary” (Ibid).

Craig rejects this theory and states that “Grass's answer .. seems inconsistent, for Luke does *not* want to objectify the post-ascension visions of Jesus” (1989:76). Craig adds further that “Had he no tradition that included Paul's

companions, then we should have another vision like Stephen's .." (Ibid).

Craig again quotes Grass who believes that “.. Paul's appearance .. could not be assimilated to the more physical experiences of the disciples ... therefore the tradition is probably reliable” (1989:78). It is clear that Craig agrees that there are differences, but he also states that “.. though visionary elements were involved, something actually happened ‘out there’ in the external world such that visual and/or auditory phenomena were experienced by ‘slanders-by’” (Ibid). Accordingly then, “What Paul saw, after all, was an *appearance* of Jesus, not a *vision* of Jesus. Paul himself gives no firm indication of the nature of the appearance to him. He says that Jesus appeared (**wlfqh**) to him, that he saw (**elwra**) Jesus, and that God revealed (**apokaluyai**) His Son to him (Gal. 1:16)” (1989:80).

Craig believes that there is a contemporary prejudice against “physicalism.” He states that “Although many modern scholars like to talk about subjective and objective (veridical) visions, for the primitive church such a distinction would seem to reduce to the difference between a self-induced illusion and a vision sent by God, and the appearances of Christ were neither illusions nor visions” (Ibid). Expounding this understanding Craig indicates that the appearances were something qualitatively distinct from anything in the later life of the church. Craig concludes with the statement that “.. the popularity of the ‘objective vision’ understanding seems not infrequently due to contemporary prejudice against ‘physicalism’” (1989:83).

### **3.5.1.2 What about II Cor 4:6?**

Craig indicates how sometimes appeal is made to II Cor. 4:6, which is thought to refer to the blinding light on the Damascus road. Craig however believes that the verse does not seem to have any connection with Paul's conversion experience: “the light is the light of the gospel (v. 4) and is compared with God's act of creation (Gen. 1:3)” (1989:81). Accordingly then, Craig indicates that “.. it seems

to me, Paul's experience cannot be reduced to a mere vision on the basis of his testimony, nor of Luke's" (1989:82).

Craig mentions another fact here. He believes that "Paul apparently did not regard the mode of the appearance to him as determinative for a doctrine of the resurrection body" (1989:82, 46n). For Craig it must then follow that there was no need to relate in exact detail his experience, as reference to it was enough.

In conclusion, Craig clearly believes that 1 Cor 15:8-11 refers to a real appearance of Jesus to Paul. Although Craig accepts that it was different from the other appearances, it was still the living Jesus, which involved extra mental aspects, which must have included a bodily appearance of Jesus.

### **3.5.2 Habermas**

Habermas holds that Paul had an experience of Jesus in bodily form. He however accepts the fact that it was unique as this appearance was after Jesus' ascension. But, Habermas believes that Paul rightly adds himself to the list as the last to which Christ appeared (Habermas 2004:107). In following Craig, Habermas confirms "Paul distinguished between the Resurrection appearance to him and other visions that he received. This is another indication of the fact that his appearance was not merely a vision, but had effects in reality" (1987:163).

#### **3.5.2.1 Paul's Damascus experience**

Habermas has done substantial research and analysis relating to Paul's Damascus experience. He firmly believes that Paul encountered Jesus that day. After discussing Habermas' rejection of legendary and hallucination theories, more detailed discussions as it relates to other objections will be analysed.

To start with, Habermas rejects legendary theories. He mentions, "Paul's experience likewise cannot be explained by legends, because such could not

account for his conversion from scepticism” (Habermas1987: 26). According to this position, there is enough evidence that indicates how Saul the persecutor became Paul, the apostle to the gentiles.

Habermas rejects the hallucination theory, which some critical scholars believe explains what really happened to Paul. Habermas explains that “Paul’s experience .. rules out these .. because of his psychological frame of mind” (1987:71). He states further that he “.. think it’s .. wrong to apply this hypothesis (hallucination) to Paul.” To substantiate this statement Habermas indicates that Act 9, 22 and 26 “will show that hallucination doesn’t work for Paul ..” (Ibid).

In Habermas’ personal correspondence with Collins, it is said, “Hallucinations are individual occurrences. By their very nature, only one person can see a given hallucination at a time. They certainly are not something, which can be seen by a group of people. Neither is it possible that one person could somehow induce an hallucination in somebody else” (1987:86).

### **3.5.2.2 The appearance to Paul**

Habermas maintains that Paul’s experience was different to the appearances to the disciples. This position is the opposite of scholars like Lüdemann who believes Paul’s appearance to be exactly the same as all the others (Habermas 2004:112). Habermas indicates, “He (Paul - FM) states that the appearance to him was ‘aborted’ and differed at least in this respect” (1987:164). For Habermas this is no problem as he states “it is the reality of the appearances that concerns Paul here, not their mode, for what his list demands is that Jesus literally appeared to certain witnesses. An anatomical study is not the point of Paul’s teaching in his citing the early creed” (1987:165). Accordingly, Habermas maintains that “Paul’s encounter with Jesus and what the disciples experienced: Paul’s experience of the risen Jesus occurred after Jesus’ ascension. That could

account for the difference in the glorified nature that Christ showed to Paul from what the disciples experienced” (2004:119).

### **3.5.2.3 The resurrection appearances in Luke**

Another aspect, which Habermas puts on the table, is “Paul’s use of the Greek word *horaō*, which is the same Greek word that Luke uses when in his account Jesus tells the disciples to touch him because he is not a ghost (Luke 24:39)” (1987:57). With this in mind, Habermas concludes, “I think Paul was arguing that Jesus literally appeared to him, period” (Ibid).

This said, Habermas indicates how Luke (most probably Paul’s companion and author of Luke and Acts - FM) “who records the most details about Paul’s experience with the Lord, also reports the bodily appearances of Jesus to his disciples. Apparently Luke .. saw no problem with recording both, believing them to be an accurate account of what actually happened” (1987:165). In this regard Habermas concludes that “Luke .. identifies Paul’s teaching on the resurrection of the body with the literal form of that doctrine held by the Pharisees (Acts 23:6)” (1987:166).

Habermas clearly believes that Paul experienced Jesus appearing bodily to him. In substantiating this claim Habermas expounds passages like Phil 3:21, Rom 8: 11, Col 2:9 and Acts 13:34-37. Then, he returns to the “problem” regarding Luke’s portrayal of the resurrection appearance to Paul. He acknowledges that Paul “saw Jesus in the sky as a blinding light” (Ibid) compared to the gospels who report that the disciples touched Jesus. Habermas then supplies five reasons why this distinction does not rule out a bodily resurrection:

- (1) Other detail in the account indicates that it was not merely an experience that occurred only in the mind of Paul.
- (2) In Acts 13 Paul clearly implies bodily resurrection.

- (3) The other disciples' experiences occurred prior to Jesus' ascension to the throne of God. Paul's experience occurred after this event.
- (4) Luke apparently did not think there was a problem between Paul's encounter with Christ and Christ's appearances to the disciples, since he records both.
- (5) Acts was written *after* Matthew, Mark and Luke. If any evolution of the nature of the appearances was occurring, it would go in the opposite direction; bodily to vision. And Paul strongly hints at its bodily nature (2004:156-7).

Habermas discusses several counter theories, which some critical scholars level against an appearance of Jesus to Paul. A few notable ones are given and Habermas' explanations are discussed thereafter:

- (1) Objective Vision
- (2) Conversion Disorder
- (3) Guilt Theory
- (4) Power theory

#### **3.5.2.4 Objective Vision**

Habermas is of the opinion that Stephen's experience of seeing Jesus in heaven can be classified as an *objective vision*, since nothing in the text hints that any of those present also saw him. The object seen is real, not imaginary. There is a reality and cause of the phenomenon outside of the mind.

According to Habermas a *subjective vision* is a product of our minds and has no cause or reality outside our mind, therefore it is much like a hallucination or dream.

Of the two, the *objective vision* comes closest to a risen Jesus. But, even here, bodily resurrection is avoided (2004:111). Habermas differentiates between what

Stephen as well as Paul experienced. The latter has experienced an appearance of Jesus in bodily form.

### **3.5.2.5 Conversion Disorder**

Some critics believe that Paul's conversion from Judaism to Christianity was a result of a conversion disorder. Habermas rejects this claim and gives several reasons why:

- (1) Paul does not fit the profile of one who is likely to experience a conversion psychosis. The primary source professional psychologists and psychiatrists use for diagnosing psychological conditions, excludes Paul completely.
- (2) Conversion disorder cannot explain other details of Paul's account of the risen Jesus appearing to him, such as the voice and his belief that God wanted him to tell others something.
- (3) Conversion disorder requires Paul's experience to include another psychosis often referred to as a 'messiah complex.' What is more, to prove a conversion disorder, Paul would have had to experience three things all at once: visual hallucination, auditory hallucination and a messiah complex. This is a highly uncommon phenomenon, which goes against the evidence in Paul's case (2004:114).

In a recent debate with Anthony Flew, Habermas reiterated "there is not one speck of evidence from Paul's accounts that he was anywhere close to this frame of mind. There is just no evidence that he wanted to change" (2005:34).

### **3.5.2.6 Guilt theory**

Some critics say that Paul's conversion from Judaism to Christianity was the result of his pain over his persecution of the Christians. Habermas rejects this claim by stating that:

- (1) There is no evidence that he experienced guilt while conducting his persecution.
- (2) Paul was very content in Judaism and confident of his actions (2004:124).

Against Lüdemann, Habermas is of the opinion that Paul's persecuting Christians do not make him a candidate "to produce subjective images of the risen Jesus" (2003:11). What is more, Habermas states "he maintained hostility toward Christianity right up to the time when he believed" (2004:124).

Habermas also states that "He did not want to become one of them, following someone he perceived to be a false Messiah cursed by God. He did not want to forfeit his own soul" (2004:109). This clearly leaves no room for guilt during Paul's persecuting endeavours.

### **3.5.2.7 Power theory**

According to Habermas some critics like Evan Fales holds that "What Paul absolutely needed .. was to legitimate a claim of independent authority .. I would suggest that he had the vision because he had the authority" (Habermas 2004:117). According to this theory, Paul's ambitions for power could be realised faster in the church than in Judaism. Against this position Habermas states that:

- (1) If Paul was looking for quick power through a prominent position of authority in the church, his actions certainly provide no indication that this was the case .. even after being a Christian for seventeen years, he visited Jerusalem in order to compare the gospel he was preaching with that preached by the apostles.
- (2) If Paul was looking for more power, being a Roman citizen, why didn't he pursue a place of power within the Roman government?
- (3) The hard life that Paul cheerfully lived as a Christian did not reflect a person who was out for self-gratification (Ibid).

Adding to the last point Habermas quotes, Clement of Rome who states that Paul was “Seven times chained, exiled, stoned, having become a preacher both in the East and in the West ..” Following this, Tertullian and Origen believed that “Paul was beheaded under Nero, who was the first emperor to execute Christians (2004:57-8). For Habermas it is quite clear that had Paul experienced anything but a real appearance of Jesus, he would not have lived the life he did.

It is evident that Habermas believes that Paul experienced Jesus in bodily form on the way to Damascus. He agrees that it was different, but only due to the fact that it was after Jesus’ ascension, which resulted in Jesus’ magnificent glory accompanying his bodily presence.

### **3.5.3 Lüdemann**

For Lüdemann it is clear that “Paul uses ‘he appeared’ with reference to himself and thus puts his encounter with Jesus in parallel with the other appearances of Jesus to the other witnesses” (Lüdemann: 1995:49).

Lüdemann is therefore critical of Willi Marxsen who states that: “It is wrong to call ... the Damascus road experience ‘Paul’s Easter’ – unless one understands by Easter the experience of finding faith in Jesus ..” (Lüdemann 1995:49, 209n. 227).

Lüdemann believes that it is possible to “presuppose that some characteristics of the Damascus event can be got out of these retrospect’s of Paul, after more than twenty years ..” (1995:49). The texts Lüdemann have in mind are 1 Cor 9:1; Gal 1:15f; Phil 3:8 and II Cor 4:6. After discussing these texts Lüdemann concludes that “This vision was felt to be an extraordinarily event and a revelation .. in it the visionary received insights into an otherworldly sphere, which had an esoteric character and therefore represented secret knowledge. The whole event had the

character of light and happened, like the vision of John (Rev 1:10), in the spirit, i.e. in rapture/ecstasy” (1995:53). Thus far “our provisional description of the Damascus event .. (as –FM) a vision fit” (Ibid). Lüdemann argues that the implication of this finding means that the persons mentioned in 1 Cor 15:3ff also saw similar visions (1995:54).<sup>78</sup>

### 3.5.3.1 The vision hypothesis

Lüdemann quotes Hans Kessler who rejects the vision hypothesis. He states, “There are no indications .. that early Christianity derived Easter faith from inner psychological events ... For all our desire to know, this compels us to fundamental modesty ...” (1995:55). Against this Lüdemann confirms that “For Kessler, consistent historical research and faith seem mutually exclusive: the one destroys the other or makes it impossible” (Ibid). Lüdemann even goes so far to say that Kessler’s understanding “.. ultimately ends up in a sublime fundamentalism or biblicism” (Ibid).

In connection with the “objective vision hypothesis” Lüdemann states that “if there is anything miraculous about an objective vision, that does not lie in the vision in itself, but in what the vision can stimulate by affecting the organ of seeing” (1995:59, 212, 255n).

In rejecting the objective vision hypothesis Lüdemann further holds that “it should be stated emphatically that the introduction of the objective vision hypothesis ... is no further help ... It stands ‘entirely in the sphere of supernaturalism and its objectifying notion of God and is thus exposed to the severest objections” (1995: 59, p 212, 256n).

After this excursion Lüdemann discusses the Acts 9: 22 and 26 passages where different interpretations of Paul’s Damascus experience are found. No detailed

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<sup>78</sup> Here Lüdemann mentions the following scholars who agree with him in this respect: D.F. Strauss, C.H. Weisse, C. Holsten, H. Grass, I. Boer.

analysis will be given here. However, here will be analyses of a selection of Lüdemann's "historical reconstructions" as it relates to the abovementioned passages.

Lüdemann states that: "It seems probable to me that Paul's understanding of the conversion as a call first arose out of an *interpretation* (emphasis – FM) which may have been made within a short period (before his first visit to Jerusalem about two years after the Damascus event)" (1995:68-9). This leads Lüdemann to state, "We need to maintain that before Damascus Paul 'saw' Jesus" (Ibid).

To sum up here, Lüdemann indicates that "it ... seems certain that the Damascus event was a vision .. of a kind that occurs in the Old Testament, in intertestamental Judaism, in numerous parallels from the Hellenistic and Roman environment of the New Testament" (1995:69). Concluding this section, Lüdemann makes the claim that "the incapacity of historical-critical exegesis to understand phenomena like visions and auditions, has still to be written" (Ibid).

### **3.5.3.2 II Cor 12**

The next step in Lüdemann's analysis is what he calls "The call vision and the vision behind II Corinthians 12" (1995:79). The following quote indicates what Lüdemann thinks in this regard: "Just a little religious sensitivity leads to the insight that the 'Damascus vision' and the 'heavenly journey' narrated in II Cor 12 belong to the same form of experience, although they are certainly not identical ... both consist of a vision .." (Ibid).

### **3.5.3.3 Paul's "pre-Christian period"**

This section relates to what Lüdemann has certainly become famous for, namely his "attempt at an explanation in terms of depth psychology" (Lüdemann 1995:81). Lüdemann explains that "the two classical approaches to psychodynamics were developed in the analytic psychology of Jung and the

psychoanalysis of Freud” (Ibid) Lüdemann states how “Jung found genetic predispositions in the expressions of the unconscious (in dreams, myths and poems) and called them archetypes” (Ibid). By contrast Lüdemann confirms how “Freud’s psychoanalysis understands Christ’s symbolism as a resonance of early childhood conflicts” (1995:82). Although Jung and Freud’s theories “seem to stand over against each other” Lüdemann somehow manages to use both these theories to “deepen an understanding of the text” (Ibid).

We briefly look at how Lüdemann applies Jung’s theory:

- (1) The pre-Christian Paul was a committed zealous persecutor of Christians.
- (2) Behind Paul’s vehemently rejecting, aggressive attitude to Christians there was an inner build-up in his person of the kind that numerous works of depth psychology have ascertained in other cases.
- (3) Perhaps we can say with Jung that Saul was unconsciously a Christian even before his conversion.<sup>79</sup>
- (4) The unconscious ‘Christ complex’ (presuming that there was such a thing in Paul) may have been formally brought to the boil by the Christians whom he persecuted. Reginald H. Fuller adds “a similar explanation was given by C.H.Dodd in his lectures at Cambridge in 1936-37, which was attended by the present reviewer (meaning Fuller – FM).”<sup>80</sup>
- (5) When Paul approached Damascus, there was a catastrophic breakthrough of the long-suppressed longing ... Paul fled from the painful situation into the other world of hallucination.

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<sup>79</sup> Here Lüdemann quotes from Jung’s own work: Jung, C.G. 1960 (1928). *The Psychological Foundations of Belief in Spirits. Collected Works* 8. p 301-318. For a further explanation of Freud and Jung’s psychological theories see Jansen, H. 2002. *Door Simon gezien. Anderhalve eeuw theologisch debat in het Nederlandse protestantisme over de opstanding van Christus. Een systematisch-theologische studie.* Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, Zoetermeer. p 290-1.

<sup>80</sup> This statement of Fuller comes from his review: Fuller, R.H. (rev) 1996. *The Resurrection of Jesus. History, Experience, Theology.* Princeton Seminary Bulletin. Volume 17, nr 1. p 99.

Lüdemann completes this section by stating that “The crucial point here is that what he had desired unconsciously had become reality in a person” (1995:83).

After this discussion Lüdemann then makes a definite effort to connect Paul’s Damascus experience with his later “experience of life .. as a liberation from the law and from sin” as is found in Romans 7 (1995:84). In his book *Heretics*, he adds that “.. it is clear that the doctrine of justification is contained in the Damascus event and from the beginning represents the structure of Pauline theology”(1996:76).

After the above section Lüdemann goes on to apply the same principles to Peter. He then compares both Paul and Peter’s experiences with each other with some conclusionary remarks. This conclusions will be discussed in the section on I Cor 15:5.

In conclusion, one may note that Lüdemann’s psychological explanations have caused considerable reaction among New Testament scholars. For Lüdemann then, Paul did not witness a bodily appearance of Jesus. Instead, several psychological factors made him experience something internal, which caused his sudden turn around in becoming one of Jesus’ apostles.

#### **3.5.4 Wedderburn**

Wedderburn excludes the possibility of Paul having witnessed a bodily appearance of Jesus.

He indicates that had it not been for the Gospels, “we would very naturally have supposed ... that what he (Paul – FM) experienced was of the same kind as the experiences of the other witnesses, and that the only difference lay in the fact

that this experience occurred at a later time” (Wedderburn 1999:71).<sup>81</sup> Wedderburn continues to state “Such a conclusion comes as a surprise, particularly to those familiar with Luke’s account of Jesus’ resurrection appearances .. on the one hand, and .. the appearances .. to Paul .. in .. Acts on the other. For these two experiences seem to be of a wholly different kind” (1999:71).

Wedderburn goes on to state that “.. some may well have regarded the series of resurrection experiences as already terminated before Paul’s conversion. It may even be that Paul’s claim to have seen the risen Jesus was itself a catalyst that compelled some to say ‘Enough is enough’ .. But if one regards the formal leave-taking of the ascension story as a later, peculiarly Lukan, development, the way lay open for late-comers to claim to belong to the same select circle of witnesses” (1999:79). Wedderburn’s understanding here indicates that “Perhaps – and this would have been fortunate for the apostle Paul ... he made it into the ranks of the divinely accredited witnesses before the shutters finally went up” (Ibid).

#### **3.5.4.1 Paul’s Damascus experience**

Wedderburn is of the opinion that the Jesus of the Damascus road does not seem to take on any human form, but is manifested in dazzling light and as an unearthly voice from heaven (Wedderburn 1999:71).

Wedderburn concurs with Lüdemann by saying that “One is fully justified .. in describing Paul’s experience as in some sense ‘visionary’, whether or not one wants to go on from there to distinguish ‘subjective’ (i.e. self-induced?) visions and ‘objective’ visions (i.e. visions occasioned by some external factor)” (1999:72). Wedderburn’s statement hereafter is quite interesting, he states that

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<sup>81</sup> This statement makes it clear that Wedderburn rejects Lüdemann’s theory that Paul had the same experience the others had.

“But because it is our faith which interprets these visions as ‘objective’, they are ultimately, Marxsen maintains, also ‘subjective’” (Ibid).

Relating to Paul’s companions on the road to Damascus, Wedderburn believes that “there is considerable doubt as to how much Paul’s experience could be shared by his travelling companions” (1999:73).

With the above in mind Wedderburn postulates that “.. it is Luke who portrays the otherworldly experience of Paul’s conversion, and this same author stresses as no other the starkly physical character of the risen Christ in ch. 24 ... in all probability with a strong apologetic motive. That suggests that the movement from the intangible to the tangible and thus the demonstrable is likelier and at any rate more clearly attested than one in the opposite direction ... We would need good grounds for believing that any other appearances were different in nature from what he saw” (1999:74). In a sense then, one gets the impression that Wedderburn affirms that Paul had some kind of a visionary experience, which per implication indicates that all the other experiences were similar.<sup>82</sup>

#### **3.5.4.2 A psychological explanation?**

Relating to psychological explanations for Paul’s Damascus experience, Wedderburn states that “Such attempts to account for Paul’s ‘conversion’ in psychological terms (as Lüdemann does - FM) .. seem to me problematic in that those writings ought to be the starting-point and the basis of our attempts to understand the apostle, for we have little else to use as a basis” (Wedderburn 1999:76). Surprisingly, on the other hand, Wedderburn indicates that “Yet the

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<sup>82</sup> Wedderburn quotes Pokorny, who grants that all the resurrection witnesses to Jesus’ resurrection are “at the same time witnesses of faith, so that their testimony always was and is exposed to the suspicion that it is a case of wishful thinking or a hallucination (subjective vision), or the historization of a myth or ideology.” In following Vollenweider, who describes the category of visions as ‘*schwankender Boden*’, shaky ground, Wedderburn concludes that “we must beware of making our perceived need for certainty a reason for asserting that the experiences were of a more tangible, thisworldly kind. That would be to reshape history according to our own predictions” (Wedderburn 1999:75).

very fact that such an explanation has been suggested, and not just by Lüdemann, means that we cannot so easily discount *a priori* the possibility that such an explanation may be correct. Disproving it may be extremely difficult as the *prima facie* meaning of Paul's writings may indeed legitimately be turned on its head and so much read between the lines" (1999:77).

Although the ascension is not relevant in this discussion, Wedderburn's analysis of Cupitt's use of the words "psi-theories" and "vision theories" probably also relate to Paul's Damascus experience. He states that "Not so wide of the mark is Cupitt's comparison of what he calls 'psi-theories' or 'vision theories' of the resurrection with phenomena like the sighting of UFO's (or the Loch Ness monster)..". (1999:255, 63n).

It is quite clear then that Wedderburn holds that Paul's Damascus experience was some sort of a visionary experience, with the possibility of psychological motifs behind it. This excludes a bodily appearance of Jesus.

### **3.5.5 Wright**

Wright mentions that when Paul "saw Jesus, he was only just in time .. and none had occurred after his own" (Wright 2003:327). It is noteworthy that Wright states that had this not been the case in the early church, "Paul could scarcely have made this claim" (Ibid). So, not only was Paul's inclusion of his seeing Jesus proof of his apostolic authority, but also the fact that just as the other apostles, he had seen "Jesus himself, personally present" (Ibid).

Although there might be some overlapping here with what follows later under Paul's Damascus experience, it is important to state the following arguments which Wright lists in support of Paul's intention of a real "seeing":

- (1) Firstly, the proximity of I Cor 9.1 means that we should assume here what is clear there, namely that Paul intends to refer to a 'seeing' which

was on par with normal human 'seeing'. It may have been more, but was not less. It was not simply a private experience.

- (2) What follows then is that 'last of all' makes it clear that, as far as Paul at least is concerned, his 'seeing' of the risen Jesus was part of a sequence that came to an end.
- (3) Then, Wright is convinced that “it is noteworthy that 15.1-11 as a whole clearly speaks of a *public event* for which there is *evidence* in the form of *witnesses who saw something and can be interrogated*” (Wright 2003:282).
- (4) What follows then for Wright is that I Cor 15 does not speak of “a non-bodily 'resurrection'. Nor does it speak of the risen body of Jesus as being made of light .. (it is – FM) the non-luminosity of Jesus' risen body that is striking (granted Daniel 12.3), not the luminosity, which is seldom mentioned in the New Testament .. or in the fathers of the first two centuries” (Ibid).

For Wright it is definite that when “Paul spoke of Jesus ‘appearing’ in verse 8, he did not mean that Jesus appeared in his (Paul's - FM) heart or mind, but to his bodily eyes and sight, as a real human being, truly and bodily raised from the dead” (2003:383).

#### **3.5.5.1 Paul's Damascus Experience**

With the above said, it is then no surprise that Wright rejects those views which hold that Paul's Damascus road experience excluded Jesus appearing in bodily form to him. He confirms that “The spectacular picture of the Damascus Road event, related no fewer than three times in Acts, has coloured the imagination of those who have read the brief and perfunctory mentions in Paul himself; it has been wrongly aligned with one passage in particular (2 Corinthians 4.6) which is about something else” (Wright 2003:376).

It is clear that both William L. Craig and Gary Habermas take the same stand in this regard.

Wright furthermore confirms that the above “.. imaginative reading has distracted attention from what Luke was trying to do through telling the story in that way (or 'in those ways', since the three accounts differ)” (Ibid).

Wright concludes that all the evidence which he describes in this section “.. should prevent us from taking it as decisive evidence for a non-bodily 'seeing' of Jesus” (Ibid).

### **3.5.5.2 An “objective” or a “subjective” experience?**

In order to come to grips with Paul’s Damascus road experience, it is necessary to give attention to the research relating to what really happened to Paul on that Damascus road.

Wright indicates how over the past two centuries, discussion of Paul’s conversion have repeatedly returned to the question of whether what happened was an 'objective' or a 'subjective' experience; that is, whether Paul saw and heard something or someone who was 'really there' in the public domain, or whether what happened to him was an 'internal' experience without any correlate in external reality (Wright 2003:377).

