

EVIDENCES FOR THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST:
AN EXPLORATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE RELATED
MATERIAL AND TOPICS FROM AN EVIDENTIAL-PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

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PREFACE

I wrote this paper toward the end of my graduate work at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, in 1989. It is not intended to be too pedantic, but rather, is meant to be a blend between competent scholarship and practical information. Balancing between the academic and the practical is not an easy task. If something is too academic (overly deep), few read it except for the academicians; and if it is too non-academic (overly shallow), few regard it as done competently enough to spend any time reading it. This paper is very eclectic, bringing together, with comparative brevity, literally hundreds, if not thousands, of pages of material. Since my aim was to wed good scholarship with practical expression regarding layout, length, and overall readability, and do so utilizing an eclectic broadness, I truly believe that I achieved my goal of producing a manuscript which can help others better understand the miracle of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus, while also introducing readers to the branch of the philosophy of religion known as Christian apologetics, as expressed in the even narrower offshoot discipline known as Christian evidentialism.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The resurrection of Jesus has been one of the subjects of much debate as scholars have sought to examine and evaluate the known material in an effort to establish what actually happened to Jesus of Nazareth. Is there really any evidence that such a man lived and died? Even if he did live and die, can it be proven beyond doubt that he was raised from the dead? This essay is an effort to explore the related material and topics, and critically analyze them from an evidential-philosophical perspective, in an attempt to ascertain either the improbability that such an event could happen, or assert the probability that such an event did, in fact, happen.

For some people the subject under discussion will be inconsequential. There are those who scoff at such endeavors, alleging that all beliefs are based on faith and nothing else, further claiming that God did not intend for there to be any tangible evidence to elicit faith. Their common war-cry is "what you don't know won't hurt you"; however, it would be nearer the truth to state that "what you don't know will hurt you, you just won't know it." Ignorance and slothfulness are no excuses for negligence and incompetence in any facet of human knowledge.

There are others who ridicule the notion of a resurrection, and any miracle for that matter, doubting whether or not there really is a God, and if there is, they are extremely skeptical about both his past and present role, and about his involvement in human history. But, there are also those who maintain, as Socrates did at his trial, that the unexamined life is not worth living, and vociferously affirm that the unexamined faith is not worth believing.¹ These analysts are convinced that issues such as the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth are much more than merely a "Jewish affair."² They are committed to a thorough examining of the information available and its subsequent interpretation and defense. They are known as Christian "apologists."

This writer openly admits that such an argument has its limitations. The phrase, "Convince a man against his will, he's of the same opinion still,"³ is saturated with truth. But, argument can expose the "unreasonableness of unbelief," and thereby demonstrate "that there is more of prejudice and credulity involved in rejecting Christian beliefs than in

¹Yandall Woodfin, *With All Your Mind* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1980), 14.

²Gary Habermas in *Did Jesus Rise From the Dead? The Resurrection Debate*, ed. Terry L. Miethe (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1987), 42.

³J. I. Packer in *Did Jesus Rise From the Dead? The Resurrection Debate*, ed. Terry L. Miethe (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1987), 150.

accepting them."⁴ Perhaps the subject under discussion in this paper is too large. That is entirely possible; however, in order to carry on a thorough discussion of the resurrection, one must of necessity deal with peripheral concerns before, during, and perhaps even after the major topic is considered. The present writer will endeavor to work through the discussion and analysis, seeking to weave the material together and adequately demonstrate its interrelatedness, and then arrive at a conclusion based on the exploration and analysis of the information.

⁴Ibid., 150.

II. THE RELIABILITY OF SCRIPTURE

The first related concern one must deal with is the reliability of the biblical material itself. Scholars, while not always agreeing on the nature of the inspiration of Scripture, regularly confirm the idea that Scripture accurately portrays nature and the dimensions of religious experience, as well as providing a true record of character, cosmology, historical actions, and states of personal being.⁵ Most posit that Scripture itself is an accommodation given by God to mankind, thus arguing that special revelation is a necessary prerequisite for acquiring true knowledge of God. Hence, the Bible becomes the one supreme and sufficient source for apprehending such information.⁶ Some scholars go so far as to posit that the acquisition of "truth" is necessarily contingent upon one's commitment to an open universe, belief in the reality of the transcendent, and belief in the possibility of the supernatural.⁷ These "Realistic" scholars argue that the cosmos enjoys an independent existence apart from its perception by mankind, that essence precedes existence, and

⁵Mark A. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1986), 143.

⁶Ibid., 144-5.

⁷Ibid., 145.

that the mind of man is quite capable of perceiving existence beyond and outside of itself with some accuracy.⁸ More will be said about this later when the writer discusses ontology and causality relative to the resurrection. At this point, suffice it to say that each human being must possess a certain degree of confidence that this world is being honest to man about what is real and that, in the exercising and testing of his faculties, man becomes relatively confident that he is perceiving what is real.

When one speaks about the reliability of Scripture, one is simultaneously placing a certain degree of confidence in language itself. Language, though it too must be critically examined, is by definition a fit and reliable vehicle for communicating ideas, thoughts, concepts, reality, and so forth.⁹ In connection with an examination of the material concerning the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, one is forced to evaluate the reliability of the New Testament documents. Since it is outside the scope of this paper to discuss textual criticism, one must of necessity rely upon the experts concerning this matter. Fortunately, there does exist much agreement among scholars regarding the dates of authorship for the New Testament documents. Moreover, even biblical critics date some Epistles of Paul in the A.D. 40s and the Gospels in the A.D. 50s, though arguing that this ten to twenty-year gap between

⁸Ibid., 146.

⁹Ibid., 148.

their authorship and the alleged resurrection (early A.D. 30s) is long enough "to permit forces that corrupt testimony to do irrecoverable damage."¹⁰ These same critics argue that most unsuspecting Bible readers "assume" that the Jesus of the Gospels is the same Jesus preached by Paul;¹¹ however, since Paul was sanctioned by the original Apostles (Acts 15:22-24) and by virtue of the fact that Luke gives no evidence to doubt that the Jesus of his Gospel is the same Jesus preached by Paul as recorded by Luke in the Acts, one can only conclude that the Jesus of the Gospels is the same Jesus of the Epistles of Paul, and, for that matter, the same Jesus of Nazareth spoken of throughout the entire New Testament. Attacks of this nature find little if any historical evidence to support their tenets. Conversely, there is a thorough-going consistency regarding the nature, accomplishments, attributes, and deity of the Jesus spoken of in the New Testament. To support the claims of the New Testament authors relative to all these assertions is not within the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say that whenever any New Testament author is writing about a resurrected Jesus, he is writing about the Jesus of Nazareth born in Bethlehem to Mary and Joseph who was allegedly crucified by Pontius Pilate and was said to have been raised from the dead. Moreover, the first missionary journey

¹⁰Antony Flew in *Did Jesus Rise From the Dead? The Resurrection Debate*, ed. Terry L. Miethe (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1987), 9-10.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 11.

of Paul (formerly Saul of Tarsus) can be dated by combining the allusion of Luke to Gallio, the proconsul of Achaia, in Acts 18:12, and an archaeological discovery naming Gallio, just as Luke records, thus dating the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians no earlier than the middle A.D. 50s. This, therefore not only attests that Luke is reliable as an historian, but also that he provided datable written documentation which was obviously based on well-preserved information that was much older, probably dating all the way back to the time of Jesus himself.¹² It must always be remembered that these very same New Testament documents which openly testify to the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth also convey promises concerning forgiveness, belonging, and an inner consciousness regarding the presence of the living God, not to mention the testimony of the documents concerning kings, queens, emperors, rulers, places, and things. If these documents have proven themselves reliable regarding these claims, might one not also feel justified in accepting their testimony pertaining to the supernatural?¹³ As Yandall Woodfin rightly argues, whatever knowledge one has of the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, the so-called Christ, must be interpreted within the confines of an understanding of his life and his creative potential, in that there can be no dualistic

¹²Wolfhart Pannenberg in *Did Jesus Rise From the Dead? The Resurrection Debate*, ed. Terry L. Miethe (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1987), 127.

¹³Woodfin, 72.

separation of the Gospel narratives into history and into interpretation, for neither was this their intention nor can the two exist apart from one another.¹⁴ It seems apparent to most that, though not proving that actual occurrences happened, the biblical writers make an effort to report accurately what they saw and what happened without "fanciful additions."¹⁵ Neither Paul nor the four Evangelists are particularly concerned to narrate the entire history of the resurrection, but rather to provide adequate evidence in support of it as an historical event.¹⁶ Again, the testimony of Luke seems to indicate that he, a trained physician, carefully investigated the accounts of the resurrection (Luke 1:1-4) and concluded that Jesus "presented himself alive" (Acts 1:1-3).¹⁷ In his debate over the resurrection with Antony Flew, Gary Habermas cites the eminent Roman historian A. N. Sherwin-White as concluding that the historicity of the writings of Luke (Luke and Acts) has been confirmed.¹⁸ While many scholars agree that the Book of Acts is historically reliable, in that this was its primary function, there are those who challenge the historical reliability of the Gospels, though admitting that they do include valid points of

¹⁴Ibid., 74-5.

¹⁵Ibid., 77.

¹⁶Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. 2 (New York, NY: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1906), 622.

¹⁷Ibid., 622.

¹⁸Habermas, 58.

historical information.¹⁹ Although the primary purpose of the Gospels is, admittedly, not to record history as such, one must still ascribe heavy consideration to their historical content, particularly the Gospel of Luke, in that it was authored by the same reliable historian who wrote the Acts. Moreover, even if the Gospel accounts of the resurrection are dismissed altogether, which would require ludicrous empirical gymnastics, one must still deal with the fact that the Acts are counted as reliable and they too record post-resurrection appearances of Jesus and his alleged ascension in the sight of more than one witness (Acts 1:1-12; 9:1-9).

It is impossible to tell just how much pertinent information regarding the resurrection was destroyed when Jerusalem was ravaged in A.D. 70. Some skeptics think that any conclusive evidence that might have existed perished at this time, thus vanquishing all hopes that the truth will ever be known with certainty.²⁰ Perhaps this view possesses some validity, in that the Roman government and the Jewish Sanhedrin might well have kept records of this nature; however, what records there are - the New Testament, Josephus, Thallus, and more - are virtually all called into question regarding their accuracy and authenticity. Additionally, who is to say whether or not critics would have accepted the aforementioned records if, in fact, some had survived, or if they would be accepted if they surfaced today

¹⁹Pannenberg, 132.

²⁰Flew, 10.

due to some recent archaeological discovery? That the Bible is supported by more ancient manuscripts (5,000 plus) than most writings of antiquity is a fact recognized even by critics.

Consider this statement of Antony Flew:

There's a much greater richness of manuscripts for all the major early Christian documents than there is for, say, the plays of Aeschylus or Sophocles or the works of Aristotle. But of course, that's not evidence about Jesus, but very good authority for the accuracy of the text that is printed in translation in the New Testament.²¹

²¹Ibid., 66.

