



W. Ross Hastings, *The Resurrection of Jesus Christ: Exploring its Theological Significance and Ongoing Relevance* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2022), pp. xii + 191, ISBN 978-1540964922. £18.99

While secularization of European culture is increasingly prevalent, references to the resurrection story still slip into popular culture and media in the Western world. After all, Easter remains a public holiday for many Western countries. It is still such a part of our culture that we rarely question its meaning. Jesus Christ was resurrected from the dead. So what?

Ross Hastings' *The Resurrection of Jesus Christ* attempts to go beyond affirming the resurrection to asking why it matters to Christians here and now. Inspired by George Frideric Handel's *The Resurrection*, Hastings asks what the resurrection means for everyone, including God, Jesus, humanity, and creation. This book aims to demonstrate 'the theological significance and ongoing relevance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ in the twenty-first century' (p. 1). Rather than simply confirming Jesus Christ's resurrection as a historical fact, Hastings explains that the resurrection has profound consequences for who Christians are. Jesus, as the last Adam, formed a new humanity when He rose again. This has significance for humans in this life and their future resurrected lives, as well as the reaffirmation of God's creation, moral order, and ethics.

Hastings argues for the importance of Christians needing to understand the resurrection, not because it is a necessary part of the faith, but rather, because its meaning undergirds the trajectory that humanity and all of the created beings in the world are moving along. *The Resurrection of Jesus Christ* is immensely readable; though written with intellectual rigour, its footnotes are sparse, allowing its readers to immerse themselves in the narrative. This accessible book is suitable for pastors answering difficult questions from their congregants, and for Christian communities reading together. The discussion questions after each chapter make it especially suitable for church group settings. There is a good mix of scriptural and doctrinal citations to engage academics, pastors, and the laity.

Chapter One, "The Resurrection as Good History" lays a foundation for Hastings' theology of resurrection. In this chapter, Hastings confirms Jesus Christ's resurrection as a historical fact established in the Gospels, and, therefore, a sound foundation of a Christian's faith. Hastings successfully debunks the scientism that is prevalent in modernity. He demonstrates that critical realism in 'faith seeking understanding', and not



logical positivism, that is, asking for verifiable proof of the resurrection, such as reproducibility, is the way to understand faith. This demonstrates ‘an uncritical enculturation to modernity, in which reason and faith are considered to be separate’ (p. 4). Hastings used the term ‘enculturation’ in his previous work *Missional God, Missional Church* ‘to describe the process whereby an existent, prevailing culture influences an individual or community [...] to imbibe its accepted norms and values so the individual or community is pressured to find acceptance within the society of that culture’,¹ something Hastings argues against. Instead, Hastings advocates for ‘inculturation’, which is to adapt the communication of the gospel for a specific culture being evangelized’.² This chapter is, in part, a discussion of the evidence of the resurrection before moving to the meat of his argument: what Christ’s resurrection means to humans on a daily basis and to their salvation, and who Christ is due to his resurrection.

Part One, “Christ’s Resurrection has *Saving Efficacy*”, consists of Chapters Two to Six. This part focuses on what the resurrection has accomplished and what it means for Christians’ salvation (soteriology). Chapter Two, “The Resurrection as the Seal of the Atonement”, is an exposition of the meaning and theological significance of the resurrection. Hastings cites Karl Barth and Martin Luther in relation to justification by faith, and challenges the recent evangelical tendency to downplay such a view of justification. Hastings finds that a new humanity begins at the resurrection, as humans are brought into union with a resurrected Christ, so that sins have been atoned for and true humanity can be restored. Chapter Three, “The Resurrection as the Substance of the Atonement”, focuses on the significance of Christ’s participation in humanity, recapitulation through reconciling and uniting all things in Christ, and the *Christus Victor* model of atonement; that is, the notion that Jesus Christ participated in humanity as the recapitulated head of humanity. Hastings finds that Karl Barth ignores human sanctification through God’s saving grace in favour of justification, and thus Hastings cites John Calvin on matters of sanctification instead. Hastings argues that the *telos* of sanctification is to recover humanness, which is not contradictory to becoming holy. Being holy should be seen as being in the fullness of humanity in which God

¹ W. Ross Hastings, *Missional God, Missional Church: Hope for Re-evangelizing the West* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), Location 377, Kindle edition.

² Hastings, *Missional God*, Location 377.



delights. Being human does not necessarily equate to being sinful, as that was not the intention when humans were first created. This is important as often Christians think that they are tasked to be Godlike to be good Christians, but Hastings' argument demonstrates that to be fully human is to be holy.