Wright then expounds what he just stated. He indicates that “.. the 'modernist' conception of 'religion', within which framework a good deal of critical scholarship has been pursued, has thought a priori of 'religious experience', including all reported experience of revelations from another world (e.g. 'heaven'), as of necessity 'internal'” (Ibid). This Wright declares was clearly “..part of the classic post Enlightenment paradigm in which, following eighteenth-century Deism,

anything to do with 'God' or 'religion' was removed by definition from contact with the world of space, time and matter” (Ibid). The implication was clearly that whenever someone constrained by this worldview comes upon a report of a heavenly vision, they are bound to classify it as 'internal'. That is all it can be - for them (Ibid).

In rejecting this hypothesis Wright states that:

- (1) “first-century Jews would not have seen things like that. For them, 'heaven' as God's sphere was every bit as real, and every bit as external to their own reality, their own hearts, minds and feelings, as the world of 'earth' ” (Ibid).
- (2) Wright even adds, “It is all very well for us to tell them, two thousand years later, what was 'really' going on” (Ibid).
- (3) In this section Wright then concludes by saying that “We need, perhaps, to be a bit more sure of our own ground before we patronizingly impose our ethic view, squelching what would emerge from a more historical, a more emic, understanding” (Ibid).

Wright puts it somewhat categorical that “When .. Paul speaks of seeing or hearing something which has a profound effect on him, this cannot of itself be allowed to mean that he was simply having a ‘religious experience’ without any objective correlate” (2003:378).

In his recent debate with Dom Crossan, Wright states that: “.. presumably plenty of other people in the ancient world had visions of people after they died, and that doesn't mean they're alive again – it means they're dead .. The ancient pagan writers were very clear about that. That's one of the reasons that you have these meals with the dead at the tomb, not to bring them back, but actually as a way of making sure that Uncle Joe ain't coming back again” (2006:35). This is a profound statement, as it could also possibly be an appropriate answer to the

theory that the disciples and early Christians would've venerated Jesus at his tomb had the location been known.<sup>83</sup>

### 3.5.5.3 Paul's understanding

Wright makes the statement that "Paul explains the difference between himself and the others not in terms of his seeing of Jesus being a different sort of 'seeing', but in terms of his own personal unreadiness for such an experience .. his 'seeing' of Jesus was the same as theirs in terms of the Jesus they saw, but it was radically different in terms of his own experience, being ripped from the womb of zealous Judaism, to come face to dazzling face with the crucified and risen lord" (Wright 2003:328). This is an interpretation, which is probably foreign, even to William L. Craig as well as Gary Habermas.

Wright goes on to state that Paul's "(the untimely born) remains a puzzle, and addressing it may help to gain more clarity here .. Paul has in mind .. a stillborn child .. He could .. be echoing Job 3:16 .." (Ibid). Once again it should be stated that Wright's reference to Job here is quite unique. He goes on to state that "Job is wishing that he could have been like a stillborn child who never sees the light .." (Ibid).

Thus for Wright it is quite clear that "Paul .. was like someone as good as dead, unable to see anything, but all that was changed in a fresh act of life-giving grace" (Ibid).<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> This goes against Wedderburn's theory. James Dunn's critique of Wedderburn shows similarities with Wright's analysis above: Dunn, J.D.G. (ed) Christopheren, A. *et al* 2002. *Beyond the Historical Impasse? In Dialogue with A.J.M. Wedderburn. Paul, Luke and the Graeco-Roman World*. JSNTS. 217.p 250-265.

<sup>84</sup> Also thinking in this line but not as developed as Wright is Jerome Neyrey in his book *The Resurrection Stories* when he states that "An unlikely choice for God's favor, Paul is legitimated and commissioned to preach as well as to administer this church .. for God has graced him and the Risen Lord has appeared to him and commissioned him." (Neyrey, J. 1988. *The Resurrection Stories*. Zacchaeus Studies: New Testament. Michael Glazier. Wilmington, Delaware. P 23).

Wright alludes to another possibility. That is Numbers 12:12 “where Moses prays that Miriam, who has opposed him and been punished with leprosy, should not remain leprous, ‘like one equal to a dead person’ .. This may offer more illumination” (Ibid). Wright interrupts his discussion here to bestow thanks on Nicolas Perrin, who made this suggestion to him. Wright states “If Paul is alluding to this story he is doing so in order to align himself with Miriam, and the early church with Moses, the ones who have seen the lord face to face” (Ibid).

For Wright it is quite clear that Paul includes himself in the list of witnesses who “saw” the risen Jesus. This appearance was corporeal and not visionary as some suggest.

### **3.6 - 1 Cor 15:44 – *swma pneumatikon***

This text has caused major discussions as it relates to the mode of the resurrection body. Craig, Habermas and Wright believe that we have here a corporeal, tangible **swma pneumatikon**. However, this body will exclude the sinful **sarx** which cannot be resurrected. On the other side Lüdemann and Wedderburn do not believe that a body in *any* form will be resurrected.

#### **3.6.1 Craig**

Before commencing on this important text, it is probably worth mentioning the following striking statement made by Craig as it relates to this text. He believes that “.. the nature of the resurrection body in I Cor. 15:35-57 .. brings to the surface one’s theological preconceptions ..” (Craig 1989:119).

Because this famous and often confusing phrase **swma pneumatikon** is so important, a more thorough background for the purpose of better understanding is needed here. Craig has done substantial research in this field, which is worth

mentioning.

### 3.6.1.1 - **sw̄ma** - **sarx**

Craig indicates how the most important term in the second half of I Cor. 15 is **sw̄ma**. He explains how during the nineteenth century, under the influence of idealism, theologians interpreted the **sw̄ma** as the form of a thing and the **sarx** as its substance. In accordance with this understanding “in the old commentaries one finds that the **sw̄ma pneumatikon** was conceived to be a body made out of *himmlischer Lichtsubstanz*” (Craig 1989:118-119). Against this understanding, Craig states that this understanding has now been all but abandoned. Craig follows Gundry’s considerations which militate against taking **sw̄ma** as form and **sarx** as substance (Ibid). One such example is when Gundry indicates that the “.. **sw̄ma** is the body, form and substance” (Ibid).

Craig further states that “Gundry succeeds admirably in carrying his main point: that **sw̄ma** is never used in the New Testament to denote the whole person in isolation from his physical body, but is much more used to denote the physical body itself or the man with special emphasis on the physical body” (1989:120).

This leads Craig to believe that “the interchange of pronouns with **sw̄ma** by no means implies that **sw̄ma** refers to the ‘person’ in isolation from the body” (1989:121).

Craig makes the claim that “There are several passages in which **sw̄ma** appears to equal **sarx** in the morally evil sense (Rom. 6:6; 7:24; 8:10, 12-13)” (Ibid). But, as he indicates, in these cases the **sw̄ma** is the instrument of **sarx** not necessarily its equivalent” (Ibid). Accordingly then:” ‘body of death’ and ‘body of sin’ are not the flesh *per se* but the physical body enslaved and doomed to death by sin” (Ibid).

Craig indicates that the remaining passage in which **sw̄ma** might appear to equal

**sw̄ma** in a morally evil sense is Rom. 8:10. Craig argues that “even if they were here synonymous, that does not win a holistic meaning for **sw̄ma**, for **sarx** is the sinful proclivity within man’s nature” (Ibid). Craig then states that the only way to equate the two is to make the body alive, which he would never do to the evil flesh. This leads Craig to the point where he indicates that “**sw̄ma** never means the morally evil **sarx** simpliciter” (Ibid).

In this regard, Craig also agrees with Gundry (1989:122).<sup>85</sup>

### 3.6.1.2 - **SW̄ma** - material substance

Craig makes it clear that **sw̄ma** involves a material substance. It is therefore not surprising that he states that for “Too long we have been told for Paul **sw̄ma** is the ego, the ‘I’ of a man .. The idea that **sw̄ma** may have an immaterial substance of medium surreptitiously introduces the notion that **sw̄ma pneumatikon** is a body made out of spirit, which it is not” (Craig 1989:123).

Craig makes a strong claim when he indicates that “The notion of **sw̄ma** as the ‘I’ is a perversion of the biblical meaning of **sw̄ma**” (1989:124).<sup>86</sup>

### 3.6.1.3 German Creed: resurrection of the *Fleisch*

Craig indicates how theologians are familiar with **sarx** as the evil, proclivity within man. What is notable is Craig’s follow up statement, which indicates, “This touches sensitive nerves in German theology because the Creed in German states that I believe in the resurrection of the *Fleisch*, not of the *body* as in the

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<sup>85</sup> Craig quotes Gundry who states that “The **sw̄ma** denotes the physical body, roughly synonymous with ‘flesh’ in the neutral sense. It forms that part of man in and through which he lives and acts in the world. It becomes the base of operations for sin in the unbeliever, for the Holy Spirit in the believer. Barring prior occurrence of the Parousia, the **sw̄ma** will die. That is the lingering effect of sin even in the believer. But it will also be resurrected. That is its ultimate end, a major proof of its worth and necessity to wholeness of human being, and the reason for its sanctification now” (1989:122).

<sup>86</sup> Craig quotes Robert Jewett who asserts that “Bultmann has turned **sw̄ma** into its virtual opposite: a symbol for that structure of individual existence which is essentially non-physical .. (this - FM) have sacrificed theology to a philosophical fashion that is already passe” (1989:124).

English translation” (Craig1989:125). On this Craig agrees that theologians are anxious to disassociate themselves from any doctrine that the flesh as a morally evil principle will be resurrected. On this however, Craig makes the remark that “they seem prone to overlook the fact that Paul often uses **sarx** in a non-moral sense simply to mean the physical flesh or body” (Ibid). When it comes to I Cor. 15, Craig believes that Paul is clearly speaking of **sarx** in a physical, morally neutral sense, for he speaks of the flesh of birds, animals, and fish, which would be absurd in any moral sense” (Ibid).

With this statement in mind Craig makes the suggestion that “Understood in this physical sense, the doctrine of the resurrection of the flesh is therefore unobjectionable” (1989:126).

#### 3.6.1.4 - **ajqrwpov yucikov / anqrwpov pneumstikov / ajqrwpov sarkino~**

Craig then moves on to I Cor. 2:14-3:3 where Paul clearly differentiates three types of men:

- (1) “the **ajqrwpov yucikov** or natural man apart from God's Spirit;
- (2) the **anqrwpov pneumstikov** or spiritual man who is led and empowered by God's Spirit;
- (3) and the **ajqrwpov sarkino~** or carnal man who, though possessing the Spirit of God ( I Cor. 12:13), is nevertheless still under the sway of the **sarx** or evil principle in human nature” (Craig 1989:126).

The above differentiations make it evident for Craig that for Paul **yucikov** did not have the connotations which we today associate with ‘soul’ “ (Ibid).

Craig believes that Paul's opponents seemed to have been unable to accept the resurrection because the resurrection of a material body was either

inconceivable or offensive to their Greek minds.<sup>87</sup> Apparently Craig shows how Paul's answer steers a careful course between the crasser forms of the Pharisaic doctrine of resurrection in which the raised will, for example, each beget a thousand children and eat the flesh of Leviathan, and the Platonist doctrine of the immortality of the soul apart from the body. Craig believes that "Paul, will contend that the resurrection body will be radically different from this natural body, but that it will nevertheless be a *body* .." (1989:127).<sup>88</sup> It is quite clear to Craig that Paul's understanding of resurrection moved away from that which the Pharisaic as well as Platonic doctrines taught. Paul's understanding is still colored by at least the Pharisaic doctrine but clearly not exactly the same.

### 3.6.1.5 **Sitou** – the seed

Craig indicates how some commentators criticize Paul's analogy of the seed because he lacked the modern botanical notion that a particular type of seed yields a particular type of plant. Accordingly they ".. thought Paul could think that a date-palm could conceivably spring from a grain of corn!" (Craig1989:129). Against this understanding Craig states that Paul ".. specifically says that God gives 'each kind of seed its own body' which harks back to the Genesis account of creation" (Ibid).

When Paul refers to "different sorts of flesh" Craig is of the opinion that Paul has "the Jewish distinction between clean and unclean food" (Ibid) in mind. For Craig then, in this context, **swma** and **sarx** is not identical. "Rather, in the present connection **sarx** means essentially 'meat' or 'organic matter'" (Ibid). Explaining this further, Craig shows that "This is not to say, however, that Paul contemplates any formal dichotomy between form and substance that carries over to the other analogies, as the older commentaries held and as Conzelmann still asserts" (1989:130).<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Here Craig puts in the following: (cf. Bultmann's "resuscitation of a corpse") (Craig 1989:126).

<sup>88</sup> Very important to Craig is that II Baruch 50-51 should be read in conjunction with Paul's argument. Craig indicates that it is highly instructive that in Acts 23:6 Luke identifies Paul's doctrine of the resurrection with that of the Pharisees.

<sup>89</sup> Craig's reference to Conzelmann, comes from his publication: *Korinther*, pp. 334-36.

With the above said, Craig clearly believes that the “old commentaries were therefore wrong in defining **sarx** tout simple as ‘substance,’ for inorganic matter would not be **sarx**; Paul would never speak of the flesh of a stone” (Ibid). Following this, Craig states that “To say that the resurrection body has therefore a different kind of flesh than the present body probably presses the analogy too far; all Paul wants to show is that as there are differences among mundane things, analogously the supernatural resurrection body could also differ from the present body” (Ibid).

In connection to terrestrial and celestial bodies (vs. 40-41), Craig shows that “There can be no doubt from v. 41 that Paul means astronomical bodies, not angels. Again the point of the analogy is the same: there are radical differences among bodies in the physical world, so why should not the body in the world to come, differ from the present body?” (1989:130). Here Craig shows how this exposes a serious deficiency in the argument of Robinson.<sup>90</sup>

### 3.6.1.6 **doxa** – Lichtsubstanz?

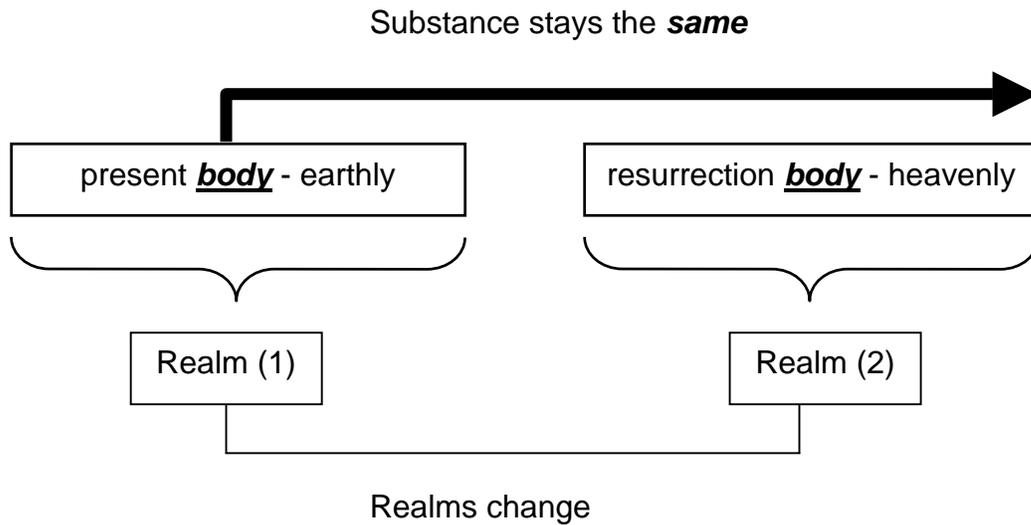
Craig states that “the **doxa** of the heavenly bodies is their brightness, which varies” (Craig 1989:131). Accordingly then, there is no trace here of *Lichtsubstanz*. “When applied to the resurrection body, however, **doxa** seems to be honour (v. 43). The analogy is also particularly apt because the **swmata epigeia** bear a close analogy to the **swma yucikon**, which can be described as **ek ghç coikos** (v. 47) and **epigeios** (II Cor. 5:1), and the **swmata epourania** resemble the **swma pneumatikon**, which is described as **ek ouranou** (v. 47; II Cor. 5:2) and **epouranioç** (v. 48)” (Ibid).

Craig indicates that these descriptions make it evident that realms of reality, not substances, are being here contrasted:

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<sup>90</sup> Robinson infers from Phil. 3:21 that Paul visualised Christ’s resurrection body as a luminous, heavenly body.

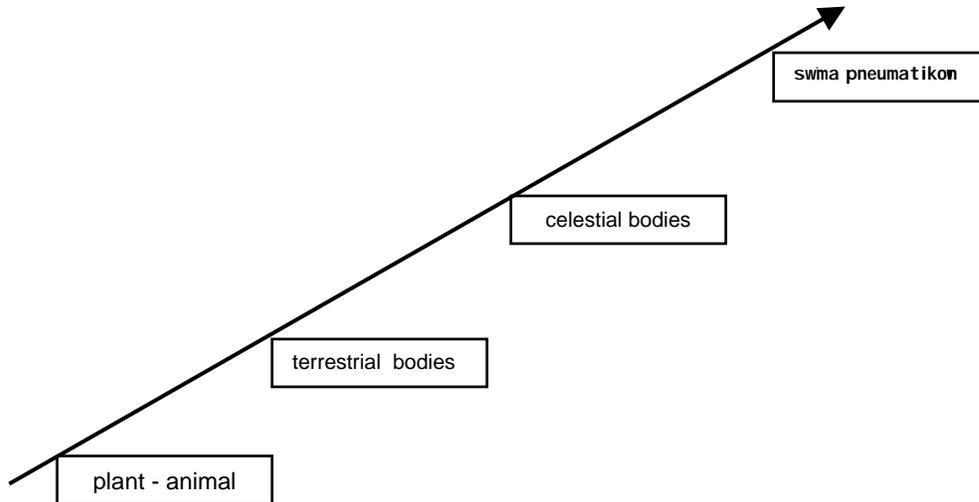
**Table 4: Realms and substance**



Thus, for Craig Paul has prepared the way for his doctrine of the world to come by three analogies from the present world. All of them show how things can be radically different from other things of the same genus; similarly a *swima pneumatikon* will be seen to be radically different from a *swima yucikon*” (Ibid). Craig makes another interesting statement when he indicates that Paul’s analogies form an ascending scale from plant to animal to terrestrial bodies to celestial bodies; the next type of body to be mentioned will be the most wonderful and exalted of all” (Ibid).

The ascending scale might be conceptually illustrated as follow:

**Table 5: Ascending scale**



### 3.6.1.7 swma pneumatikon

Following Craig’s discussion above, he moves on to define the spiritual body in more detail. He states that from verses 42-50 “.. the **swma pneumatikon**.. will be imperishable, glorious, powerful, and spiritual; whereas the present body is perishable, dishonourable, weak, and physical (vs. 42-44)” (Craig 1989:131). He explains it as follows:

- (1) It is sown **ejh fqora!** but it is raised **ejh ajfqarsia!** .. Paul teaches personal bodily immortality, not immortality of the soul alone.
- (2) It is sown **ejh ajtimia**, but it is raised **en doxh!**.. with the whole creation to be set free from sin and decay .. for the redemption of our bodies .. This body, dishonoured through sin and death, will be transformed by Christ to be like his glorious body.
- (3) It is sown **ejh ajsqeneia!** but it will be raised **ejh dunamei**. Paul knew physical weakness very well! .. his ‘thorn in the flesh’ .. Paul found in his weakness the power of Christ ... Just as Christ ‘was crucified in

weakness, but lives by the power of God' (II Cor. 13:4), so Paul longed to know the power of the resurrection and looked forward to the day when he, too, would receive a powerful resurrection body (II Cor. 5:1-4; Phil. 3:10-11).

- (4) It is sown a **sw̄ma yucikon**, but it is raised a **sw̄ma pneumatikon**. By a **sw̄ma yucikon** Paul clearly does not mean a body made out of **yuch̄n**. Rather, just as Paul frequently uses **sarkikos** to indicate, not the physical substance of a thing but its orientation, its dominating principle, so **yucikos** also indicates, not a substance, but an orientation (1989:131-3).

After the above analysis, Craig asserts that "In the New Testament **yucikos** always has a negative connotation .. Hence, the emphasis on **sw̄ma pneumatikon** is not that the body is physical, but that it is natural" (Ibid). It then follows that ".. **sw̄ma yucikon** ought rightly to be translated 'natural body', it means our ordinary human body. This is the body that will be sown. But it is raised **sw̄ma pneumatikon**. And just as **sw̄ma yucikon** does not mean a body made out of **yuch̄n** neither does **sw̄ma pneumatikon** mean a body made out of **pneuma**" (Ibid). Here Craig states that virtually every modern commentator agrees on this point, meaning that Paul is not talking about a rarefied body made out of spirit or ether; he rather means a body under the lordship and direction of God's Spirit (1989:135-6).<sup>91</sup>

Craig feels very strongly that it is "unfortunate that Paul's carefully chosen term **sw̄ma pneumatikon** has been usually translated 'spiritual body,' for such a rendering tends to be very misleading .." (1989:136).

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<sup>91</sup> Craig states further that philological analysis then, leads, in Clavier's words, to the conclusion that ". . . the 'spiritual body' is, in substance, the same body ; this body of flesh, but controlled by the spirit, as is the body of Jesus Christ" (Craig 1989:136). Craig's response is "Clavier sadly misunderstands v. 50, as evident from his remark that Paul should have mentioned bones along with flesh and blood" (Ibid). Craig however goes on to state that "The contrast is not between physical body/non-physical body, but between naturally oriented body/spiritually oriented body" (Ibid). Craig also adds here that "It is the same contrast that Paul drawn between the natural man and the spiritual man in I Cor. 2:14-15, a passage which seems decisive for the understanding of Paul's contrast in I Cor. 15" (Ibid). Accordingly then "They do not differ *qua sw̄ma* ; rather they differ *qua* orientation" (Ibid).

Craig agrees with Hering who suggests that it is better to translate *swma pneumatikon* as the opposite of natural body (*swma yucikon*), that is, a *supernatural* body” (Ibid). Thus, “ ‘spiritual body’ .. as Hering rightly comments, (if –FM) understood substantively is practically a self-contradiction. By the same token, ‘physical body’ is really a tautology” (Ibid). Craig makes it quite clear that a “natural body/supernatural body is a better rendering of Paul's meaning here” (Craig 1989:137).

### 3.6.2 Habermas

Habermas believes that we will be raised with a spiritual body. But, he rejects those views, which associate with this a non-embodied spirit. This, according to Habermas is not what Paul or the Gospels teaches. As this position is also shared by Craig it is not necessary to repeat all the arguments in support of this position.

Habermas states that “I would define a spiritual body in Paul’s sense as a real body, the same body, but changed .. What is raised is the same body, and it is a real body, yet it is changed” (Habermas 1987:98-9). For Habermas this ‘spiritual body’ “.. occupied space and time and could be touched” (2005:40).

Against those who say that Paul only refers to a spirit, he states “Paul does not say that the Resurrection body is a spirit. He says that there is a spiritual *soma* and there is a natural *soma*. We do injustice to Paul if we ignore the word *soma* and stress the word *spiritual*” (1987:100). Habermas indicates that our dead bodies “.. is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body” (Ibid). This means, “There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body” (1 Cor. 15.44) (Ibid).

He then goes on to indicate, “The Greek for spirit, obviously is *pneuma*. But the word Paul uses here is *pneumatikos soma* for ‘spiritual body.’ Paul is clearly

saying (that – FM) some change (occur – FM) here. He is not saying Jesus is a spirit, but there is a physical body” (Ibid).<sup>92</sup>

Habermas follows Craig who states that “Virtually every modern commentator agrees on this point: Paul is not talking about a rarefied body made out of spirit or ether; he means a body under the lordship and direction of God’s Spirit” (1987:167). Habermas believes, as does Craig and Wright that the spiritual is in contrast to the natural, fleshly body. Verse 50 will deal with this statement.

### **3.6.2.1 - 1 Cor 2:14-15**

Habermas compares verse 44 with 1 Cor 2:14-15 where Paul also contrasts **yucikōr** (natural) with **pneumatikōr** (spiritual). This could mean the unsaved man versus the Christian who is led by the Holy Spirit. The exact same words is used in 1 Cor 15:44 which indicate to Habermas that our body is sown with its fleshly and sinful appetites and raised holy with spiritual appetites. This, together with other instances where Paul refers to “changed”, “transformed” and “raised” indicates to Habermas that it is unwarranted to speak of a “disembodied future existence” when Paul refers to the term “spiritual body” (Habermas 2004:162-3).

### **3.6.2.2 - Phil 3:20-21**

Habermas wants to indicate from this text that 1 Cor 15:44 implies a real body. Habermas states: “For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body (soma), that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body (soma) (Phil. 3.20-21)”

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<sup>92</sup> This comes from an undated internet article: Habermas G. Twelve Historical Facts for the Resurrection of Jesus. Internet article. <http://www.garyhabermas.com/video/video.htm> (16/10/2006).

(Habermas1987:58). Habermas explains: “First there is the body, then it is the body plus something else to fashion a glorious body” (Ibid).<sup>93</sup>

Another aspect, which Habermas deals with, is the view that Paul’s understanding of resurrection body cannot be reconciled with the Gospels. To this he states that “..the Gospels and Paul agree on an important fact: the resurrected Jesus had a new spiritual body. The Gospels never present Jesus walking out of the tomb. . . when the stone is rolled away, Jesus does not walk out the way He does in apocryphal literature” (Ibid). This leads Habermas to state, “He’s already gone, so He presumably exited through the rock. Later He appears in buildings and then disappears at will” (Ibid). Thus, for Habermas it is clear that “The Gospels clearly say that Jesus was raised in a spiritual body. It was His real body, but it was changed, including new, spiritual qualities” (Ibid).

In conclusion it is clear that Habermas believes that all believers will rise with a real body. That body being called a spiritual body does not at all take away the fact that it will be a body, though glorified as that of Jesus.

### 3.6.3 Lüdemann

From the discussion relating to Paul’s Damascus experience, and Peter’s experience of Jesus, it is clear that Lüdemann rejects even the possibility that they could’ve witnessed Jesus in bodily form. From this it clearly follows that Lüdemann rejects any resurrection associated with a body.

In this dissertation, all of the five scholars’ interpretation of I Cor 15:44 & 50 are analysed. It is noteworthy that Lüdemann’s book *The Resurrection of Jesus*,

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<sup>93</sup> This comes from an undated internet article: Habermas, G. *Twelve Historical Facts for the Resurrection of Jesus*. Internet article. <http://www.garyhabermas.com/video/video.htm> (16/10/2006).

*History, Experience. Theology* excludes any focussed discussion as it relates to these two verses. Lüdemann probably refers only once to verse 50 to support his claim that the empty tomb tradition was unknown to Paul. It might be that the significance of these verses will fall away should Lüdemann's theories regarding I Cor 15:1-11 and the Gospels be correct. This is probably why he does not deal with these verses in this book.

Of particular significance, is the following. In 1984 Lüdemann was of the opinion that "There is a consensus in research that according to 1 Corinthians 15,<sup>94</sup> all Christians will be given a resurrectional body after the parousia and that the transformation results is a *soma pneumatikon*, which is contrasted with the earthly body, the *soma psychikon*" (Lüdemann 1984:241-2).