III. THE TESTIMONY OF NON-BIBLICAL MATERIAL

Thallus, a Gentile writer, seemingly alludes to the darkness experienced at the time of the alleged crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth. Regarding Thallus, F. F. Bruce writes,

The first Gentile writer who concerns us seems to be one called Thallus, who about A.D. 52 wrote a work tracing the history of Greece and its relations with Asia from the Trojan War to his own day. He has been identified with a Samaritan of that name, who is mentioned by Josephus (*Antiquities* xviii.6.4) as being a freedman of the Emperor Tiberius. Now Julius Africanus, a Christian writer on chronology about A.D. 221, who knew the writings of Thallus, says when discussing the darkness which fell upon the land during the crucifixion of Christ: "Thallus, in the third book of his histories, explains away this darkness as an eclipse of the sun unreasonably, as it seems to me" (unreasonably, of course, because a solar eclipse could not take place at the time of the full moon, and it was at the season of the Paschal full moon that Christ died).²²

This may well be the earliest non-Christian reference to Jesus of Nazareth, also showing that the Passion was known in Rome, in that Julius Africanus refers to Thallus, who was probably situated in Rome at the time of his (Thallus') writing.²³ Luke

²²F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*, 5th ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1960), 113.

²³James C. Denison, *Christian Evidentialism in Outline* (Fort Worth, TX: Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989), 27.

records the darkness (Luke 23:44-45), simply stating that the sun was obscured. It is interesting that, of the four Gospels, it should be the Gospel of Luke that mentions this, the one who expressly states that he checked things out thoroughly.

Apparently Julius Africanus, as well as Thallus, was also well aware of this claim of darkness, and saw no reason to dispute its truth. Even if, as Thallus supposed, it was an eclipse of the sun that caused the darkness, the point still remains that something strange occurred on that certain day, at a certain time of the season, which is recorded both by the Christian Luke and the non-Christian Thallus. Two sources, therefore, attest to the fact that an abnormal event occurred - darkness in daytime - at the time of the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth, the so-called Christ. If Julius is quoting Thallus properly, this is good evidence for believing that Jesus really did live, that he really was crucified, and that strange events surrounded his crucifixion. This is not, however, evidence that he was raised from the dead; not yet anyway.

Josephus, the Jewish historian, offers more evidence of the non-biblical nature concerning the historical Jesus of Nazareth when he writes,

Now, there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works - a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ; and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross [A.D. 33, April 3], those that loved him at the

first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them alive again the third day [A.D. 33, April 5], as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten-thousand other wonderful things concerning him; and the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day.²⁴

In this paragraph Josephus refers to Jesus as a wise man and even questions whether or not he should be considered to be a man.

This seems to be an allusion to his claims to deity. Josephus is not saying that Jesus was, in fact, a God-man, he is simply recognizing that Jesus was credited with many "wonderful works," and that many thought of him as more than a mere mortal.

Apparently, Jesus was able to attract followers from among both Jews and Gentiles according both to Josephus and the biblical texts. It is doubtful that Josephus himself really believed that Jesus was the Messiah. A more likely interpretation is that the followers of Jesus considered him to be the Messiah; thus, Josephus is recording popular opinion. How many men by the name of Jesus who fit this description were crucified by Pilate?

Josephus seems to imply that the principal men from among the Jews ("us") were not too adamant in their condemnation of Jesus to Pilate. It appears to this writer that if, indeed, a later Christian author were to attempt to color the works of Josephus with a Christian flavor, he would have ascribed a great deal of guilt and involvement to the Jewish ecclesiastical leaders.

According to the thoroughly Christian perspective, these Jewish

²⁴Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, vol. 4, trans. William Whiston (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984), 11, VXIII 3, 3.

leaders did more than suggest crucifixion! Josephus even goes on to mention at least one post-resurrection appearance of which he had heard, and, furthermore, records that this was to more than one person i.e. "them"; however, Josephus does not testify that Jesus really died for sure, though he may be implying it when he writes "alive again."

Some feel that the words "wise men," and "astonishing deeds," and "tribe," are stylistically typical of Josephus and without parallel in any Christian writings.²⁵ Again, this is not conclusive evidence for the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, but it does seem to indicate that ideas concerning his divinity, miracle-working ability, and resurrection were circulating very early (i.e. before A.D. 97, the approximate time of the death of Josephus).²⁶ Additionally, Josephus mentions Jesus the so-called Christ again in connection with one Ananus, a Sadducee, who had become high-priest and was looking for an opportunity to exercise his newly acquired authority when he writes,

Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he assembled the sanhedrim of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others, [or, some of his companions]; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned.²⁷

The identification of Christ without comment may indicate a widespread knowledge of him, or, perhaps, may be depending upon

²⁵Denison, 33.

²⁶Ibid., 32.

²⁷Josephus, 139-40, IX, 1.

his earlier mentioning of Jesus in XVIII 3,3. It may well be that James was persecuted for his Christian faith, which could also be construed as evidence for the resurrection of Jesus by some, in that James, formerly an unbeliever, was the recipient of one of the post-resurrection appearances by Jesus (1 Cor. 15:7) which changed the course of his life forever.

In arguing both for an early oral tradition and a written tradition regarding the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, Baxter points out that Clement, Bishop of Rome, in his Epistle to the Corinthians ca. A.D. 95 mentions the resurrection, and reminds his readers that the idea of the resurrection is prominent in the Apostles' Creed.²⁸ Another interesting source is Melito of Sardis. It has been conjectured that he died ca. A.D. 190,²⁹ but not before he delivered the sermon known as "A Homily on the Passover," in which he writes concerning Jesus,

This is he who made the heavens and the earth, and formed humanity in the beginning, who is announced by the Law and the Prophets, who was enfleshed in a Virgin, who was hanged on the Tree, who was buried in the earth, who was raised from the dead and went up into the heights of heaven, who is sitting on the right hand of the Father, who has the authority to judge and save all things, through whom the Father made the things which exist, from the beginning to all the ages.³⁰

²⁸Batsell Barrett Baxter, *I Believe Because . . .* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1971), 225.

²⁹Campbell Bonner, *The Homily on the Passion* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1940), 3.

³⁰Melito, "A Homily on the Passover" in *The Christological Controversy*, trans. Richard A. Norris, Jr. (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1986), 47.

Although the purpose of this paper is not theological in nature, one cannot miss the full-blown theological implications of this quotation. Could this many theological concepts have developed to this extent so rapidly unless good evidence had been available to promote such ideas? Is it likely that the idea of the bodily resurrection of Jesus was merely fabricated by his followers in such a way so as to deceive thoroughly even those either present or living near the time of the alleged resurrection, such as Thallus, Julius Africanus, Josephus, Clement of Rome, Melito of Sardis, and more? These are just a few of the non-biblical sources which must be given consideration along with the biblical material; however, as influential as all of these might be, so far there is only evidence for the probability that one Jesus of Nazareth did live, was crucified at the hands of Pilate, and was believed to have been raised from the dead by all the biblical sources and by many non-biblical sources. One still must wrestle with the issue of why these people actually believed that he had been raised from the dead. For all one knows, at this point, this may simply be legend; however, legends still do not nullify the texts.³¹ Critics are willing to admit that Jesus lived and preached.³² Many admit that rumor had it that he had been raised from the dead. These same scholars both recognize and admit that there is an abundance of textual evidence, biblical and non-biblical, in support of the miraculous claims of Jesus, even more

³¹Habermas, 160.

³²Flew, 8.

textual material than is extant regarding Plato, Sophocles, and others; however, these same scholars say there is no reason to question or dispute the claims of the latter as there is the former.³³

³³Ibid., 111.

IV. MIRACLES

Anytime anyone anywhere makes a decision or arrives at a conclusion concerning almost anything, he or she probably made use of preconceived ideas, premises, or presuppositions. The thinking process becomes so much of a habit, most do not realize its fallacies. Much of what humans regard as "known" cognition is nothing more than an explanation which conforms well with one's presupposition. Philosophers, like all other humans, have their presuppositions too. Some begin an inquiry with the presupposition that another explanation of the known evidence will fit better than the popular explanation. This is what is termed "a posteriori" reasoning.³⁴ Others assume that only parallel cases, be they imagined or real, within the natural system of the cosmos constitute explanation, thus ruling out in advance the possibility of any creative, unique acts or events. This is what is termed "a priori" reasoning.³⁵ Admittedly, it is honorable to view something from as many angles as possible and not necessarily accept the consensus opinion; but to rule out the consensus opinion from the outset, regardless of the evidence, smacks of incompetence, intellectual suicide, and the presence of

³⁴Packer, 145.

³⁵Ibid.

an insurmountable bias that will be forever impeding one's quest for truth. Likewise, to seek to explain all things on the basis of parallel cases which have occurred within the world system reveals an horrendous prejudice against the possibility of some unique event occurring outside the present norm. As a result of this centripetal subjectivity, "a priori" thinkers are forced to use words like "never," and "impossible," often without even giving neutral consideration to data. One must rarely say "never," that is, of course, if one is genuinely attempting to discover truth, not attempting to support his or her own presupposition.

By virtue of its definition, a miracle is a natural impossibility.³⁶ Conversely, a miracle must then become a supernatural possibility. There are many "laws" which are active in nature. Hence, "law-abiding" events are rather predictable and repeatable; but what about "non-law-abiding" events? They are not so predictable or repeatable; but do these actually occur? Maybe some things that happen are simply unexplainable, therefore, they get lumped together under the catch-all "supernatural." Perhaps the event was not supernatural at all; but then again, maybe it was.

One must allow for the possibility of external intervention in nature, because arguing from naturalistic premises within a natural system still does not disprove the possibility that a

³⁶Flew, 6.

miracle, a natural impossibility and a supernatural possibility, was performed by a stronger power.³⁷ The author is not here going to present an argument for the existence of God. He merely wants to raise the question as to whether or not it is nature (Nature?) which is the supreme reality of the universe, and, as such is bound by itself never to violate any "law," ever, or is there a supreme reality which is above and beyond the natural system?

Some evidence for the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth will inevitably run counter to all "known" laws of nature. Likewise, some evidence for the resurrection will also, of necessity, reinforce the second of the possibilities mentioned above - that there is a supreme reality which is above and beyond the natural system; however, one must recognize the fact that, although laws are statistical in nature, in that as they function they increase the probability that something might happen, they neither cause things to happen themselves, nor do they keep things from happening. Further, they do not present a barrier for intervention by a supreme reality (God?), nor do they function in some Newtonian system where all laws are rigidly fixed, understood, and enforced in all cases. Therefore, they present no problem for miracles.³⁸ In fact, Christian apologists would argue that the miracles performed by Jesus which are recorded in the biblical texts have adequate and sufficient testimony to establish them as historically real, in that (1) many were

³⁷Habermas, 17.

³⁸Ibid., 17-8.

performed in the public eye; (2) some were performed in the company of unbelievers; (3) they occurred over a fairly long period of time, in great variety, and through different mediums; (4) those who were cured testified that they had been healed; and, (5) the opponents of Jesus admitted that he had performed them.³⁹ Even critics of the resurrection and of miracles admit that a supernatural power would have to "override" the natural order for either to happen.⁴⁰ Christian apologists describe miracles as temporarily "superceding" the laws of nature, that is to say the "normally observed and known patterns of nature."⁴¹ Critics also charge that miracles do not happen everyday, because if they did, they would neither be miracles nor unique.⁴² But how can one know this for sure? It appears self-contradictory, on the one hand, to deny outrightly the possibility of a miracle, and, on the other hand, to imply that unnatural or supernatural occurrences do take place. This seems to be a concession by a noted skeptic, then, that atypical occurrences take place, while also stubbornly refusing to allow room for the supernaturally miraculous to explain them. The words filibuster and stall tactic come to mind, suggesting intentional postponing of concluding the inevitable - that biblical miracles have no natural explanations, only supernatural explanations.

³⁹Denison, 74.

⁴⁰Flew, 34.

