# The Resurrection Of Jesus John Dominic Crossan And N T Wright In Dialogue

# The Resurrection of Jesus: John Dominic Crossan and N.T. Wright in Dialogue

The resurrection of Jesus Christ remains a central tenet of Christianity, yet its interpretation sparks ongoing debate among scholars. This article explores the

contrasting yet surprisingly complementary perspectives of two influential New Testament scholars: John Dominic Crossan and N.T. Wright, focusing on their approaches to the resurrection narrative and its implications. We will delve into their differing methodologies, examining their interpretations of the historical evidence and exploring the resulting theological implications. Key areas of discussion will include **historical Jesus studies**, **the resurrection appearances**, **the significance of the empty tomb**, and the **impact on early Christianity**.

## Contrasting Methodologies: History and Theology

Both Crossan and Wright are highly respected biblical scholars, but their approaches to the resurrection differ significantly. Crossan, known for his historical Jesus research, emphasizes a historical-critical methodology. He prioritizes the reconstruction of the historical Jesus, focusing on the social and political context of first-century Palestine. This approach often leads him to a more skeptical stance on the miraculous aspects of the resurrection narrative, preferring explanations rooted in social and psychological factors within **early Christianity**.

Wright, on the other hand, adopts a more holistic approach, integrating historical-critical analysis with theological reflection. He stresses the importance of understanding the resurrection within the context of God's overall plan for creation and redemption. This means paying attention not just to the historical accounts but also to the theological implications of the resurrection for understanding Jesus' identity and mission. His work often emphasizes the **resurrection appearances** as crucial evidence for the event's transformative impact on the early church.

## The Empty Tomb and Resurrection Appearances: Differing Interpretations

The empty tomb is a key element in the resurrection narratives. Crossan acknowledges the historical plausibility of an empty tomb, suggesting that it might be explained by factors like the hasty burial practices of the time or the relocation of the body by unknown individuals. He views the tomb as potentially significant, not as proof of resurrection per se, but as a catalyst for the development of faith in the resurrection among Jesus' followers.

Wright, while acknowledging the challenges of establishing the historicity of the empty tomb definitively, sees it as a vital element within the overall narrative. He argues that the empty tomb isn't simply a piece of circumstantial evidence but acts as a powerful symbol of Jesus' victory over death and the expectation of bodily resurrection. He also places strong emphasis on the **resurrection appearances**, arguing that these accounts are crucial to understanding the transformation of the early Christian community. He highlights the historical significance of these appearances as evidence of an event that undeniably shaped the early church's faith.

## The Significance of the Resurrection for Early Christianity: A Shared Conclusion

Despite their methodological differences, both Crossan and Wright recognize the profound impact of the belief in the resurrection on the emergence and development of early Christianity. Crossan observes that the belief in Jesus' resurrection provided the community with a powerful sense of hope and identity in

the face of persecution and oppression. The narrative of resurrection offered a framework for understanding their experience of suffering and gave them a reason to continue their mission despite immense hardship.

Wright, similarly, underscores the transformative power of the resurrection belief within early Christianity. He argues that the resurrection appearances were not simply hallucinations or wishful thinking but experiences that profoundly altered the disciples' understanding of Jesus and their own calling. These experiences, Wright argues, provided the foundation for the bold proclamation of the gospel and the rapid spread of Christianity throughout the Roman world. Both scholars concur on the historical importance of the resurrection belief, despite differing in their interpretations of its specific nature.

## Beyond the Debate: A Synthesis of Perspectives?

While Crossan and Wright offer contrasting interpretations of the resurrection, their work isn't necessarily mutually exclusive. Their differing approaches highlight the multifaceted nature of the resurrection narrative, allowing for a richer and more

nuanced understanding of its significance. Crossan's emphasis on the social and historical context provides a crucial framework for understanding the development of the resurrection belief within early Christianity, while Wright's theological insights provide a deeper understanding of its cosmic significance within the Christian faith. Ultimately, engaging with both perspectives enhances our appreciation for the complexity and enduring power of the resurrection narrative.

# FAQ:

### Q1: What is the main difference between Crossan and Wright's approaches to the resurrection?

A1: Crossan primarily employs a historical-critical methodology, focusing on the historical plausibility of events within the context of first-century Palestine and potentially offering alternative explanations rooted in social and psychological factors. Wright incorporates a more holistic approach, integrating historical-critical analysis with theological reflection, emphasizing the narrative's role within God's overarching plan for redemption.

**Q2: Does Crossan deny the resurrection of Jesus?**

A2: Crossan doesn't explicitly deny the resurrection but challenges traditional interpretations. He suggests that the belief in the resurrection emerged from the disciples' experiences and their reinterpretation of Jesus' teachings and death in light of their hopes and expectations. He doesn't necessarily dismiss the possibility of a supernatural event, but emphasizes the significance of sociological and psychological factors.

**Q3: What role does the empty tomb play in each scholar's interpretation?**

A3: For Crossan, the empty tomb might be explained by historical circumstances but isn't necessarily proof of a supernatural resurrection. It served as a catalyst for the belief system. Wright, however, views the empty tomb as a significant symbol within the overall narrative of Jesus' victory over death, integral to the subsequent resurrection appearances.

**Q4: How do the resurrection appearances factor into their respective views?**

A4: Crossan acknowledges the resurrection appearances but suggests they may be explained through various social and psychological factors. Wright emphasizes their historical importance as transforming events that fundamentally shaped the early Christian community and their understanding of Jesus.