Since then, he has altered his position substantially. This will be discussed further on.

### 3.6.4 Wedderburn

After careful consideration of Wedderburn's book *Beyond Resurrection*, it becomes quite clear that for him, the **swma pneumatikon** of verse 44 is highly problematic. Somewhat related to this is Wedderburn's section on what he calls "Life now?" In this section he pleads for a kind of realised "here and now" experience of resurrection. In this way he tries to take the focus off a possible life after death, where one could imagine that the **swma** part of **swma pneumatikon** falls away.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Obviously relating to verse 44.

<sup>95</sup> The discussion with Wedderburn in this regard affirms this statement:

Mulder: "Are you saying that in us, living according to the ethical Jesus or the human Jesus that there might be some kind of eschatological component which we don't know much about and that it might realize once we die, but we're not going to discuss it or try to define anything about it?"

Wedderburn: If one thinks about realized eschatology, then in a sense we have it already, and the question of a second phase is a rather speculative matter" (Wedderburn, A.J.M. 2006. *Interview with Mulder, F.* Ludwig Maximilian Universität, Munchen. 06 July 2006).

As will be seen below, Wedderburn analyses the Corinthian situation in a particular and perhaps unique way. After showing Paul's uneasiness with their wilful sinning, Wedderburn makes a case for a realised eschatology, which ends up in the Fourth Gospel where "Eternal life" is *only* here and now. The implication is clear, implying that **swima pneumatikon** is an all earthly concept (Wedderburn 1999:156).

Wedderburn states that Paul's problem with the Corinthians is "too high an estimate of what Christianity already have in this world" (Ibid). Accordingly they "were inclined to claim more for their present existence in this world than Paul felt to be warranted" (Ibid). In line with this context, Wedderburn indicates in the second part of 1 Cor 15, how they were "deluding themselves if they believed that their present, earthly existence could be their final state; first the final enemy, death must be defeated (v. 26), and they must not confuse their natural existence in the image of the earthly man, Adam, with the nature of the existence that will be theirs in the image of the heavenly Adam of the end-time, Christ (esp. Vv. 44-50)" (Ibid). Wedderburn furthermore states that how "being saved through grace" could not mean "one was free to go on sinning, thus giving grace more scope (!)" (Ibid). This, Paul argues is impossible, "not only because Christians share in Christ's death too, and therefore break with sin, but also because the purpose of their sharing in Christ's resurrection is that they might 'walk in newness of life' (Rom 6:4)" (1999: 156-7).

Accordingly Paul states that "the gift of the Spirit .. is a foretaste .. a 'pledge' .. for the future age here and now (II Cor 1:22; 5:5) .. just as Christ's resurrection was in his eyes the 'first-fruits' of a still future resurrection (I Cor 15:20)" (Ibid).

Wedderburn then states that "It is characteristic of Paul's thought that for him Christians live as one's already having, but at the same time not yet having, the

future state .. (there is a - FM) tension between these two poles of the already fulfilled and the not yet fulfilled” (Ibid).<sup>96</sup>

Now here is noticed an interesting twist in Wedderburn’s argumentation. He states, “the authors of Colossians and Ephesians, were perhaps not so successful in maintaining this “not yet fulfilled” (1999:157). In this regard it is worth mentioning that this statement probably goes back to Wedderburn’s wrestling with Robert C. Tannehill’s book, *Dying and Rising with Christ*: “There it is assumed .. that when in Col 2:11-13 rising with Christ is spoken of in the past tense .. a ‘more primitive form’ than that found in Rom 6 where Paul seems to confine the resurrection of Christ to the future; there he was modifying an already existing idea of a ‘past resurrection with Christ’ rather than creating a new idea” (1987:1). It is quite interesting that in the end, Wedderburn concludes that “both the apostle and his followers (referring to the writers of Colossians and Ephesians – FM) provided canonical hand-holds for the Gnostics ..”(1987:231). See also Wedderburn’s commentary on Colossians.<sup>97</sup> Wedderburn’s acquaintance with Gnosticism goes back quite some time.<sup>98</sup>

Of particular importance for Wedderburn is also to state that “The Fourth Gospel is a prime witness to a ‘realized eschatology’ .. ‘Eternal life’ is .. not a future gift, but something that those believing in Christ already have (3:36). As Marxen puts it, ‘Jesus lived and gave a resurrection into new life even before his crucifixion. So too ‘resurrection’ seems to be a present reality ..” (1999:158).

Thus, in the above analysis it becomes clear that Wedderburn tries to show a development in thought, which can be described as follows:

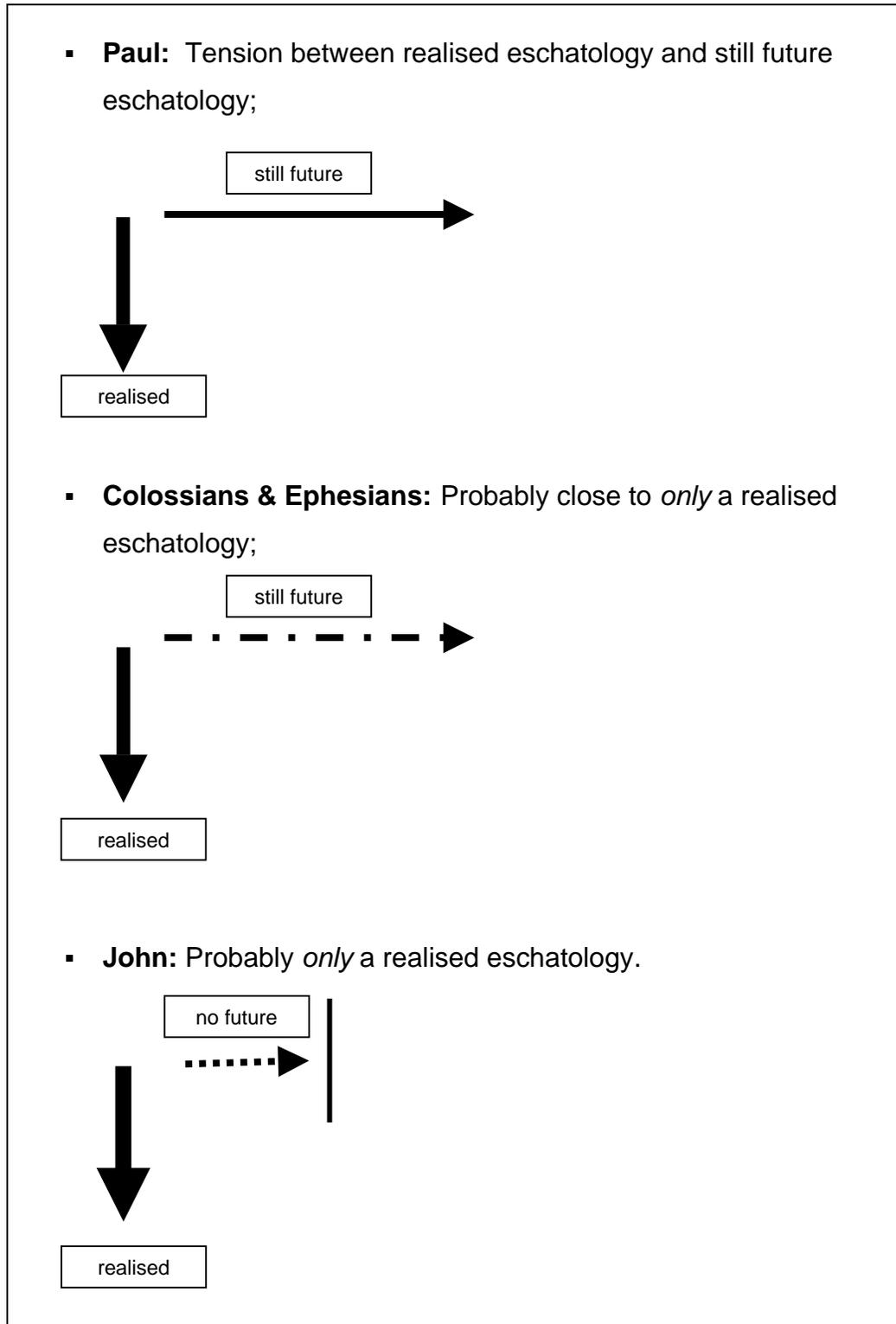
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<sup>96</sup> Paul’s focus on a future eschatology is well described by J.S. Vos, quoted in H.J. de Jonge’s *Visionary Experience and the Historical Origins of Christianity* when he states that “The Corinthians’ denial of a future resurrection has been interpreted ... as the expression of their scepticism with regard to any life after death at all.” De Jonge, H.J. in Bieringer, G. (ed) et al 2002. *Visionary Experience and the Historical Origins of Christianity. Resurrection in the New Testament. Festschrift J. Lambrecht*. P 36, 6n)

<sup>97</sup> This comes from: Wedderburn, A.J.M. & Lincoln, A.T. 1993. *The Theology of the Later Pauline letters. New Testament Theology*. Cambridge University Press. P 3-64.

<sup>98</sup> In this regard see Wedderburn, A.J.M. & Logan, A.H.B. (ed) 1983. *The New Testament and Gnosis: Essays in honour of Robert Mcl. Wilson*. T & T Clark Limited. Edinburgh.

**Table 6: Eschatological development**



The implication of the above is that **swma pneumatikon** ends up confined to this world only.

It is therefore not strange that Wedderburn, when discussing Paul's concept of a **swma pneumatikon** states that "All his stress ... is on the discontinuity between the old 'body' and the new, so much so that it comes as rather a surprise that he adds, seemingly as an afterthought, that the new is also, like the mortal and perishable old nature, a 'body'" (1999: 71).

With the above discussion in mind, the following section, which Wedderburn postulates, can be understood in a broader sense.

#### **3.6.4.1 Bodily resurrection – philosophically necessary, philosophically tenable?**

Wedderburn states that "the notion of a 'spiritual body' is open to the charge of incomprehensibility, that it is a combination of mutually incompatible terms very much like 'a square circle'" (Wedderburn 1999:132).<sup>99</sup>

Wedderburn then follows with a few interesting statements:

- (1) "it is hard to be other than agnostic about the survival of the human person after death and about the nature of any such survival" (1999:134).
- (2) "if we wish to use the idea of resurrection to satisfy this real theological and philosophical need, in order to present a coherent and tenable view of an after-life, then Paul's notion of resurrection will not meet that

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<sup>99</sup> Wedderburn states that "For Paul Tillich the physical account of the resurrection leads to the absurd question ... as to what happened to the molecules which comprise the corpse .. Then absurdity becomes compounded into blasphemy" (1999:132-3). After quoting Vollenweider in the same context, Wedderburn indicates that in itself that is in no way invalid .. as long as the gap between the reinterpretation and that which is being reinterpreted is clearly recognized .." (Ibid).

need, for it lacks that vital ingredient, the continuity between the old nature and the new” (1999:146).

- (3) “After a careful examination of 1 Cor. 15 and even more of II Cor. 5:1-10, Hans Grass in fact comes to the conclusion that Paul’s arguments presuppose that the old corporeal existence is no longer required .. and thus the tomb of Jesus need not be emptied .. This verdict of Grass’s is convincing as an interpretation of the texts, even if the analogies which he draws to Gnostic thought are less so, and the idea of our ‘bearing’ a body conflicts with other anthropological passages in Paul where our bodies seem rather to be ourselves in our corporeality” (1999:146-7).

Wedderburn further states that “some who question the literal .. interpretation of the stories of the empty tomb and of Jesus’ bodily resurrection .. subscribe to, a belief in a ‘spiritual resurrection’” (Ibid). But Wedderburn seems not satisfied with this concept either. He states that “What on earth (or in heaven!) is a ‘spiritual body’?, we can equally properly ask ‘What is a ‘spiritual resurrection?’ ... in the present context, simply the equivalent of ‘figurative, metaphorical’” (1999:147). Wedderburn explains further that “.. the claim that Jesus has risen .. spiritually is much the same as putting ‘risen’ in inverted commas: he .. (has - FM) not ‘risen’ in any normal sense of the term, but, playing on words, we use the image of ‘resurrection’ to speak either of, for example, Jesus’ continued influence .. or of the quality of life which we now experience, inspired and motivated by his life and his teaching” (1999:148).

Expounding this view further Wedderburn makes the following statements:

- (1) “.. if existence as spirit is something other than continued existence in the body as we know it, what becomes of the problems of continuity and identity which were raised in the last section?” (1999:150).
- (2) “.. it is the term ‘resurrection’ .. that still remains problematic: why use it at all? .. I find this clinging to the word ‘resurrection’ rather perplexing,

particularly in works that are certainly not aiming to be orthodox” (1999:151).

- (3) “It would .. be a matter of some relief, sparing us much intellectual embarrassment and bewilderment, were we to discover that indeed ‘resurrection’ was not about personal survival after death at all. A further step beyond this would be to discard all talk of ‘resurrection’ as potentially misleading and simply to speak, say, of ‘life’” (1999:152).

### 3.6.5 Wright

Wright clearly believes that *swma pneumatikon* refers to a real body. As his position is very similar to that of Craig, it is not necessary to go into more detail here.

Wright has an interesting introductory section on this verse. He is of opinion that several English translations create unfortunate and confusing misunderstandings here. Wright indicates how the majority of English translations of the Bible, probably send out “highly misleading messages” when “assume at this point that Paul is describing the new, resurrection body as something which, to put it bluntly, is non-physical – something which you could not touch, could not see with ordinary eyesight, something which, if raised to life, would leave no empty tomb behind” (Wright 2003:348). Wright however agrees with Anthony C. Thiselton’s understanding as it relates to a proper understanding of this verse.<sup>100</sup>

Wright clearly discussed it early in his book that the “ancient philosophers made distinction between different kinds of substance, but they did not draw the line in the same place that modern western thought has done between ‘physical’ and ‘non-physical’” (Ibid). It is thus unfortunate that “contemporary readers are liable to be thrown in quite the wrong direction” as in the mainstream post-

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<sup>100</sup> Wright indicates how Thiselton’s “critique of Martin is important, as is his comments on the older ‘non-physical’ misreading of *pneumatikon* (2003:348, 106n).

Enlightenment worldview, “the world of space, time and matter” do not intersect with a “spiritual world” which leads to a “Deist picture of a remote, detached God ..” Wright feels very strong about this point and states further that “This multifaceted disjunction is simply untrue .. to Paul’s thought” (2003:349).

Wright continues with a profound analysis of what **swma pneumatikon** means. Only a few interesting aspects are highlighted here:

- (1) “.. if one wanted to say ‘non-physical’, one would use *psychikos*, not *pneumatikos*, which shows how misleading the regular translations are!” (2003:354).
- (2) “the *psychikos/ pneumatikos* contrast .. would have to be characterized as ‘ordinary human life’ contrasted with ‘life indwelt by the Spirit of God’ “ (Ibid).
- (3) The dead “will have a *soma pneumatikos*, a body animated by, enlivened by, the Spirit of the true God, exactly as Paul has said” in e.g. Rom 8:9-11 (2003:355).
- (4) “The *pneumatikos* state is not simply an original idea in the mind of the creator .. this model of humanity is the future reality, the reality which will swallow up and replace merely *psychikos* life. Thus Paul develops the Adam-Messiah contrast ..” (Ibid).

From the above it is quite clear that Wright believes in a bodily resurrection. The Spirit of God will indwell this body.

### 3.7 - 1 Cor 15:50 - **sarx kai; aiḡma**

As was the case with verse 44, verse 50 has also been responsible for major theological debate. Here again, you have Craig, Habermas and Wright who argue that this phrase, in no way threatens the notion of bodily resurrection. In fact, they believe **sarx kai; aiḡma** is a Jewish expression, referring to the **sarx** which is fleshly, sinful, and therefore not to be resurrected.

On the other hand, Lüdemann and Wedderburn uses this phrase in particular to highlight their understanding that no **swma** will be resurrected.

### 3.7.1 Craig

Much of what has been stated in Craig's analysis of verse 44 is also relevant here. As with verse 44, verse 50 has also caused considerable debate and confusion.<sup>101</sup> Craig is of the opinion that even scholars like Raymond E. Brown and James D.G. Dunn stumble concerning this verse (Craig 1989:139).

Craig is of the opinion that a proper understanding of **swma pneumatikon** in conjunction with this verse, leaves no room for a rejection of the Jesus' bodily resurrection.

Three statements, which Craig makes, are worth mentioning:

- (1) Craig believes that "most commentators are agreed that 'flesh and blood' is a typical Semitic expression denoting the frail human nature" (1989:141).
- (2) "The fact that the verb is in the singular may also suggest that Paul is not talking of physical aspects of the body, but about a conceptual unity: 'flesh and blood is not able to inherit ..' " (Ibid).
- (3) "Therefore Paul is not talking about anatomy here" (1989: 2).

#### 3.7.1.1 The transformation at the parousia

Craig indicates that God could of course create a new body (or wine) *ex nihilo*, but the question is not what God could do, but what God does do. Accordingly, Craig states "Paul fervently believed that God would raise and transform our

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<sup>101</sup> Craig quotes Jeremias, who indicates how the misunderstanding of this verse has played a disastrous role in the New Testament theology of the last sixty years until the present day; it has led to a spiritualizing of the resurrection so that only the **pneuma** survives .." (Craig 1989:139).

bodies at the Parousia” (Craig 1989:48).

Craig shows that the only phrases in Paul's discussion that could possibly lend themselves to a "dematerialising" of Christ's body are **swma pneumatikon** and 'flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.' But, as Craig firmly believes, "virtually all modern commentators seem to agree that these expressions have nothing to do with substantiality or anatomy, as we have seen" (1989:157). Instead **swma pneumatikon** speaks of the heavenly orientation of the resurrection body, while the **sarx kai; aiḡa** refers to the mortality and feebleness of the natural body in contrast to God. With this in mind Craig states that ".. it is difficult to understand how theologians can persist in describing Christ's resurrection body in terms of an invisible, intangible spirit; there seems to be a great lacuna here between exegesis and theology" (Ibid).<sup>102</sup>

### 3.7.1.2 **sarka kai; ostea / sarx kai; aiḡa**

A probable comparison can be made between Luke's **sarka kai; ostea** and Paul's **sarx kai; aiḡa**. Craig disagrees. He states that "Many scholars have stumbled at Luke's 'a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see I have,' claiming that this is in direct contradiction to Paul" (1989:342). Against this argument, Craig states, "Paul speaks of 'flesh and blood,' not 'flesh and bones.' Is the difference significant? I think it is. 'Flesh and blood,' as we have seen is a Semitic expression for mortal human nature and has nothing strictly speaking, to do with anatomy .." (1989:343). For Craig there is thus a vast difference between the two concepts.

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<sup>102</sup> Craig states here that he "can only agree with O'Collins when he asserts in this context, 'Platonism may be harder than we suspect' " (1989:157).

### 3.7.2 Habermas

Habermas believes that **sarx kai; aiḡna** does not at all contradict the fact that believers will rise from the dead with bodies. Habermas is clearly in agreement with Craig here. It is therefore not necessary to repeat the whole discussion here. Only some aspects, which remain vital in Habermas' discussion, are highlighted.

As with verse 44, Habermas indicates that “Paul .. is not discussing Jesus' anatomy. The phrase ‘flesh and blood’ is widely used in Semitic idiom .. It means that mortal human bodies cannot experience immortality; our bodies cannot enter eternal life as they are presently. Hence, a transforming change is needed” (Habermas1987:167).

This leads Habermas to conclude that “Paul uses a semitic idiom to point out the perish ability of our mortal bodies; Resurrection anatomy is just not the point. Therefore there is no need to take Paul's doctrine as disagreement with the teaching in the Gospels at all” (1987:186). Habermas once again clearly states that the Gospels and Paul concur on the resurrection body. To substantiate this claim, Habermas quotes J.A.T. Robinson who states “We may describe this as a ‘spiritual’ or ‘glorified’ body .. so long as we do not import these phrases any opposition to the physical as such” (Ibid).

This brings Habermas then to the nature of the body in the New Testament. This, he says “was chiefly construed in a holistic sense, incorporating body and immaterial portion” (Ibid). Another way of putting it is “a corporeal Resurrection of Jesus' body” (Ibid).

Elsewhere Habermas states that Paul is “contrasting a body that is holy with its spiritual appetites, with one that is weak with both its fleshly and sinful appetites” (2004:162).

It is quite clear that Habermas believes that **sarx kai; aiḡna** in no way undermines our resurrection bodies. The term refers to our earthly bodies, which are weak, fleshly and sinful.

### **3.7.3 Lüdemann**

Much of what was said at 3.6.3 applies here. As was indicated there Lüdemann rejects even the possibility that Peter and Paul could have witnessed Jesus in bodily form. From this it clearly follows that Lüdemann rejects any resurrection associated with a body.

Against those who believe the tomb to be empty Lüdemann replies: “.. this reflection, which is at first sight illuminating, comes up against the observation that Paul explicitly rejects the ‘resurrection’ of flesh and blood .. For that reason alone it is questionable whether the apostle was interested in the empty tomb” (1995:45). It might be that the significance of these verses fall away should Lüdemann’s theories regarding I Cor 15:1-11 and the Gospels be correct. This is probably why the only mention of **sarx kai; aiḡna** is the above reference.

The reference to **sarx kai; aiḡna** convinces Lüdemann that no resurrection will take place.

### **3.7.4 Wedderburn**

As is understandable, several issues discussed concerning Wedderburn’s understanding of verse 44 are also applicable here. For the purpose of a more comprehensive understanding, it is however needed to articulate Wedderburn’s position as verse 50 comes into play.

Wedderburn firmly believes that **sarx kai; aiḡna** indicates a substantial discrepancy with Luke's understanding of Jesus' resurrection (Wedderburn 1999:66).<sup>103</sup>

It is then no wonder that Wedderburn indicates how Gnostic groups identified with Paul's conception of resurrection (relating of course to Wedderburn's understanding). He further expounds this theory in his book *Baptism and Resurrection*, indicating how some Gnostic groups used **sarx kai; aiḡna** “.. to reconcile it with their disparagement of the body” (1987:212-3).<sup>104</sup>

With the above in mind it is understandable that Wedderburn believes that “.. the nature of the risen Jesus was as variable and elusive as that of the mythical Proteus” (1999:70).<sup>105</sup>

#### **3.7.4.1 A creedal inheritance misunderstood?**

Wedderburn probably holds that the Apostles' Creed's affirmation of the resurrection of the *flesh* (*resurrectio carnis*) or, as some modern versions have it, the resurrection of the body, is actually that which Paul cannot believe (Wedderburn 1999:117).<sup>106</sup>

Accordingly then Wedderburn indicates how Paul's understanding “is more notable for the absence of those qualities which we normally associate with bodies ... In line with this, the Gnostic Ophites could appeal to 1 Cor 15:50 to prove that the resurrection body was formed of soul and spirit” (1999:118).

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<sup>103</sup> Wedderburn interestingly states that “Dunn ... grants that ... what Luke affirms (Jesus' resurrection body was flesh and bones - FM), Paul denies (the resurrection body is *not* composed of flesh and blood - FM)!” (1999:66). Wedderburn then indicates “Small wonder .. that Strauss ... found ‘the evangelical representation of the corporeality of Jesus after the resurrection to be contradictory’ ” (Ibid).

<sup>104</sup> So for instance in the Gospel of Philip, where Paul is quoted in logion 23 (1987: 21-3).

<sup>105</sup> In making this statement, Wedderburn builds it on Perry, *Enigma*, esp. P 237-238. p 70

<sup>106</sup> Here Wedderburn quotes Dahl, *Resurrection*, p 37, Luther's *Small Catechism* (Q. p 195, in which he allegedly criticizes the phrase ‘*resurrectio carnis*’ and Calvin's *Institutes* [3.25.8] )

Wedderburn's concern for the Valentinian Gnostics is also apparent when he indicates that “.. one is also left with considerable sympathy for those Valentinian Gnostics .. we can see that their view has a very clear and a very obvious basis in Paul's statements .. these Valentinians would not have (denied - FM) .. the resurrection .. but an affirmation of it in a thoroughly Pauline form” (1999:119).

Following the above discussion, Wedderburn makes the clearly controversial statement that “Now much of what has been said about the resurrection ‘body’ is that it is not like the body in which we now live, would it not be better to avoid the term altogether? .. the continuity of the old *with* the new (body - FM) raises a whole set of further problems” (1999:120-1).

#### **3.7.4.2 A faith for this life alone?**

Following Wedderburn's understanding of verse 50, he states that “Have his (Jesus') ministry and his teaching no value or point or worth unless he rose bodily from the dead? ... Paul's logic simply cannot hold water today. His rhetoric has led him astray here. For by implication it utterly devalues Jesus' existence and ministry and all that he achieved during his life on earth” (Wedderburn 1999:154).<sup>107</sup>

#### **3.7.4.3 The Fourth Gospel**

With Wedderburn's understanding of **sarx kai; aiḡna** in mind, the following kind of argument naturally follows. He quotes D.Z. Philips who suggests as an interpretation of the notion of ‘overcoming death’ “that this means no more and no less than that one has lived in such a way in this life that this present life is not rendered pointless by death” (Wedderburn 1999:159). This leads Wedderburn to indicate that “.. the statements in the Fourth Gospel which seem to talk of a still

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<sup>107</sup> See 4.2.2.2 The Historical Jesus.

future resurrection in the traditional terms seem redundant (thereby leading Rudolf Bultmann to consider them to be secondary additions)” (Ibid). Wedderburn then adds that “Equally, however, this way of rendering them apparently redundant can be seen as merely taking a (quite legitimate - FM) step further, the tension in Paul’s thought between life now, through the Spirit, and the (fullness of) life still to be granted in the future ..” (Ibid).

The above said, Wedderburn adds “John does nevertheless describe the resurrection appearances of Jesus, in very tangible terms .. Equally that may simply be because that was what the Fourth Evangelist found in his tradition ..” (1999:160).

Wedderburn goes on to make a very interesting interpretation of Jesus’ appearance to Thomas in John 20. He states “The rebuke to Thomas is surely related .. (to - FM) those demanding signs .. Is it not then, the Fourth Evangelist saying that what was to be seen in the life of Jesus before his death should have been enough to evoke faith, enough to base faith on? He speaks to ‘the situation of those who are dependent upon the witness of the first eyewitnesses alone’ “ (Ibid). With this said Wedderburn asks the rhetorical question: “Is it because the earthly life of Jesus should be enough to evoke faith that the writer of the Fourth Gospel tells the story which he .. tells? (cf. 20:31) .. “ (1999:161).