⁴¹Habermas, 42.

⁴²Flew, 35.

While some competent Christian apologists are busy disclosing evidence for their beliefs in the intervention of the supernatural within the natural order, critics are engaged in a riotous demand for more evidence. Others from both sides are too engrossed in grinding their proverbial axes so as not to care either way. The point being made is that, happily, a relationship does exist, in that scholars from both sides are exchanging ideas and information on the subjects of miracles, resurrection, and so forth. Hopefully, Christian apologists will not be guilty of pressing the interpretation of their evidence too far and will continue their scholarly efforts to ascertain the validity of the Christian Scriptures and the supernatural claims of these same documents. Additionally, critics must dismiss the notion that repeatable empirical evidence is either the only, or the major, epistemological test for truth, because this sets up criteria that are themselves non-empirical, thus ruling out, a priori (before analysis), vast ranges of reality. Hence, miracles cannot be ruled out by this approach because the methodology is guilty of ruling itself out in the process.⁴³ As one writer puts it, "Those who deny the miraculous a priori have obviously disqualified themselves as interpreters of claims to the miraculous."⁴⁴

⁴³Habermas, 18.

⁴⁴Denison, 73.

V. UNIQUENESS OF THE CHRISTIAN RESURRECTION CLAIM

Some would agree that no other major world religion has ever formulated a confessional statement espousing that its founder had, in actual point of time, lived on this earth, died, and truly come forth from a tomb in a resurrection body as he predicted that he would.⁴⁵ If Jesus of Nazareth actually accomplished such a feat as this, then all the other doctrinal affirmations of the Christian faith must also hold true, including those pertaining to the ultimate destiny and bodily resurrection of man.⁴⁶ While all facets of Christian doctrine are significant, none can compare with the importance that the resurrection carries with it. All of Christianity hinges on the reality of the resurrection. It is unique in all the world as a religious claim accompanied by the aforementioned qualifications. Just as Christian apologists wrestle with the issue of evidences for the resurrection of Jesus, critics grapple with the issue of evidences against the resurrection of Jesus. Theologian Jurgen Moltmann writes,

⁴⁵Wilbur M. Smith, "Resurrection" in *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Everett F. Harrison (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1960), 448.

⁴⁶Ibid.

The resurrection of Christ is without parallel in the history known to us. But it can for that very reason be regarded as a "history-making event" in the light of which all other history is illumined, called in question and transformed.⁴⁷

Moltmann seems to be implying that, if in fact the resurrection occurred, it thus calls into question all naturalistic paradigms for ontology. He does not here affirm the resurrection; but he does affirm the idea of the resurrection of Christ as a causal event which changed the course of human history. Wilbur Smith, a resurrection theologian from the mid twentieth-century writes, "Whatever be the rich legacies of the great thinkers and cultures of the ancient world, they have left no contribution to the doctrine of the resurrection of the body."⁴⁸ Christian philosopher and apologist Yandall Woodfin calls it unique in all the world.⁴⁹ Regarding the monumental work of historian Arnold Toynbee relative to this discussion, Smith writes,

Toynbee's treatment of the resurrection of Christ in his epochal *Study of History* is most significant. The chapter, "Christus Patiens" is devoted to the subject of "correspondences between the story of Jesus and the Stories of certain Hellenic Saviours with the 'Time Machine.'" In this attempt at parallel tabulation, Toynbee lists eighty-seven events in and aspects of the life of Christ for which, he says, parallels can be found in the stories of the heroes of antiquity, beginning with "the hero is of royal lineage," and closing with "the executor's conversion." There is no hint, however, that in the ancient world there is a

⁴⁷Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, trans. James W. Leitch (New York, NY: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1967), 180.

⁴⁸Smith, 448.

⁴⁹Yandall Woodfin, *Why Be a Christian?* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1988), 109.

story worth placing at the side of the New Testament account of the resurrection of Christ.⁵⁰

In his debate with Antony Flew, Gary Habermas credited Edwin Yamauchi, Professor of Ancient History at Miami University in Ohio, with saying that Jesus of Nazareth is the only founder of any major world religion "for whom there is eyewitness testimony of his miracles."⁵¹ A further point of uniqueness is emphasized by Moltmann who writes, "The life, work, death and resurrection of Jesus are therefore not described after the pattern of the appearance of epiphany gods, but in the categories of expectation that are appropriate to the God of promise."⁵² Theologian William Hendricks claims that it is a universal desire to want to continue to live, arguing that there is a common fear of death which grows out of anxiety about the unfamiliar, therefore, mankind the world over has developed elaborate rituals, or rites of passage, which deal with the crucial stages of human development including birth, entry into adulthood, marriage, and death.⁵³ The same author writes,

It is God's most creative act since the beginning of creation. In the resurrection God is giving new life to a dead world and is concluding finally and definitively mankind's search for the resolution to death. To go on

⁵⁰Smith, 448-9.

⁵¹Habermas, 41.

⁵²Moltmann, 143.

⁵³William L. Hendricks, "A Risen Savior--Unique Among Religions?" in *Biblical Illustrator*, Spring 1987, 17.

living again and again and to die again is no resolution to death.⁵⁴

If, in fact, Jesus of Nazareth did rise from the dead, then his victory over death would declare a final "yes" to life and a definitive "no" to death. This once-for-all resolution to death refutes the words of Charles Hartshorne, who writes, "Supposing natural life to be followed by supernatural life, supernatural life could end in some equally supernatural death."⁵⁵ Hence, the bodily resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth is theologically unique and comprehensive among the religions of mankind, and carries with it a great deal of theological freight in that it was implicitly expected by Yahwists, if not explicitly predicted by Old Testament documents. Moltmann provides a closing word here:

Thus although Christianity stands in the midst of the religious life of its time, epiphany faith can influence it in the first instance only as a formal element in its presentation. For it stands under the protection of the Old Testament thought of God, which expects God to act uniquely and comprehensively upon the world.⁵⁶

⁵⁴Ibid., 19.

⁵⁵Charles Hartshorne in *Did Jesus Rise From the Dead? The Resurrection Debate*, ed. Terry L. Miethe (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1987), 142.

⁵⁶Moltmann, 144.

VI. EXPANDED ONTOLOGY

Heretofore the present writer has endeavored to present a survey regarding the reliability of Scripture itself and introduce the reader to some non-biblical material relevant to a discussion of the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, as well as familiarize the reader with the necessarily related subject of miracles and the uniqueness of the Christian resurrection claim. If, in fact, Scripture is reliable in its testimony concerning the resurrection of Jesus, and, assuming that some of the non-biblical materials do, in fact, support the claims of Scripture concerning the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, and that some miraculous events may have indeed happened in point of time relative to the life of Jesus of Nazareth, and given the certainty that the resurrection motif inherent in Christianity is virtually unique among religions and cultures, naturalists may well be driven to the point of readjusting their ontology.

Those who possess a more naturalistic ontology (view of reality, i.e. what is real) look for regularities within the world system with a view to explaining the seemingly new or

unexplainable by associating it with parallel cases.⁵⁷ It is often possible to draw analogies between past events and present events and thus ascribe a relative degree of probability to them by interpreting the unknown aspects of the one based upon the known aspects of the other, provided, of course, that there is a common core of similarity.⁵⁸ This model is very useful, but has its limits; however, to what events may ideas such as creation, incarnation, and resurrection be compared for analogical support? Woodfin recognizes the limitations of the analogical method when he asserts that it carries with it a phenomenological bias by presupposing that there will always be a common core of similarity between all historical events or things.⁵⁹ Obviously, however, a common core of similarity is either not always recognizable or is altogether absent. Therefore, one must expand his or her ontology to encompass more than simply the natural order of the cosmos. Even though it is very likely that most non-biblical claims of the miraculous are invalid, one cannot dismiss them altogether in order to avoid dealing with evidence in a specific case, unless one is prepared to retreat automatically, in an a priori manner, which, of course, is absurd.⁶⁰ One's

⁵⁷Packer, 144.

⁵⁸Moltmann, 175.

⁵⁹Woodfin, *With All Your Mind*, 77-8.

⁶⁰Habermas, 169.

interpretation of nature must, then, allow for the possibility of its being transcended by the Creator, or some supreme reality, when reliable evidence is available which necessitates the belief that the event cannot be adequately explained on the basis of natural causes alone, and if the event is accompanied by an interpretive word which illuminates its meaning and its redemptive purpose. This "convergence of event and word,"⁶¹ is termed a miracle, and when encountered in the form described provides good reason for one to expand his or her ontology to include the miraculous.

Moltmann argues that the resurrection is neither mythical nor historic, but revelational, since there is the absence of a common core of similarity, analogy is impossible. Thus, he has expanded his method of understanding by comparison to make room for that which has, hitherto, been non-existent, classifying it not as the accidentally new, but as the expectational category of the eschatologically new.⁶² He argues that there is no analogy to the resurrection anytime or anywhere, but that it is itself an analogy of what shall be in the future, thus contradicting all "substantio-metaphysical" definitions of a common core of similarity. In that it is an eschatological analogy meant to foreshadow a future historical event, in this way only can it be

⁶¹Woodfin, *With All Your Mind*, 204.

⁶²Moltmann, 178-9.

regarded as historic, because by pointing the way to future events it makes history; hence, it is historic "because it discloses an eschatological future."⁶³

⁶³Ibid., 180-1.

VII. CRUCIFIXION AND BURIAL CUSTOMS

By virtue of its very nature, crucifixion is not something from which somebody just gets up and walks away. Normally, death was inflicted by way of suffocation. The only way for the victim to breathe sufficiently was to pull himself up in order to expand the chest cavity and receive air into the lungs. In order to expedite death, the legs of the victims were often broken for the purpose of denying this lifting process (see John 19:31-33). The Gospel of John records that Jesus was stabbed in the chest (side) with the spear of a soldier (John 19: 34) which brought forth blood and water. The blood probably came from the right side of the heart, and the water from the pericardium.⁶⁴ Had Jesus still been alive, the jab would have killed him. It was a common Roman procedure to insure that the victim was, indeed, dead.⁶⁵ The writer of the Gospel of John claims to have been an eyewitness to this (John 19:35). Moreover, Roman soldiers were skilled at killing and certainly knew when their victims were dead. This is

⁶⁴Habermas, 69.

⁶⁵Ibid.

why they broke the legs of those who were still showing signs of life, and why they stabbed the others in the heart.

As one might imagine, religion and climate often dictate the burial customs of people.⁶⁶ Hebrew law necessitated that burial follow as soon as possible after death, certainly within twenty-four hours, mostly for sanitary precautions in the hot eastern climate, and in order to provide a safeguard against violating the laws of cleanness by touching the corpse.⁶⁷ The Egyptians embalmed their dead, the Romans cremated theirs, and the Hebrew people allowed the bodies of their loved ones to decompose after friends, especially women, had washed the corpse and wrapped it in a linen cloth, some even placing myrrh and aloes between the folds of material as it was being enveloped, the purpose of which was not to preserve the body, but rather, to purify it ceremonially, sometimes weighing up to one-hundred pounds in addition to the weight of the corpse, though some of the myrrh and aloes may have been burned in honor of the loved one rather than wrapped in the material (John 19:39; 2 Chron. 16:14).⁶⁸ The writer of the Gospel of John said he saw that Jesus was dead, that the Roman soldiers (plural, John 19:32-34) thought he was dead, that Nicodemus thought he was dead, and everyone who helped

⁶⁶Brian L. Harbour, "First-Century Burial Preparation," in *Biblical Illustrator*, Winter 1985, 70.