**Q5: Can their perspectives be reconciled?**

A5: While their methodologies differ substantially, their work isn't necessarily contradictory. A synthesis of their approaches can offer a richer understanding of the resurrection narrative, integrating historical context with theological interpretations. Crossan's work provides a grounding in the historical realities, while Wright's offers a theological framework for understanding the significance of the event.

**Q6: What is the impact of their differing interpretations on contemporary Christianity?**

A6: Their contrasting interpretations offer contemporary Christians a wider range of perspectives on the resurrection, encouraging critical engagement with the biblical

texts and prompting deeper reflection on the faith's core beliefs. It also fosters a more nuanced understanding of the historical and theological complexities surrounding this pivotal event.

**Q7: Are there any other scholars whose views are relevant to this discussion?**

A7: Yes, many other scholars contribute to the ongoing discussion on the resurrection, including Gerd Lüdemann, who offers a skeptical perspective, and Craig Evans, who defends a more traditional view. Comparing and contrasting multiple perspectives enriches the overall understanding of this complex topic.

**Q8: What are the implications for future research on the resurrection?**

A8: The ongoing dialogue between scholars like Crossan and Wright, and the methodologies they employ, necessitates further interdisciplinary research, integrating insights from history, sociology, psychology, and theology to achieve a more complete understanding of the resurrection narrative's multifaceted nature and lasting impact.

# The Resurrection of Jesus: A Dialogue Between Crossan and Wright

The puzzling resurrection of Jesus has intrigued theologians and scholars for ages. Two prominent voices in this ongoing discourse are John Dominic Crossan and N.T. Wright. While both acknowledge the historical Jesus and the importance of the resurrection narrative, their interpretations differ significantly, leading to a fascinating intellectual conflict of perspectives. This article will explore their contrasting viewpoints, highlighting the key differences and potential points of agreement.

Crossan, a renowned expert of historical Jesus studies, famously advocates a primarily symbolic interpretation of the resurrection. He emphasizes the historical background of first-century Palestine, a time marked by intense spiritual creeds and a prevalent anticipation of divine intervention. For Crossan, the resurrection accounts, particularly in the Gospels, should be understood as manifestations of the disciples' belief and their rebirth in the wake of Jesus's demise. He argues that the

resurrection narratives are not literal historical accounts of a bodily rebirth, but rather symbolic portrayals of the enduring effect of Jesus's message and his life. He views the resurrection as a proclamation of the continuation of Jesus's being within his followers, a spiritual reality that surpasses the limitations of material existence.

Wright, on the other hand, offers a more actually rooted interpretation, emphasizing the crucial role of the resurrection in understanding Jesus's identity and claims. He argues that a solely symbolic reading fails the consistent emphasis in the New Testament on the corporeal rebirth of Jesus. Wright sees the resurrection not merely as a psychological experience but as a factual event with important consequences. He emphasizes the Jewish setting of the resurrection, arguing that the early Christians understood it within the framework of Jewish apocalyptic beliefs. For Wright, the resurrection validates Jesus's claims to be the Messiah, fulfilling God's promises and confirming the reign of God. He sees the resurrection as the apex of Jesus's service and the foundation of Christian belief.

The contrast between Crossan and Wright highlights the intricacy of interpreting the resurrection narratives. Crossan's emphasis on the cultural background and the

emotional reformation of the disciples offers valuable perspectives into the creation of the resurrection faith. However, it might be argued that his interpretation diminishes the literal claims of the New Testament. Wright's historically rooted approach offers a powerful defense of the traditional understanding, but it might struggle to address the challenges posed by the diverse resurrection accounts in the Gospels.

A fruitful method might involve recognizing the strengths of both perspectives. Crossan's emphasis on the disciples' experience and the symbolic power of the resurrection narrative enhances Wright's emphasis on the historical reality of the event. The resurrection could be understood as both a factual event with transformative consequences and a potent symbol that continues to shape the experiences of believers. The discussion between Crossan and Wright serves not to divide but to expand our understanding of this central event in Christian history.

In closing, the resurrection of Jesus remains a topic of intense intellectual investigation. The contrasting interpretations of Crossan and Wright offer valuable perspectives that help us contend with the difficulties of this mysterious event. By

engaging with both their arguments, we can deepen our understanding of the resurrection's meaning for both historical and contemporary contexts.

**Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs):**

1. **What is the main difference between Crossan and Wright's views on the resurrection?** Crossan emphasizes a primarily symbolic interpretation, focusing on the disciples' faith and transformation, while Wright advocates for a historically grounded view, emphasizing the resurrection as a real event that validates Jesus's claims.

2. **Can both Crossan's and Wright's perspectives be reconciled?** Yes, a synthesis is possible. Crossan's focus on the symbolic meaning complements Wright's emphasis on historical reality. The resurrection can be understood as both a historical event and a powerful symbol.

3. **How does understanding this debate affect my faith?** Engaging with these diverse interpretations encourages a deeper exploration of your faith, fostering intellectual honesty and a more nuanced understanding of the resurrection's

significance in your own life.

4. **Which interpretation is "correct"?** There's no single "correct" interpretation. Both perspectives offer valuable insights, and the truth may lie in a synthesis of both viewpoints, recognizing the historical context alongside the enduring spiritual impact.

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