Lastly, Wedderburn indicates how some may object to ‘this step further’ and cite “II Tim 2:18; for there a certain Hymenaeus and Philetus are condemned for saying that the resurrection has already taken place” (1999:162). Wedderburn has an particular view on this issue. He states that “does one need to regard the writer of II Timothy as being *the* definitive interpreter of the Pauline heritage? .. what about .. Col 2:12; 3:1 and Eph 2:6, which also speak of our resurrection as already accomplished .. ?” (1999:163).

In conclusion, Wedderburn believes that **sarx kai; aĩma** indicates that Paul did not believe in the resurrection of the body and that therefore, Gnostic and other

interpretations are not only acceptable, but also forthcoming. This leads Wedderburn then to emphasize a now already and complete realised eschatology.

### 3.7.5 Wright

Much of what has been discussed in Wright's understanding of verse 8-11 and 44 also applies to verse 50. Therefore only a few insights made by Wright are listed below.

Wright states: "Why .. does he say 'flesh and blood cannot inherit God's kingdom'?" (Wright 2003: 359). To this he replies: "Ever since the second century (and increasingly in scholarship during the twentieth) doubters have used this clause to question whether Paul really believed in the resurrection of the *body*" (Ibid).

Against these "doubters" Wright states that ".. the second half of verse 50 already explains, in Hebraic parallelism with the first half, more or less what he means, as Paul's regular use of 'flesh' would itself indicate: 'flesh and blood' is a way of referring to ordinary, corruptible, decaying human existence" (Ibid). This understanding is clearly something different from "as it has so often been taken to mean, 'physical humanity' in the normal modern sense" (Ibid). For Wright it actually means " 'the present physical humanity (as opposed to the future one), which is subject to decay and death'" (Ibid).

Wright states further that "The referent of the phrase is not the presently dead but the presently living, who need not to be raised but to be changed; and this brings us back to the dual *focus* of verses 53 and 54. Both categories of humans need to acquire the new, transformed type of body" (Ibid).

A final remark concerns continuity and discontinuity. Wright states that “despite the discontinuity between the present mode .. and future mode .. there is an underlying continuity between present bodily life and future bodily life, and that gives meaning and direction to present Christian living” (Ibid).

Following this position, it is then no surprise that Wright names Wedderburn in his footnote as wrongfully “caricatur(ising – FM) Paul’s view (and subsequent Christian views) in terms of living a life which is ‘[simply] a preparation for another one beyond death and the grave’. That might be how some jaded Christians have put it; but what Paul describes is new creation bursting in to the present world” (2003:359,142n).

It is clear that the term **sarx kai; aiḡna** in no way hinders the belief in the corporeal resurrection as Wright understands it.

### **3.8 1 Cor 15:5(b) – The resurrection appearance to Peter**

It is interesting to note, that most of the scholars studied in this thesis did not go into much detail as it relates to Peter’s resurrection appearance. It is only Lüdemann, whose view of the resurrection focuses in particular on Peter.

Craig, Habermas and Wright, believe that Jesus did appear in bodily form to Peter. Wedderburn has his doubts. Lüdemann believes that Peter had an “experience” of Jesus, but that was nothing more than a hallucination.

#### **3.8.1 Craig**

Craig believes that Peter really saw an appearance of Jesus bodily.

Craig indicates how some scholars have followed Harnack’s theory that Peter and James represent two different factions in the early church. Accordingly then, both groups had to be accommodated in the appearance tradition. That could entail that Peter and James’ appearances were fabricated. Craig rejects this

notion and states that “.. we ought to dismiss at the outset Harnack's old theory that the list reflects two rival factions in the early church: Peter and the Twelve versus James and the Apostles” (Craig 1989:51). Craig substantiates this claim with the following:

- (1) “The chronological order .. precludes .. rival lists ..”
- (2) “The parallelism is insufficient ground for .. purely speculative theory of leadership contention ..”
- (3) “There was not sufficient time for the competing lists to arise.”
- (4) “James's exclusive prominence in the church was touted only in certain Judaeo-Christian groups of second generation followers ..”  
(Ibid).

Craig acknowledges that the New Testament does not indicate in detail what this appearance of Peter entailed. However, he states that “.. even if we are left without a story of this appearance, we nevertheless possess two apparently early testimonies to Peter's having seen Jesus .. Paul's evidence, and Luke's as well, indicate that this appearance was prior to that to the Twelve” (1989:54).

Craig believes that “the evidence for an appearance of Jesus to Peter seems quite impressive .. (because – FM) Paul himself spoke with Peter about six years after the event and vouches for its facticity” (1989:55).

Later on when Craig analyses Luke, he states that “Once one strips away the conflicting external circumstances of these scenes we know little more than what Luke himself tells us: that having previously denied Jesus, Peter after leaving the empty tomb and going home, saw Jesus. With that we must be content” (1989:266).

### 3.8.2 Habermas

Habermas clearly believes that Peter witnessed an appearance of the risen Jesus. It is however clear that this appearance does not generally form part of Habermas' arsenal of accepted facts which virtually all scholars agree upon. But that in no way means that he rejects Peter's resurrection appearances.

Habermas believes this appearance as historical and adds that in Acts "Peter .. claimed that the risen Jesus ate and drank with his disciples" (Habermas 1987:157, 2004:294, 14n).

Habermas indicates how "According to Acts, Peter .. claimed that Jesus' body did not decay in the grave as did David's, but rather was raised up by God (Acts 2:25-32)" (1987:157). Habermas and Licona state later that "It is difficult to imagine how Peter .. could have been any clearer if they meant to communicate a literal, physical resurrection" (2004:294).

They also make the statement that those who regard this appearance as mythical or legendary are simply wrong. To substantiate this claim they state that "If a mythical genre was being employed, Peter .. could have easily said, 'David died, was buried, his body decayed, but his spirit has ascended to be with God'" (2004:89). It naturally follows then that "Jesus likewise died, was buried, and his body now decays. But as with David, his spirit has ascended to be with God where he is now seated at the right hand of power" (Ibid). Habermas and Licona's response to this statement is that "This would more closely resemble mythical or vision language. The language the apostle employed, however, seems to have been historical" (Ibid).

Habermas and Licona clearly contend that Acts portray an authentic event, which Peter refers to. In support, one can mention several critical scholars whom they

quote to substantiate the claim. This includes: Bart Ehrman; A.N. Sherwin-White; Gerald O'Collins and Craig Blomberg (2004:294-5, 14n).

### 3.8.3 Lüdemann

Lüdemann has a quite substantial discussion in his book on Peter. We have to analyse it in some detail as it forms one of the strong pillars in his view on the resurrection.

Lüdemann believes that Peter experienced a vision of Jesus. This goes back to a definite historical event. But, that experience was a hallucination.

#### 3.8.3.1 Peter's experience: historical

Lüdemann makes the following interesting statements:

- (1) "The appearance to Peter was an individual appearance .. a visionary event, which is to be deemed historical" (Lüdemann 1995:84).
- (2) ".. the tradition of Peter as the first witness .. was *suppressed* .."  
Lüdemann follows Adolf von Harnack who stated that "The author of the First Gospel deleted the vision(s) - FM) of .. Peter .. and .. inserted a vision of the women which he himself composed .." (1995: 85, 221, 353n).

Lüdemann then discusses the following texts: Luke 5:1-11; John 21 and Matt 16:17-19. Noteworthy remarks in this section are:

- (1) Lüdemann follows Bultmann who states that ".. the Easter experience of Peter was the hour when the messianic faith of the earliest community was born" (1995: 88, 222, 364n).
- (2) ".. the historical verdict may be expressed that Peter (like Paul later) heard and saw Jesus alive after his death. With this vision was

connected the task of mission and the leadership of the church and the granting of authority to forgive sins” (Ibid).

- (3) “If it should be historical, it would seem likely that Peter’s denial of Jesus (*before* his death) and vision of Jesus (*after* his death) should be connected. This might possibly give us a deepened access to Peter’s vision” (1995:89-90).

### 3.8.3.2 Peter’s denial of Jesus

Lüdemann then goes back to what he calls the “prehistory of the appearance” which is to be found in Peter’s denial in Mark 14:54 and verses 66-72.

Here are some profound statements that he makes:

- (1) “..the tradition of the denial .. was originally handed down in isolation from the passion narrative and without a prediction” (Lüdemann 1995: 95).<sup>108</sup>
- (2) Lüdemann follows Martin Dibelius<sup>109</sup> statement that Peter himself told of his denial “.. in connection with his Easter experience” (1995: 224, 383n).<sup>110</sup>

After the above discussion, Lüdemann makes the noteworthy statement that Peter’s denial of Jesus is factual. He states: “The denial of Jesus by Peter – a historical fact” (1995:95).

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<sup>108</sup> Lüdemann in part builds this assertion on Eta Linnemann’s discussion in her 1970 *Studien zur Passionsgeschichte*, FRLANT p 102. Interesting, is that Linnemann have since dropped this theory. See her book: Linnemann, E. 1990. *Historical Criticism of the Bible. Methodology or Ideology?* Kregel Publications. Grand Rapids, Michigan.

<sup>109</sup> Ben Witherington, interestingly however makes the statement that Dibelius also stated that to explain what happened at Easter and the church which followed, you’ll have to have an “x” big enough to explain what happened. (Witherington, B. in Ankerberg, J.F. 2003. *Questions Surrounding Jesus’ Resurrection*. DVD, TATRI, Chattanooga, Tennessee. [www.johnankerberg.org](http://www.johnankerberg.org)).

<sup>110</sup> Very interesting here is that Linnemann rejects this position by stating that “in that case 1 Cor 15:5 would have had to read: ‘And he was seen by Peter, who denied him.’ Lüdemann’s reply to this is “That is not convincing ..” (Lüdemann 1995:224).

### 3.8.3.3 Paul and Peter's Easter experiences

Then follows a comparison between Paul and Peter's Easter experiences. It can be summarized as follows:

- (1) Both experience an "original" revelation.<sup>111</sup>
- (2) The vision of Jesus is indissolubly connected with the denial of Jesus or the persecution of his community.
- (3) The guilt feeling is replaced by the certainty of grace.
- (4) Both may have shared a similar doctrine of justification, even if these did not completely correspond (Lüdemann 1995:96).

Lüdemann highlight some unique features of Peter's Easter experience as follows:

"Peter had transgressed or sinned against Jesus by denying him. But under the impact of Jesus' proclamation and death, Peter, through an experience of the 'risen Lord', related God's word of forgiveness present in the activity of Jesus once again to himself, this time in its profound clarity" (Lüdemann 1995:97). This leads Lüdemann to state that "... where is forgiveness greater than where one has previously literally denied everything and rejected it? The message of forgiveness thus ran literally through the death of Jesus" (Ibid).

### 3.8.3.4 Peter's Easter vision – a piece of mourning

Following Lüdemann's analysis of Peter's denying Jesus comes the also famous section on "Peter's Easter vision – a piece of mourning". According to this theory "He experienced the word of Jesus as something living, as an encounter with the whole Jesus himself, in an image" (Lüdemann 1995:97). Lüdemann's footnote here is illuminating. He connects this statement with David Chichester's work *Word and Light. Seeing, Hearing, and Religious Discourse*, in which the

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<sup>111</sup> This is the only two experiences which Lüdemann regard as historical and independent in the New Testament. All the others spring from these initial experiences.

following statement is made: ‘Speak to me, so that I can see you’” (1995: 97, 225, 392n).

Then, Peter’s experience is compared to Spiegel’s psychoanalytical theory. Spiegel states among other things that “.. there can be a breakdown of the controls of reality, since the unconsciousness cannot bear the loss of a beloved person and ‘uses the very organs which play an essential part in the formation of the reality-principle to create a pseudo-satisfaction for itself’” (1995: 99, 225, 393n).<sup>112</sup>

Lüdemann did not want to go so far as to identify Peter’s vision as wishful thinking or delusional, but rather opted for the theory that Peter’s vision was “a living and vital image of Jesus which took the place of the beloved dead person” (1995:99).

A further theory, which Lüdemann investigates, relate to the possibility of Peter’s “mourning” and “vision” in comparison with specific investigations at Harvard. In that research, three factors were mentioned which prevented mourning:

- (1) a sudden death;
- (2) an ambivalent attitude to the dead person associated with guilt feelings;
- (3) and a dependent relationship.

Lüdemann is of the opinion that all three these elements apply to Peter and the disciples. In short it can be described as follows:

- (1) the crucifixion of Jesus happened unexpectedly;
- (2) the disciples experienced ambivalence and guilt; Peter wept bitterly and;
- (3) there was a dependent relationship between Jesus and the disciples (1995:99).

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<sup>112</sup> Somehow in agreement with Lüdemann here, De Jonge indicates how “Broer goes on to accept the alleged disillusionment ... after the crucifixion as historically plausible and then explains their visionary experiences psychologically as caused by a state of psychic disorder ..” (De Jonge 2002:52).

With this in mind Lüdemann states that “the mourning .. was enormously helped in the case of Peter by a vision, indeed concentrated in a moment of epiphany. The mourning first led to a deeper understanding of Jesus, and this in turn helped towards a new understanding of the situation of mourning” (1995:100).

According to this theory, it is therefore understandable that Peter was psychologically primed to project an apparition of Jesus. Dale C. Allison describes Lüdemann’s position in this regard accurately: “Because of his complex situation, the disciple could not let go of his guilt or manage his grief in a normal way. So his unconscious mind conjured the resurrected Jesus to forgive him his sins” (Allison 2005:242).

Lüdemann believes that Peter’s vision led to theological conclusions. He states that “Recollections of who Jesus was led to the recognition of who Jesus is. Seeing Jesus here included a whole chain of (potential!) theological conclusions” (Lüdemann 1995:100).

Somewhat in support of Lüdemann’s stance, Allison indicates “many firsthand accounts of several people seeing at once the apparition of a person recently deceased (is known - FM)” (Allison 2005: 270, 292n). Allison further indicates that these apparitions are especially prominent in parapsychology. In support of Lüdemann, Allison also indicates how his own wife Kris and daughter had “seen” his departed father, Cliff Allison shortly after his death. He continues to say that “I have inevitably thought of this series of reports (including several other “seeings” - FM) when subsequently reading 1 Cor 15 ..” (2005:276). In line with Lüdemann’s insistence on theological interpretation, Allison states that “I suppose I could compose a little list like Paul’s and regard it as evidential” (Allison 2005:277).

To conclude, Lüdemann believes that Peter had a historical, visionary hallucination of Jesus. It is clear that Lüdemann completely rejects the possibility of any other explanation.

### 3.8.4 Wedderburn

Wedderburn does not discuss Peter's inclusion in the above text. Instead, he focuses on the clear absence of the women here. He states that Peter's inclusion here is rather related to "power and authority" (Wedderburn 1999: 58).

After rejecting Lüdemann's proposal that the women at the tomb is a legendary redaction, Wedderburn states that "we are left with the likelier explanation that women played the major role in the earliest stages of the events of Easter ... It is far likelier that a prominent role of women ... was later suppressed, than that such a tradition was a later creation" (1999: 60).

#### 3.8.4.1 An oblique appearance

With the above said, it is no surprise that Peter does not receive that much attention in Wedderburn's book. It might therefore be justifiable for supposing that Wedderburn has problems with the tradition of Peter's experience of the risen Jesus.

Wedderburn indicates, "a separate appearance to Peter is only .. obliquely referred to in the New Testament (Luke 24:34)" (Wedderburn 1999: 116).<sup>113</sup>

Despite the above, Wedderburn probably agrees that a tradition of Peter's experience of the risen Jesus is an early one when, in the context of Peter and James, there "is insufficient reason to doubt the tradition" (presuming that Wedderburn not only speaks of James here) (1999: 116).

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<sup>113</sup> In the footnote to this statement he then goes on to make a few noteworthy remarks:

- (1) "This oblique reference is in itself puzzling: did not Luke know of a story of Peter's experience of which he could tell?"
- (2) "The appearance to Peter *alone* , which plays such an important role in many reconstructions of the rise of belief in Jesus' resurrection .. proves to be extremely – and surprisingly elusive. Despite that, it plays an .. important part in Ludemann's account .."
- (3) "Nevertheless, as Grass notes, it seems rather to have been the appearance to the Twelve which was of greatest importance to the early church, of greater importance than all others, including the appearance to Peter" (Wedderburn 1999: 275-6, 275n).

There are a few sections where Wedderburn discusses the disciple's experiences of the risen Jesus. Although there is no direct indication that Peter is in mind here, it may be safe to suppose that such a conclusion can be made indirectly. A few of those examples, which might be relevant, are discussed.

#### **3.8.4.2 The coming to faith of the disciples**

Wedderburn shows how Ulrich B. Müller states that “the disciples had sought to come to terms with Jesus’ death, and their reflections are not only to be understood as a process of grieving (as Lüdemann’s account - FM), even if this does not lead to saying farewell to the departed one but to a creative vision of the risen Jesus, but are also to be seen as in the first instance cognitive” (Wedderburn 1999: 43-4).

Notice how, contrary to Lüdemann, the following phenomena is mentioned: “process of grieving”; “creative vision” *and* “in the first instance cognitive”.

However, Wedderburn does make the following concession when he states that “Even if one is not persuaded by the various psychological explanations offered for it, they cannot be ruled out, and may therefore mean that the cause of the ‘disciples’ experiences lies in their own (possibly disturbed) psyche and not in the miraculous action of God ... these psychological explanations have a built-in advantage over against more supernatural explanations of the resurrection, in that it is very difficult to ‘explain’ an event that is allegedly without any real analogy ..” (1999:96).<sup>114</sup>

To conclude, Wedderburn indicates that the tradition of the women as the first and primary witnesses is more likely to be authentic than the Peter tradition. He

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<sup>114</sup> In Wedderburn’s footnote here, he states that “I therefore have difficulty in seeing why Alan Padgett can so curtly dismiss Lüdemann’s account as ‘patently absurd’”, in ‘Advance’, p 304. (1999:96, 240n).

then indicates that Lüdemann's psychological hypothesis is not as far fetched, as many would imagine.

### **3.8.5 Wright**

After a careful reading of *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, it becomes clear that Wright's focus is not primarily on the apostle Peter. A few observations are made:

The only remark Wright makes in relation to verse 5 as it relates to Peter, is the following:

"The mention of 'Cephas' accords with Paul's normal way of referring to Peter, though it almost certainly here belongs to the pre-Pauline tradition which he is quoting. An early, personal appearance to him is mentioned in Luke, where he is called 'Simon'" (2003:324). By stating the above, Wright clearly accepts the biblical testimony.

In terms of the other texts, which deal with Peter and the risen Jesus, it might be appropriate to refer to one of these sections.

#### **3.8.5.1 John 21**

One such example comes from the John 21 narrative. As is well known this section relates to the Galilean appearance at the lakeshore. Peter and six other disciples go fishing and catch nothing; Jesus unrecognised, directs operations from the shore, resulting again in a spectacular catch. Later on, Jesus takes Simon Peter for a walk along the shore, and asks him three times if he loves him, corresponding to Peter's triple denial in chapter 18. Receiving a triple 'Yes' for reply, he commissions him to be a kind of under-shepherd, which will require him, too, to face suffering (Wright 2003:664).

Wright is of the opinion that this is a credible portrayal of Peter. He states, “the writer is certainly attempting to present a coherent and credible portrait of the individuals concerned. They are anything but cardboard cut-outs producing stock responses and questions. The writer intends us to take the story seriously as a narrative which belongs in its own context, not as an obvious allegory of later church experience” (2003:665).

#### **3.8.5.1.1 Wright’s eschatological understanding**

Although eschatology is not part of this thesis, it is worthwhile just to mention (particularly in relation to Wedderburn) Wright’s eschatological understanding of John 21. Wright rejects what some call an “over-realized eschatology” here. He states “the thematic structure of the gospel as a whole tells against collapsing the whole thing into simply a death which is also a moment of glory” (Wright 2003:665).

In Wright’s understanding of Peter’s resurrection appearances, it is quite clear that Peter really witnessed Jesus appearing to him in bodily form.

Wright states that “It is quite unwarranted to suggest that the story of Peter and John has been inserted or interpolated, at a late stage in the tradition ..” (2003:664).

#### **3.8.5.2 Visions in the ancient world**

Wright strongly rejects Lüdemann’s explanation of an initial “vision” of Peter, comprising “the projection of feelings of guilt or grief” (Wright 2003:690).

Wright states that “Most people in the ancient world knew that visions and appearances of recently dead people occurred. No doubt there are all kinds of explanations for things like that” (Ibid). Wright shows how “Various theories can be advanced about the psychological state of the person who experiences them,

though the evidence seem to suggest that in some cases at least the phenomena are clearly related to actual events rather than simply the projection of feelings of guilt or grief ... Visions of this sort .. did not normally involve physical contact, let alone watching the recently departed person eating and drinking; indeed, accounts of visions of the dead sometimes made it clear that this is what did *not* happen” (Ibid).

Wright concludes that “.. the ancient world as well as the modern knew the difference between visions and things that happen in the ‘real’ world” (Ibid). It is therefore quite clear that “such visions meant precisely, as people in the ancient and modern worlds have discovered, that the person was dead, not that they were alive” (Ibid). It is for this reason that Wright contends “they (visions) *could not possibly*, by themselves, have given rise to the belief that Jesus had been raised from the dead” (Ibid).

In Wright’s sermon *Pentecost, Power and Politics* on Acts 2.22-42, it is then not surprising that Wright states that “The resurrection of Jesus, a robustly bodily event leaving a definitely empty tomb behind it, is the demonstration that Jesus really is the Messiah, David’s ultimate heir, Israel’s rightful king, the world’s true Lord. That is the message of Peter’s address. It is classic early Christian evangelism” (2003b).<sup>115</sup>

## 4 Critical assessment and interpretation

Assessing and interpreting five scholar’s research and findings as it relates to the resurrection of Jesus could produce at least five thick PhD’s. It is therefore a hopelessly impossible task to even try to attempt a thorough assessment in a master’s degree. Some conclusionary remarks will be formulated. As was indicated in the introduction, firstly the scholars’ different views as it relates to

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<sup>115</sup> Sermon: Wright, N.T. 2003b. *Pentecost, Power and Politics* on Acts 2.22-42. Sermon at Westminster Abbey at Evensong on the Feast of Pentecost, June 8. [http://www.westminster-abbey.org/voice/sermon/archives/030610\\_pentecost.htm](http://www.westminster-abbey.org/voice/sermon/archives/030610_pentecost.htm) (16/10/2006)

some of the crucial texts will be evaluated, then secondly, their hermeneutical presuppositions will be indicated, and lastly, a conclusion with a final interpretative analysis will be given.

#### **4.1 Crucial selected texts and their interpretation**

What follows will be a summary selected from the different interpretations as it relates to some of the specified texts. The most crucial issues will be described, of which the “empty tomb” will be emphasized.

##### **4.1.1 - 1 Cor 15:4 - kai; oti eita fh**

This text became an absorbing study. It was fascinating to see how different scholars read different interpretations into the text. It is clearly no exaggeration to imply that this text might be of significant importance for the New Testament as a whole.<sup>116</sup> Several reasons for this can be given:

- If this text refers to an empty tomb, then it means that the Gospel accounts become more believable.
- If this text does not refer to an empty tomb, then the chances are more likely that the Gospel accounts cannot be believed in this regard.
- If this text refers to an empty tomb, then it raises the credibility of the appearances of Jesus.
- If this text does not refer to an empty tomb, then the possibilities are more likely that the appearances of Jesus were visionary or hallucinations.

Craig, Habermas and Wright believe the tomb was really empty:

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<sup>116</sup> Theissen & Merz indicate that for H. Von Campenhausen, the empty tomb plays a key role in the reconstruction of the Easter events (Theissen *et al* 1998:479, 480, 499).

Craig also state that “.. the church historian Hans Freiherr von Campenhausen in an equally epochal essay defended the historical credibility of Jesus' empty tomb. During the ensuing years a stream of works on the historicity of Jesus' resurrection flowed forth from German, French and English presses. (Craig, W.L. *Contemporary Scholarship and the resurrection of Jesus*. Internet article. <http://www.bethinking.org/resource.php?ID=15>) (16/10/2006).

- Craig states that “.. it seems to me that the empty tomb is implied in the sequence of events related in the formula. For in saying that Jesus died--was buried--was raised--appeared, one automatically implies that an empty grave has been left behind .. a dead-and-buried man was raised, itself seems to imply an empty grave” (Craig 1989:88).
- Habermas states that “.. (1 Cor. 15:3-4) .. strongly implies the empty tomb, especially in the context of Jewish thought” (Habermas 1987).
- Wright states further that “The fact that the tomb itself, so prominent in the gospel accounts, does not appear to be specifically mentioned in this passage, is not significant; the mention here of ‘buried, then raised’ no more needs to be amplified in that way than one would need to amplify the statement ‘I walked down the street’ with the qualification ‘on my feet’” (Wright 2003:321).

On the other hand, Lüdemann and probably also Wedderburn do not believe that the tomb was empty:

- Lüdemann makes it clear that “the statement about the burial of Jesus (verse 4) is connected with the death and *not* (emphasis – FM) the resurrection ... Paul “did not explicitly” made a connection between an empty tomb and the bodily resurrection” (Lüdemann 1995:45-7).
- Wedderburn indicates that “It is true that, somewhat desperately, some scholars have clutched at the words ‘and was buried’ (v.4), and have seen this as evidence that Paul must have been aware of the tradition of the empty tomb” (Wedderburn 1999:270, 226n). Wedderburn indicates that “.. it is dangerous to infer from the mention of Jesus’ burial an awareness of a subsequent reversal and undoing of that burial. At any rate, as Marklein and

others have seen, ‘he was buried’ is attached to the death of Jesus, not his resurrection” (Ibid).

Theissen and Merz make a thorough analysis of the “pro” and “con” theories relating to the empty tomb. The five scholars analysed in this thesis covered most of those theories. It might however be good to conclude this section with Theissen and Merz’s well-balanced summary:

1. *Pro:* The resurrection message could not have been proclaimed had the body of Jesus been in an unopened tomb.  
*Con:* Resurrection faith is compatible with the knowledge of an unopened tomb (Mark 6:14).
2. *Pro:* In 1 Cor 15:4 Paul reliably bears witness to a burial of Jesus.  
*Con:* Paul’s resurrection hope is far too variable. In Phil 1:21 Paul hopes to be with Christ immediately after his death – regardless of the fate of his body.
3. *Pro:* The charge that the disciples had stolen Jesus’ body presupposes the existence of an empty tomb.  
*Con:* What is presupposed is not the fact of an empty tomb but the claim that there was such a fact.
4. *Pro:* The well-attested Jewish custom of venerating the tombs of martyrs is absent.  
*Con:* The place where the miracle of the resurrection took place could even more have become the place of cultic veneration.
5. *Pro:* The burial by Joseph of Arimathea is well attested in Mark.  
*Con:* The people in Jerusalem buried Jesus (Acts 13:29).