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Ibid., 70-1.

Nicodemus thought he was dead too (John 19:40). This is just the testimony of one Gospel writer. There are simply too many people to hoodwink concerning the reality of his death. The only thing left for his followers to do now was place his body in a tomb.

According to scholars, two tomb designs were common in Palestine at the time of Jesus, the most common being the kokim, a niche cut in the tomb wall just large enough to hold a body, and the arcosolium, a ledge cut into the rock wall with a curved archway above it, both of which were sealed with a wheel-like stone placed in front of the opening⁶⁹ and then sealed around its perimeter, either with wax or mortar. Apparently, it was very common for groups of women to venture to the tomb of a loved one early in the mornings simply to visit the grave.⁷⁰ After all of the flesh on the body had decayed, the bones of the dead person were gathered together and placed in a special box, known as an ossuary, which was then either buried or placed in the center of the tomb area, thus, the same tomb could be used again and again as a place for the flesh of the dead to decompose.⁷¹

⁶⁹Ibid., 72.

⁷⁰Ibid., 73.

⁷¹Ibid.

VIII. RESURRECTION DISTINCT FROM RESUSCITATION

The New Testament records that several people who had actually died were raised back to life by Jesus of Nazareth. Some scholars believe that this was done as a sign that the new age had dawned, as a pledge of the conquest which Jesus would himself have over death, and as a symbol which signified the in-breaking of the Kingdom of God, in which there is to be no more death (Rev. 20:14; 21:4).⁷² On this subject Smith writes, "One factor is common to each of these miracles: Christ spoke and the dead heard his voice, as though he were extending himself into the other world, and the world the other side of death was accessible and obedient to him."⁷³ The English word "resurrection" can be traced to the Greek word *anastasis*, meaning to stand up or stand again, and is not applied to any of the miracles in the Bible where the dead were restored to life as in the cases of the daughter of Jairus (Mark 5:21-43), the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-17), or Lazarus (John 11:17-44), all of which should be considered strictly as resuscitations and not resurrections,

⁷²David Ewert, *And Then Comes the End* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1980), 96.

⁷³Smith, 450.

since each of these had to face death again; whereas, in Koine (common, New Testament) Greek, *anastasis* refers to bringing the body back to life for eternity.⁷⁴

Most Christians would argue that the idea of the resurrection of Jesus and of believers is a primary theme inherent in Christian doctrine, "woven into the fabric of Scripture," expressing the hope of every believer as well as specifically identifying the climactic step in the redemptive plan of God for saving people from sin and death.⁷⁵ In the Old Testament, only a few hints of a resurrection are present, for the idea developed slowly, perhaps due to a "strong corporate concept of community," which placed little emphasis upon the individual as distinct apart from the whole people of God.⁷⁶

The Old Testament speaks frequently about Sheol, the grave, a place where one was considered neither quite dead nor quite alive (Job 10:21-22; Ezek, 32:24-25; Pss. 88:12; 94:17; 115; Isa. 38:10-18; 14:9-20).⁷⁷ Although a brighter hope emerges in Old Testament passages such as Pss. 16:10-11; 17:15; 49:15; 73:24; Isa. 26:19, and Dan. 12:2, the Old Testament still closes with little more than a hint that there is anything other than

⁷⁴J. Terry Young, "Resurrection Theology," in *Biblical Illustrator*, Fall 1987, 65.

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Ibid., 66.

⁷⁷Ibid., 67.

Sheol.⁷⁸ Perhaps this is the reason why the New Testament concept of a full-blown resurrection catches the reader by surprise, in that it is now clearly established in its form regarding Heaven, Hell, and life after death. Furthermore, it was generally accepted among the Jews, especially the Pharisees, though it was denied by both the Samaritans and the Sadducees.⁷⁹

Where did this full-blown idea come from? Few if any other religions or cultures believed in the resurrection of the body. Religions influenced by Greek philosophical thought ridiculed the idea of a resurrected body, which would confine the immortal soul for eternity, for, to them, salvation was the release of the soul from the prison of the body. In mythologies there is no idea of a general resurrection in which all, or even many, would participate based on their faith in the founder of their religion and his resurrection from the dead. In fact, resurrection parallels in other religions seem to have developed either alongside the Jewish idea of the resurrection, or, perhaps, were themselves influenced by it, but did not serve as a source for the idea.⁸⁰

So where did this idea of a general resurrection of the dead and the resurrection of the so-called Christ come from? Was it

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Ibid.

simply a fabrication from the mind of man? A wishful thinking as it were? J. Terry Young conjectures that, sometime during the inter-testamental period, the idea of the resurrection began to gain popularity among the Jews in conjunction with their hope of a delivering Messiah.⁸¹

⁸¹Ibid.

IX. A RESURRECTED SAVIOR: UNIQUE AMONG RELIGIONS?

Having already discussed the uniqueness of the resurrection in general, what about the uniqueness of a resurrected Savior? On this point Hendricks writes,

All religions have sought to resolve the universal problem of death. Christianity has done so in its proclamation of a risen Savior, a hope unique among religions.⁸²

Hinduism posits the idea of reincarnation, the process of being born over and over, at different levels of life according to deeds (karma) performed in one's previous life. Occasionally, Hindu saviors are alleged to have returned to this world to give guidance to their devotees concerning better deeds, and, consequently, better rewards the next time around.⁸³

Buddhism focuses on the effort of the Buddha to be released from death and the cycle of rebirths by utilizing the eight-fold path, whereby absorption into the great world soul (Brahman) would be achieved. Thus, the resolution of death for Buddhists is loss of individual identity and absorption into the absolute. There are stories about the Buddha ascending to heaven after his

⁸²Hendricks, 16.

⁸³Ibid., 18.

death which are regarded, however, as a transformation, but not as a physical resurrection.⁸⁴ Neither Taoism nor Animism promote any supreme savior, and certainly no resurrection of the dead, only a wandering of the spirit either in bliss or in torment.⁸⁵ Islam does speak of a resurrected life for all believers, though there is no reference to a resurrected Savior.⁸⁶

In the Old Testament, "To sleep with the fathers," is considered by many to be a euphemism for resurrection, in that sleep necessarily infers an awakening (Gen. 47:29; Deut. 31:16; 1 Kings 1:29).⁸⁷ Those who argue for an Old Testament concept of the resurrection propose that, when Abraham offered up Isaac to Yahweh, he was convinced that God could also raise him back up from the dead (Heb. 11:19);⁸⁸ however, Judaism itself, according to Hendricks, "does not affirm a resurrected messiah, nor a pre-existing, divine messiah."⁸⁹ Therefore, it would appear that the idea of a resurrected Savior is unique to Christianity alone, and is not derived from other religious sources. This concept is, therefore, thoroughly New Testament and completely Christian in

⁸⁴Ibid.

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶Ibid., 19.

⁸⁷Smith, 449.

⁸⁸Ibid.

⁸⁹Hendricks, 19.

light of its absence from other religious traditions. Moreover, on this subject Smith writes,

The theme of the resurrection of the body, including the bodily resurrection of Christ, is given more space in the New Testament than any other one basic Christian truth, with the possible exception of the death of the Lord Jesus. Rarely did Christ speak of his coming without uttering a prediction of his resurrection within three days following. As an indication of his power over death, on three occasions he brought back to life those who had died, and he gave his disciples power to raise the dead.⁹⁰

All of the miracles mentioned in the Bible are "auxiliary and secondary" to the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, for only in him does man have tangible, historical evidence of resurrection. Hendricks too, therefore, concludes, "A risen Savior is, indeed, a feature unique to Christianity."⁹¹ Furthermore, in that the authors of the New Testament are writing about experiences from this side of the "alleged" resurrection of Jesus rather than before it, and by virtue of the fact that their writings demonstrate a full-blown concept of both his resurrection and the resurrection of believers, and given the fact that they did not inherit this idea of a resurrected Savior from Judaism, or any other religion, where did they get the idea of a resurrected Savior? Resurrection of the body was not a thing which they understood, even though Jesus did speak of it prior to his death.

⁹⁰Smith, 449.

⁹¹Hendricks, 19.

They were not understanding his claims to deity or his assertions concerning his own death and resurrection. Thus far, most would agree that a man named Jesus, who lived in Nazareth, really did exist, and was an "alleged" miracle working preacher who gathered a fairly large following consisting mostly of Jews. Additionally, most would also agree that this same Jesus was crucified by Pilate and really did die. Furthermore, many would agree that the idea of a resurrected Savior is unique to Christianity alone; but, the point of departure may well be where the New Testament writers get their idea of a resurrected Savior. The starting place for this discussion, then, is the empty tomb.

X. THE CASE OF THE EMPTY TOMB

All of the gospel writers teach that the tomb of Jesus was empty, and Paul implies it in 1 Cor. 15:4. The independent accounts of the empty tomb add credibility to its truthfulness. It was common knowledge that the tomb was empty, not merely alleged to be empty. There were plenty of people around to check out the story and the tomb for themselves. One cannot even imagine that they did not. The Jewish leaders would have made certain that Jesus was dead and that he was buried. They would have taken measures to insure that they would not be duped. This is why they employed the help of the Roman guards. The leaders would have made sure that the dead, wrapped body was, in fact, Jesus of Nazareth. The various explanations concerning the empty tomb only serve to substantiate the claim that the tomb of Jesus of Nazareth was empty. The Jews would have had everything to gain had they been able to produce the body of Jesus. Even if the Romans had been guilty of stealing it, the Jews seemed to have had enough influence to get it back and end the rumors for good. Additionally, had the Romans been guilty of stealing the body, their problems with the Jews would have increased both

politically and religiously as long as any rival to Caesar was not totally exterminated. How many dead bodies had the Romans or the Jews lost? What an embarrassment! If these pillars of government and society could not be trusted with carrying out capital punishment, what could they be trusted with?

Mary Magdalene certainly was not expecting the body of Jesus to be resurrected. She was shocked and dismayed to find it missing. Her composure was so shaken that she even threw off the normal restraints of Jewish women and spoke with a stranger whom she thought was the gardener (John 20:15).⁹² The further confusion of the disciples over the empty tomb verifies that they, too, thought a grave-robber had been at work. Upon their arrival at the tomb, they discovered no sign of haste, but rather, indications of an orderly exit made by someone who was leisurely divesting himself "of what no longer befitted Him."⁹³ Apparently, it is now thought by many, Jesus exited through both his grave-clothes and the rock.⁹⁴ Edersheim thinks that the stone was rolled away from the door of the tomb by an earthquake after the resurrection.⁹⁵ If this be the case, then it was removed for the purpose of facilitating discovery of the empty tomb rather

⁹²Edersheim, 635.

⁹³Ibid., 634.

⁹⁴Habermas, 58.

⁹⁵Edersheim, 632.

than to let him out. If someone else had stolen the body, would they not have put the stone back in place and resealed the tomb? Would they not have feared for their very own lives, as did Peter, and would they not have sought to keep the matter as secret as possible rather than promote riotous confusion? One wonders how many other stones were dislodged, and if the presence of guards at tombs was the norm! Obviously, the Jews and Romans suspected in advance that something unusual might happen, so they took extra precautions to prevent it, but what they feared still happened anyway. Burial in an unoccupied tomb seems to have been a rare privilege, thus implying that, since no other body was present, either in the shelves or the tunnels, there was no possibility of a mistake over which was the body that was missing, for it was not merely a matter of remembering the right tomb, but also remembering which shelf in the tomb the body was placed on (Mark 16:6; Luke 23:55; John 20:12).⁹⁶ Pannenberg argues that proclamation of the empty tomb and the resurrection could not have prospered at Jerusalem unless the tomb was actually empty, and no viable theories were proposed to account for it.⁹⁷ The same scholar reasons that the absence of any insinuation in Jewish sources saying that it was a lie and the

⁹⁶R. T. France, *The Evidence for Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 151.