Chapter Four, "The Resurrection as the Ground of Participation in the Life of God", asks how the resurrection transforms Christians through progressive sanctification to become more like God in character. Hastings challenges the conflation of justification and sanctification as if they were one thing in Orthodox and Catholic traditions, affirming John Calvin's attempt to keep the two distinct yet inseparable. He finds that God's commitment to creation is reaffirmed because the resurrection occurs in a physical body. Chapter Five, "The Resurrection as the Ground of Vocation and Mission", asks how the resurrection of Jesus Christ relates to individual Christians and church communities. Hastings finds Jesus' resurrection related to Christians' calling through the joy of vocation and mission. Full humanness is constituted in the uniqueness of the individual participating with Christ in work, family, and communal lives. Chapter Six, "The Resurrection as the Ground of the Bodily Resurrection", asks what the resurrection means in the glorification of the believer and bodily resurrection when the kingdom of God is fully realised. Here, Hastings addresses popular questions about what the resurrected body will be like in relation to the mind and the soul. He finds that the consistency in the pre-risen and post-risen body lies with our identity. Hastings also deals with the time between death and resurrection. In writing about the second coming, Hastings points out that he does not have all the answers, though he believes that our resurrection is a participation in the resurrection of Christ.

Part Two, "Christ's Resurrection has *Ontological* Significance", consists of Chapters Seven to Ten. Shifting from the emphasis of Part One on the saving efficacy of the resurrection, this part focuses on matters of being (ontology). Hastings argues that the essence of the person of Jesus Christ is inherent in the act of resurrection. Chapter Seven, "The Resurrection Declares Jesus's Unrivalled Supremacy", asks what the resurrection says about Jesus as a person; that is, His victory over death, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and confessing the work of salvation. Chapter Eight, "The Resurrection Signals Christ's Entry into His Office as Great High Priest and King", asks how the resurrection relates to Jesus's tripartite role as the



King-Priest-Prophet and its importance for the worship of the church as participation in Christ's preaching. Chapter Nine, "The Resurrection as the Reaffirmation of Creation", asks what Jesus Christ's resurrection in a body means for creation, ethics, science, and art. Humans are redeemed to fulfil the potential of humanity in creation, not to be taken outside of the created world. Therefore, redemption is a redemption-in-creation, not outside of it. Chapter Ten "The Resurrection and the Nature of the Second Coming", explores Jesus Christ's second coming in light of the resurrection and what the new creation might look like.

Theological debates in the West are often presented in abstract forms, assuming a certain universality. As a constructivist-interpretivist, my understanding of truth and meaning will necessarily be different from Hastings' understanding as a critical realist. There are reflexive elements in this book that demonstrate Hastings' situatedness. Hastings is currently the Sangwoo Youtong Chee Professor of Theology at Regent College in Vancouver, Canada. A Zimbabwean Scot, Hastings graduated with his PhD (Divinity) from the University of St Andrews, under the supervision of Alan Torrance. Hastings credits Torrance for leading and inspiring him on his theological journey. Throughout the book, we can see Hastings citing T. F. Torrance and James Torrance, and the works of various faculty and alumni from the University of St Andrews, including Richard Bauckham, Oliver Crisp, Trevor Hart, Christa McKirland, John Webster, and N. T. Wright. Likewise, he also cites several of his colleagues from Regent College, including Hans Boersma, J. I. Packer, and Eugene Peterson. There is currently a movement in academia towards decolonising citations and the rise of citation justice. While Hastings' arguments are solid, thought-provoking, and representative of the live discussions of leading academic communities in Britain and Canada, nonetheless, that is necessarily at the expense of engaging with other voices. I would encourage him to venture outside his immediate anglophone evangelical Christian circle and explore more voices of non-white theologians from majority world contexts.

In addition, if this book attempts to address resurrection and what it means for Christians in the twenty-first century, it will have to begin by not assuming a homogenous twenty-first-century Christian community. Perhaps in Hastings' context, there might be a 'fragmented culture characterized by secularism, naturalism, consumerism, ethnocentrism, individualism, religious pluralism, moralism, libertinism, modern



scientism, and postmodern despair' (pp. 174–75). However, this characterisation is not universally applicable, especially in regions that, for example, have not lived through the Western Enlightenment, or are not democratic societies. How the resurrection answers questions about life – especially on matters related to the care of creation, ethics, science, and art – will necessarily be different in Lagos than in Shenzhen. This observation demonstrates my biases as a scholar with strong interests in contextual and lived theology. Hastings would necessarily be writing for a specific intended audience, and his book should therefore be read with his context in mind: anglophone evangelical Christianity. This is where the reader can contribute to Hastings' conversation as well, through discussion with others on what he proposes, and what his propositions would look like in their specific contexts. The discussion questions Hastings lists at the end of each chapter can be a good starting point. For example, Hastings' Questions Two and Three in Chapter Nine start with 'Not all Christians can be scientists, but we all can and should be engaged with creation' and 'Not all Christians have the same level of artistic ability, but we can all develop the creativity centers of our brain' respectively. Questions like these, which presume differences within the community of Christians, open the field of discussion for readers from diverse backgrounds, making the conversation more inclusive and comprehensive.

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is not meant to focus on apologetics but, rather, on constructive theology of the resurrection. Hastings asked a critical question of what the resurrection means to humans and the created order. This question has not been adequately addressed in Christian communities previously, and he does so in an accessible way. Hastings ends with a call to action for his readers to live in the reality of the resurrected Christ and to preach hope in a suffering and fragmented world. *The Resurrection of Jesus Christ* will prove to be helpful for church communities in building up their faith and theological understanding of the self.

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