6. *Pro:* The apparent contradictions between the empty tomb traditions confirm different traditions, which confirm each other.  
*Con:* The differences between Mark and Luke are not great enough to presuppose independent traditions.
  
7. *Pro:* The archaeological evidence of the ‘tomb’ in the Church of the Sepulchre in Jerusalem corresponds with literary evidence.  
*Con:* This confirmation could also indicate a secondary stage of an unused tomb in the neighbourhood of Golgotha. (1998:499-503)<sup>117</sup>

With the above analysis in mind, it is clear that **kai; oti ejtafh** is important for the whole tradition of the empty tomb. If this phrase does not refer to Jesus’ empty tomb, then the Gospel stories of the empty tomb could be a later legendary redaction. Keep in mind that the Gospels were written decades after Paul’s letters, which could further strengthen this hypothesis. That would imply that Jesus had in fact died and never came out of the tomb.

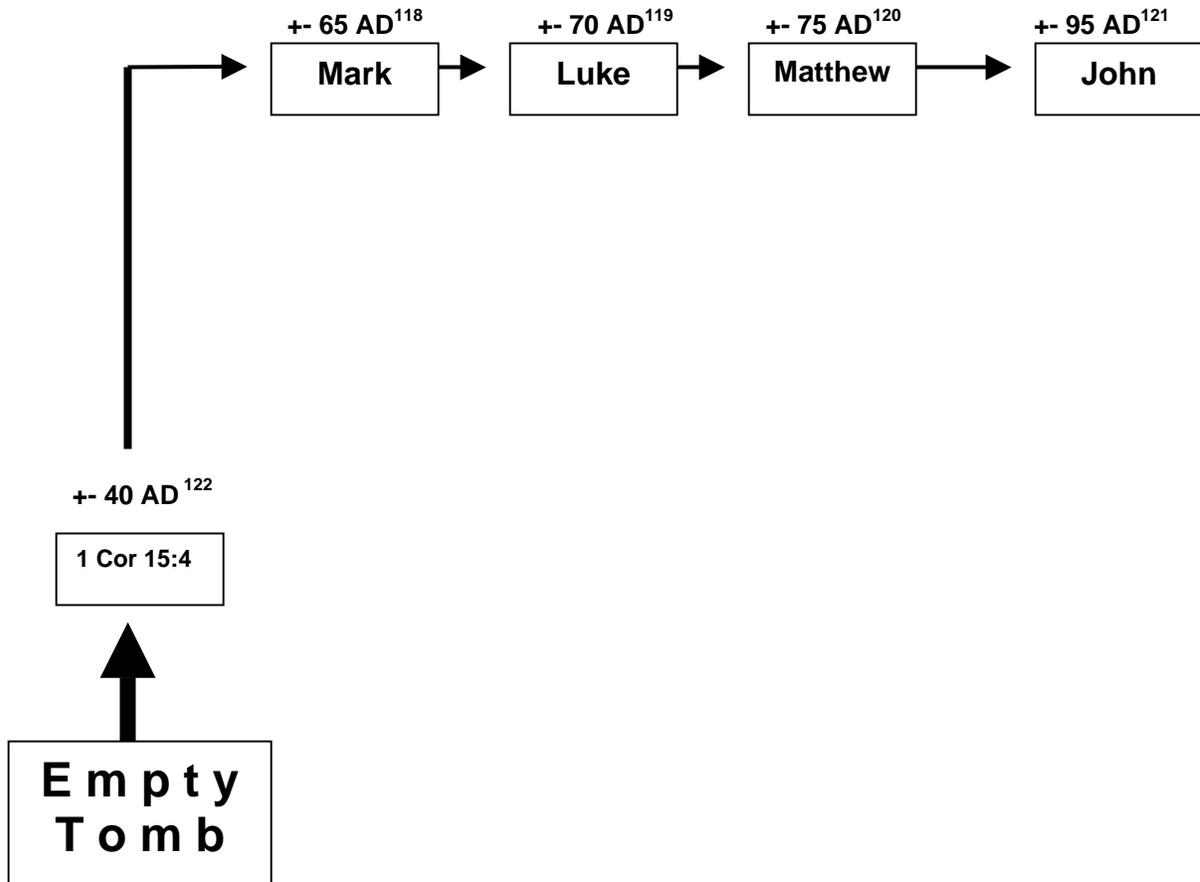
If however, **kai; oti ejtafh** do refer to Jesus’ empty tomb, and Paul believed that, then the chances are that much greater that the Gospels confirm that Jesus’ tomb was indeed empty, and that he had risen.

The following chart **indicate** what has been discussed above:

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<sup>117</sup> It is quite interesting that Theissen concludes this discussion with the following statement: “.. if one wanted to arrange the considerations developed here into a spectrum of different views, the balance would tilt towards the possibility that the tradition of the empty tomb has a historical nucleus “ (Theissen *et al* 1998:503).

**Table 7: I Cor 15:4, the empty tomb and the Gospel narratives**



Craig, Habermas and Wright, believe **kai; oti eptarfh** refer to the empty tomb, and that Paul believed it to be true. This would indicate that the Gospels confirm that the tomb was in fact empty.

<sup>118</sup> This date is the view of W.S. Vorster in: Vorster, W.S. in Du Toit, A.B. (ed) 1988. *Die Evangelie volgens Markus: Inleiding en Teologie*. N.G. Kerkboekhandel Edms Bpk. Pretoria. p 117.

<sup>119</sup> I.J. Du Plessis believes Luke can probably not be dated after 70 AD. See: Du Plessis, I.J. 1988. *Die Evangelie volgens Lukas: Inleiding en Teologie*. N.G. Kerkboekhandel Edms Bpk. Pretoria. p 164.

<sup>120</sup> H.J.B. Combrink believes Matthew dates after 70 AD. See: Combrink, H.J.B. 1988. *Die Evangelie volgens Matteus: Inleiding en Teologie*. N.G. Kerkboekhandel Edms Bpk. Pretoria. p 74.

<sup>121</sup> J.A. du Rand believes that John can probably be dated between 90-10 AD. See: Du Rand, J.A. 1997. *The Johannine Perspectives. Introduction to the Johannine Writings – Part I*. Orion, Johannesburg. p 68.

<sup>122</sup> Craig, Habermas, Lüdemann, Wedderburn and Wright all date this text within five years after the Easter events.

Lüdemann and Wedderburn on the other hand believe that *kai, oti ejtafh* do not refer to the empty tomb, and that Paul was not interested in it. Both of them refer to verse 50 to substantiate this claim.

#### 4.1.2 1 Cor 15:8-11- Paul: *ešcaton*

This text is just as important, as most scholars agree that Paul's resurrection experience forms the basis of much of the New Testament.

Did Paul see a hallucination or did he really see the glorified Jesus in bodily form? Craig, Habermas and Wright believe the latter. They state:

- Craig: "What Paul saw, after all, was an *appearance* of Jesus, not a *vision* of Jesus" (Craig 1989:80).
- Habermas states that "I would define a spiritual body in Paul's sense as a real body, the same body, but changed .. What is raised is the same body, and it is a real body, yet it is changed" (1987:98-9). For Habermas this 'spiritual body' ".. occupied space and time and could be touched" (Habermas 2005:40).
- For Wright it is quite clear that when "Paul spoke of Jesus 'appearing' in verse 8 he did not mean that Jesus appeared in his (Paul's - FM) heart or mind, but to his bodily eyes and sight, as a real human being, truly and bodily raised from the dead" (Wright 2003:383).

Lüdemann believes it was a hallucination; Wedderburn leaves the door open for that possibility:

- For Lüdemann, "When Paul approached Damascus, there was a catastrophic breakthrough of the long-suppressed longing ... Paul fled from the painful situation into the other world of hallucination" (Lüdemann 1995:84).

- Wedderburn quotes Pokorny, who grants that all the resurrection witnesses (which include Paul – FM) to Jesus’ resurrection are “at the same time witnesses of faith, so that their testimony always was and is exposed to the suspicion that it is a case of wishful thinking or a hallucination (subjective vision), or the historization of a myth or ideology” (Wedderburn 1999:75). In following Vollenweider, who describes the category of visions as ‘*schwankender Boden*’, shaky ground Wedderburn concludes that “we must beware of making our perceived need for certainty a reason for asserting that the experiences were of a more tangible, thisworldly kind. That would be to reshape history according to our own predictions” (Ibid).

If Paul had a hallucination, then it brings all the other Gospel testimonies of appearances of Jesus into suspicion.

If however, Paul really encountered a tangible living Jesus, then it raises the credibility of the Gospel testimonies.

#### 4.1.3 - 1 Cor 15:44 – **sw̄ma pneumatikon**

For Craig, Habermas and Wright, **sw̄ma pneumatikon** represents a real body, stripped of the flesh and sinful mortality and glorious as Jesus’ resurrection body:

- Craig agrees with Hering who suggests that it is “better to translate **sw̄ma pneumatikon** as the opposite of natural body (**sw̄ma yucikon**), that is, a *supernatural* body” (Craig 1989:136). Thus, “ ‘spiritual body’ .. as Hering rightly comments, (if –FM) understood substantively is practically a self-contradiction. By the same token, ‘physical body’ is really a tautology” (Ibid). Craig makes it quite clear that a “natural body/supernatural body is a better rendering of Paul's meaning here” (Craig 1989:137).

- Habermas states that “I would define a spiritual body in Paul’s sense as a real body, the same body, but changed .. What is raised is the same body, and it is a real body, yet it is changed” (Habermas 1987:98-9). For Habermas this ‘spiritual body’ “.. occupied space and time and could be touched” (Habermas 2005:40).
- Wright indicates how several Bible translations probably send out “highly misleading messages” when they “assume at this point that Paul is describing the new, resurrection body as something which, to put it bluntly, is non-physical – something which you could not touch, could not see with ordinary eyesight, something which, if raised to life, would leave no empty tomb behind” (Wright 2003:348). The dead “will have a *soma pneumatikos*, a body animated by, enlivened by, the Spirit of the true God, exactly as Paul has said” (Wright 2003:355).

For Wedderburn and Lüdemann, **swma pneumatikon** indicates that there will be no bodily resurrection.

- Wedderburn focusses so much on the discontinuity that one gets the impression that **swma** disappears completely:

He states that “What on earth (or in heaven!) is a ‘spiritual body’?, we can equally properly ask ‘What is a ‘spiritual resurrection?’ ... in the present context, simply the equivalent of ‘figurative, metaphorical’.” Wedderburn explains further that “.. the claim that Jesus has risen .. spiritually is much the same as putting ‘risen’ in inverted commas: he .. (has - FM) not ‘risen’ in any normal sense of the term, but, playing on words, we use the image of ‘resurrection’ to speak either of, for example, Jesus’ continued influence .. or of the quality of life which we now experience, inspired and motivated by his life and his teaching” (1999:147-8).

- In 1984 Lüdemann believed the following:

“There is a consensus in research that according to 1 Corinthians 15,<sup>123</sup> all Christians will be given a resurrectional body after the parousia and that the transformation results is a *soma pneumatikon*, which is contrasted with the earthly body, the *soma psychikon*” (1984:241-2).

Since then, he has changed his position to:

“.. you did not return, because your resurrection did not take place, but was only a pious wish. That is certain, because your body rotted in the tomb – that is, if it was put in a tomb at all and was not devoured by vultures and jackals ...” (Lüdemann 1999:3).

If **sw̄ma pneumatikon** refer to a spiritual bodiless spirit, then the empty tomb is unnecessary, and the bodily appearances of Jesus in the Gospels become legendary redactions.

If **sw̄ma pneumatikon** however, refer to a tangible resurrection body, then it confirms the belief in the empty tomb, as well as the resurrection appearances in the Gospels.

#### 4.1.4 - 1 Cor 15:50 – **sarx kai; aīma**

Does this text indicate that there will be no bodily resurrection, or that the sinful human nature will not rise with the glorified body? Craig, Habermas and Wright indicate that **sarx kai; aīma** represent the sinful human nature which will not be raised. Our bodies however will be raised to become like that of Jesus:

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<sup>123</sup> Obviously relating to verse 44.

- Craig indicates that “most commentators are agreed that ‘flesh and blood’ is a typical Semitic expression denoting the frail human nature ... The fact that the verb is in the singular may also suggest that Paul is not talking of physical aspects of the body, but about a conceptual unity: ‘flesh and blood is not able to inherit ..’ ... “Therefore Paul is not talking about anatomy here” (Craig 1989:14-2).
- Habermas believes that “Paul uses a semitic idiom to point out the perishability of our mortal bodies; Resurrection anatomy is just not the point. Therefore there is no need to take Paul’s doctrine as disagreement with the teaching in the Gospels at all” (Habermas 1987:186).
- Wright asserts that “despite the discontinuity between the present mode .. and future mode .. there is an underlying continuity between present bodily life and future bodily life, and that gives meaning and direction to present Christian living” (Wright 2003:359).

For Wedderburn and Lüdemann the argument is settled: There will be no tangible resurrection of the body:

- Wedderburn believes that “.. the nature of the risen Jesus was as variable and elusive as that of the mythical Proteus” (Wedderburn 1999:70).<sup>124</sup> Wedderburn makes the clearly controversial statement that “Now much of what has been said about the resurrection ‘body’ is that it is not like the body in which we now live, would it not be better to avoid the term altogether? .. the continuity of the old *with* the new (body - FM) raises a whole set of further problems” (Wedderburn 1999:120-1).
- In 1984 Lüdemann believed the following:

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<sup>124</sup> In making this statement, Wedderburn builds it on Perry, *Enigma*, esp. p 237-238. p 70

“There is a consensus in research that according to 1 Corinthians 15,<sup>125</sup> all Christians will be given a resurrectional body after the parousia and that the transformation results is a *soma pneumatikon*, which is contrasted with the earthly body, the *soma psychikon*” (Lüdemann 1984:241-2)

Since then, he has changed his position to:

“.. you did not return, because your resurrection did not take place, but was only a pious wish. That is certain, because your body rotted in the tomb – that is, if it was put in a tomb at all and was not devoured by vultures and jackals ...” (Lüdemann 1999:3).

If **sarx kai; aiḡma** indicates that there will be no resurrection *body*, then it is fair to say that the tomb was not empty, that the Gospels are legendary redactions, and that the Christian faith is a fraud.

If however, **sarx kai; aiḡma** refers only to the frail sinful human nature, and that the resurrection will comprise of a *body*, then it is fair to say that the tomb was empty, that the Gospels refer to bodily appearances of Jesus, and that the Christian faith is founded on this events.

## **4.2 Hermeneutical presuppositions**

It is clear from the discussions thus far that Craig; Habermas and Wright's hermeneutical presuppositions relate somewhat to each other. In the same way one could dare to say that Lüdemann and Wedderburn's hermeneutical presuppositions also relate somewhat to each other. By saying this, in no way is it implied that these scholars are identical to each other. Each has his own unique characteristics.

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<sup>125</sup> Obviously relating to verse 44.

In what follows, an interpretation of their hermeneutical presuppositions will be given with ad hoc critical assessments.

#### 4.2.1 Craig, Habermas and Wright

It is possible to find minor differences between Craig, Habermas and Wright. In general however, the differences are not extensive. No wonder that they can refer to each other in a fairly positive way. So, for instance, Craig says of Wright: “I think that Wright’s book is best seen as the most extensively developed version of the argument for the resurrection of Jesus from the fact of the origin of the disciples’ belief in Jesus’ resurrection ... Wright’s book is an invaluable reference work and a benchmark of resurrection scholarship” (Craig 2006:148).

We have seen that these scholars hold that God can intervene in nature. They reject the classical 19<sup>th</sup> century theory that the world is a closed system. One final statement from each of them is being given:

- Craig rejects the view that the universe and history is a closed system. In this regard Craig indicates how Rudolph Bultmann<sup>126</sup> works with an “.. *a priori* assumption of history and the universe as a closed system.” Craig then quotes Richard R. Niebuhr in stating, “Bultmann retained uncriticized the nineteenth century idea of nature and history as a closed system, which forced him to insist that the resurrection is only the wonder of faith” (Craig 1989:320,19n).
- Habermas indicates that: “Unless God or some supernatural agent acts, there is no miracle ..” (1987:63) He goes on to ask the question: “If God created the universe .. what would prohibit such a Being from suspending or temporarily overriding those same laws to perform a miracle? In the absence of any compelling reasons to reject this possibility, we must be open to it (Habermas 2004:138).

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<sup>126</sup> Here Craig quotes from Bultmann’s reply to his critics, in *Kerygma and Myth*, 1: 197.

- Wright states, “The radical hermeneutic of suspicion that characterises postmodernity is essentially nihilistic, denying the very possibility of creative or healing love. In the cross and resurrection of Jesus we find the answer: the God who made the world is revealed in terms of a self-giving love that no hermeneutic of suspicion can ever touch ..” (Wright 1998).<sup>127</sup>

In support of this position Peter de May sums up Richard Swinburne’s position as follows: “The physical element of the resurrection of Jesus certainly implies a violation of natural laws by an act of God” (De Mey 1998:273).

Swinburne himself confirms that “Those who think that the total evidence is against the traditional account do so because they think the background evidence makes a resurrection very improbable ... There is a significant balance of detailed historical evidence in favour of the resurrection, but it is not strong enough to equal the very strong force of background evidence – if the latter is construed only as evidence of what are the laws of nature” (Ibid).

Swinburn clearly indicates that there is historical evidence, but the background evidence, referring to the presupposition that God can violate natural laws determines the outcome.

With this in mind Swinburne concludes his article with a word of warning towards New Testament scholars who seem to think that they can do without background theories .. He states “Not only are they themselves influenced by theological presuppositions, but readers will only accept their conclusions with regard to the historical evidence, when they match the world view to which they adhere” (De May 1998:272).

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<sup>127</sup> Wright, N.T. 1998. The Resurrection and the Postmodern dilemma. Originally published in *Sewanee Theological Review*. No 41.2. [http://www.ntwrightpage.com/Wright\\_Resurrection\\_Postmodern.htm](http://www.ntwrightpage.com/Wright_Resurrection_Postmodern.htm) (16/10/2006).

Although De Mey has some critique on Swinburne's position, he agrees at least as far as to say, "Belief in the resurrection of Jesus does not ultimately depend upon historical evidence, but upon the acceptance of a world view that allows one to interpret the resurrection of Jesus as an act of God" (De Mey 1998:273).

#### 4.2.1.1 Faith and history

Could it be said that according to Craig, Habermas and Wright, a presuppositional belief that God can intervene in history (i.e. in the resurrection of Jesus), makes them utterly subjective and irrational in the way they present evidence for their faith in the resurrection? There are certainly those critics who think so.

One example is Michael Martin's critique of Craig's book *Reasonable Faith*. Martin quotes the following excerpt from Craig's book:

"The magisterial use of reason occurs when reason stands over and above the gospel like a magistrate and judges it on the basis of argument and evidence. The ministerial use of reason occurs when reason submits to and serves the gospel. Only the ministerial use of reason can be allowed. ... Should a conflict arise between the witness of the Holy Spirit to the fundamental truth of the Christian faith and beliefs based on argument and evidence, then it is the former which must take precedence over the latter, not vice versa" (Craig 1994:36).

Martin is of the opinion that Craig has an "epistemological problem(s)" as it relates to his "... claim that one can know that Christianity is true by the self-authenticating witness of God's Holy Spirit" (Martin 1998).<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> This comes from: Martin M 1998. *Craig's Holy Spirit Epistemology*. Internet article: [www.infidels.com](http://www.infidels.com) (30/10/2006).

The above however just underscores that everybody, including Martin, works with presuppositions.

Craig makes it quite clear at the start of his volume *Assessing the New Testament Evidence for the Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus*, that although he believes that the Bible has been inspired by the Holy Spirit, “This presupposition remains, however innocuous, since in no place in this work do I argue for the credibility of an account on the basis that it is inspired and therefore authoritative” (Craig 1989:xvii).

One can go so far back as John Calvin to show that proofs do *not* produce faith, but that it *can* be helpful. Calvin states that “In vain were the authority of Scripture fortified by argument ... if unaccompanied by an assurance higher and stronger than human Judgment can give. Till this better foundation has been laid, the authority of Scripture remains in suspense” (Calvin 1997).<sup>129</sup> Then follows the important statement: “On the other hand, when recognising its exemption from the common rule, we receive it reverently, and according to its dignity, those proofs which were not so strong as to produce and rivet a full conviction in our minds, become most appropriate helps” (Ibid).

Related to the above “conviction in our minds”, Allison is of opinion that apologists, of which Gary Habermas<sup>130</sup> is a prime example “.. strive vigorously .. to verify their faith, and they convince themselves that robust probability is indeed on their side” (Allison 2005:339). But, as was indicated earlier, this statement as a whole is not justifiable.

It becomes clear that for Craig, and probably for Habermas and Wright as well, faith in the resurrection of Jesus is a gift of God, which, after revelation, becomes

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<sup>129</sup> This comes from: Calvin, J. & Beveridge, H. 1997. *Institutes of the Christian religion*. Translation of: *Institutio Christianae religionis*. Reprint, with new introd. Originally published: Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1845-1846. Logos Research Systems, Inc. Oak Harbor, WA.

<sup>130</sup> Craig and Wright are probably also in mind here.

a hermeneutical presupposition affirming that God intervenes in his creation.<sup>131</sup> This gift is revelation.<sup>132</sup> Steve Moyise in his *Introduction to Biblical Studies* illustrates this correctly when he quotes Vanhoozer saying, “biblical interpretation must take into account the transforming effect of the Spirit. It is impossible to stand aloof from scripture and hope to correctly interpret it ... the Spirit not only convinces us that this is divine ... it also opens our eyes (and hearts) to its message” (Moyise 2004:116). But, as was indicated at several stages, Craig, Habermas and Wright can still, with intellectual integrity substantiate that belief in a rational academic environment.<sup>133</sup>

To explain the relation between faith and history, Craig quotes Van Daalen who states that “.. faith is a leap in the dark. That such a leap in the dark is a risk worth taking can only be found out by actually doing it” (Craig:1989:338).

Craig clearly rejects this position by stating that “This catastrophic misunderstanding springs from the error of taking faith as an epistemological category, a way of knowing. It ignores the fact that in biblical usage, faith is not merely *assensus*, but *fiducia*. Because faith is a whole-souled trust or commitment, it cannot in any way be opposed to either knowledge or evidence.

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<sup>131</sup> Craig will however probably agree with Martin Stowasser who indicates that “.. in the question of the resurrection, one gets to the point where one can’t grasp with our historical epistemology ... one gets to the point with the text, where one trust those great traditions ..” This statement was made by Stowasser when we had a (short) discussion about Gerd Lüdemann’s understanding of the resurrection. (Stowasser, H. 2006. *Interview with Mulder F.* Kath. Theologische Fakultät. Universität Wien. 06 July 2006).

As McGrath indicates, one should however not be confused with Karl Barth’s understanding of the “.. *unendliche qualitative Unterschied* between God and human beings. God cannot and must not be constructed or conceived in human terms .. Time and time again Barth emphasizes the vastness of the gulf fixed between God and humanity, and the impossibility of bridging this gulf from our side. Barth substitutes for Lessing’s ‘ugly great ditch’ of history the ‘glacial crevasse’ of time and eternity. God is *totaliter aliter*, wholly and absolutely different from us” (McGrath 2002:217-8). This focus of Barth, which is particularly evident in his commentary on Romans might lead one to reject any historical substantiation of the faith we hold dear.

<sup>132</sup> In line with this statement, Van der Watt states that “.. die meestersverhaal van die Skrif is .. ‘n openbaringsverhaal wat as sodanig outoritatief aanspreek ... Binne die Christendom ontwikkel die mens dus nie sy of haar eie godsdiens nie, maar word hy of sy uitgenooi, aangemoedig, ingelig, voorgeskryf ensovoorts, en dit kom van God. Die verhaal is dus nie neutraal nie. Na sy eie aard formuleer dit nie ‘n skugter moontlike waarheid naas al die ander waarhede nie. Openbaring spreek normatief aan” (Van der Watt 2005:257-8).

<sup>133</sup> One thinks here of I Peter 3:15: “but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.” (*The Holy Bible : English standard version*. 2001. Good News Publishers: Wheaton. Libronics)

On the contrary, Paul and the gospels invite us to believe on the basis of the evidence .. No biblical writer could construct a dichotomy such that if one saw the risen Jesus, then one no longer needed to believe ..” (1989:339, 31n).

It is quite interesting that for Craig, Habermas and Wright, you have critics on two sides of the field: on the one side, there are those who accuse them of a blind faith, completely transcendental; whereas on the other side, there are those who accuse them of a rational verifiable *head knowledge* with no need for faith. Both these accusations misrepresent their positions. It becomes clear that they want to integrate faith and history in such a way as to give attention to the transcendent character of revelation, as well as analysing the reality of Christ’s incarnation into this concrete and real world.<sup>134</sup>

To conclude then, Craig, Habermas and Wright share a worldview, which allows God to intervene supernaturally in history. This they believe is why faith in Jesus’ resurrection is possible. Faith in this act of God does not however amount to “.. a leap in the dark ..”, but is a revelation from God, which can be testified to on reasonable historical grounds.

#### **4.2.1.2 A challenge to Critical Realism**

Discussing Wright’s hermeneutical presuppositions, his understanding of the epistemological position called critical realism has been briefly explained.

Before we get to critical realism, however, perhaps it is necessary to state in short, what *realism* is. According to G. Daws Hicks, one of the very first philosophers who wrote on critical realism, *realism* could be described as “the principle that things may be, and are, directly experienced without owing either their being or their nature to that circumstance” (Hicks 1938:xiii).

Critical realism however rejects such “direct experience of things” (Ibid).

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<sup>134</sup> Against this position, Van der Watt indicates how Räsänen develops the standpoint that “teologie buite die mure van die kerk as historiese wetenskap beoefen moet word. Die kerk gebruik dit net as geloofsboek.” (Van der Watt 2005:250, 7n).

Critical realism has many faces. Once more, it must be emphasized that critical realism is (in the words of Roy Bhaskar), “.. like a lush tropical garden overgrown with a rich assortment of life forms, many of which we encounter here for the first time. This is its strength, and this is its weakness” (Bhaskar 2001:285).<sup>135</sup> Thus, Lopez and Potter seem to be correct to state, “the field of contemporary ... critical realism could not be presented as a homogeneous field .. we suggest, instead .. a ‘unity through diversity’” (Lopez *et al* 2001:311).

Wright indicates that “This method recognizes that all knowledge of the past .. is mediated not only through sources but also through the perceptions .. personalities, of the knower. There is no such thing as detached objectivity .. But this does not mean that all knowledge collapse into *mere* subjectivity. There are ways of moving towards fair and true statements about the past” (Wright 2003:29).