⁹⁷Pannenberg, 131.

body was still there, or that the location of the tomb was unknown, add weight to the evidence that the empty tomb points toward the literal resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.⁹⁸ Habermas points out that, by virtue of the fact that tombs were for bodies, and the body was missing, whatever happened, then, must have happened to the body.⁹⁹ In conclusion of this section, one may safely assert that the tomb which was supposed to have contained the body of Jesus was empty. This cannot be disputed; however, there are a number of theories which purport to explain the empty tomb. It is to a survey of these that the writer now turns.

⁹⁸Ibid.

⁹⁹Habermas, 162.

XI. THEORIES OF THE EMPTY TOMB

A. The Mistaken Tomb Theory

The mistaken tomb theory seeks to explain the empty tomb by conjecturing that Mary went to the wrong tomb only to find it empty, and then, through teary eyes, saw the gardener and supposed he was the risen Christ.¹⁰⁰ This, however, presupposes that Mary Magdalene was expecting Christ to rise from the dead, and it is also at odds with the biblical witness which testifies that she thought Jesus was the gardener, not that she thought the gardener was Jesus. Furthermore, did Peter and John also run to the wrong tomb? Was there some large cemetery that would have complicated the finding of the proper tomb? What about the appearance of the angels at the same tomb? Moreover, the women had seen where he was buried (Matt. 27:61). Surely Joseph of Arimathea would have corrected the mistake and put an end to the resurrection rumors, not to mention the fact that the Jews and the Romans would have gone to the tomb and produced the body themselves. Lastly, what about the post-resurrection appearances?

¹⁰⁰George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), 321.

How does this theory account for them? The answer is that it cannot.

B. Stolen by Joseph of Arimathea

Some argue that Joseph of Arimathea stole the body; however, what motive would he have for stealing it? How could he have accomplished this with the presence of the soldiers? How could he have so completely deceived the apostles? Finally, this theory is very young, dating back only to a German theologian of the nineteenth-century.¹⁰¹ In other words, nobody seriously considered this theory for about 1800 years because it was too preposterous.

C. The Authorities Stole the Body

The "authorities stole the body" theory reasons that those in charge of the crucifixion of Jesus were the ones who stole his body, thus, getting past the guards would pose no problem; however, why would they do it and compound their problems? Would the guards really run the risk of trusting these leaders, knowing that their own lives were at stake if they did not perform their duties? Surely these leaders would have placed the body on public display as soon as they heard rumors of a resurrected Savior.¹⁰² Especially concerned to bring to a halt any such nonsense would have been the Sadducean leaders, who outrightly denied the

¹⁰¹Baxter, 227.

¹⁰²Denison, 72.

doctrine of the resurrection (Acts 23:8)! Another dead end theory.

D. The Women Stole the Body

The "women stole the body" theory proposes that the women swiped the body of Jesus without telling the disciples. One immediately wants to ask how they got past the guards, whose very lives depended on the fulfillment of their orders to guard the tomb. What did they do with the body? Would they have allowed the disciples to become martyrs for a lie? Would they not have been found out sooner or later? How did they get the grave-clothes to stay in such an orderly fashion? For this, along with the empty tomb itself, seemed to convince John and Peter that the body was missing, thus they "believed" the report of Mary that his body was gone (John 20:8-9).¹⁰³ Another dead end theory.

E. The Disciples Stole the Body: Deliberate Fraud

The "deliberate fraud" theory suggests that the disciples stole the body, but concealed it, then began to proclaim that Jesus was not dead, but had returned to life.¹⁰⁴ Where did they get the idea of a bodily resurrection? Why were they not interrogated by the Jews or the Romans concerning the whereabouts of the body? Would cowardly Peter have changed his ways in so

¹⁰³Edd Rowell, "Jesus' Postresurrection Appearances to His Disciples," in *Biblical Illustrator*, Winter 1987, 33.

¹⁰⁴Ladd, 321.

short a time without something miraculous? How would the disciples get past the guards, steal the body, and escape unnoticed? This theory has been around since the time of Justin Martyr,¹⁰⁵ but still does not explain why the disciples would want the body, nor does it explain their future lives as a whole. Would they really have died for a lie when they knew for sure that it was untrue? Would Paul have been convinced by such a fraud? Habermas, on this point, writes, "Albert Schweitzer dismissed Reimarus's fraud theory and listed no proponents of this view since 1768."¹⁰⁶ Another dead end theory.

F. The Swoon Theory

The swoon theory is predicated upon the idea that Jesus never was really dead, but only swooned from the beatings, weakness, and loss of blood, and that the coolness of the tomb and the fragrance of the aromatic spices, coupled with the much needed rest, all served to revive him.¹⁰⁷ If this be the case, how did he get out and past the soldiers? What about the soldiers who were supposed to have seen to it that he was dead? Would Joseph of Arimathea place a live man in his tomb? Would the women wrap a man up in grave-clothes who was not yet dead? Where did Jesus go from here? Are people to believe that he did not really die on

¹⁰⁵Edersheim, 637.

¹⁰⁶Habermas, 21.

¹⁰⁷Ladd, 321.

the cross, though medical knowledge argues otherwise? Could he have undergone such excruciating torture, lain in a tomb on a rock-hard surface, wrapped from head to toe without food and water, for several days only to regain consciousness, unwrap himself, rearrange the wrappings, roll away the stone, fight off, or sneak past, the guards, walk several blocks to where the disciples were, and announce to them that he was the crucified and risen Lord of Life, and they are going to believe him? Of course not. They are going to get a doctor. Habermas muses here, "Oh boy, I can't wait until I get a Resurrection body just like his!"¹⁰⁸ This theory also badly misses the mark.

G. Jesus Really was Resurrected

The "Jesus really was resurrected" theory argues that the only way to explain thoroughly the empty tomb is to understand that Jesus was really resurrected from the dead. This is the only theory which harmonizes with all of the material presented in this paper up to this point. But, the fact of the empty tomb alone is not adequate evidence for the resurrection. For this reason, one must move to a discussion of more evidences, namely, the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus, and the various theories which have been proposed over the years in an attempt to explain them.

¹⁰⁸Habermas, 69-70.

XII. THEORIES OF THE POST-RESURRECTION APPEARANCES

A. The Television/Telegraph Theory

The television/telegraph theory proposes that Jesus somehow telegraphed or televised pictures of himself in bodily form to some of his followers in their minds;¹⁰⁹ however, this seems to dismiss arbitrarily the testimonies regarding many who saw him walking, talking, eating, breaking bread, and so forth. Moreover, some not only saw him, but also heard him and felt him (Mary and Thomas).

B. The Vision Theory

The vision theory supposes that the imaginations of those who claim that they saw him, being subjective, caused the disciples to experience real visions, which they interpreted to mean that Jesus was alive and victorious over death.¹¹⁰ Critics argue that many devotees have claimed to have had visions of the Hindu deity Shiva - but only one person at a time.¹¹¹ Noll argues that, "psychological explanations do not provide ultimate

¹⁰⁹Smith, 452.

¹¹⁰Ladd, 321.

¹¹¹Flew, 113-4.

explanations for human actions or existence."¹¹² It must be remembered that these people were not expecting the bodily resurrection of Jesus, a necessary prerequisite to a vision, for, as Smith writes,

To account for a visionary experience, there must be, first, a psychological condition for creating such a state - in this case the burning expectation on the part of the disciples that they would behold their Lord again. But such an expectation had not had time to develop in the apostolic company. The women who went to the tomb Easter morning planned to anoint a dead body, not to see a risen Lord.¹¹³

If these people thought they were seeing Jesus, and really were not, all they had to do was check the tomb. This is something that the authorities did for sure, particularly on Sunday! Moreover, the "visions" were recurring and only lasted for about forty-days, and in various geographical locations. Are Christians to believe that these different appearances to various people, in an assortment of locations, at numerous times, to some people more than once, and several times to groups of people were all visions? Were these "visions" of sufficient power to change the disheartened disciples into happy martyrs? The showing of the wounds, the offer to touch him, the command to handle him, and eating with him all mitigate against the vision theory. Furthermore, it is ridiculous to suppose that hundreds of people

¹¹²Noll, 147.

¹¹³Smith, 451.

had been seized by resurrection mania. What of the empty tomb and the moved stone? How can one account for this and also account for the appearances? Admittedly, visions have occurred, even if only in the mind of the person seeing them. Edersheim here argues that, "Elijah, who is so constantly introduced in Jewish tradition, is never represented as sharing in meals or offering his body for touch."¹¹⁴ Finally, one may conclude, again with Edersheim, that "visions of an excited imagination would soon have given place to corresponding depression."¹¹⁵ Since this was definitely not the case, and since there is much evidence against this theory, it too has been placed on the shelf alongside the others to gather dust.

C. The Hallucination Theory

The hallucination theory is often associated with the vision theory mentioned above. Moreover, it seems to rule itself out by definition, in that, hallucinations are private events observed by one person alone.¹¹⁶ Two people cannot see the same hallucination at the same time, let alone eleven or five-hundred people! Therefore, the same arguments which are used to topple the vision theory are equally as effective when used against the hallucination theory; however, if these appearances cannot be

¹¹⁴Edersheim, 624.

¹¹⁵Ibid., 626.

¹¹⁶Habermas, 50.

satisfactorily explained by the television/telegraph theory, the vision theory, or the hallucination theory, how can they be accounted for? Is there some other naturalistic theory to be used to explain either the empty tomb or the post-resurrection appearances? The answer to this question seems to be no. As Habermas rightly argues, one could cross-examine the evidence thus far and falsify its claims if one had a naturalistic theory to replace it.¹¹⁷ One feels compelled to demand that evidence be presented against the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth rather than for it! Is there any true evidence against the resurrection of Jesus Christ except either a priori or a posteriori reasoning? Is it not true that the chief objection of the skeptic is the miraculous nature of the resurrection? Nevertheless, miraculous or not, historians must account for the fact that the alleged resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth was a fundamental, personal and corporate conviction held by virtually all of the apostles, and by many hundreds of others, which thus established the basis of their preaching and their willingness to suffer martyrdom.¹¹⁸ This leads to one, and only one, final theory. The theory that Jesus really did rise from the dead, which is the position of this writer.

D. The Theory That Jesus Did Rise from the Dead

¹¹⁷Ibid., 95.

¹¹⁸Edersheim, 627.

The theory that Jesus really did rise from the dead argues that faith could not, and did not, produce any visions, hallucinations, or televised appearances, and that the visions, hallucinations, or televised appearances did not produce faith.¹¹⁹ This theory asserts that there is no adequate explanation to account for the rise of the resurrection faith of the disciples, except that Jesus of Nazareth actually rose from the dead and appeared in bodily form, just as the New Testament records. A fitting conclusion to this section of the essay is provided by Wolfhart Pannenberg:

It has been said rightly that the legends created by excessive criticism have been less credible than the biblical reports themselves. Therefore the historical solidity of the Christian witness poses a considerable challenge to the conception of reality that is taken for granted by modern secular history. There are good and even superior reasons for claiming that the Resurrection of Jesus was a historical event, and consequently the risen Lord himself is a living reality. And yet there is the innumerably repeated experience that in this world the dead do not rise again.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹Ladd, 322.

¹²⁰Pannenberg, 134.

XIII. FAITH IN ONTOLOGY

Although the writer briefly discussed ontology and the need for one to expand his or her ontology to include the possibility of the miraculous or the unique, it is wise at this point to emphasize that any apologetic for the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth is only as strong as the faith one has in ontology itself. This holds true in virtually every realm of knowledge. One must arrive at a belief, an assurance, that the world is really being honest about reality. It goes without saying that in order to arrive at this assurance, one must have confidence in his or her ability to interpret experiences from a pragmatic perspective, a rational/reflective perspective, and an intuitive perspective. This confidence is gained through the exercising of one's faculties, experiences, and insights from others, just to name a few. Once this faith in ontology has been established, one is ready to examine various spheres of inquiry. Until then, doubts about what is real will present themselves as insurmountable obstacles in every quest for understanding, perhaps ending in an ontological perspective which classifies things as mere illusions and unreal. Therefore, the writer admits

to his trust in ontology, though he by no means embraces gullibility at any point. Furthermore, when one establishes his or her parameters regarding trust in ontology, one is driven to examine the possibilities of causality in association with the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.

XIV. CONFIDENCE IN CAUSALITY

It is true that, in many cases, cause and effect relationships cannot be determined; however, until a better method for explaining a sequence of events emerges, one must recognize the undeniable effects which the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth have caused. Few, if any, would argue that the presence of Christian churches, hospitals, schools, and eschatological hope are not the result of the belief of many millions of people who accepted the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth as real. To charge that these effects, and many more, are the result of a fraud, a joke, a vivid imagination, or an outright mistake brings with it more problems than it can solve. Yandall Woodfin defends this view in a masterful way when he writes, "If one attempts to explain the rise and continuance of the church on the basis of an early misunderstanding, one should prepare to defend an ontology which can sustain creative living and profound hope on the basis of that which has no foundation in reality."¹²¹ Until this is done, faith in ontology and confidence in causality will continue to be useful approaches for the

¹²¹Woodfin, *With All Your Mind*, 78-9.

Christian apologist. This is particularly true in light of the fact that, whether one reasons forward or backward, one is placing confidence in causal sequences or causal associations, which thus allow one to move from what is experienced or seen, to what either is or was historically probable.¹²²

¹²²Ibid., 73.

XV. EVIDENCES FOR THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST

A. The Empty Tomb

Having thus surveyed the various theories relative to the empty tomb of Jesus of Nazareth, one is forced to conclude that Jesus truly was dead, that he remained dead for several days wrapped in grave-clothes in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, and that he probably rose from the dead on the third day, exiting both the grave clothes and the tomb.

B. The Post-Resurrection Appearances

The New Testament reports at least ten post-resurrection appearances made by Jesus. Scholars cannot be certain as to the chronological sequence of these appearances, nor can they be certain that some of the accounts do not overlap; however, for purposes of clarity, the appearances will be listed here in a possible order of sequence, complete with Scripture reference, location (if given) and time (if given).

1. To Mary Magdalene and the Other Mary, and Perhaps Others (Matt. 28:1-10; Mark 16:9; Luke 24:1-12; John 20:11-18)

Apparently, the first appearance was to Mary Magdalene on Sunday just before dawn at the tomb of Jesus. John records that

she saw two angels who spoke to her concerning her weeping. She saw a man that she supposed was the gardener. John could well be emphasizing that she knew by appearance the difference between men and angels. As mentioned above, Mary Magdalene confused Jesus with a gardener, not a gardener with Jesus, for there was no gardener! She was not expecting to see Jesus. Evidently, his appearance was somewhat different than before, probably due to his agony. This adds credibility to the narrative, in that John in no way seeks to polish up the picture of Jesus. Empirically speaking, Mary Magdalene is said to have seen, heard, and touched him. Visionary experiences certainly are not of this nature. It is likely that Matt. 28:1-10 records this same incident; however, it mentions only one angel, which does not mean that there were not two. Additionally, Matthew has another Mary accompanying Mary Magdalene to the tomb, whom he also credits with having touched Jesus. The stories agree on the essentials of the stone being removed from the entrance of the tomb, the presence of angelic beings, a surprise encounter with Jesus, and the fact that Jesus spoke and instructed Mary Magdalene to go and tell his brethren. To these things Luke also agrees, but adds other women to the group.

2. To Simon Peter (Luke 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5)

Luke and Paul both record that Jesus appeared to Simon Peter. Other than Paul, Simon Peter may have been the only Apostle to have received a personal post-resurrection encounter with Jesus.

3. To Cleopas and Another Disciple (Mark 16:12; Luke 24:13-35)

While enroute to the village of Emmaus that same Sunday, Cleopas and an unnamed disciple (Luke?) conversed with Jesus without even recognizing that it was him. This corroborates the experience of Mary Magdalene, who did not recognize him either. Luke records that Cleopas and his associate already knew of the empty tomb and of the testimony of "some women" who said they had seen Jesus alive. Apparently, Cleopas was with a group of disciples, some of whom ventured to the tomb to see for themselves, and found it just as the women had described. By the time that Cleopas had finished his discussion with this stranger, they had arrived at Emmaus. They asked him in and he accepted. It was when he broke the bread and blessed it that they recognized him, at which time he vanished from their sight.

4. To Ten Apostles and Others, Thomas Being Absent (Luke 24:36-49; John 20:19-23; 1 Cor. 15:5)

Even though Luke reports that the "eleven" were present, it is likely that he uses this as a figure of speech to refer to the Apostles in general, for Thomas was absent during at least one post-resurrection appearance. That this was the case seems to be explicitly indicated by John. Maybe this is a separate appearance

and Thomas was present. Nevertheless, there was an appearance to the Apostles when Thomas was not present (John 20:19-23) and another one when he was (John 20:24-29). It is obvious that there were more than ten present at several of his appearances, which is far too many people to believe that they were hallucinating or seeing a vision.

5. To All Eleven Apostles and Others, Thomas Being Present (John 20:24-29)

An appearance to all eleven Apostles and others, with Thomas being present, occurred at a house in Jerusalem on the next Sunday, one week after the resurrection. That there were not other appearances elsewhere during the week is not mentioned. Perhaps there were. Additionally, Jesus is again seen, heard, and touched, this time by Thomas, who had previously doubted the authenticity of the resurrection reports.

6. To Simon Peter and Six Other Disciples at the Sea of Tiberias (John 21:1-23)
7. To the Eleven on a Mountain in Galilee (Matt. 28:16-20)
8. To the Eleven and a Group of Disciples in Bethany (Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:6-9)

This could have been the Ascension or simply another separate appearance. At any rate, there are a number of people assembled according to Luke in 24:50-53 and Acts 1:6-9. This may well be the group of more than five-hundred which is referred to by Paul in 1 Cor. 15:6. Perhaps this appearance to more than

five-hundred was on the mountain in Galilee recorded by Matthew (28:16-20).

9. To James (1 Cor. 15:7) (When?)

James, the half-brother of Jesus, received a personal post-resurrection appearance. He was not an Apostle, and may not even have been a believer at the time. That soon changed!

10. To Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:3-8; 22:6-11; 26:12-18; 1 Cor. 15:8)

When enroute to Damascus, approximately one to three years after the resurrection, Saul of Tarsus was the recipient of an encounter with the risen Jesus. It appears from the accounts that the companions of Saul saw the light and heard the sounds, but could not comprehend the message. Paul, unlike Thomas, never claims to have pressed his fingers into the wounds of Jesus. The word used to describe his seeing is the Greek word *horao*, which is the ordinary term used for referring to a physical body, not a vision. The conversion of Saul of Tarsus to Christianity from Judaism is tantamount to an Ayatollah converting from Islam to Christianity! Jesus did not appear only to friendly, receptive people. On the contrary, James and Saul were unbelievers at the time of their encounters. Jesus appeared to enemies as well as friends. The conversions of James and Saul are all the more persuasive support for the resurrection of Jesus. On this point Baxter writes,

If ever there was a man in the first-century who knew all the arguments against the resurrection of Christ which the Sanhedrin could draw up, that man was Saul of Tarsus. Yet, in spite of all this, he came to believe that Christ had been raised from the dead by the power of God.¹²³

Moreover, his very claim to apostolic authority was bound up in his personal encounter with the resurrected Jesus. The recognition of his position by the others was directly related to whether or not his experience was similar to theirs, and sufficiently different from mere visionary experiences. The fact that the other Apostles recognized him indicates that they accepted his testimony as authentic.¹²⁴ A summary of the information indicates that the appearances of Jesus after his resurrection were either in and near Jerusalem or in Galilee, perhaps following the pattern of movement of the disciples, who were in or near Jerusalem for the Passover Feast, then back in Galilee (John 21:1-3), then back in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost. This is a logical, historical, and consistent pattern. Moreover, Jesus repeatedly appears as a person clothed in a body rather than as a spirit, thus emphasizing the identification of his post-resurrection body with his beaten and crucified body (John 20:25-27), and with the same body which had eaten with the disciples (Luke 24:41-43), thus concluding that the Jesus who

¹²³Baxter, 229.

¹²⁴Pannenberg, 132-3.

appeared after the resurrection was, in fact, the same Jesus of Nazareth who had died on the cross. This identity of the risen Christ with Jesus of Nazareth is the "crucial element" in the post-resurrection appearance reports as espoused by Luke when he writes, "This same Jesus" (Acts 1:11; 10:40).¹²⁵ The appearances thus confirm the resurrection, the event which in turn validates the life, work, words, and sacrificial death of "this same Jesus." Admittedly, as Yandall Woodfin argues, one must trust the ethics of the reporters, believing that these accounts were not mere fabrications of discouraged disciples who were attempting to keep faith in Christ alive.¹²⁶ The independent accounts concerning the empty tomb and the post-resurrection appearances are bound together by an essential unity - that the risen Jesus is no longer in the grave-clothes or in the tomb, and that he is alive and visiting his followers.

Neither can the appearances be explained on the basis of psychological expectation, for the disciples were anticipating only a general resurrection of the dead at the end of the world.¹²⁷ The facticity of these appearances is further enhanced by the limited number of bodily appearances, the limited time (i.e. between Passover and Pentecost, except for Paul), and the

¹²⁵Rowell, 34.

¹²⁶Woodfin, *With All Your Mind*, 75.

¹²⁷*Ibid.*, 76.

presence of many witnesses at several of the appearances, including the more than five-hundred mentioned by Paul, who made it a point to stress that most were still living at the time of his writing, as if to say, "Go ask them!"

Further, there is no evidence of collusion on behalf of the witnesses or the authors. It has already been argued above that the documents were written very close to the time of the resurrection. Even if the appearances of Jesus were more spiritual in nature, which they were not, this still would not rule out the idea of a literal resurrection. In conclusion of this section, it can be asserted that the testimony of these witnesses is valid because there are numerous witnesses, they were intelligent, they were educated people (Luke and Paul), they were well acquainted with Torah, they were of unquestioned integrity, as is deduced by their refusal to forsake their testimonies, they were willing to undergo severe loss, even death, for the sake of their words, and, finally, the emptiness of the tomb could have been validated easily.¹²⁸

C. The Change in the Disciples

Some contend that the disciples were half-witted ignoramuses if they believed that the crucifixion was final in light of all that Jesus had spoken before his death;¹²⁹ however, strange as it

¹²⁸Denison, 71.

