



BOOK REVIEW

## Steven Edward Harris, *Refiguring Resurrection: A Biblical and Systematic Eschatology*

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Steven Edward Harris' dense monograph, *Refiguring Resurrection: A Biblical and Systematic Eschatology*, is intensely christological. The author regularly (and persuasively) redirects the reader's eschatological attention back to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The anchor for this christological focus is found in chapter 3, titled, 'The Resurrection of the Lord Jesus', which could be a stand-alone monograph if it were filled out further. At nearly forty-five pages long already, this chapter forms the heart of the book and his systematic eschatology flows from the headwaters of his biblical Christology.

In the first half of the book in particular, Harris helpfully and judiciously attends to the rehabilitation of figural readings in the tradition of the premodern readers of scripture. Using the scriptural narratives of persons who were brought back to life in the Old and New Testament, Harris argues that these should rightly be identified as *resurrections* – not simply linguistically tied to the resurrection of Jesus, but pre- and post-figurations of the latter. In order to show both the continuity and discontinuity of all the biblical resurrections in relation to the resurrection of Christ, he uses a fivefold framework. This framework, built directly from an inductive reading of the stories, consists of the following markers: mediation, family identity, bodiliness, restoration of relationships and victory over death. The structure not only allows Harris to lead the reader into conversation with the text and its modern interpreters, but also into a deep dialogue with the tradition and its many voices.

Harris' usage and handling of sources is exceptional, if not inspirational. He is at home with Augustine and Aquinas as he is with Barth and Pannenberg; with Origen and Bonaventure as with N. T. Wright and Douglas Campbell. And yet, perhaps what impresses upon the reader most is how original the work is in totality. Harris plays no favourites and tows no party lines. Though the reader could avoid engaging in the notations and still retain the arc of both Harris' figural reading and his eschatological reasoning, to do so would risk missing some of the most engaging points of debate and some of the author's honest wrestling.

Where the overarching work lacks some conceptual clarity is in the integrity between its two stated intents. First, Harris is convincing in his argument for pre- and post-figural readings of Old and New Testament resurrections. His starting point notes that there is an (almost) unanimous consensus in the modern academic guild that these nine instances (1 Kings 17; 2 Kings 4, 13; Matt 27; Mark 5; Luke 7; John 11; Acts 9, 20) of men, women and children being brought back to life are to be regarded

as *mere resuscitations*. He reasons compellingly that these deaths and resurrections are pre- and post-figurations of Christ's death and resurrection and as *figures* they contain both a 'yes' and a 'no' in correlation to their antitype. His second broad intent is to ensure that the eschatological subheadings of modern systematic theology are grounded in and tethered to the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. Once again, this skein is successfully pulled through the second half of the book and done with erudition and force. But just how these two projects mutually inform each other in substantial ways is less clear. It is not always evident how the figural readings of non-christological resurrections actually inform and shape the christological eschatology of the second half of the book.

More weighty protest, however, should be assigned to the presence and form of chapter 4, which attends exegetically to the two accounts of 'post-figural resurrection' from the biblical book of Acts (chapters 9 and 20) and also attempts to venture beyond the witness of scripture and into Pentecostal history. My concerns here are many, but the main ones can be adumbrated as follows: Harris finds these Acts accounts carry 'even greater antithetical figural weight than their earlier, prefigurative counterparts' (p. 112), but why then does this lead to the conclusion that seeking historical instantiations beyond the canon of scripture is a worthwhile endeavour? Why then, furthermore, is the same fivefold framework not applied to the examples from Pentecostal history? Or why skip almost two millennia of history to focus solely on a few examples from (minority world) Pentecostal history? And what do we make of the example he uses of the woman who was 'resurrected' only to fall ill and into suffering almost immediately again as she succumbed to death for a second time? Or more soberingly, what are we to make of the 2019 death and promised-but-never-realised resurrection of the child of a Bethel Church staff member in California he mentions? It certainly seems to give no warrant or weight to Harris' claim in the conclusion of the book that 'the church must renew the Christian practice of raising the dead' (p. 272). It surely cannot escape a writer as well-versed in the history of Christianity as Harris is, that this has not been the practice or even the desire of the historic church. Rather, the spiritual practice has been *ars moriendi*. Harris' conclusion feels like an ecclesial practice that, in truth, undercuts a large portion of the work which holds onto future hope in the person of Jesus Christ.

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