As was indicated earlier, Wright probably comes close to Kevin J. Vanhoozer’s “hermeneutical realism”. Vanhoozer asks the question: “Just how confident can we be as interpreters that we have discovered the meaning of the text rather than ourselves and our projections?” (Vanhoozer 1998:462).<sup>136</sup> To this he answers, “The short response is to say both that *our knowledge must be tempered by humility, and that our scepticism must be countered by conviction*” (Ibid). With

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<sup>135</sup> This quote of Bhaskar is made by Bertell Ollman in: Ollman, B. in Lopez, J. & Potter, G. (ed) 2001. *Critical Realism in the light of Marx’s Process of Abstraction in After Postmodernism. An Introduction to Critical Realism*. The Athlone Press. London & New York. p 285.

In the discussion with Ulrich Körtner, he mentioned Michael Welker and Klaus Berger as important exponents of critical realism. Körtner’s own position, however is as follows: “For myself, it is very important to have a theory of metaphor .. the problem of realism for me is ... metaphor is not only the biblical kind of metaphor, but it is also an absolute metaphor, so we have no possibility in this metaphorical speech of a non-metaphorical speech. So we have to think, but we have no other way to discuss this reality than in the language of metaphor ... so I think it is very important to have a good theory of metaphor if you want to discuss the reality of resurrection. So Ricoeur is for me very important for what he developed is a theory of absolute metaphor ... for Ricoeur, metaphor does not say what something is, and it does not compare anything with another object .. but it creates a form of reality ..” (Körtner, U. 2006. *Interview with Mulder, F.* Evangelische Fakultät, Vienna, 5 July 2006).

<sup>136</sup> As part of my reading program for this degree, I thoroughly read Kevin Vanhoozer’s 1998, almost 500 page long book “*Is There a MEANING in the TEXT?*” Wright’s critical realism is, although similar in many respects, also different, in that he has more confidence in “probable” historical facts.

this goes an attitude of being a “humbly confident progressively interpreter” (1998:466). It was argued that Wright probably agrees whole-heartedly with this statement.

But why is it important to analyse critical realism here? Because classical critical realism, as defined by some scholars, rejects any foundational meta-narratives as *universally* true.

Wright states that critical realism “acknowledges the reality of the things known, as something other than the knower, while also fully acknowledging that *the only access we have to this reality lies along the spiralling path of appropriate dialogue or conversation between the knower and the thing known* (emphasis – FM) .. Related to the efficacy of language, critical realists do not hold that the texts are derivative of an objective world, but they do insist that the texts may represent and *refer* (emphasis – FM) to an objective world” (Wright 2006:59-60). The above “the spiralling path of appropriate dialogue” needs to be analysed further.

#### **4.2.1.2.1 “*spiralling path of appropriate dialogue*”**

The above “spiralling path of appropriate dialogue or conversation between the knower and the thing known” (Ibid) might, somehow, open the door for future subjectivity, which could destroy Wright’s hard labours in making an honest case for the bodily resurrection. This is certainly not an innuendo that it is Wright’s intention, on the contrary! The aim is only to indicate the probability that critical realism which Wright employ so fruitfully is not necessarily adequate for future generations.

For Wright it is beneficial, but others might in the future misuse the provisional, tentative character of critical realism’s spiralling progressive accumulation of knowledge to come up with evidence which could lead to the denial of the bodily

resurrection. At least one should acknowledge that such a scenario is in principle possible.<sup>137</sup>

Jacob Kremer, the well know Austrian specialist on the resurrection might be an example that fits here.

Although it is not at all suggested that Kremer works with a critical realist epistemology, it is significant that he, generally known for his staunch defence of the empty tomb, revised his position on the empty tomb and resurrection of late.<sup>138</sup> This is significant as Craig and Habermas continue to use Kremer to support their belief in the empty tomb.

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<sup>137</sup> Let's say hypothetically, as Wedderburn indicates, scientists "discover in Palestine a skeleton conveniently labelled 'Jesus of Nazareth, king of the Jews'?" (Wedderburn 1999:221). What if scientific tests confirm that its date is around 33-36 AD and a substantial amount of scientists believe this evidence? Let's say it is a fabrication of those who intended to destroy the real facts, but there is not sufficient evidence to counter this claim? What will critical realism's answer be in this scenario? And add to that Joe Barnhart's quote from C. Clifford who indicates that: "It is wrong, always and for everyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence." This comes from: Barnhart, J. 1996. *Karl Popper: philosopher of critical realism – Column*. Humanist. July-August 1996.  
[http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m1374/is\\_n4\\_v56/ai\\_18501025/pg\\_3](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1374/is_n4_v56/ai_18501025/pg_3) (16/10/2006)

<sup>138</sup> Or that is at least the impression following the interview in July 2006. The following excerpt is important here:

Kremer: "..... my position is: Jesus is resurrected yes, in the moment of His death. Death and resurrection at the same time. And then the picture of the explanations. And many Christians come to this .. and this is my position.

Mulder: If somebody would ask you, let say, you do an interview on the radio and somebody asks you the question: prof Kremer, did Jesus rise with a body, and does it mean that the grave is empty? What would your answer be?

Kremer: Ahh, maybe possible that the grave was deserted, but it is no proof, no proof. Because when Jesus resurrected, he was resurrected with His body, and the distinction between soul and body is a distinction out of the Greek philosophy, and in the Holy Scripture nothing is written about it. For instance, a critic of mine professor 'Schubracht', he is very against me, because I said 'I don't know if the grave was empty .. it is not important, no'. And then he had the interesting problem too .. years ago Ratzinger had written an article about the distinction between '*leichaam*', body und libe. The leichaam isn't the same as the body. Because '*lichaam*', that is a symbol of the dead .. I think it's in the Protestant churches too .. the dead are in the grave until the last day of the resurrection, no. In the grave the lichaam, but it is a symbol of the dead. And therefore we say in German 'das lere Grab' .. the grave are without body, it's looking for the resurrection.

Mulder: So the empty grave is not that important?

Kremer: No, no, it's got nothing to do.

Mulder: OK.

Kremer: Probably it is an expression of the church, but we know nothing" (Kremer, J. 2006. *Interview with Mulder, F.* Evangelische Fakultät, Vienna, 5 July 2006).

Is it not in this instance fair to say, that if critical realism's tentative nature convinces a scholar that the empty tomb is irrelevant, that in such an instance revelation has been shifted to the side? Who will decide on the empty tomb: critical realism or God's revelation through the Holy Spirit?

#### 4.2.1.2.2 “absolute knowledge and absolute agnosticism”

Related to the “spiralling path” as discussed above might be Vanhoozer's statement that “There must be a recognition of givens and of limits; the morality of literary knowledge demands both. If we are to live these tensions, we must *avoid absolute knowledge and absolute agnosticism* (emphasis – FM) alike” (Vanhoozer 1998:462).

In their analysis of critical realism, also connected to Vanhoozer's statement above, Potter and Lopez indicate how “knowledge evolves. Hopefully we produce truer and truer (truth is not absolute) accounts of reality” (Potter *et al* 2001:12).

Are the above statements not the kind of statement, which somehow could accommodate Wedderburn's position (although it is certainly not Vanhoozer's intention!) of a “reverent agnosticism” (Wedderburn 1999:97) and a “vulnerable faith”? (1999:221). To substantiate this claim, the following excerpt from the discussion with Wedderburn is important:

*Mulder: “But if you look at all the times you quote DF Strauss and other guys who are of that school, and the way some of the arguments are structured, some have critiqued your book and said it is almost as if some of the statements that you make is not tentative, cautious, it's almost in a fixed, absolutistic way some of the arguments*

*are portrayed. I'm perhaps too general when I say that, one should be careful to say it like that.*

*Wedderburn: What I think .. a Durham college e-mailed me .. a church historian said that I was in complete denial and I said in reply that he misses the point entirely .. that one ... could be agnostic, in distinction then of Lüdemann who very catagorically states that things didn't happen the way they wanted to explain it" (2006)<sup>139</sup>*

In *Beyond Resurrection*, Wedderburn states further that "As far as the resurrection of Jesus itself is concerned, a decisive historical judgement is to my mind epistemologically improper and impossible" (Wedderburn 1999:97-9). It is then that Wedderburn pleads for what he calls a "reverent agnosticism".

The above is certainly a far cry from the way in which Wright articulates critical realism. The following statements might substantiate this claim:

- "It is .. historically *highly probable* (emphasis – FM) that Jesus' tomb was indeed empty .." (Wright 2003:687). What does Wright intend to say? He certainly wants to indicate the *fact* of the empty tomb!
- "The proposal that Jesus was bodily raised from the dead *possesses unrivalled power* (emphasis – FM) to explain the historical data at the heart of early Christianity" (Wright 2003:718). Wright is clearly convinced of the bodily resurrection here.

In a similar way, Van der Watt probably makes the same kind of firm statement when he states that the critical center must be formulated. He says: "Die kritiese

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<sup>139</sup> Wedderburn, A.J.M. *Interview with Mulder, F.* Ludwig Maximillian Universität. Munich. 06 July 2006.

kern ... moet geformuleer word” (Van der Watt 2005:256).<sup>140</sup> To substantiate this claim, Van der Watt quotes R. Morgan who states that: “Is there a scriptural norm which will help to maintain Christian identity? The norm itself would remain scripture, but a rule of faith or creed or christological formula that summarizes the central thrust of Christian scripture would guide its interpretation. Any such criterion is bound to be christological because it is in the crucified and risen Jesus that Christians see the decisive saving revelation of the God of Israel and Creator of the world, the Judge and Saviour” (Ibid).

Despite the strong affirmative statements made by Wright, one still wonders whether critical realism could still somehow accommodate views, which are contrary to the meta-narratives of the Christian church.

#### **4.2.1.2.3 “A central thrust of Scripture” possible?**

The above begs the question: Is there a “central thrust of Christian scripture” which is non-negotiable? Or to put it even stronger, is there a “central thrust of Christian scripture” which is absolute?

Thiselton, for instance state that “*Christian theology would move into self-contradiction if ... the ... message of the cross, and the universality of eschatological promise (is interpreted – FM) as merely context-relative; as the product or construction of a particular social culture with no claim to offer a universal critique of life and thought, and even a metacritique of other criteria of*

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<sup>140</sup> It is however worth mentioning here that Van der Watt is acutely aware of the fact that various interpretations and “pre-occupations with a supposed ‘centre’ at the expense of exegetical and other detail” should be rejected, as indicated by Anthony C. Thiselton. Thiselton indicates that Wayne Meeks’ book *The Writings of St Paul: Norton Critical Edition* indicates how several scholars have tried to find such a “centre” in the letters of Paul (Thiselton 1992:242).

Another important point worth mentioning here, is the whole field of Language Philosophy. Although its detail cannot be discussed here, Van der Watt’s fruitful articulation of “Speech-Act Theory” as Thiselton describes it, offers a theory which holds that language refer to actions, and that, accordingly, language possesses the ability to communicate authentically about what actually happened in the past. See Thiselton (1992:272-312). It might be an interesting endeavour to analyze “Speech-Act Theory” and critical realism concurrently.

thought, understanding, and action” (Thiselton 1992:612). He adds, “Pannenberg rightly insists, the resurrection and Christology provide a ‘centre’ for an universal horizon which transcends this or that context-relative life-world” (Thiselton 1992:617). For Thiselton, this however does not “deliver Christian interpretation from fallibility”, but it seems quite clear that Jesus’ death and resurrection should be retained as the “central thrust”<sup>141</sup> for Christian interpretation (Ibid).

A further example to indicate the “central thrust” might be Willem J. Ouweneel<sup>142</sup> who states that “Gods Zelfopenbaring is absoluut ... Door vast te houden aan het absolute, transcendente uitgangspunt blijven we bewaard voor het postmoderne relativisme” (Ouweneel 2006:108).<sup>143</sup>

McGrath says it strikingly: “Fragmentary and broken though human words may be, they nevertheless possess a capacity to function as the medium through which God is able to disclose himself, and bring about a transformation encounter of the risen Christ and the believer” (McGrath 2002b:26).

The above statements beg the question: Can critical realism accommodate any Christian meta-narrative, which is absolute?

Philip Hodgkiss refers to Archer who holds that “critical realism presupposes a central shape to the world which exhibit emergent properties of pre-existing forms. ... the basic ontology that reality exists independently of us thinking about it must be seen as veridical” (Hodgkiss 2001:50).

It is with the above in mind that Christopher Norris deals with the challenge, which Quantum mechanics (henceforth QM) brings to critical realism. In his rejection of orthodox QM, Norris indicates how “Although he had been among the

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<sup>141</sup> See Morgan above (Van der Watt 2005:256).

<sup>142</sup> Prof. dr. dr. dr. Willem J. Ouweneel, Professor in Philosophy and Theology, Evangelische Theologische Faculteit, Leuven (Belgium).

<sup>143</sup> It is clear that Ouweneel wants to retain the “absolute, transcendent uitgangspunt” but that he is also acutely aware of the temporality of theological discourse.

chief contributors to the early development of QM, Einstein was by now deeply dissatisfied with what he saw as its failure to provide (an – FM) adequate realist .. account of QM phenomena” (Norris 2001:117). He concludes that Einstein eventually adopted “a realist position that entailed far more in the way of express ontological commitment” (Ibid).<sup>144</sup> In his conclusion, Norris states that “.. critical realism is strongly placed to clarify some of the most vexing issues in quantum-theoretical debate” (Norris 2001:127).

With the above in mind, it is not surprising that Hicks indicate that “More than one writer has observed that the ‘new realism’<sup>145</sup>, not with standing its avowedly

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<sup>144</sup> In the Q & A after Julian Müller’s (professor in Practical Theology: University of Pretoria) lecture on “*Hoe lyk vandag se mense?*”, Louw Alberts, a renowned South African physicist, against Julian Müller indicates how most physical scientific scientists are critical of postmodernism. Accordingly, they reject the idea that all knowledge is relative, or that there is no absolute truth. He states that:

Alberts: “Baie dankie vir u uiteensetting. U weet as natuurwetenskaplike het ek die probleem van al die verskillende denkrigtings in die wêreld, is die natuurwetenskaplikes die mees skeptiesste oor die denkrigting van die postmodernisme. Hulle beskou dit eintlik as iets wat oorgeneem is deur die menswetenskappe, en wat eintlik nie verstaan wat aangaan in hierdie totale heelal nie, so laat hulle maar rustig daaroor klets. En al wat ek daarmee wil sê is u sal uitvind dat ek as natuurwetenskaplike lag party keer vir die postmodernistiese denkwys in die natuurwetenskappe, begryp u wat ek wil sê? En derhalwe is jou reaksie om te sê kyk, laat die teoloë en die filosowe nou maar speel met hulle begrippe, maar ons moet maar eers wag en kyk wat word.

Müller: Ja, dankie dr Alberts, dit is ‘n interessante opmerking wat u maak. Ek sal definitief nie met u in debat tree oor die natuurwetenskap nie. Maar dit is tog so dat mense dit al geskryf het en dat dit dikwels gesê word dat die eerste stappe na postmoderne manier van dink, en verstaan van die werklikheid, vanuit die natuurwetenskaplike gekom het. Met die ontwikkeling van die kwantum fisika, wat dinge ontdek het wat van tevore ontken is en na vore gebring het, wat nuwe wyse van paradoksale verstaan na vore gebring het van die werklikheid, beide die fisiese en ook sosiale en die geestelike werklikheid. Mm, so, ek weet nie as u dit sê of u daarmee bedoel dat die filosofies, teologiese denke wat iets probeer maak van die postmoderne wêreldbeeld, dat dit eintlik belaglik is vanuit die natuurwetenskappe nie? As u dit sê dan wil ek dit ontken, daar’s genoeg getuienis aan die ander kant van mense wat, en dit is die wonder vir my van die tyd waarin ons leef, dat natuurwetenskaplikes, en sosiaal wetenskaplikes en teoloë, ‘n nuwe basis gevind het om opnuut vir mekaar te verstaan, en met mekaar saam te praat, wat van tevore nie bestaan het nie. Die probleem was in die ou wêreldbeeld die geskeide een van teologie en wêreld hier onder, wetenskap hier onder en natuurwetenskap hier onder, en teologie daar, die een het niks vir die ander een te sê nie. Binne daai wêreldbeeld het die gesprek opgedroog, vasgeloop, nie waar nie. Verstaan ons mekaar verkeerd?

Alberts: Nee, nee, miskien druk ek myself verkeerd uit. Dat die natuurwetenskap al die verandering bring, maar die hele gedagte dat waarheid is relatief, of daar is nie absolute waarhede of strewe na absolute waarhede nie, is eintlik in die natuurwetenskaplike wêreld verwerplik” (Müller, J. 2002. *Hoe lyk vandag se Mense?* Lecture at the Centurion Theatre. Pretoria. Q & A with Louw Alberts after lecture. 07 March 2002. Personal transcrip of the video recording).

<sup>145</sup> Here actually implying critical realism.

polemical attitude towards idealism, is, in truth, separated from the latter only by the thinnest of lines” (Hicks 1938:44).

The above makes it clear that there is at least a strand of critical realism, which provide for some meta narratives, or may we say absolute truths.

In Wright’s sermon *Pentecost, Power and Politics* on Acts 2.22-42, it is then not surprising that he states that “The resurrection of Jesus, a robustly bodily event leaving a *definitely* (emphasis – FM) empty tomb behind it, is the demonstration that Jesus really is the Messiah, David’s ultimate heir, Israel’s rightful king, the world’s true Lord. That is the message of Peter’s address. It is classic early Christian evangelism” (Wright 2003b).<sup>146</sup>

#### 4.2.1.2.4 “A central thrust of Scripture” turned around?

There are however those critical realists<sup>147</sup> who would firmly deny any foundational meta-narratives. Accordingly, statements like “I suppose, I suggest, It may well be, What if” and “best historical explanation”<sup>148</sup>, all of which Wright makes ample use of could be used for other purposes. These words, which are true to critical realism, could turn out to be so provisional that in due time, some critical scholars could accumulate skeptical material, and use the same terms mentioned above, to come to the conclusion that the “best historical explanation” is in fact that Jesus did not rise bodily from the dead.<sup>149</sup>

Perhaps, the following might be an analogy to explain this statement:

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<sup>146</sup> Sermon: Wright, N.T. 2003. *Pentecost, Power and Politics* on Acts 2.22-42. Sermon at Westminster Abbey at Evensong on the Feast of Pentecost, June 8. [http://www.westminster-abbey.org/voice/sermon/archives/030610\\_pentecost.htm](http://www.westminster-abbey.org/voice/sermon/archives/030610_pentecost.htm) (16/10/2006).

<sup>147</sup> It is interesting how Frank Pearce and Tony Woodiwiss, interpret Michel Foucault as a critical realist in: Pearce, F. & Woodiwiss, T. in Lopez, J. & Potter, G. (ed) 2001. *Reading Foucault as a Realist. After Postmodernism. An Introduction to Critical Realism*. The Athlone Press. London & New York. p 61.

<sup>148</sup> These phrases are used in this sequence by Robert H. Smith (2004:250).

<sup>149</sup> This critique is not leveled against Wright, it is just suggested that others may use it in this manner.

The “*best*” athlete in the 100 meters Olympic final, might in four years’ time, run out of his (explanatory) “*power*”, and ends up last. He might “*suggest*” that “*it may well be*” that it is hypothetically “*highly probable*” to “*suppose*” that he was not in good shape. Could critical realism be used the other way around – to indicate that it is “*highly probable*” that Jesus did not rise bodily from the dead?

Epistemologies like hermeneutical realism, critical realism, metaphysical realism (and whatever else may still come), are all scientific epistemologies, which are fallible. All epistemologies are tools, which are always dispensable. Karl R. Popper is therefore at least in this instance correct, when, in applying his famous “*falsification*” of *all* theories, (which could include critical realism), he indicates, “*my proposal was that a statement (a theory, a conjecture) has the status of belonging to the empirical sciences if and only if it is falsifiable*” (Popper 1994:xix).

One can also refer to Thomas Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, in which, according to Potter and Lopez, he indicates how “*the actual history of the natural sciences*” are “*powerfully exposed (to – FM) the social-historical determinants of scientific thought*” (Potter *et al* 2001:7).

By contrast, the reality of Jesus’ bodily resurrection is non-negotiable. This is pure revelation<sup>150</sup> (Van der Watt 2005:256). As epistemologies lose their appeal and explanatory power, new ones should always be developed (or old one’s should be re-discovered)<sup>151</sup> to once again give Christians the adequate tools to state their firm belief in this revelatory doctrine, which surpasses all temporal tools to articulate it.

Following the analysis of Craig, Habermas and Wright, it is certain, that for them the bodily resurrection of Jesus is “*A central thrust of Scripture*”. Although several historical arguments could be produced to substantiate this claim, this belief is

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<sup>150</sup> See: Van der Watt, J.G. 2005. *Huidige uitdagings vir die Ned Geref Kerk rakende fasette van Skrifgebruik*. NGTT. Deel 46 nr 1&2. University of Stellenbosch.

<sup>151</sup> One thinks here of John Wycliff, Savonarola, Luther and others reformers.

only possible through the Holy Spirit's illumination. With this in mind, this section is finished with a short excerpt from these three scholars as they affirm, each in his own unique way this illumination:

Craig: "Should a conflict arise between the witness of the Holy Spirit to the fundamental truth of the Christian faith and beliefs based on argument and evidence, then it is the former which must take precedence over the latter, not vice versa" (Craig 1994:36).

Habermas: "The Christian has the Holy Spirit who testifies to her that Christianity is true and that she belongs to God. The historical certainty we have of Jesus' resurrection only reinforces that God's Spirit has indeed spoken to us" (Habermas 2004:33).<sup>152</sup>

Wright: "The more I appreciate my own laughable inadequacy, the more I celebrate the fact of the Trinity. Without the possibility of invoking the Spirit of Jesus, of the living God, for every single task, what would keep me going? Pride and fear, I guess. I know enough about both to recognize the better way" (Wright 1993:35).

#### 4.2.2 Wedderburn

It is true that Lüdemann and Wedderburn differ quite substantially. This was clearly evident in the discussion with Wedderburn.<sup>153</sup> That does not however

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<sup>152</sup> In his debate with Flew Habermas also states that "... there's a point at which you've got to say, either, 'I do' or 'I don't' exercise faith. The point at which one says, 'I do' is what Christianity is all about. It's certainly more than the facts alone .." (Habermas 2005:73).

<sup>153</sup> The following excerpt from the discussion with Wedderburn is applicable:

mean that there are no similarities between them. Wedderburn states for instance that “Lüdemann is right to question whether Paul ... was likely to be interested in the empty tomb ..” (1999:87). With regards to a psychological explanation of Paul’s experience, he states that “.. the very fact that such an explanation has been suggested, and not just by Lüdemann, means that we cannot so easily discount *a priori* the possibility that such an explanation may be correct ..” (Wedderburn 1999:76-7).

Probably in line with this assertion Wedderburn pleads for a thorough historical investigation of the New Testament evidence for the resurrection. After his endeavour on that path he states that “The logical conclusion of such an investigation ([which includes *his* understanding of – FM] historical criticism .. radical questioning .. causal explanations .. as Ernst Troeltsch indicates, it) seems therefore to be, apparently, a regrettable and thoroughly unsatisfactory ‘Don’t know’, a historical agnosticism that seems to undermine any profession of faith, unless one somehow manages to anchor it independently of any historical occurrences” (1999:96-7).

In his review of Wedderburn’s book, G.A. Wells indicates that he “.. confesses that the result of a historical investigation into the traditions of Jesus’ resurrection seems to yield very little that is of much use for Christian faith, and who urges a

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- Mulder: “I asked one question of quite a few professors. Now I’ve got a good idea what you’re going to answer me, but if you mind me asking it again, it’s not a stupid question, I ask it on purpose. If somebody asks you over the radio for instance: Professor Wedderburn, did Jesus rise with a body, and does it mean the grave is empty?”
- Wedderburn: I would have to say I don’t know.
- Mulder: Can you expand a bit, let’s say you’ve got two minutes?
- Wedderburn: I would have to say that that is one possibility of the phenomena. Something happened to the disciples and apparently to Paul ..
- Mulder: If I would pose the question to prof Gerd Lüdemann, would he say no?
- Wedderburn: I think so yes.
- Mulder: OK
- Wedderburn: He is quite catagorical, and that is where we part company. He is dogmatic when I don’t think one can be dogmatic”

(Wedderburn, A.J.M. 2006. *Interview with Mulder*, F. Ludwig Maximillian Universität, Munchen. 06 July 2006).

reverent agnosticism as to whether anything in fact happened at Easter above and beyond what went on in the minds of the followers of Jesus” (Wells 1999).<sup>154</sup>

In line with both Lüdemann and Wedderburn’s understanding of miracles, Walter Kasper states, “Extraordinary events are no longer regarded with astonishment. They are reduced to the general and uniform aspects of reality” (Kasper 1976:89-90). Kasper goes further to indicate how form criticism indicates how a number of miracle stories turn out to be projections of the experiences of Easter back into the earthly life of Jesus ..” (Ibid).

It becomes quite clear that both Lüdemann and Wedderburn accept Hume’s theory in his influential essay “*Of Miracles*,” which focuses on the relationship between miracle-claims and the laws of nature. Accordingly, no empirical evidence exists for miracle claims (Habermas 1987:16).<sup>155</sup>

Accordingly, no miracle, including Jesus’ resurrection is in principle possible. Thus, starting with an *a priori* position, which excludes any supernatural intervention in history, makes the empty tomb and resurrection of Jesus a fairy tale even before exegesis starts.

#### **4.2.2.1 Faith and History**

When it comes to the relationship between faith and history, Wedderburn’s positions become quite interesting, especially as he rejects the historicity of the empty tomb, the bodily resurrection and life after death.

As is the case with Craig, Habermas and Wright, Lüdemann and Wedderburn base their faith/ or at least substantiate it on the basis of their historical results.

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<sup>154</sup> This article comes from the internet: Wells, G.A. 1999. The Earliest Christianity. The New Humanist Vol. 114, No. 3. Sept 1999, pp. 13-18. <http://skeptically.org/newtestament/id20.html>  
The last sentence sounds pretty close to Bultmann’s position.

<sup>155</sup> This statement is a revised statement made by Gary Habermas in his debate with Anthony Flew (1987).

Wedderburn indicates that the ".. apparent 'dead end' for our understanding of Christian faith and of God" leads him to a position of ".. coming to terms with the loss of what had previously been thought to be the firm basis for so many traditional assertions about God, Jesus and the world" (Wedderburn1999:99). In this endeavour, Wedderburn self-consciously moves beyond the New Testament, though he claims that he is keeping with the spirit of Jesus' teaching in John's Gospel that after Jesus is gone, the Spirit would lead them into greater truth.<sup>156</sup> Wedderburn states further that "We cannot rest content with the answers which the New Testament gives us, for it sees that the New Testament is not internally consistent, nor can it be shown to correspond to what we know of the world" (1999:106).