¹²⁹Flew, 87.

may seem, the death of Jesus was responsible for shattering all the hopes they had of ever ruling with him in his earthly kingdom. They were so fearful for their own lives that they viewed the crucifixion from a distance (Luke 23:4-9), although John was actually close at the moment of the death of Jesus (John 19:26). After the crucifixion, the disciples went into hiding like a band of cowards, their hopes being nailed to a cross.¹³⁰ Far from creating belief, the post-resurrection appearances shocked them, for they were still thinking of a general resurrection of the dead at the end of the world (John 11:24). The candidness with which the authors portray the actions of the disciples, as they groped and fumbled to grasp the miracle of the resurrection, indicates that they did not produce this idea themselves, either out of a vivid imagination or out of a forged enthusiasm.¹³¹ Their faith was gone, therefore, it was not responsible for producing the resurrection story (Luke 24:25). There must have been an event which provided the driving force to rekindle their faith. Faith did not produce the resurrection. The resurrection produced the faith. Ladd contends thusly:

The fact of the resurrection and faith in the resurrection are inseparable but not identical. The fact created the faith.¹³²

¹³⁰Ladd, 316.

¹³¹Woodfin, *Why Be a Christian?*, 107.

¹³²Ladd, 320.

All of these men were instantaneously, profoundly, and permanently changed. They immediately began to broadcast the resurrection, going everywhere preaching Christ crucified and his triumph over death. Their proclamation was declared even to the point of suffering persecution, hardship, imprisonment, and, finally, martyrdom.

Could the empty tomb alone produce this sort of faith? Not hardly. After they had seen the risen Jesus, they remained faithful, persistent, and consistent in their claims regarding his appearances. They had nothing to gain by lying except persecution and a life-long battle with personal guilt generated by intentional deception. Moreover, as Woodfin writes, "Hypocrites do not become good martyrs."¹³³ Treachery regarding such an event would aid neither Christ nor themselves, for, "Claims to have seen Jesus after his death could not have started such a faith had Jesus' corpse been available for inspection."¹³⁴ The fact that the authorities did not explode the resurrection faith and alleged "rumor" indicates that they could not produce the body. There was no occurrence here of any "resurgence" of courage or faith. These disciples were not expecting anything like this to happen. They had completely missed grasping all that Jesus had said concerning his resurrection. How, then, can one

¹³³Woodfin, *Why Be a Christian?*, 107-8.

¹³⁴Packer, 149.

account for the rise of faith in the Apostles and disciples aside from the fact of the self-manifestation of the risen Christ Jesus, performed by a miraculous act of God, thus completing the redemptive event of the cross?¹³⁵ On this point Packer writes, "The idea that those who constantly risked their freedom and their lives proclaiming the Resurrection faith had in fact stolen the body, and therefore knew all along that their preaching was not true, is unbelievable."¹³⁶ Moreover, considering again their previous state of mind, depression, discouragement, and the absence of any motive, one can only conclude that they came to believe, and that undeniably, that Jesus was indeed alive from the dead.¹³⁷ Relative to this statement Baxter writes, "One finds it hard to explain how the apostles and other disciples would give up home, family, wealth, and prestige, in order to belong to a hated sect that wore the name of a despised martyr."¹³⁸

D. The Preaching of the Disciples

An appropriate opening to this section is given by Young, who writes,

What has been only a theory about something that might happen in the future became a startling reality that brought the disciples of Jesus into a vivid consciousness of who He really was and what He was

¹³⁵Moltmann, 186.

¹³⁶Packer, 149.

¹³⁷Edersheim, 625.

¹³⁸Baxter, 232.

saying and doing. The resurrection of Jesus was so important in their own faith that it became the center of their preaching (see Acts 2:23-24; 3:15; 5:30-31; 10:34-40; 13:28-30; 1 Corinthians 15:12-19).¹³⁹

It is here notable that the first recorded Christian sermon did not emphasize the birth, life, or works of Jesus, but his resurrection (Acts 2:14-36).¹⁴⁰ On this point Habermas argues,

Additionally, the apostles made the literal Resurrection their central claim and most of them died for this specific message. This combination is not, to my knowledge, duplicated in the spread of any other religious movement.¹⁴¹

Ewert contends that Jewish opinion held that no one could raise the dead except God (cf. 2 Cor. 1:9), and that what really annoyed the Jewish leaders when the church was established at Pentecost was not that the Apostles were preaching the resurrection, but that they were preaching "in Jesus the resurrection from the dead" (Acts 4:2). He explains further that the Apostles were not merely preaching that the dead would rise, but that they were proclaiming an historical event which guaranteed the resurrection of all men.¹⁴² Moltmann rightly argues, "It would be foreign to the intention of the Easter texts themselves, if the 'point' of their statements were to be sought

¹³⁹Young, 67.

¹⁴⁰Ladd, 317.

¹⁴¹Habermas, 154.

¹⁴²Ewert, 95.

solely in the birth of faith."¹⁴³ On the contrary, their point was to emphasize the reality of the resurrection of Jesus, just as the point of the preaching of the Apostles was to emphasize it. No spiritualizing can be tolerated here. These texts and words are to be taken literally. Additionally, Edersheim makes this valid observation when he writes, "Indeed, the world would not have been converted to a dead Jewish Christ, however His intimate disciples might have continued to love His memory."¹⁴⁴

Some might argue that all of the testimony of the New Testament is given by committed, friendly witnesses, and therefore should not be considered. But, since when does this eliminate or disqualify testimony? Particularly when these were eyewitnesses. To disqualify them is to close the books on the case, which is exactly what some critics would like to do. Nevertheless, serious researchers are obligated to go through them rather than around them.

E. The Observance of Sunday as the Lord's Day

For Jews to convert to Christianity in the first place would have taken a miracle; but for them to change the day of worship from Saturday the Sabbath to Sunday is shocking. This indicates the seriousness with which they viewed the resurrection. To be sure, there were those who still wanted to observe the Law of

¹⁴³Moltmann, 173.

¹⁴⁴Edersheim, 625.

Moses, exclude Gentiles, and probably even continue to meet on Saturday, just as there are today. But, by and large, the observance of the Lord's Day on Sunday stands as an historical reminder of what happened on the certain Sunday after the crucifixion. On this point Smith explains, "The phrase, 'the first day of the week' is not found in Scripture until the dawn of Easter, and is introduced by both the Synoptic writers and the apostle John into their respective narratives of the events of the day of the resurrection (Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:2,9; Luke 24:1; John 20:1, 19)."¹⁴⁵

F. The Absence of Additions in the Texts

What the resurrection really consisted of and what actually happened is something that the New Testament is silent about. It would seem that, had these been fabricated stories, some bright (dull?) person would have set out to spruce them up a bit. That this did not happen not only adds credibility to the reality of the resurrection, but also to the reliability of the texts themselves. On this point Moltmann concludes,

Nowhere is the actual process of the raising of Jesus described in a historicizing or mythological way. What actually happened between the experience of his crucifixion and burial and his Easter appearances, is left in the darkness of the still unknown and still hidden God.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵Smith, 453.

¹⁴⁶Moltmann, 197.

G. The Creed of 1 Corinthians 15

The presence of an ancient creed concerning the death, empty tomb, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth may be one of the most persuasive arguments for the resurrection of all. For, as Habermas argues, the technical terms for "delivered" and "received" in 1 Cor. 15:3 indicate a pre-Pauline date and source, as well as the use of the proper names for Peter (Cephas in 15:5) and James (Jacob in 15:7), which may point to the possibility of an Aramaic original, dating into the A.D. 30s.¹⁴⁷ By virtue of the fact that Paul incorporated this creed into his letter to the Corinthians, it must be admitted that he had it. This means that it existed before he received it. Finally, the facts upon which this creed is based would of necessity be earlier still, certainly much earlier than ten to twenty years after the crucifixion. Habermas believes that Paul received this creed from Peter and James and recorded it in 1 Cor. 15:3-8.¹⁴⁸ If this is true, then not only were these eyewitnesses interviewed by Paul, he was also interviewed by them. It probably came as no surprise to them that all of their stories harmonized well together. Moreover, if, in fact, Peter gave the creed to Paul, then he is claiming to have been an eyewitness to a collective appearance of the resurrected Christ. The value of the creed resides in the

¹⁴⁷Habermas, 23.

¹⁴⁸Ibid., 43.

fact that it is early and that it is attested by eyewitnesses. This early date is quite important, in that it does not allow time for superstitious rumors to develop. Any false tittle-tattle surrounding the event would have to square with the standard set forth in the creed, which, for all intents and purposes, was like unto the Constitution of the United States, even complete with the names of some of the witnesses. Even if the creed was not put in its final form until Paul placed it in 1 Corinthians 15, the fact still remains that he had at his disposal nothing less than fragments written in formalized language, which he pieced together,¹⁴⁹ which gained the approval of Peter and James, and which could be verified for his readers, since many of the eyewitnesses were still alive at the time of his writing.

H. The Establishment of the Church

The resurrection of Jesus is directly responsible for the establishment of the Christian church. Her establishment and survival, no thanks to Rome, is a miracle. She has outlived civilizations, persecutions, the Age of Reason, the Age of Revolution, and continues strong today. Critics charge that if the Mosaic God did reveal himself in Palestine in the person of Jesus in the early A.D. 30s, that he must not have intended for this manifestation to be spread to all and accepted by all.¹⁵⁰ But

¹⁴⁹Pannenberg, 129.

¹⁵⁰Flew, 10-1.

what about Pentecost and the conversion of thousands of pilgrims, who spoke different languages, who returned to their homes and spread the news? What about Lottie Moon, William Carey, Luther Rice, Adoniram Judson, and literally thousands of others who have dedicated their lives to spreading this message all over the world? With competition from the Greek mystery religions, and persecution from without and within, it is nothing short of incredible that the church still survives today. Is this luck? Is she built on a lie? Has it not already been established that her sacred texts are supported like no other religion's texts in the history of the world? Does this not also include the resurrection of Jesus? On this point Smith writes, "By setting forth proofs of this miracle, the church was able to shake the foundations of the ancient religions then predominant in the Mediterranean world."¹⁵¹ Ladd continues this line of thought by writing,

That which brought the church into being and gave it a message was not the hope of the persistence of life beyond the grave, a confidence in God's supremacy over death, a conviction of the immortality of the human spirit. It was belief in an event in time, and space: Jesus of Nazareth was risen from the dead.¹⁵²

Even opponents, like Celsus, have noted how the church is acceptant of all men, and her charity has been imitated by the apostate emperor Julian.¹⁵³ How could something so fragile be so

¹⁵¹Smith, 449.

¹⁵²Ladd, 320.

¹⁵³Denison, 77.

all-inclusive in its outreach to mankind, and yet continue to thrive? Frequently, when people of a different race or culture infiltrate a religion, the tensions are overwhelming. Admittedly, Christianity has had its problems too, but can it not be asserted with confidence that the church is resilient, and, by and large, has learned how to adapt to culture and reach out to people without compromising necessary doctrines? Is this not the very argument of Paul with Peter in Gal. 2:11-21? To be sure, the church has had her embarrassing moments too. Her reluctance to act against slavery, participation in the Crusades, the activities of the Inquisition, and her negative reactions to science are only a few of her shortcomings.¹⁵⁴ Scandals with televangelists and the exposing of sexually promiscuous preachers continue to trouble her. But, to her credit, it must be stated that she has admitted many of her faults and taken steps to correct them. How many other religions admit that they have been wrong in anything? Islam? Buddhism? Hinduism? No. While critics assail her for her neglects and abuses, they are also obligated to account for the good that she has done, for in comparison with other groups or agencies, not one has ever had the impact, for the good, that she has had.¹⁵⁵ Yes, the church is composed of "frail creatures of dust" who are convinced that they are to be

¹⁵⁴Ibid., 76.

