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A. N. Wilson Gets It Too — No Resurrection, No Christianity

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A. N. Wilson is a prominent British man of letters. Once headed for the Anglican priesthood, he later experienced what has been called a “deconversion” from Christianity. A skilled historian, his book *God’s Funeral: The Decline of Faith in Western Civilization*, traces the Western world’s slide into secularism.

He understands, at least, what he now rejects. He recently responded to the “Lost Family Tomb of Jesus” controversy in the *Sunday Herald Sun* [Australia] and made two crucial points. In the first place, Wilson stressed the fact that if it were proved that Jesus Christ did not rise from the dead, Christianity must necessarily fall. His second point is as accurate and important as his first — there is no form of proof adequate to the challenge of proving that Jesus Christ was not raised from the dead.

In this section of his article, Wilson refers to the claim by producer James Cameron that the bones of Jesus had been found in a tomb near Jerusalem:

If such a find were found to be what Cameron claims, it would be historically revolutionary.

It would prove, among other things, that the traditional Christian belief was false, that Jesus did not rise from the dead. Long ago, Paul the Apostle wrote to his friends in Corinth that if Christ did not rise from the dead, their faith was in vain. No doubt, if Cameron’s find were proved to be authentic, it would destroy the Christian religion. The Pope could shut up shop. The Church of England could be absorbed by the National Trust as just a collection of medieval buildings.

Unbelievers in the resurrection would feel that their scepticism had been justified and the vast majority of Christian believers, who profess their faith in Christ risen from the dead, would be compelled to admit their faith had been based on a mistake.

Faith based on a mistake? If Jesus Christ was not raised bodily from the dead, Christians are mistaken at the very core of our beliefs. This would indeed “destroy the Christian religion.”

More:

But the only serious written “source” for the life of Jesus is the Gospels. They were all the products of an institution that still survives in our world: the Christian church. The Gospels were not written to make a quick buck in Hollywood. Nor were they trying to attract a publisher. They were the record, probably dating from a generation after Jesus, of what people believed about him.

The four books attributed to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were written to sustain the communities of faith in Rome and Palestine and Asia Minor, which believed Jesus to be Lord. They contain stories of Jesus rising from the dead. That, believe it or not, is the story of Jesus. You either accept it or you reject it.

Yes, Mr. Wilson, you either accept or reject the claim that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead by the power of God, and we cannot avoid the consequences of that choice.

We should appreciate [A. N. Wilson's](#) honesty. After all, these words come from one who once considered himself a Christian, but now calls himself merely a “Christian fellow traveler.” He understands what Christians believe, and has the intellectual honesty to trace those beliefs to their source and consequences. Now, if only others were so honest.

Here's one who doesn't get it. Steve Gushee of [The Palm Beach Post](#) argues that Christians need not worry that Christianity would fall if the resurrection of Christ were disproved.

From his article:

The claim that one held the bones of Jesus of Nazareth is highly unlikely. The documentary assumes much and conjectures more to make its case. Even if true, that should not destroy faith in Jesus' resurrection. It might restore a measure of spiritual integrity to a faith awash in false literalism.

Religious truth is seldom expressed literally but in images, with poetry and mystery. Resurrection stories are no different.

The disciples were convinced that the crucified Jesus was with them. They knew that his living spirit was the driving force in their lives and that, when breaking bread in his name, he was with them. They were convinced that Jesus was alive. That conviction changed the world.

The resurrection of Jesus is, for the faithful, a profound spiritual truth about the nature of God and God's relationship with his creation. They need not read the stories that tell of that wonder literally in order to embrace that truth. The resurrection is about new life, not old bones.

A seminary dean told me 40 years ago that, even if someone dug up the body of Jesus, he would not believe in that cadaver but in the Jesus embraced by the community that proclaims his resurrection.

This is an amazing argument — that disproving the resurrection would “restore a measure of spiritual integrity to a faith awash in false literalism.” This turns the entire Christian faith on its head. We have only Mr. Gushee's recollection of the conversation with a “seminary dean,” but that dean offered a pathetically perverse portrait of Christianity. His dichotomy relies on the old (and false) distinction between the “Jesus of History” and the “Christ of Faith.” They are one and the same, or Christianity is a lie. It's as simple as that.

We discussed the resurrection of Christ in light of current controversies on Monday's edition of [The Albert Mohler Program](#) [listen [here](#)].