He states further that we must be prepared "to move beyond this 'resurrection' to expound the nature of Christian existence in a way that is independent of this term" (1999:95).

Wedderburn's book describes several reasons for this "move beyond" the resurrection. A few of these reasons not mentioned earlier in this thesis can now be stated briefly, as they are quite controversial, and give a clearer picture of Wedderburn "agnostic" position:

- "Pauls's rethoric has led him astray"  
"Have his ministry and his teaching no value or point or worth unless he rose bodily from the dead? ... Paul's logic simply cannot hold water today. His rethoric has led him astray here. For by implication it utterly devalues Jesus' existence and ministry and all that he achieved during his life on earth ... Such teaching as that of Paul in 1 Cor. 15 also .. devalues and disregards .. countless individuals (who - FM) have lived valuable and admirable lives,

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<sup>156</sup> Bibza, J. 2001. *Beyond Resurrection – Review*. Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society. Jun 2001. [http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qa3817/is\\_200106/ai\\_n8959471/pg\\_2](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3817/is_200106/ai_n8959471/pg_2) (16/10/2006).

regardless of whether .. in the name of Christ or not ... Paul may argue as he does due to the rhetorical needs of the situation ..” (1999:154-5)<sup>157</sup>

- “Future resurrection .. redundant”

“D.Z. Philips suggests as an interpretation of the notion of ‘overcoming death’ that this mean no more and no less than that one has lived in such a way in this life that this present life in not rendered pointless by death .. It is true, then, that the statements in the Fourth Gospel which seem to talk of a still future resurrection in the traditional terms seem redundant thereby leading Rudolf Bultmann to consider them to be secondary additions ... Equally, however, this way of rendering them apparently redundant can be seen as merely taking a (quite legitimate) step further, the tention in Paul’s thought between life now, through the Spirit, and the (fullness of) life still to be granted in the future ..” (1999:159).

- Jesus’ life before his death is enough.

“The rebuke to Thomas is surely related .. (to - FM) those demanding signs .. Is it not then, the Fourth Evangelist saying that what was to be seen in the life of Jesus before his death should have been enough to evoke faith, enough to base faith on? He speaks to ‘the situation of those who are dependent upon the witness of the first eyewitnesses alone’. Is it because the earthly life of Jesus should be enough to evoke faith that the writer of the Fourth Gospel tells the story which he .. tells (cf. 20:31) .. “ (1999:161).

- II Tim 2:18 not difinitive.

Wedderburn indicates how some my object to ‘this step further’ and site “II Tim 2:18; for there a certain Hymenaeus and Philetus are condemned for

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<sup>157</sup> The following excerpt from the discussion with Wedderburn is applicable here:

Wedderburn: “..should I arrive beyond the grave and find it is otherwise I hope .. the important thing is how one lives in this world. This is the fundamental difficulty I have with Paul .. He says that if you are not sure about the next life, then this life is worthless, and I don’t think it is true of Paul or of Jesus. It is a major argument” (Wedderburn, A.J.M. 2006. *Interview with Mulder, F.* Ludwig Maximillian Universität, Munchen. 06 July 2006).

saying that the resurrection has already taken place” (1999:162). Wedderburn has an interesting view on this issue. He states that “does one need to regard the writer of II Timothy as being *the* definitive interpreter of the Pauline heritage?” (1999:163).

It becomes quite clear then, that Wedderburn moves beyond what the New Testament teaches.<sup>158</sup> This might be the result of his “reverent agnostic” position which is again the result of his historical interpretation of the New Testament texts. He states further that he “.. can see no other way for Christians to go once they see how mysteriously inscrutable this founding event of the Christian church really was, once they see that intellectually a form of agnosticism, of suspension of judgment, is the only adequate response to the nature of the evidence” (1999:221).

#### 4.2.2.2 The Historical Jesus

As can be expected, faith for Wedderburn becomes fully built on his reconstruction of the Historical Jesus. He states that “.. the version of Christian faith that I have described is vulnerable at all points, for all that it can appeal to is the intrinsic worth of the life of Jesus lived and the message that he delivered, and the inherent quality of the life which is lived in this world by the community which follows him” (1999:221).

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<sup>158</sup> Relating to this “moving beyond”, Craig Koester makes the following statement: “.. if you take away this central event of resurrection, then, where does resurrection faith come from? .... you really have to get *imaginative* (emphasis - FM) to try and think where this came from. The Christians consistently did not say ‘Well, I got this new insight of life’. The consistency of Christian testimony was that Jesus was raised. That is the consistent element. Now if you say they really don’t mean that, what they really mean is it’s an appreciation of his teachings, then that become a *radical inversion* (emphasis – FM) of what the testimony is and you begin to wonder, would that be sufficient to account for the spreading of belief in the resurrection. That’s what really gets *challenging* (emphasis – FM)” (Koester C 2006. Seminar. University of Pretoria. 04 August 2006). Now even if Wedderburn disagrees with Koester’s faith in the resurrection, he will surely have to agree with the following excerpts: “you really have to get imaginative”, “radical inversion” and “challenging”. In his book Wedderburn legitimates this “moving beyond” by appealing to the different strata that developed during the church fathers and beyond (including the different Gnostic groups).

Commenting on his rejection of a bodily resurrection, which, for him entails a triumphalist manifestation of divine power, Wedderburn states that “.. those of Jesus’ followers .. whose lives most closely mirror the way of life of Christ would be left affected by this shift in perspective, for they have found the meaning of the worth of their living in a costly service of God and of others here in this suffering world, and look not for triumphalist manifestations of divine power either in this world or in another” (1999:221).

A similar line can be traced in Jurie le Roux’s article on Andries van Aarde’s book *Fatherless in Galilee*. In an English excerpt on the internet, Le Roux states “The historical Jesus has been the central point of interest for the past eighteen months<sup>159</sup> ... Van Aarde describes Jesus as fatherless. He was born as a ‘nobody’ and died as a ‘nobody’. The experiences of a fatherless boy in the Mediterranean world during the first century are illuminated quite strikingly” (Le Roux 2002).<sup>160</sup> In the Afrikaans article, Le Roux adds that “Genoeg is bekend dat ons iets van die historiese Jesus se radikale omgee vir die ander kan verstaan .. Van Aarde het die pyn van vaderloosheid geken en daarom het die vaderlose Jesus hom aangespreek. Hy het geleer wie Jesus was en wat hy nou nog vir mense kan beteken” (Le Roux 2002:97).<sup>161</sup>

As will be shown later again, Wedderburn focuses on Jesus’ suffering and solidarity with the poor and marginalized. This focus excludes a bodily-resurrected Jesus.

#### **4.2.2.3 Mysticism**

In addition to the Historical Jesus, Wedderburn introduces the “elusive and variegated topic, mysticism” which will indicate that “God may be portrayed either

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<sup>159</sup> This statement refers to South Africa.

<sup>160</sup> This comes from Le Roux’s internet review: Le Roux, J.H. 2002. *Van Aarde and the fatherless Jesus*. 10 May 2002. Nr 15. [www.otnet.co.za](http://www.otnet.co.za)

<sup>161</sup> Le Roux basis this statement on his analysis of p 6 of Van Aarde’s book: *Fatherless in Galilee*.

as a journey out of oneself .. or as a journey into the depths within oneself” (Wedderburn 1999:214). Concluding this section, he states “we do not really know so much about God and should not pretend that we do .. both God and reality are indeed most mysterious” (1999:216).<sup>162</sup>

Wedderburn goes into some detail explaining and criticising Dorothy Sölle and other scholars’ view on mysticism. In short, Wedderburn finds a connection between mysticism and ethical activism, as portrayed by Sölle’s nuanced feminist appropriation. For the purpose of this thesis, further analysis is not necessary.

#### 4.2.2.4 A new paradigm for faith

What one finds here then, is a basis for faith stripped from any traditional Christian foundational meta-narrative.<sup>163</sup> Instead, it is probably safe to say that Wedderburn wants to move beyond a faith based on the “mysteriously inscrutable” evidence in the New Testament to existentialism similar to that of Rudolf Bultmann.<sup>164</sup> Where Bultmann still holds to what McGrath calls a “ ‘kernel’ of the *kerygma*” (McGrath 2002:144), Wedderburn finds existential fulfilment in

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<sup>162</sup> McGrath indicates in his book *Christian Spirituality* how the “.. term ‘mysticism’ (and related terms such as ‘mistical’ and ‘mistic’) means very different things to different people” (McGrath 1998:5). He then goes on to explain three senses of the word. The one explanation which probably comes close to Wedderburn’s position is the following: “Mysticism is an approach to spiritual issues .. which stresses inner experience and correspondingly marginalizes or rejects any use of cognitive approaches to spirituality. In this sense of the word, mysticism denotes potentially irrational and anti-intellectual approaches to experience, often regarding apparent contradiction as a virtue” (1998:6).

<sup>163</sup> Van der Watt states that “Die kritiese kern (die pilare van die meestersverhaal) waarsonder die Ned Geref Kerk meen daar nie meer legitiem van Christenskap gepraat kan word nie, moet geformuleer word.” To substantiate this claim, Van der Watt quotes R. Morgan who states that: “Is there a scriptural norm which will help to maintain Christian identity? The norm itself would remain scripture, but a rule of faith or creed or christological formula that summarizes the central thrust of Christian scripture would guide its interpretation. Any such criterion is bound to be christological because it is in the crucified and risen Jesus that Christians see the decisive saving revelation of the God of Israel and Creator of the world, the Judge and Saviour” (Van der Watt 2005:256, 31n).

<sup>164</sup> By this it is not insinuated that Wedderburn complies in full with Bultmann’s position. Instead, as indicated in at least the following pages: 16, 80, 88, 138, 148, 159, Wedderburn follows Bultmann in some key respects which open the door for an existentialism which moves beyond the original meaning of the text.

the Historical Jesus,<sup>165</sup> mediated by a mysticism which assist the “.. journey out of oneself.. (or the – FM) .. journey into the depths within oneself ..” (Wedderburn 1999:214).

Worth noting here, are Wedderburn’s words of advice relating to the pastoral situation as it relates to his findings. One such interesting section relates to “the fear of the unknown,” where Wedderburn discusses the reality of death. Wedderburn states that “Now undoubtedly it might .. help that person to be able to say that one knows what awaits us beyond the grave, but that is precisely what the evidence of the New Testament rightly and critically read, does not provide ... One might be tempted here to offer them the prospect of a reunion with the departed one ... in an after-life. One might offer them that, but with a good conscience?” (1999:222-3).

The above clearly illustrates that Wedderburn is serious when he believes that a “reverent agnosticism” is the only real option, once the evidence for Jesus’ resurrection is analysed critically. This is further evident as his book is dedicated to “Fiona and Martin”, his two children (1999:v).<sup>166</sup>

After the discussion with Wedderburn it seems clear that he continues to stand by what he wrote in *Beyond Resurrection*.<sup>167</sup> This is further highlighted as he

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<sup>165</sup> It might be save to connect existentialism with the Historical Jesus. With regards to Andries van Aarde’s book “*Fatherless in Galilee* (which is a thorough analysis of the Historical Jesus), Jurie le Roux quotes from Albert Schweitzer’s book *The quest of the historical Jesus*. Le Roux states: “Schweitzer was reg. Wie hom met die historiese Jesus besig hou, sê eintlik meer van homself of haarself as van die historiese Jesus. En hierin is die aantreklikheid en uitdaging van Van Aarde se boek oor die historiese Jesus geleë” (Le Roux, J.H. 2002. *Andries van Aarde se Vaderlose Jesus*. HTS 58(1). Universiteit van Pretoria. p 97).

<sup>166</sup> The following excerpt from the discussion with Wedderburn is applicable here:

Mulder: “If you would have to explain to your own child in two three minutes, what you were trying to say in your book *Beyond Resurrection*, what where you trying to establish?”

Wedderburn: I think I would say that one can’t prove anything about .. Jesus after life .. and it is therefore better to concentrate on the present, to pick up .. in the fourth gospel about the resurrection which is now. You have the two parts, the one resurrection which is about after death which is the more traditional view. But we also have in Paul and in John the idea that resurrection is now, and that experience is in a form of death ..”

(Wedderburn, A.J.M. 2006. *Interview with Mulder, F.* Ludwig Maximillian Universität, Munchen. 06 July 2006).

<sup>167</sup> In the discussion with Wedderburn, the following excerpt is applicable here:

indicated that, since he rejects the resurrection of Jesus, the next important project must be the meaning of Jesus' crucifixion and death.<sup>168</sup>

After an analysis of Lüdemann, certain aspects covered in Wedderburn's discussion will once again be discussed.

### 4.2.3 Lüdemann

As was indicated above, Lüdemann works with a presupposition that sees the universe as a closed system. De May indicates "Lüdemann allies himself with the deterministic, monistic and closed world view that reached its climax in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century in the writings of Darwin and Haekel" (De May1998:254).

It is worth mentioning that Lüdemann initially also wants to give the impression of a tentative and "don't know" attitude which Wedderburn embraces. So for instance he initially concurs with Karl Jaspers who indicates that "Anyone who is in final possession of the truth can no longer talk properly with others – he breaks off real communication in favour of the content of his belief" (Lüdemann 1995:8).

However, Lüdemann does not follow through with this line of thought. He makes strong and absolutistic statements like "investigate the historical truth – honestly and regardless of other factors" (1995:vi); "autonomous historical reason"

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Mulder: "Can you single out one or two theologians who made some critiques on your book that you think is valid .. If you could've written the book over, you could've included their perspectives on some of the points?"

Wedderburn: Not on things that I haven't read .. I am not persuaded that I want to recant anything" (Wedderburn, A.J.M. 2006. *Interview with Mulder, F.* Ludwig Maximillian Universität, Munchen. 06 July 2006).

<sup>168</sup> In the discussion with Wedderburn, the following excerpt is applicable here:

Wedderburn: "Well, it is part of a larger three part project on Jesus and historiography .. and how Jesus saw his own death, then at the third strand how Paul interpreted Jesus' death .. I suppose they will be complimentary to one another .. it could take a long time" (Wedderburn, A.J.M. 2006. *Interview with Mulder, F.* Ludwig Maximillian Universität, Munchen. 06 July 2006).

(1995:13); “purely historical and empirical way” (1995:14-5); “ruthlessly honest quest for truth” (1995:19) and many more. His interpretation of the data leads him to make categorical claims like:

- “it ... seems certain that the Damascus event was a vision .. of a kind that occurs in the Old Testament, in intertestamental Judaism, in numerous parallels from the Hellenistic and Roman environment of the New Testament” (1995:69).
- “If I am not repudiated by historical evidence or a clear reason, I am compelled by the historical facts ... to maintain my protest against the hypocrisy of the Protestant Church ..” (1996:136).
- “.. you (Jesus –FM) did not return, because your resurrection did not take place, but was only a pious wish. That is certain, because your body rotted in the tomb – that is, if it was put in a tomb at all and was not devoured by vultures and jackals” (1999:2-4).

With reference to the Göttingen school Lüdemann states further their “uncompromising dedication to the study of early Christian texts from a strictly historical perspective, subject to no dogmatic compulsions ..” (2002:88).

Lüdemann’s position is by now very clear to comprehend. What are quite important however, are the different stages of faith, which Lüdemann’s journey represents. The aim here is to indicate a hermeneutical development as it relates to his understanding of the resurrection of Jesus. It is therefore appropriate to rephrase *this discussion to Lüdemann’s journey of faith and history*.

#### **4.2.3.1 Lüdemann’s journey of faith and history**

It is quite clear that Lüdemann has gone through several theological phases in his career as theologian.

So for instance:

1. In 1984, he still held to the view that the Christian God exists and that Jesus was raised from the dead with a spiritual *body*;<sup>169</sup>
2. In 1994, he declared that God did not raise Jesus from the dead;<sup>170</sup>
3. In 1999 he “said goodbye to Christianity with a ‘Letter to Jesus’” (1999:1-9). In 2002 he states, “I have come to the conclusion that my previous faith, derived as it was from the biblical message, has become impossible” (2002:88).

As is indicated in his 1994 book *The Resurrection of Jesus. History, Experience, Theology*, at that stage (number 2 above) Lüdemann found solace in Wilhelm Herrmann’s theological position. We now turn to this important theme.

#### 4.2.3.2 Wilhelm Herrmann in Lüdemann’s work

It is important, when trying to understand Herrmann’s theology to see it in the broader picture, which includes the works of Kant,<sup>171</sup> Lessing,<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> It is assumed that before Lüdemann’s exposure to critical theology, he probably had some form of naive faith, though this statement is speculative. In 1984 Lüdemann was of the opinion that “There is a consensus in research that according to 1 Corinthians 15, all Christians will be given a resurrectional body after the parousia and that the transformation results in a *soma pneumatikon*, which is contrasted with the earthly body, the *soma psychikon*” (Lüdemann 1984:241-2). It is not clear what Lüdemann’s hermeneutical presuppositions were at the time, but it might be safe to say that at the time, some sort of intervention by the Christian God was still part of his theological and epistemological understanding.

<sup>170</sup> As will be discussed in more depth, at this time Lüdemann associated with Herrmann to help him “keep the faith” if you may.

<sup>171</sup> Bennett gives a good summary of Kant in his book *In search of Jesus, insider and outsider images*. There for instance, he states that “Kant’s ideas on Jesus are found in his *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* (1960). For Kantians, Jesus is the perfect man, whose radical moral fortitude overcomes human sin. Jesus thus emerges as the ‘embodiment of a universal idea of goodness, of humanity in its moral perfection’ (Allen, 1998, p 123). Jesus was not the Son of God in a literal but in a metaphorical sense. Kant rejects supernatural intervention ... Jesus’ sacrificial death takes a back seat to the example of his life or service, and to his ethical teaching” (Bennett 2001:101).

<sup>172</sup> Bennett quotes Lessing as saying that “if no historical truth can be demonstrated, then nothing can be demonstrated by means of historical truths ... to demand of me that I should form all my metaphysical and moral ideas accordingly ... is the broad, ugly ditch which I cannot get across ... If anyone can help me to cross it, let him do it. I beg him, I adjure him” (Bennett, C. 2001. *In Search of Jesus. Insider and Outsider Images*. Continuum. London & New York. p 100 [Lessing GE 1956:53-5]).

Schleiermacher<sup>173</sup> and others.<sup>174</sup> A good analysis of Herrmann's theology, particularly as it relates to faith can be found in Daniel P. Veldsmann's *Etisering – Personalisering – Eksistensialisering van die Geloofsbegrip*.<sup>175</sup>

At the end of his book *The Resurrection of Jesus. History, Experience, Theology*, Lüdemann refers to Wilhelm Herrmann (both Rudolf Bultmann and Karl Barth's teacher) and shows his appreciation to him for helping him maintain faith despite the historical impasse. He states how he “.. came to treasure Wilhelm Herrmann as someone who thought through the question of the relationship between history and faith in all its radicality, and am all the more delighted to follow this significant Marburg theologian of the Ritschl school there” (1995:253,703n).

It is within this Herrmannian context that Lüdemann goes on to define his *then* faith position. Lüdemann asks the question:

“ ‘Can we still be Christians?’ the answer has to be a confident ‘Yes’.<sup>176</sup> And the further question whether the *extra nos* is guaranteed is to be answered with an emphatic affirmative, because Jesus is not an invention or a projection: ‘We are Christians because, in the human Jesus, we have met with a fact whose content is incomparably richer than that of any feeling which arises within ourselves – a fact, moreover, which makes us so certain of God that our conviction of being in communion with him can justify itself at the bar of reason and of conscience. The man Jesus is the *objective* power which is the enduring basis of the experience of a Christian ... He is the ground of faith. (The statement that he is risen, whatever it means, e.g. statements about the future of Christians as notions of

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<sup>173</sup> Theissen and Merz indicate that Schleiermacher, in following H.E.G. Paulus, believed that “Jesus seemed to have died and for the moment returned to life” (1998:476) See also Bennett (2001:105) and Habermas (2001:1).

<sup>174</sup> As Danie Veldsman rightly indicates, Herrmann had substantial disagreements with these scholars. But, certain continuities are extractable as will be indicated later.

<sup>175</sup> Veldsmann, D.P. 1994. *Etisering – Personalisering – Eksistensialisering van die Geloofsbegrip*. DD Skripsie. Universiteit van Pretoria. p 47-136.

<sup>176</sup> Keep in mind that this same question was first asked by D.F. Strauss who's answer was ‘No’. As will be indicated later, Lüdemann's initial ‘Yes’ became ‘No’ in 1999 with his “*Letter to Jesus*”.

faith for which there is no epistemology are to be distinguished from this ground of faith)” (1995:182).

Lüdemann adds that it is here on the historical Jesus, as he is presented to him by the texts and encounters him through historical reconstruction, that the decision of faith is made, not on the risen Christ as I would have liked him to be. One must therefore stop at the historical Jesus, but “we may believe that he is also with us as one who is alive now” (Ibid).

Very important, is that Lüdemann puts the following quote from Herrmann as a footnote here:

“Indeed, I can conceive a man getting a most vivid impression of Jesus’ power, just when he sees that this historical appearance has been swathed in a thick mist of legends, and that, nevertheless, the glory of the inner life breaks through all these veils, a man who thinks he sees this has, at any rate, a firmer ground for his faith than another who *determines* to believe in the resurrection of Jesus in order that he may have his feet planted on a fact that overcomes the world” (1995:253,706n).

Following these statements, Lüdemann rightly asks the question: “What do you think about probably the most important idea of faith, the hope of resurrection? To put it concretely, what do you think about your own future, about your own death?” (1995:183). To this Lüdemann states that one commonly gets the impression that modern Protestant theology leaves no hope at all of ‘resurrection’ for the individual (Ibid). Lüdemann concludes with two statements:

- (1) In following Hirsch, he states that “.. we can understand eternal life, which opens up with death to the one standing in belief in redemption, only poetically and in similes, in images and in words

... As all knowledge bears within itself an inner relationship to its limits, it would destroy itself if it were not ready to honour intimations of something beyond the conscious world which transcend knowledge” (Ibid).

- (2) “.. the unity with God experienced in faith continues beyond death – that is the insight of faith, which, as it talks of this, takes on features of praise. It comes to consummation in God while still in the night of death – ‘there is nothing to think about *beyond* such faith .. it makes no sense also to ask what events will follow in the beyond” (Ibid).

Commenting on what he just said, Lüdemann indicates that “It is no harm that from now on – to follow Carlyle – Christians should live by the little that they really believe, not by the much that they take pains to believe. That is a great liberation, which already bears within it the germ of the new” (1995:184). And *that* was Lüdemann’s famous last words in that 1995 book!

It is worth mentioning here that at *this* time, these statements by Lüdemann had clear parallels with Wedderburn’s “reverent agnosticism.”

#### **4.2.3.3 Lüdemann’s Enlightenment – “an abiding place”**

Here we come to Lüdemann’s “last phase.”

In his book *The Great Deception* Lüdemann analyses what he believes to be the authentic sayings and actions of Jesus (which – FM) was perverted by the Christian church.<sup>177</sup> Lüdemann states that “The triumph of the Christian church was and is the tragedy of Israel” (1999:111). For Lüdemann this “perversion” holds that they “transformed the Jew who told parables” into a Jesus born of a virgin, a miracle worker, and who died and rose from the dead, resulting in a

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<sup>177</sup> See also Lüdemann’s book: Lüdemann G 2001. *Jesus after 2000 Years*. Prometheus Books. Amherst. It is however significant that even in this book, I Cor 15:12ff is not discussed.

Jesus who is “the ruler of the world who one day will pass judgement on the dead and the living” (1999:110).

Lüdemann’s conclusion in this book is important as it could indicate a further development following his 1994/5 position on remaining a Christian. He states that:

“.. we cannot do other than to protect Jesus against all that the first Christians have made of him. What is left is indeed too little to build a Christianity on, especially as we would then have to understand Jesus contrary to his own intentions, and furthermore gloss over his erroneous expectation of the future. So all that is left is for us to look forward. Here *only* (emphasis – FM) enlightenment can prepare an abiding place for the life which pulses all over this earth. It leaves heaven for those who long for it: the angels, the sparrows, and the Christians” (1999:111).

In addressing Jesus Lüdemann states:

“Despite profound experiences with your God ... your hopes for the future died. They clashed with brutal reality .. And had not your followers .. proclaimed belief in your resurrection, all your words and deeds would have been blown away like leaves by the wind ... But you did not return, because your resurrection did not take place, but was only a pious wish. That is certain, because your body rotted in the tomb – that is, if it was put in a tomb at all and was not devoured by vultures and jackals ... No authentic religion can be built on projections, wishes and visions, not even if it appears in such a powerful form as that of the Christian church, which has even exalted you to be the Lord of the worlds and coming judge. But you

are not the Lord of the worlds, as your followers declared you to be on the basis of your resurrection, nor did you want to be ... You deceived yourself, and your message has been falsified by your supporters for their own advantage, contrary to the historical truth. Your teaching was a mistake, since the messianic kingdom did not materialize” (1999:2-4).

Here we find a development, where Lüdemann clearly indicates that he has abandoned Christianity all together. With this in mind, the following question he asked in 1995 is important:

“ ‘Can we still be Christians?’ the answer has to be a confident ‘Yes’” (1995:182). In retrospect, if Lüdemann were to use the exact same phrase today, it would probably read as follows:

“ ‘Can we still be Christians?’ the answer has to be a confident ‘No’.”

One clearly gets the impression that Lüdemann’s initial “treasure” of “Wilhelm Herrmann as someone who thought through the question of the relationship between history and faith in its radicality”, and his “delight” in following this “significant Marburg theologian of the Ritschl school” (1995:252, 703n) did not endure in standing the test of time.

And maybe, this is not significant, as Daniel L. Deegan has already indicted decades ago, how “Herrmann’s category of the ‘inner life’ of Jesus functions as the ground of faith and how by this Herrmann thinks we may avoid the additional *credendum* of a resurrection-miracle as part of this ground” (Deegan 1965:87).

Maybe Craig’s understanding of D.H. Van Daalen is applicable here, when he states that: “Faith is a leap in the dark ..” (Craig 1989:338, 31n). This “leap in the dark” for Lüdemann, probably started many years ago, with:

1. *first* his unqualified acceptance of classical historical-critical methodology, (2002:88)<sup>178</sup>
2. followed by the Herrmannian “ ‘inner life’ as the ground of faith” (Deegan 1965:87, cf. Lüdemann 1995:253,706n),
3. and eventually, Lüdemann’s statement that “my previous faith .. has become impossible” (2002:88).<sup>179</sup>

#### 4.2.4 Lüdemann and Wedderburn together

After the above analysis, it becomes clear that Lüdemann and Wedderburn have several things in common. They both share the Classical 19<sup>th</sup> century historical critical method. Consequently they view the universe as a closed system where miracles are impossible. Accordingly, they reject the bodily resurrection of Jesus and build their faith on their understanding of the historical Jesus.<sup>180</sup>

Several scholars have over the years rejected this one sided understanding of Jesus. James D. J. Dunn, a long time colleague of Wedderburn disagrees with this one sided faith in a historical Jesus. He asks the question: “*Can we .. speak meaningfully of a continuity and unity between the kerygmatic Christ and the historical Jesus?*” (Dunn 2005:225). After discussing thoroughly his objection to the notion that the historical Jesus is completely different from the kerugmatic Jesus, Dunn concludes with: “*there are sufficiently clear foreshadowing’s of the*

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<sup>178</sup> In this article, Lüdemann clearly indicates that since 1975, he has been working with the “strictly historical exegesis” of the “History of Religions School”.