¹⁵⁵Ibid., 77.

ambassadors for Christ as he was the delegate for the Father.¹⁵⁶ Often, she has been a dismal failure in her efforts. Sometimes, she has humiliated herself; however, in fairness, it must be admitted that she has been responsible for much good in the world, as discussed above, not to mention the elimination of gladiatorial combat, elevation of the status and role of women, prison reform, eradication of cannibalism, the creation of protective structures for marriage and family life, banning of foot-binding in the Orient, prohibiting the burning of widows in India, warnings against astrology, black magic, gambling, and drug abuse, and much more.¹⁵⁷ In the words of Yandall Woodfin, "It would be staggering to imagine what the world today would be without the leavening influence of God's kingdom through the centuries."¹⁵⁸ Yet, regrettably, some skeptics still either fail to see the truth of the resurrection of Jesus, or refuse to admit it, though they are befuddled at the growth and accomplishments of the church. Consider the words of Charles Hartshorne who writes,

I admit that, as my father thought, it is remarkable that a crucified man should have been the source of so vast a company of believers. I cannot explain this

¹⁵⁶Edersheim, 644.

¹⁵⁷Woodfin, *Why Be a Christian?*, 142.

¹⁵⁸Ibid.

convincingly. But then I cannot explain how Buddhism or other religions grew as they did.¹⁵⁹

While it may not satisfy all the critics, this writer is willing to suggest that Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam are primarily culturally related, and thus enjoy a great deal of biological growth (children born to devotees), and some proselytization; whereas Christianity, while drawing members in both of these ways, is a much more diverse religion, adept at crossing over racial and cultural barriers otherwise impenetrable. The reason for this success rests not in the amazing drawing power of a crucified man, but rather, in the unparalleled bodily resurrection of the founder of its faith, for without the resurrection of Jesus Christ, there would be no reason for faith. Thank God the cross was only one phase of redemption, a major phase to be sure; but the resurrection proclaimed God's acceptance of Christ's sacrifice once and for all time.

¹⁵⁹Hartshorne, 137.

XVI. CONCLUSION

To the honest researcher, it should be totally obvious that something very unique, unprecedented, and unparalleled revolved around this Jesus of Nazareth, the so-called Christ. As Pannenberg writes, "Therefore, it is self-contradictory to claim the occurrence of an event while at the same time rejecting the competence of historical judgment in judging the facticity of the events."¹⁶⁰ The author concurs in the sense that, something special did happen - the event - therefore, contemporary scholarship must respect the assessment of historical judgment and deal with the evidence germane to the event, rather than throwing it out in an a priori manner. The event of the resurrection was not done in a corner. Many would contend that events like creation, the Exodus, and the resurrection all happened as part of the plan of God, who was preparing the world to believe in the triumph of his power and love over evil, hence, everything that Jesus said and did was to provide grounds for faith and establish the certain hope that, in and through him,

¹⁶⁰Pannenberg, 126.

every kind of evil, including death, would be destroyed.¹⁶¹ Just as sure as the oceans of the world contain fish, there was a Creation, there was an Exodus of the Jews from Egypt, and there was the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, the virgin born son of God who is the Christ, from the dead. At the very least the evidence surrounding the resurrection establishes the high probability that it literally occurred. With Habermas, one would hope that metaphysics would not be formulated in opposition to historical facts,¹⁶² though Hartshorne openly admits that his "metaphysical bias is against resurrections."¹⁶³ Perhaps this position taken by Hartshorne, Flew, and others, is better described as "dogmatic agnosticism" rather than "dogmatic denial," to use the words of Packer.¹⁶⁴ But, is this position not an admission on the behalf of its adherents that good evidence exists, yet they are unwilling to give it serious consideration? It is difficult to understand how some who place so much stock in critical investigation can conveniently withhold judgment when the investigation concludes in the probability that their metaphysical bias could be wrong. Of all the statements ever made by Jesus of Nazareth, none were so daring as his prediction that

¹⁶¹Woodfin, *With All Your Mind*, 106.

¹⁶²Habermas, 175.

¹⁶³Hartshorne, 142.

¹⁶⁴Packer, 147.

he would rise again from the dead in three days.¹⁶⁵ At the time he uttered these words, the Apostles had no idea that he meant that they would be fulfilled literally (Matt. 12:39-40; John 2:19-22); however, as Woodfin rightly argues, all of the New Testament authors were convinced, *ex post facto*, that he had predicted his own death, resurrection, and vindication by the Father.¹⁶⁶ This convergence of word and event together with its redemptive purpose seems to indicate nothing less than a miracle. The doctrine of the resurrection, unlike other short-lived doctrines, has proven itself to be extremely durable for nearly two-thousand years of testing and opposition.¹⁶⁷

Although it is not the intent of the writer to present an apology for the continuity of the New Testament literature itself, one must ask the question, "Is there continuity in the New Testament regarding the resurrection of Jesus?" Luke 24:5 wonders why one would seek the living among the dead, as if to say that Jesus is the absolute embodiment of life, and wonder how anyone can conceive of him as dead.¹⁶⁸ John 11:25 teaches that Jesus is the resurrection and the life, as if to surmise that he who constitutes life cannot be conceived of as the opposite of

¹⁶⁵Smith, 450.

¹⁶⁶Woodfin, *With All Your Mind*, 98.

¹⁶⁷Ibid., 109.

¹⁶⁸Ibid., 74.

that which he claims to define - life. On this point, Woodfin argues that to think of him as dead is the equivalent of not thinking of him at all.¹⁶⁹ Is this the position of "dogmatic agnosticism?" Could all of the New Testament authors have manufactured such a view of life over death, and remained so thoroughly consistent with one another had there been no Resurrection? This is highly doubtful. Thus, once again, evidence seems to indicate the probability of the resurrection. For those who suppose there to be a paradox between faith and reason, Habermas writes, "In fact, I would assert that faith is practically impossible without some factual basis."¹⁷⁰ Thus, there are respectable rational reasons and excellent historical reasons to believe in the resurrection of Jesus, and there is no reason for keeping faith separate from historical facts; however, because faith is a factor in believing in the resurrection of Jesus, along with evidences, one must be content to employ the word "probability" in connection with the resurrection, rather than "provable." If the case involved nothing more than historically verifiable evidences, one might dogmatically assert the certainty of the resurrection; but, as long as faith is an element involved in the decision, one must be content to live within the tension of the probable. Is anything provable? Does

¹⁶⁹Ibid.

¹⁷⁰Habermas, 170.

man not live in a world replete with probability rather than absolute certainty? The weather man says there is a 70 percent chance of rain; the car will probably start; he is probably going to get mad; Harvard will probably defeat Yale; conclusively, then, where there is evidential certainty there is no need for faith. And where there is no need for faith, there is no need for God. But, since life is surrounded by probability and lived within the sphere of the probable, faith is necessary, therefore God is necessary. The element of faith cannot be avoided even by the most obstinate atheists and the most resolute agnostics. Moreover, regarding this point, Woodfin contends, "If naturalists cannot explain the source of life and its continued personal existence they should not be too critical of Christians who believe in the resurrection of Christ from the dead."¹⁷¹ Some might argue that the resurrection narratives are presented by their writers as nothing more than myths designed to give rise to an existential faith in their readers, dismissing the possibility of a literal event. In response to this accusation the writer is again reliant upon the insightful Yandall Woodfin who writes,

While granted that cosmic and eschatological truth cannot be captured fully by a historical narrative and that there is figurative imagery in the resurrection accounts, it should be quite plain that the passion-resurrection stories are not presented by their writers as literary myths . . . In fact the Gospel narratives are presented to demythologize the cyclical nature

¹⁷¹Woodfin, *Why Be a Christian?*, 105.

myths of the dying and rising gods rather than to promulgate a new myth.¹⁷²

The intent of the New Testament is not to promote a cyclical view of history, but rather to demonstrate the undisguised linear pattern which life follows. It is not a life-death-life-death model which is employed in the New Testament, but rather a life-death-Life or a life-death-Death optional pattern which is propounded. The New Testament provides verbal assurance that the believer will rise from the dead. As one lives in this assurance and in the consciousness of the presence of God, and the light of his word, one gains existential assurance that one day he or she will live forever with the risen Christ in his Kingdom. By investigating the evidences surrounding the resurrection, one can gain historical assurance that he or she will participate with Jesus of Nazareth in his conquest over death.¹⁷³ What can be known for sure is that Jesus of Nazareth really did live, and there is good reason to believe that he worked miracles. Additionally, he was crucified at the hands of Pontius Pilate to please many of the Jewish ecclesiastical leaders whom he (Jesus) had offended. He was wrapped in grave-clothes and placed in a new tomb, that of Joseph of Arimathea near Jerusalem. His death caused despair and loss of hope to enshroud his followers. The tomb in which he had

¹⁷²Woodfin, *With All Your Mind*, 74.

¹⁷³*Ibid.*, 81.

been placed was discovered to be empty a few days after his corpse had been placed in it. The soldiers did not know how the body had come up missing; the Jews did not know; and the followers of Jesus did not know either. At approximately the same time that his tomb was found empty, his supporters began to experience what they believed to be literal appearances of him. These appearances transformed his disciples, particularly the eleven, James, and Saul of Tarsus, from doubters into bold proclaimers willing to die for their belief in his resurrection. The resurrection became the central focus of the early kerygma (proclamation) of the church. It was proclaimed especially in Jerusalem, the site of his arrest, crucifixion, and tomb. As a result of their belief in the resurrection, the church was born and grew rapidly, and Sunday became the primary day of worship for disciples, replacing the Sabbath, wherein they commemorated the resurrection of Jesus from the dead by assembling themselves together to worship him as God.

In light of these ascertainable facts, this writer is compelled to conclude that the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth is neither fundamentally provable by the evidences, nor is it fundamentally disprovable. This is what it is not, but what is it? It is the conviction of this writer that the resurrection of Jesus is highly probable, based on the evidences examined and the philosophical necessity of faith inherent in nearly every phase

of human "knowledge." Furthermore, in that the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth is highly probable as historical fact, one still cannot and must not separate it from the ethical and existential question concerning what one is to do, now, in light of this probability. This, too, is the contention of Moltmann.¹⁷⁴ In conclusion, it is the assessment of the present writer that the risks involved in not believing in the resurrection far outweigh the risks involved in believing in it. If one believes it and lives in its light, one has everything to gain and nothing to lose if and when it is proven true. Conversely, if one does not believe it and, therefore, does not live in its light, one has everything to lose and nothing to gain if and when it is proven true. If it turns out to be false, nobody gains anything, in fact, everybody loses. But, one must not be dismayed, for disproving the resurrection of Jesus Christ simply cannot be done. Therefore, faith and reason compel one to believe the biblical testimony, receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, and live in the light, and in the wake, of his glorious resurrection; for, in so far as his resurrection happened just as he said it would, the resurrection of the body of each believer will also happen, just as the Bible teaches. Will yours be a resurrection to eternal life or to eternal death? Believe in him and on him and know real life.

¹⁷⁴Moltmann, 166.

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