<sup>179</sup> See also (Lüdemann 1999:2-4, 111).

<sup>180</sup> Therefore, if Danie Veldsman for instance relates to what he terms as the complexity between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith, and thereby implying in following Taylor (1990) – an intersubjective, sosio-historical sensitivity, it needs to be defined what that entails. (Veldsman, D.P. 1995. *Belang van die historiese Jesus vir populêre religiositeit*. R & T, Vol 2/3. p 320) If that means an *a priori* dogmatic interpretation that the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith are radically different, then that would bring a hermeneutical presupposition to the New Testament which could reject any transcendent reality, which is clearly necessary to believe in Christ’s bodily resurrection. This however does not mean that the historical Jesus, as portrayed by all its different exponents, should not be analysed and evaluated, on the contrary!

*centrality of the kerygmatic Christ in the self-understanding of Jesus during his ministry for us to recognize the kerygmata of the early churches as a development from Jesus' own proclamation in the light of his resurrection"* (Dunn 2005:232).

Reginald H. Fuller criticises Lüdemann by indicating that he "betrays his philosophical presuppositions when he criticizes C.F.D. Moule for appealing to a transcendent reality beyond history. Such an appeal, argues Lüdemann, has been untenable since Kant" (Fuller 1996:100). Against this Fuller states that "there is another reality, accessible to faith 'in, with, and under' historical events. If there is not, then word and sacrament cannot mediate eschatological salvation" (Ibid).<sup>181</sup>

Lüdemann and Wedderburn's understanding of the historical Jesus, leads them to a faith expressed in an individualised existentialism: in Wedderburn's case there is experimentation with mysticism, and in Lüdemann, there's emphasis on Herrmann's "inner life" approach to faith.

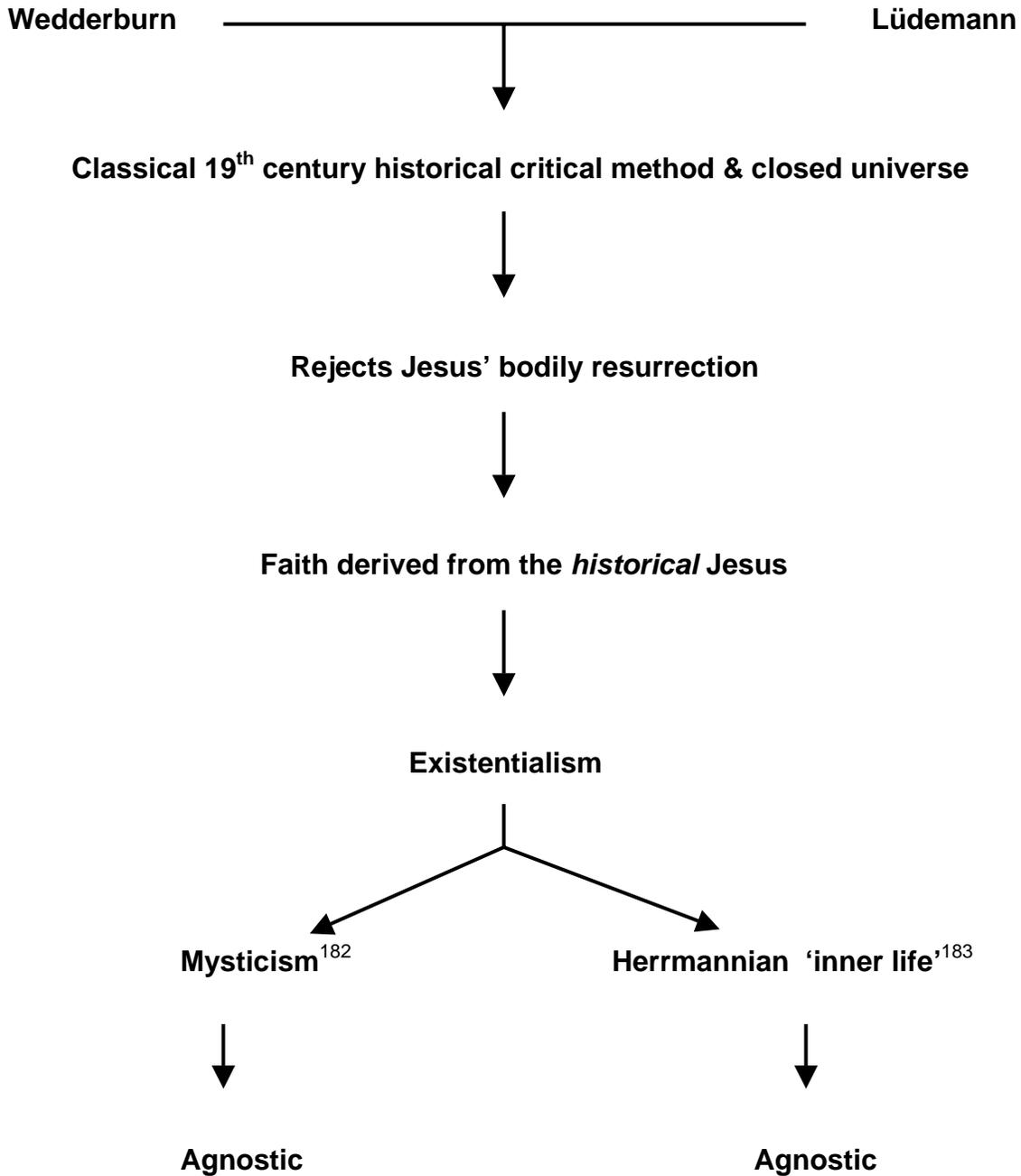
Although these articulations of their faith differ, it is not necessarily that different after all. That which precedes this phase is very similar. Lüdemann's eventual complete abandonment of the Christian faith is irrelevant, as the rejection of the bodily resurrection, which both Wedderburn and Lüdemann ascribe to, is already a rejection of the traditional Christian faith.

The following chart explains the above in a simplified way:

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<sup>181</sup> The list of critiques on Lüdemann is substantial. Most of these are somewhat in line with what Fuller mentions here. Some of those that was studied is as follows: Ellis, E.E. 1996. *Review of: The resurrection of Jesus: History, Experience, Theology*. SWJOT. Vol 38, Spring. p 45-46; O'Collins, S.J. 1996. *Review of: The resurrection of Jesus: History, Experience, Theology*. Theol. St. No 57 Je. p 341-2; Saldarini, A.J. 1996. *Review of: The resurrection of Jesus: History, Experience, Theology*. BAS. October. p 18, 52; O'Niell, J.C. 1996. *Review of: The resurrection of Jesus: History, Experience, Theology*. Theology. Vol. 99, Mar-Apr. p 154-6; ect.

**Table 8: Lüdemann and Wedderburn compared**



<sup>182</sup> In Wedderburn's view, one should believe in "... a God .. who is fullness itself and yet is empty, source of all and at the same time at the mercy of all. If the paradoxical is one of the hallmarks of mystical language (referring to Dorothy Sölle - FM), then this way of viewing and speaking of God richly deserves the epithet 'mystical'" (Wedderburn 1999:218).

<sup>183</sup> (Deegan 1965:87, cf. Lüdemann 1995:253,706n).

What is important is that their hermeneutical presuppositions lead them to an individualised existentialism, which is divorced from traditional Christian faith.

#### **4.2.5 Existential faith and 19<sup>th</sup> century liberal theology**

Existentialism has many faces. You get Kierkegaard, Sartre, Heidegger, Marcel, Schleiermacher, Herrmann, Bultmann and many more. Alan D. Schrift is correct to indicate “The range of thinkers and writers associated with existentialism makes it difficult to isolate any set collection of these to which all would agree” (Schrift 2006:32). However, Schrift goes on to indicate, “What unites the existentialists is a denial of any given human nature. Instead, human beings exist first, and then define themselves in terms of action” (2006:33).

Kierkegaard and Schweitzer are briefly mentioned to try and explain some universal point of departure, which underlie existentialism.

##### **4.2.5.1 Søren Kierkegaard**

The well-known phrase “a leap of faith” was given to the world by none other than Kierkegaard (Graham 2004:74). What follows then is that “there is only one proof of the truth of Christianity and that, quite frankly, is from the emotions ..” (Graham 2004:75).<sup>184</sup>

Bennett indicates how “Kierkegaard, who influenced Heidegger, resolved how to bridge Lessing’s broad, ugly ditch by positing a leap of existential faith .. Truth, he said, ‘is subjective’, known in ‘passionate conviction, though it is absurd’ “ (Bennett 2001:130). Bennett explains how Kierkegaard is an example of “how a scholar’s psychological, inner, spiritual experience influenced his academic work” (Ibid).

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<sup>184</sup> Graham quotes from: Kierkegaard, S. 1938. *The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard* (translated by Alexander Dru), Oxford University Press. New York. p 1926. One cannot help but think here also of some modern day charismatic movements.

In his *Fear and Trembling* (1843) Kierkegaard discusses his famous retelling of the story of Abraham and Isaac. Lessing’s influence can clearly be seen as he moves along. He states “Abraham cannot be mediated; in other words, he cannot speak. As soon as I speak, I express the universal, and if I do not do so, no one can understand me” (Calarco *et al* 2003:63).

It is evident that Lessing’s “ugly great ditch” (*der garstige breite Graben*) has had an enormous influence, not just on Kierkegaard, but on the whole of the post Aufklärung study of the Christian faith. Lessing believes that it is impossible to bridge the gap between the Easter events and today. He says, “That, then, is the ugly great ditch which I cannot cross, however often and however earnestly I have tried to make this leap. If anyone can help me cross it, I implore him to do so” (McGrath 2002:285). It can be seen in the following chart:

**Table 9: Lessing's “great ditch”**



#### **4.2.5.2 Albert Schweitzer**

Bennett sums up Albert Schweitzer by indicating: “What, then, can be said of Jesus for today? What matters, he says, is not who Jesus was, or even what he believed about himself, but that a ‘spiritual force’ flows from him into our time” (Bennett 2001:125). Schweitzer states:

He comes to us as the One unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lakeside, He comes to those who new Him not. He speaks to us the same word: 'Follow thou me!' and sets us to the tasks, which He has to fulfil for our time. He commands. And to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, He will reveal Himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in His fellowship and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience Who He is" (2001:126).

Bennett concludes by stating that "Few, if any, other theological classics end with such an emotive, haunting beautiful affirmation of the reality of the existential response to the Christ of faith, in whom, for all his historical scepticism, Schweitzer continued to trust" (Ibid.) Bennett believes that existentially, Schweitzer rescued something from Jesus' life. For him, the example of Jesus' love in action, his willingness to die instead of the disciples, demanding imitating: 'he sensed that the ethics of Jesus had to become, for him ... a way of life' " (Ibid).

#### **4.2.5.3 Existentialism and bodily resurrection**

Existentialism is, in a way, a search for faith following the results of 19<sup>th</sup> century (and related) historical Jesus research.<sup>185</sup> Thus, in this context, existential faith in Jesus does not need him to do miracles, or to be bodily raised from the dead. What is important is that you have a spiritual experience. This experience is personal and need no rational explanation, except perhaps reference to a historical Jesus who becomes the highest moral example.

With regards to this historical Jesus, Jurie Le Roux interprets Schweitzer so strikingly: 'Schweitzer was reg. Wie hom met die historiese Jesus besig hou, sê

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<sup>185</sup> This however is not applicable to Wright's use of the Third Quest for the historical Jesus. However, for other Third Questers who deny the bodily resurrection it might well be.

eintlik meer van homself of haarself as van die historiese Jesus” (Le Roux 2002:97). Le Roux fully agrees with Schweitzer here, as he states that this is the attraction and challenges which Van Aarde, a member of the Jesus Seminar’s book *Fatherless in Galilee* entails.

This indicates that although interpreted differently by its exponents, the principle stays the same.

Although some existentialist insights might obviously be useful in some respects, one gets the impression that in most cases, existentialism has made faith a complete subjective, internal experience. In fact, for some, existentialism is the result of the denial of the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ.<sup>186</sup>

If the above analysis is reasonable, then it raises the question of whether existentialism in its classical conception, should be a viable tool for Christians to express their faith in God. Or to go back even further, if existentialism is in part a faith response to the results of 19<sup>th</sup> century (and related) historical Jesus research, then it might be judged as insufficient for the traditional Christian faith. This question gets even more important when the same concern is raised at the 19<sup>th</sup> century historical Jesus. This statement should also be understood in the context of the analysis of Wedderburn and Lüdemann’s unique applications of existentialism.

### **4.3 *The bodily resurrection as meta - narrative***

#### **4.3.1 Bodily resurrection – revealed truth credibly substantiated**

After analysing the exegetical results of these five scholars, it is believed that Craig, Habermas and Wright’s conclusions are the result of thorough and

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<sup>186</sup> This statement might be warranted in the case of Wedderburn and Lüdemann.

credible exegesis. It is clear that the accusation of a “blind faith” does not do justice to their work.

A significant amount of highly qualified New Testament scholars, after years of in depth critical analysis, continue to believe that Jesus was bodily raised from the dead and that the tomb is empty. One thinks here of: Benoit, Blank, Blinzler, Bode, Brown, von Campenhausen, Clark, Delorme, Dhanis, Dunn, Ellis, Grundmann, Gundry, Hengel, Hook, Jeremias, Klappert, Ladd, Lane, Lehmann, Leon-Dufour, Lichtenstein, Manek, Marshall, Martini, Moule, Mussner, Nauck, Perry, Rengstoff, Robinson, Ruckstuhl, Schenke, Schmitt, Schubert, Schwank, Seidensticker, Schnackenburg, Strobel, Stuhlmacher, Trilling, Vogtle, Wilckens (Habermas 2004:287, 27n). Many more “conservative” scholars could be added to the list.

As it relates to Jesus’ resurrection, Craig, Habermas and Wright successfully adhere to I Peter 3:15b’s command:

“Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you”.

This said, these scholars will probably add 1 Cor. 1:27 which says:

“But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God. He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, in order

that, as it is written, ‘Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord’.”

It is worth noting that both Craig and Habermas were sceptics who, after an investigative struggle, were graciously convinced by the Holy Spirit that Jesus is alive.

It is believed that Craig, Habermas and Wright had encounters with the living Jesus. This is the result of the Holy Spirit who graciously revealed this truth to them. They in turn manage to share this good news, through the enabling of the Spirit, and with intellectual integrity.

#### **4.3.2 Bodily resurrection – foundational truth for true Protestant Churches**

A further implication of this research could hold that accommodation of those views particularly as they relate to Wedderburn and Lüdemann, including classical existentialism in general, may represent a deviation from the foundational meta-narratives of the traditional Christian faith.

Although this is not a thesis in Church history or Systematic theology, the popular proverb *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda* is relevant here (Strauss 2005:145). This principle of the Protestant Reformation, which holds that reformation is a recurring process, could very well be misused by some, to accommodate hermeneutical presuppositions and epistemologies, which deny the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ.

If Protestant churches that claim to be confessionally bound to its meta-narratives, as clearly attested to in its classical confessions of faith,

accommodate such re-interpretations,<sup>187</sup> the ecclesiastical life of its churches, may soon lead to a serious and substantial compromise of its foundational pillars and meta-narratives.<sup>188</sup>

Van der Watt is therefore right when he states that:

“Wat is die kolf waarsonder krieket nie gespeel kan word nie, of die Rooikappie waarsonder die wolf en Ouma nie kan nie? Sake wat konstituerend vir die wese van die Christendom met sy verhaal is, moet duidelik uitgespel word. Is iets soos die fisieke opstanding van Christus byvoorbeeld werklik ononderhandelbaar?” (Van der Watt 2005:256).

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<sup>187</sup> Here several issues can be mentioned, but, particularly as it relates to the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ!

<sup>188</sup> **A: Wedderburn:**

The following extract from the discussion with Wedderburn is relevant here:

- Mulder: “Do they (your church) have a confession of faith?  
Wedderburn: They do, yes.  
Mulder: And do you have to ascribe to it?  
Wedderburn: The Church of Scotland only requires a fairly vague and indifferent consent to the confession of faith.  
Mulder: Not literal then I suppose? For instance the resurrection is very literal in the Westminster confession of faith?  
Wedderburn: Well, all confessions of that time is.  
Mulder: And the playing field on this area would also be reasonable, the interpretation that you make?  
Wedderburn: Well, I’m not the only one with that profession who doesn’t believe in a literal physical resurrection. That is established for certain.  
Mulder: Have you ever had conflict with people in your church regarding your view on the resurrection?  
Wedderburn: Not direct conflict, no” (Wedderburn, A.J.M. 2006. *Interview with Mulder, F.* Ludwig Maximillian Universität, Munchen. 06 July 2006).

**B: Markus Öehler:**

The following extract from the discussion with Markus Öehler is relevant here:

- Öehler : “I would say about the empty grave that it is not so important.  
Mulder: Your church won’t have a problem with you saying that?  
Öehler: No  
Mulder: Nobody?  
Öehler: Some will, of course .. that’s typical of my church .. but we still live in this church together .. that’s typical for the Protestant churches. Maybe in Austria it is different from other countries. In Austria you can say things and still say you believe in Jesus, although we are not of the same opinion ..” (Öehler, M. 2006. *Interview with Mulder, F.* Evangelische Fakultät, Vienna, 5 July 2006).

Van der Watt's analysis following the above statement is just as crucial when he indicates that confessions draw the non-negotiable lines for the church.<sup>189</sup> He indicates that:

“Eintlik probeer geloofsbelydenisse die grense van die ononderhandelbare verhaallyn trek ... Dit het miskien tyd geword dat die kerk weer belydenismatig die aard van sy identiteit uitspel en die konsekwensies daarvan ernstig neem of, as alternatief, dat die kerk selfondersoek moet doen of hy nog ernstig oor sy eie belydenis is” (Van der Watt 2005:257).

The rejection of the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, or the uncritical accommodation of those who deny it, is not a new invention. Especially since the Enlightenment, the bodily resurrection of Jesus has been questioned as never before. We have an illustrious list of critical scholars who, like Lessing, affirm Jesus' *moral worth*, but when it comes to a Jesus who miraculously heals the sick, gives out bread to the poor, commands the ocean, and above all, are raised to new bodily life, *that*, to these scholars “.. must be understood ... as only metaphorically true” (Bennett 2001:102).

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<sup>189</sup> Keep in mind that confessions of faith in the protestant tradition are not the result of one or even a few individuals, but the Church as a whole who, though sinful, confesses faith in the one Jesus Christ through the loving presence of the Holy Spirit. The late Willie Jonker, one of H. Berkhouwer's students, and a respected systematic theologian in South Africa, states it well when he indicates that:

“Die Christelike kerk het deur die eeue heen belydenis afgelê van die heilswaarheid en die bevrydende betekenis daarvan. In tye van insinking kan die drang om dit te doen, verflou en die woorde ontbreek wat daarvoor nodig is. Maar wanneer die Heilige Gees die kerk in 'n uur van beslissing aanraak, vind die gemeente telkens weer woorde van vreugde om die troos en bevryding van die evangelie van God se genade uit te spreek. Dan ervaar die gemeente weer wat Petrus eenmaal gesê het: “Wat ons betref, dit is onmoontlik om nie te praat oor wat ons gesien en gehoor het nie” ( Hand. 4:19–20 ). Die gereformeerde belydenis is die produk van die aanraking van die kerk deur die Heilige Gees in 'n uur van beslissing. Dit is die vreugdevolle getuienis wat in die tyd van die Reformasie op die lippe van die gemeente gelê is. Dit verwoord—al geskied dit in menslike swakheid—die bevrydende waarheid van die evangelie van die evangelie. Teenoor misleiding, teenoor die ingebore neiging tot selfverlossing, teenoor alle vals religieusiteit wil dit die een waarheid bely dat die verlossing van voor tot agter uit die liefde en genade van God voortvloei en in Jesus Christus alleen gegee is. Daarmee wil dit getuienis aflê van die waarheid waarvan Christus gesê het dat dit werklik vry sal maak ( Joh.8:32 ).” This quotation comes from: Jonker, W. D. 1997, 1994. *Bevrydende waarheid : Die karakter van die gereformeerde belydenis* (electronic ed. 1st uitg.). Hugenote-Uitgewers: Wellington.

With the above in mind, Adrio König is correct when he indicates that we have a situation where, for two centuries, some scholars confess the Twelve Articles on Sundays, but their explanations of the resurrection cannot be reconciled with Scripture and our confessions. He states “.. ons (sit – FM) met twee eeue se geskiedenis agter ons ... waarin teoloë ook ‘elke Sondag die Twaalf Artikels bely het,’ maar dan verklarings van die opstanding gegee het wat nie met ons verstaan van die Skrif en ons belydenis te rym is nie” (König 2006:13).

Van der Watt is therefore right when he states that, perhaps the time has come for his church to once again confess and stipulate its meta-narratives, which will include taking the consequences of that confession seriously. (Van der Watt 2005:256-7).

It is therefore fitting to close here with Paul’s famous words in I Cor 15:54-56:

“When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled:

‘Death has been swallowed up in victory.’  
‘Where, O death, is your victory?  
Where, O death, is your sting?’ “

## 5 Conclusions

### Scholars

This study started with the question whether Jesus’ bodily resurrection is non-negotiable for the Christian faith. To come to an informed decision, five scholars of divergent positions were selected to render a better understanding of all the major standpoints.

The hermeneutical presuppositions of these scholars, which include their view of Scripture were analysed. Thereafter, some crucial New Testament texts, namely:

I Cor 15: 4, 5b, 6, 8-11, 44 and 50 were analysed as they relate to these scholars' understanding and interpretation. Other New Testament texts, as they related to these texts, were also discussed.

It is clear that these scholars differ substantially in their interpretations. However, Craig, Habermas and Wright on the one hand, and Lüdemann and Wedderburn on the other, represent the significant different points of view.

### **Hermeneutical Presuppositions**

It further became clear that their hermeneutical presuppositions play a key role in their understanding of these texts. Craig, Habermas and Wright on the one hand, works with an *a priori* that God can intervene/ supersede the laws of nature. This makes a bodily resurrection possible.

Lüdemann and Wedderburn on the other hand, works with an *a priori* that God cannot intervene/ supersede the laws of nature. This makes a bodily resurrection impossible.

It was decided on purpose not to comment on the exegetical detail, as it is clear that what underlies the exegesis, is hermeneutical presuppositions. A good example is verse 4 - **kai; oti ejtafh** (*he was buried*). For Craig, Habermas and Wright this phrase refers to Jesus' empty tomb. For Wedderburn this phrase only allows for that possibility, but eventually he rejects it. For Lüdemann this phrase excludes an empty tomb.

### **Epistemology**

Some critique concerning both groups as they relate to hermeneutical presuppositions and epistemology, was given. In the case of Craig, Habermas and Wright, critical realism was analysed. It was shown that this epistemology could be utilised as a useful tool to give a reasonable scientific apology for the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. It was further indicated that this epistemology's provisional status might for some, be used to accommodate, for example, Wedderburn's position of a "reverent agnosticism."

It was therefore suggested that scholars who believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus, should continue to develop tools to articulate this position with integrity to the world.

### **Historical Jesus**

In the case of Wedderburn and Lüdemann, it was indicated how they both work with the hermeneutical presupposition that God cannot intervene/ supersede in natural creation. Their appreciation of classical 19<sup>th</sup> century liberal theology brought them to the position where the only basis for faith, is their conception of an ethical historical Jesus, stripped of all supernatural power.

### **Resurrection**

It was indicated that Craig, Habermas and Wright believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus. Lüdemann categorically, and Wedderburn close to that, reject the bodily resurrection of Jesus. This conclusion, they say, is the result of their historical critical analysis of the New Testament. This led them to each developing his own unique existential faith, in Wedderburn's case mixed with mysticism, and in Lüdemann's with Herrmann's "inner life" version of existentialism. This assisted them in continuing to call themselves Christians. For Lüdemann, however, existentialism only lasted a few years. He has abandoned the Christian faith all together.

### **Existentialism**

It was then argued that existentialism, in the context of being a faith reaction to the results of classical 19<sup>th</sup> century liberal theology, as portrayed in the "historical Jesus" research, should not be a viable option for scholars and churches who want to remain faithful to the meta-narratives of their Protestant faith as expressed in their confessions.

Furthermore it was shown that Craig, Habermas and Wright have managed to substantiate their faith in the bodily resurrection of Jesus with integrity. That would mean that the accusation of a "blind faith" is unreasonable.

## Meta-narrative

In conclusion, it was argued that the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ is a foundational meta-narrative of the Christian faith, which is indispensable. The well-known Protestant Reformation proverb *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda* should therefore not be re-interpreted in such a way as to make provision for those views which deny the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. These re-interpretations pave the way of denial and deviation from the truth as revealed in Scripture by the Holy Spirit.

## 6 The Way Forward

- **1 Cor 15:4**

There might be room for further study with regards to this verse. Did Paul believe Jesus' tomb was empty or not? As we saw, on both sides different interpretations are given.

- **Continuity and discontinuity with regard to the bodily resurrection**

Further study with regard to the appearance and disappearance of Jesus in Paul and the Gospels. Craig referred to the same substance but different realms.

- **Critical realism and the bodily resurrection**

Critical realism has been indicated as an epistemology, which can at present, face up to the challenge. Wright fruitfully uses this method to verify the bodily resurrection. However, someone like Wedderburn could just as well use the same principles to indicate the opposite.

In the context of the resurrection, the above statement could produce certain questions worth studying:

Can the bodily resurrection “evolve”? If the answer is yes, how?

If it is accepted that there are no absolutes, how can the bodily resurrection of Jesus be regarded as meta-narrative and absolute?

- **Apostolicum and the resurrection of the flesh**

In the light of the analyzed texts and interpretations, a New Testament study combined with Systematic Theology, concerning the nature of “flesh”, according to the Apostolicum, could provide noteworthy results.

- **The significance of the apostolicum in the light of modern exegetical approaches which confirm the bodily resurrection**

The growing gap between Systematic Theology and New Testament Science, ever since the 19<sup>th</sup> century liberal theology is generally recognized. Recent New Testament research has restored some credibility to ancient creeds like the Apostolicum, at least as it relates to the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ.

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